

## The NAACP's Spingarn Medal

by Don Neal

As America's oldest civil rights organization, The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) remains a fixture in fighting for civil rights and social justice for all.



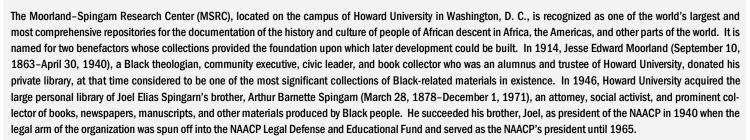
In 1914, Joel Elias Spingarn (May 17, 1875-July 26, 1939) established the Spingarn Medal, awarded annually by the NAACP for outstanding achievement by an African American. His will included a bequest to fund the Spingarn Medal in perpetuity. More than 100 people have been awarded the Spingarn Medal. Of them, 24 men and eight women have also been commemorated on a U.S. postage stamp. The women are the focus of this one-page exhibit.

Joel Elias Spingarn was an American educator, literary critic, civil rights activist, military intelligence officer, and horticulturalist. He was born in New York City to an upper middle-class Jewish family. He graduated from Columbia College in 1895. He served as a professor of comparative literature at Columbia University from 1899 to 1911.

Politics was one of his lifetime passions. In 1908, as a Republican, Spingarn ran unsuccessfully for a seat in the U. S. House of Representatives. Spingarn, one of the

few White Americans who decided in the 1900s decade to support the radical demands for racial justice being voiced by W. E. B. Du Bois, was a delegate to the national conventions of the Progressive Party in 1912 and 1916. At the first of those conventions, he failed in his attempts to add a statement condemning racial discrimination to the party platform and subsequently took up the cause of racial justice. As an influential liberal Republican, Spingarn helped realize the concept of a unified Black movement by joining the NAACP shortly after its founding and was one of the first Jewish leaders of that organization, serving as chairman of its board from 1913 to 1919, its treasurer from 1919 to 1930, and its second president from 1930 until his death in 1939.

In 2009, Joel Spingarn was among twelve civil rights leaders honored with images appearing on six American postage stamps issued to mark the centenary of the NAACP.





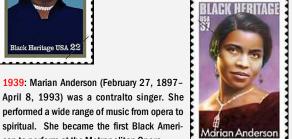
1939: Marian Anderson (February 27, 1897-

can to perform at the Metropolitan Opera.

1935: Mary McLeod Bethune (July 10, 1875-



May 18, 1955) was an educator who was active nationally in African-American affairs and was a special adviser to President Franklin D. Roosevelt.



1958: Daisy Gatson Bates (November 11, 1914 - November 4, 1999) played a leading role in the Little Rock Integration Crisis of 1957. She mentored nine Black students who enrolled at all-White Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. The students used her home as an organizational hub.





1983: Lena Horne (June 30, 1917-May 9, 2010) was a dancer, actress, singer who appeared in film, television, and theatre.whose career spanned more than seventy vears. Horne advocated for human and civil rights and took part in the March on Washington in August 1963.



1993: Dorothy Height (March 24, 1912-April 20, 2010) was a civil rights and women's rights activist and a leader in the civil rights movement and considered a member of the March on Washington's "Big Six." She was the president of the National Council of Negro Women for 40 years.



civil rights movement.

1994: Maya Angelou (April 4, 1928-May 28, 2014) was a memoirist, popular poet, and civil rights activist best known for her autobiography, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1969), and for reciting her poem "On the Pulse of Morning" at the first inauguration of Bill



