

This Day in History... April 4, 1928

Birth of Maya Angelou

Maya Angelou was born Marguerite Annie Johnson on April 4, 1928, in St. Louis, Missouri. Poet, actor, author, teacher, and activist, Angelou became an influential voice of the 20th century.

When she was young, Angelou's older brother nicknamed her "Maya," from calling her "Mya Sister." When she was three, Angelou and her brother moved to Stamps, Arkansas, to live with their grandmother. She and her brother were shuffled back and forth between her mother's home in St. Louis and her grandmother's home in Stamps. While attending Lafayette County Training School in Stamps, Angelou was greatly influenced by her teacher Mrs. Bertha Flowers, who introduced her to the works of Charles Dickens, William Shakespeare, Edgar Allan Poe, and more.



In 2014, Angelou was honored by the Conference of Minority Transportation Officials as one of the "Women Who Move the Nation," for her accomplishment as a streetcar operator when she was 16.

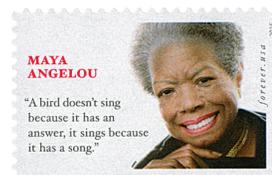
Angelou returned to performing in the 1961 play *The Blacks*. She then moved to Cairo for a time, editing an English newspaper. In 1962, she moved to Accra, Ghana, where she attended college and worked at the University of Ghana. She edited and wrote for local papers and performed on the radio and in Ghana's National Theater. Angelou also befriended Malcolm X in Ghana, and returned to the US in 1965 to help him build a new civil rights organization, though he was killed shortly after. After spending time singing in Hawaii, where her brother lived, Angelou returned to San Francisco to start writing again, while also composing and acting in plays.

In 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. asked Angelou to organize a march, but she didn't have the time. When he was assassinated on her 40th birthday, she was devastated. With the encouragement of close friend James Baldwin, she wrote, produced, and narrated the 10-part documentary series *Blacks, Blues, Black!* Her friends also encouraged her to write an autobiography.



Angelou performed throughout Europe in *Porgy and Bess* in 1954-55.

She also read her poem "A Brave and Startling Truth" at the 50th Anniversary meeting of the United Nations. She directed her first feature film, *Down in the Delta*, in 1996 and worked with Hallmark on a line of cards and decorations. When criticized for being too commercial, she said "the enterprise was perfectly in keeping with her role as 'the people's poet.'" In 2010 Angelou was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. She died on May 28, 2014.



This stamp caused a bit of controversy as it included a quote attributed to Joan Walsh Anglund, which Angelou recited often. The stamp was also issued one year after Angelou's death, instead of the usual five.

At the age of 14, Angelou joined her mother in Oakland, California, where she attended the California Labor School. Two years later, she became the first black female streetcar conductor in San Francisco. Angelou had a brief marriage to Tosh Angelos, during which time she took dance classes and formed a dance team with Alvin Ailey. She also started dancing to and singing calypso music. It was at this time she changed her name to Maya Angelou at the suggestion of her manager, because it was more distinctive. In the mid-1950s, she traveled Europe performing in *Porgy and Bess*, learning the languages of every country she visited. Angelou recorded her first music album, *Miss Calypso*, in 1957. She then appeared in the 1957 film *Calypso Heat Wave*, performing her own songs.

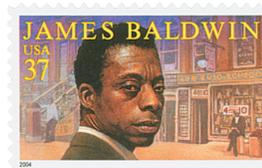
Angelou moved to New York City in 1959 to focus on writing. She joined the Harlem Writers Guild and published her first works. After meeting Martin Luther King Jr. in 1960, she created the *Cabaret for Freedom* to raise money for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. She became the organization's northern coordinator and continued organizing fundraisers.



Angelou started a dance team with Alvin Ailey, calling themselves "Al and Rita," performing for black organizations in San Francisco.

In 1969, Angelou made literary history. The initial installment of her memoirs, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, became the first best-selling nonfiction work by an African American woman. Angelou didn't slow down. She was the first Black woman to write a screenplay – *Georgia, Georgia* (1972). She wrote songs for Roberta Flack, created film scores, wrote articles, short stories, television scripts, documentaries, and poetry. She was nominated for a Tony Award in 1973 for performing in *Look Away*, appeared in the 1977 mini-series *Roots*, and directed the play *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl* in 1988.

Angelou never graduated from college, but was awarded more than 50 honorary doctoral degrees and taught at Wake Forest University for 25 years. Her recitation of her poem "On the Pulse of the Morning" at Bill Clinton's 1993 inauguration earned her a Grammy Award. She



Baldwin was a close friend she called "my brother."

This Day in History... April 4, 1928

Birth of Maya Angelou

Maya Angelou was born Marguerite Annie Johnson on April 4, 1928, in St. Louis, Missouri. Poet, actor, author, teacher, and activist, Angelou became an influential voice of the 20th century.

When she was young, Angelou's older brother nicknamed her "Maya," from calling her "Mya Sister." When she was three, Angelou and her brother moved to Stamps, Arkansas, to live with their grandmother. She and her brother were shuffled back and forth between her mother's home in St. Louis and her grandmother's home in Stamps. While attending Lafayette County Training School in Stamps, Angelou was greatly influenced by her teacher Mrs. Bertha Flowers, who introduced her to the works of Charles Dickens, William Shakespeare, Edgar Allan Poe, and more.



In 2014, Angelou was honored by the Conference of Minority Transportation Officials as one of the "Women Who Move the Nation," for her accomplishment as a streetcar operator when she was 16.

Angelou returned to performing in the 1961 play *The Blacks*. She then moved to Cairo for a time, editing an English newspaper. In 1962, she moved to Accra, Ghana, where she attended college and worked at the University of Ghana. She edited and wrote for local papers and performed on the radio and in Ghana's National Theater. Angelou also befriended Malcolm X in Ghana, and returned to the US in 1965 to help him build a new civil rights organization, though he was killed shortly after. After spending time singing in Hawaii, where her brother lived, Angelou returned to San Francisco to start writing again, while also composing and acting in plays.

In 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. asked Angelou to organize a march, but she didn't have the time. When he was assassinated on her 40th birthday, she was devastated. With the encouragement of close friend James Baldwin, she wrote, produced, and narrated the 10-part documentary series *Blacks, Blues, Black!* Her friends also encouraged her to write an autobiography.



Angelou performed throughout Europe in *Porgy and Bess* in 1954-55.

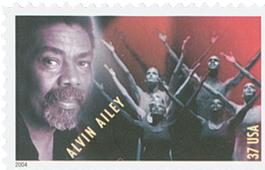
She also read her poem "A Brave and Startling Truth" at the 50th Anniversary meeting of the United Nations. She directed her first feature film, *Down in the Delta*, in 1996 and worked with Hallmark on a line of cards and decorations. When criticized for being too commercial, she said "the enterprise was perfectly in keeping with her role as 'the people's poet.'" In 2010 Angelou was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. She died on May 28, 2014.



This stamp caused a bit of controversy as it included a quote attributed to Joan Walsh Anglund, which Angelou recited often. The stamp was also issued one year after Angelou's death, instead of the usual five.

At the age of 14, Angelou joined her mother in Oakland, California, where she attended the California Labor School. Two years later, she became the first black female streetcar conductor in San Francisco. Angelou had a brief marriage to Tosh Angelos, during which time she took dance classes and formed a dance team with Alvin Ailey. She also started dancing to and singing calypso music. It was at this time she changed her name to Maya Angelou at the suggestion of her manager, because it was more distinctive. In the mid-1950s, she traveled Europe performing in *Porgy and Bess*, learning the languages of every country she visited. Angelou recorded her first music album, *Miss Calypso*, in 1957. She then appeared in the 1957 film *Calypso Heat Wave*, performing her own songs.

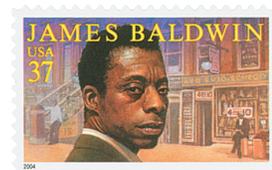
Angelou moved to New York City in 1959 to focus on writing. She joined the Harlem Writers Guild and published her first works. After meeting Martin Luther King Jr. in 1960, she created the *Cabaret for Freedom* to raise money for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. She became the organization's northern coordinator and continued organizing fundraisers.



Angelou started a dance team with Alvin Ailey, calling themselves "Al and Rita," performing for black organizations in San Francisco.

In 1969, Angelou made literary history. The initial installment of her memoirs, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, became the first best-selling nonfiction work by an African American woman. Angelou didn't slow down. She was the first Black woman to write a screenplay – *Georgia, Georgia* (1972). She wrote songs for Roberta Flack, created film scores, wrote articles, short stories, television scripts, documentaries, and poetry. She was nominated for a Tony Award in 1973 for performing in *Look Away*, appeared in the 1977 mini-series *Roots*, and directed the play *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl* in 1988.

Angelou never graduated from college, but was awarded more than 50 honorary doctoral degrees and taught at Wake Forest University for 25 years. Her recitation of her poem "On the Pulse of the Morning" at Bill Clinton's 1993 inauguration earned her a Grammy Award. She



Baldwin was a close friend she called "my brother."