

# Black Barbie

by Don Neal



The U. S. Postal Service celebrates Barbie and a remarkable career journey with ten new stamp designs, each featuring Barbie dressed for one of many iconic careers. Together, the stamps pay tribute to a legacy of endless possibility, creativity, and empowerment over the span of 65-plus years. The new stamps were issued on July 11, 2026, at a first-day ceremony held in Austin, Texas, the during National Barbie Doll Collectors Convention.

Barbie was introduced by businesswoman Ruth Handler, co-founder of Mattel, Inc., at the American International Toy Fair in New York City on March 9, 1959, which now is celebrated as Barbie's official birthday. The first Barbie dolls were sold in blonde and brunette versions, wearing a black-and-white zebra-striped swimsuit with a signature topknot ponytail, and were marketed as a "Teen-age Fashion Model." Despite initial skepticism due to Barbie's adult appearance, the doll sold about 350,000 units in its first year, exceeding expectations and establishing Barbie as a major success in the toy market.



"Colored Francie" made her debut in 1967, and she sometimes is described as the first African-American Barbie doll. However, she was produced using the existing head molds for the White Francie doll and lacked distinct African characteristics other than dark skin.



The first African-American doll in the Barbie range is usually regarded as Christie, who made her debut in 1968.

The first Black celebrity-inspired Barbie doll was Julia Barbie, released in 1969. She was based on the title character of the 1968 TV series *Julia*, played by Diahann Carroll, the first Black woman to lead a weekly television series in a non-stereotypical, professional role (nurse).



Black Barbie, designed by Kitty Black Perkins, was launched in 1980, but still had Caucasian features. Black Barbie is the first Black doll that actually bore the Barbie name. With her short natural do and glamorous red dress, and that hip slogan on the box, the doll became a symbol of what many of us already knew: We aren't just the sidekicks and best friends; we are beautiful too, and the fabulous center of our own stories.



In 1990, Mattel created a focus group with African-American children and parents, early childhood specialists, and clinical psychologist Darlene Powell Hudson. Instead of using the same molds for the Caucasian Barbies, new ones were created. In addition, facial features, skin tones, hair texture, and names were all altered. The body shapes looked different, but the proportions were the same to ensure clothing and accessories were interchangeable.

In 1990, Mattel launched the first African doll, Nigerian Barbie, as part of The "Dolls of the World" collection. Mattel increased its diversity over the next decade by introducing Barbies and Kens wearing cultural dress from countries all around the world, including Kenya (1993), South Africa, and Ghana (1996).



The first time Barbie appeared on a U. S. stamp was as part of the pane to Celebrate the Century: 1960s, issued September 17, 1999.

Throughout the decades, Mattel has made celebrity-inspired Barbies. In 2005, they immortalized Destiny's Child, which Billboard ranked as one of the greatest musical trios of all time. It featured Beyoncé Knowles, Kelly Rowland, and Michelle Williams in shimmering gowns. Other celebrity Barbies include Diana Ross, Brandy, Zendaya, and Mariah Carey.

In September 2009, Mattel introduced the "So In Style" range, which was intended to create a more realistic depiction of Black people than previous dolls.

Since 2015, Barbie has been on a mission to honor diverse role models. In 2019, South African singer/songwriter Lira (Lerato Molapo), tennis great Naomi Osaka, model and activist Adwoa Aboah, and actress and activist Yara Shahidi all saw themselves replicated in 11.5 inches of plastic.

In 2016, Mattel expanded its tradition of honoring history-making women, celebrating icons in the present day like Misty Copeland, the first Black principal dancer of American Ballet Theatre. A year later, Olympic fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad got her own doll, the first Barbie to ever wear a hijab.

Mattel shined a light on great Black women of history with their own dolls starting in 2018. With the launch of the "Inspiring Women" series, Mattel honored legends (and stamp subjects) Rosa Parks, Ida B. Wells, Celia Cruz, Maya Angelou, Madam C. J. Walker, Bessie Coleman, and Ella Fitzgerald, as well as Katherine Johnson, Tina Turner, Gabby Douglas, and other historic women with collectible Barbies in their images. The collection declared that anybody, regardless of skin color, hair texture, body type, or circumstances, can be a Barbie — and so much more.



For the same reasons of validation, visibility, respect, and self-esteem, body diversity in toys absolutely matters too. Though Mattel made the wheelchair-user doll Share-a-Smile Becky in 1997, it wasn't until 2019 that the first Black wheelchair-user doll was launched. The natural-hair beauty rocks two Afro puffs and a stylish top with jeans and sneakers, and comes with a ramp, allowing accessibility to all the places Barbie wants to go. In 2020, Mattel added a Black Barbie with the skin condition vitiligo to its Fashionistas collection as well, expanding opportunities for Black children with disabilities to see a version of themselves at play too.



For International Women's Day in 2022 and as part of Mattel's Dream Gap Project, Shondaland leader Shonda Rhimes became a Barbie, decked out in a stunning Carolina Herrera sweater and skirt.

In 2022, with the Barbie Tribute Collection, Mattel created a doll in honor of actress Laverne Cox, the first transgender Emmy acting nominee and the first trans Barbie doll in history.



Mattel, Inc. released the 2023 President Barbie, dressed in a pink-and-gold ball gown, to pay homage to *EBONY*'s July 2023 cover girl, Issa Rae and her role in the *Barbie* film.



Celebrating what would have been her 46th birthday, the Barbie Signature Aaliyah doll was released in 2025 as part of the Barbie Music Series. The doll pays tribute to the "Princess of R&B," who is presented in her iconic look from the 1997 "One in a Million" music video.

In October 2025, the award-winning multi-hyphenate and entertainment powerhouse Debbie Allen joined the Mattel legacy with her own Barbie Signature Tribute doll.

Coming full circle, Mattel, Inc. celebrated the 45th anniversary of the first-ever Black Barbie by paying homage to her creator, Kitty Black Perkins, the first Black designer for Barbie and who was Chief Designer for the Barbie brand for 28 years. The 2025 anniversary tribute stuns with dark brown skin, voluminous curly hair, and a bright red off-shoulder dress inspired by the original 1980 design.

In January 2026, Mattel released Barbie Opal Lee Doll as part of the Inspiring Women series, honoring Dr. Opal Lee, the civil rights activist widely known as the "Grandmother of Juneteenth." According to Mattel, this doll celebrates Lee's lifelong dedication to education, community work, and her pivotal role in making Juneteenth a federally recognized holiday in the United States. The release continues the mission of the Barbie Signature Inspiring Women series, which highlights real women whose courage and perseverance have helped shape history and inspire future generations.



This year's global Barbie Dream Team honors women who were among the first in their fields, including: Serena Williams (United States): Tennis Legend with 23 Grand Slam singles titles, entrepreneur, and global icon.

See a full collection of Barbie dolls at The Strong National Museum of Play in Rochester, New York.

Learn more about the history behind Barbie with the award-winning Netflix and Shondaland documentary *Black Barbie*.

[www.shondaland.com/our-films/black-barbie/10-of-the-most-important-black-barbies-you-need-to-know](http://www.shondaland.com/our-films/black-barbie/10-of-the-most-important-black-barbies-you-need-to-know)

[people.com/celebrity/celebrity-barbies/](http://people.com/celebrity/celebrity-barbies/)

Barbie, the best-selling doll of all time, is dressed to portray ten different careers. In 65-plus years as a staple of imaginative childhood play, Barbie has represented more than 250 careers, encouraging generations of fans to dream big and explore a world of possibilities. Each stamp spotlights a photograph of an outfit worn by an era-appropriate Barbie doll with the apparel's release date.

The new Barbie stamps include three Black dolls dressed as an astronaut, a robotics engineer, and a music star. The astronaut doll was slightly ahead of her time in 1986. Inspired by the



flights of Sally Ride and Guion Bluford in 1983, Mae Carol Jemison applied to the astronaut program in October 1985. After NASA postponed the selection of new candidates following the Space Shuttle *Challenger* disaster in 1986, Jemison reapplied in 1987. She was chosen out of roughly 2,000 applicants for 15 slots in NASA Astronaut Group 12, the first selected after *Challenger*. The media covered her as the “first Black woman astronaut” in 1987. She made history again when she became the first Black woman in space on September 12, 1992. During her time at NASA, she flew on one mission, STS-47. The eight-day mission on Space Shuttle *Endeavor* saw Jemison log 190 hours in space, orbiting Earth 127 times. Other Black female NASA astronauts are Stephanie Wilson, Joan Higginbotham, Sian Proctor (a finalist for the 2009 NASA Astronaut Class but was not one of the nine astronaut candidates selected that year), Jessica Watkins, Jeanette J. Epps, and Yvonne Cagle.

The robotics engineer doll may have inspired Oluwami Dosunmu-Ogunbi, a Nigerian American roboticist, engineer, and educator. She earned her bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, graduating with honors in 2017. She then pursued advanced studies at the University of Michigan Ann Arbor, obtaining a master’s degree in mechanical engineering in 2020, followed by a master’s degree and Ph.D. in robotics in 2021 and 2024. She is the first Black woman to earn a Ph.D. in Robotics from the University of Michigan.

With her voluminous tresses, the music star Barbie easily could have been inspired by Grammy-winning singers Diana Ross, Beyoncé, or H. E. R. (especially with the guitar).

As mentioned, Barbie is being celebrated on stamps, dressed for one of many iconic careers. It is important to know that real women are in those careers, and many of them are pioneers and/or have made history on their remarkable career journeys. Being immortalized as an inspiring doll is one thing, but being a role model and possible mentor is a real possibility.

I have made a first day cover for each of the ten “career” Barbies and connected her to a real Black woman who also is in that career. Some are familiar, while others will be new to you. All of these women are trailblazers whose talent, skill, expertise, courage, determination, or perseverance have made them successful and notable people. May they be an inspiration to the endless possibilities for all of us.





6°

# Mary Eliza Mahoney



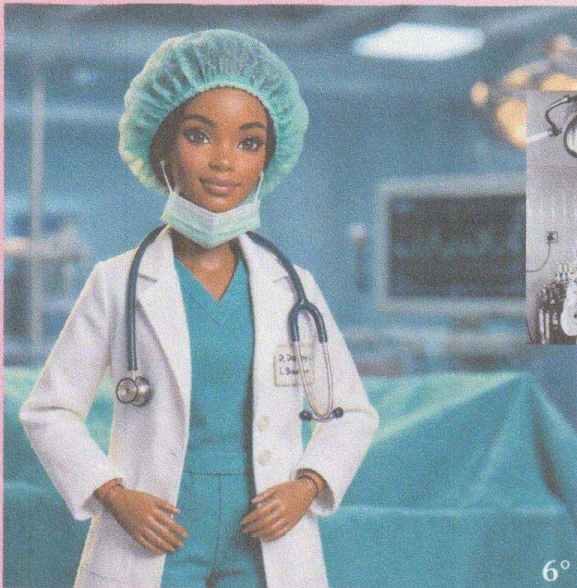
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Mary Eliza Mahoney (May 7, 1845 – January 4, 1926) was admitted into a 16-month program at the New England Hospital for Women and Children in Boston (now the Dimock Community Health Center) in 1878 at the age of 33, alongside 39 other students. Mahoney had connections to the hospital through prior work as a cook, maid, and washerwoman there when she was 18. Mahoney worked nearly 16 hours daily for the 15 years that she worked as a hospital laborer. Mahoney graduated in 1879 as a registered nurse alongside two White colleagues – the first Black person to do so in the United States. As a private-duty nurse, she initially charged the princely sum of \$1.50 per day. Mahoney was inducted into the American Nurses Association Hall of Fame in 1976 and the National Women's Hall of Fame in 1993.



6°

# Dorothy Lavinia Brown



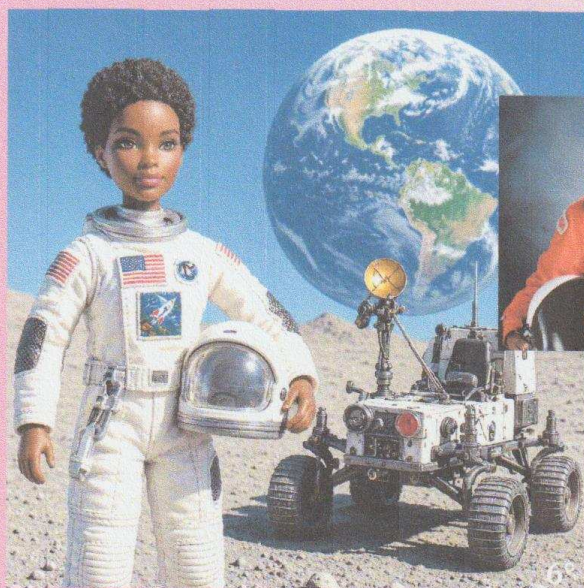
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Dr. Dorothy Lavinia Brown (January 7, 1914 – June 13, 2004) was an American surgeon, legislator, and teacher. She was the first female surgeon of African-American ancestry from the Southeastern United States. She also was the first Black female to serve in the Tennessee General Assembly as she was elected to the Tennessee House of Representatives. In 1944, Brown was admitted to study medicine at Meharry Medical College, a historically Black college in Nashville, Tennessee. Dr. Brown then did a one-year internship at Harlem Hospital, and next she completed a five-year residency in general surgery at Meharry and Hubbard Hospital. In 1959, Dr. Brown became the first Black female surgeon to become a fellow of the American College of Surgeons.



# Mae Jemison



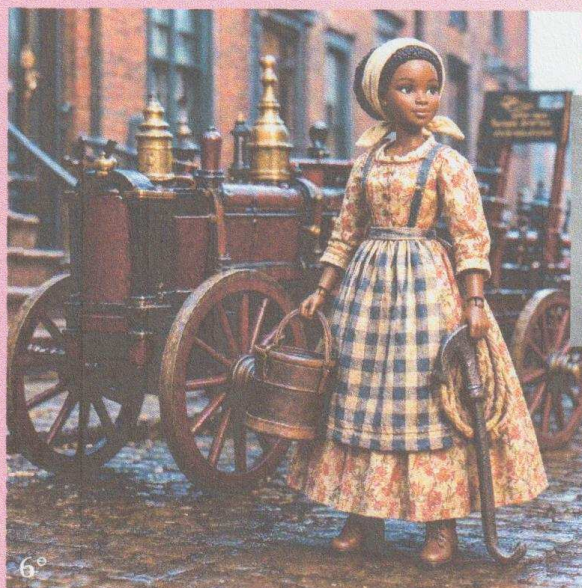
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Born October 17, 1956, Mae Jemison received degrees in Chemical Engineering and African American Studies from Stanford University in California and went on to Cornell Medical School and became a medical doctor. Jemison spent the summer between her second and third year of medical school in Kenya, Egypt, Greece, and Israel and subsequently became a medical officer in the Peace Corps. In 1983, after watching Sally Ride, Jemison decided to apply to the astronaut program at NASA. On September 12, 1992, Jemison went into orbit aboard the space shuttle *Endeavour* STS-47 as the first Black American woman in space. The *Endeavour* crew made 127 orbits around the Earth. Jemison left NASA in 1993, continuing to work for the benefit of others as an educator, entrepreneur, and author.



# Molly Williams



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Molly Williams (fl. 1818) was the first known female, and first known Black, firefighter in the United States. She was a slave of the New York City merchant Benjamin Aymar. She was affiliated with the Oceanus Engine Company #11 in lower Manhattan, a volunteer firefighting group that was still in its infancy. The modern-day Fire Department of New York, featuring paid firefighters, was founded in 1865. During her time in the company, she was called Volunteer No. 11. Williams made a distinguished presence in her sturdy work clothes of calico dress and checked apron. Her service was noted particularly during the blizzard of 1818. Male firefighters were scarce due to a cholera outbreak, but Williams took her place with the men on the dragropes and pulled the pumper to the fire through the deep snow.

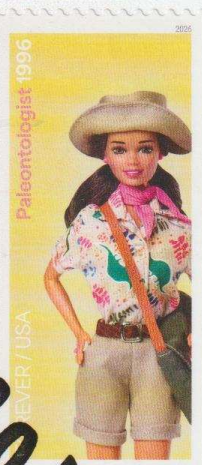


# Lisa White

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Lisa White is a micropaleontologist (a scientist who studies fossils at a microscopic level). She attended college at San Francisco State University in California. She became interested in the field during an internship at the U. S. Geological Survey where she identified and counted microfossils in deep ocean rocks in Alaska. White went on to earn her Ph.D. from the University of California at Santa Cruz and worked at San Francisco State University for 22 years holding a variety of positions, including Professor, Department Chair, and Associate Dean. During those years, she launched and managed programs to increase the representation of people of color in the geosciences. Dr. White currently is the Director of Education and Outreach at the University of California Museum of Paleontology in Berkeley, California.



# Nakia Smith

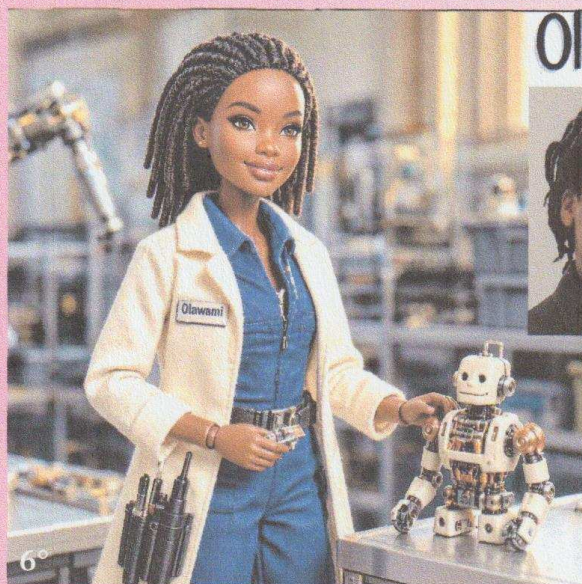
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Upon the theatrical premiere of *Sinners*, the Ryan Coogler film became a record-breaking, worldwide sensation. The movie resonated with Dallas' Nakia Smith, a deaf interpreter who comes from a four-generation family of deaf people. Smith is being praised for using her platform to raise awareness of Black American Sign Language (BASL) by educating her followers in sign language and teaching them common phrases. Soon after *Sinners'* premiere, Smith got the opportunity to interpret the film in BASL — a first in HBO Max's history. She went on to share the history of BASL that started after Black people were prevented from attending the first American school for the deaf, which opened in 1817, until 1952. Smith asserts that people do need to know that BASL is not slang — it's a language itself.



Oluwami Dosunmu-Ogunbi



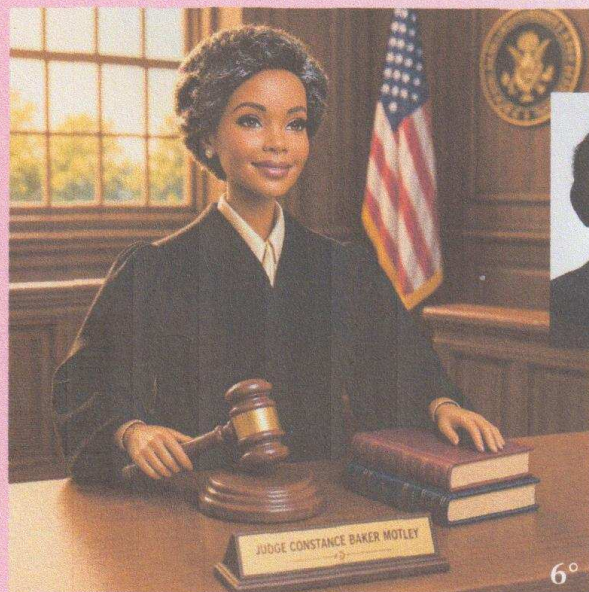
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Oluwami Dosunmu-Ogunbi is a Nigerian American roboticist, engineer, and educator. She is the first Black woman to earn a Ph.D. in Robotics from the University of Michigan. Her research focuses on controls with applications in ALIP-based bipedal locomotion, a powerful framework for stable, adaptive, and efficient walking on complex terrains, e.g., search-and-rescue robots and robotic exploration. Dosunmu-Ogunbi's achievement is expected to inspire more young women to pursue careers in robotics, artificial intelligence, and other STEM disciplines, where women remain underrepresented. In 2024, she was inducted into the Edward Alexander Bouchet Graduate Honor Society (Bouchet Society), named for the first Black American doctoral recipient in the United States (Physics, Yale University, 1876).



Constance Baker Motley



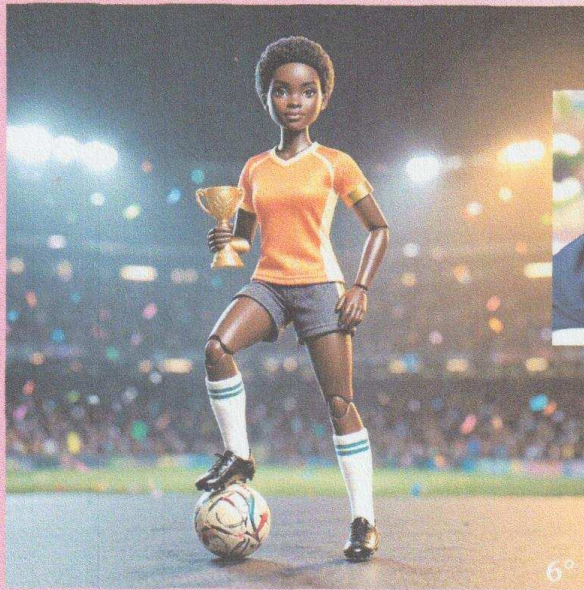
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Constance Baker Motley (September 14, 1921 – September 28, 2005) was an American jurist and politician who served as a Judge of the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York. A key strategist of the civil rights movement, she was state senator, and Borough President of Manhattan in New York City before becoming a United States federal judge. She obtained a role with the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund as a staff attorney in 1946 after receiving her degree from Columbia Law School, and continued her work with the organization for more than 20 years. She was the first Black woman to argue at the Supreme Court and argued ten landmark civil rights cases, winning nine. She was a law clerk to Thurgood Marshall, aiding him in the case *Brown v. Board of Education*.



Asisat Oshoala



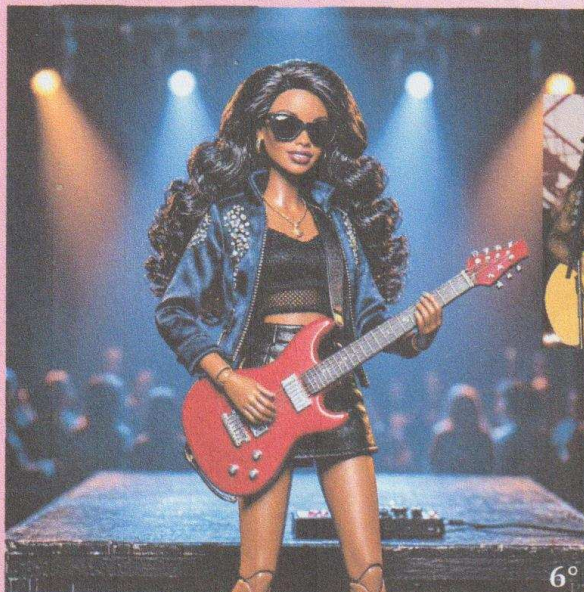
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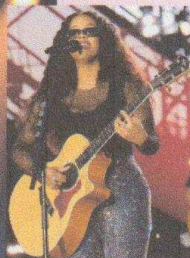
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Asisat Lamina Oshoala OON (born October 9, 1994) is a Nigerian professional footballer who plays as a striker for Saudi Women's Premier League club Al Hilal and the Nigeria national team. She widely is regarded as one of the best female football players of her generation and is one of the most celebrated African female footballers of all time, having won African Women's Footballer of the Year a record six times. In September 2014, Oshoala was made a Member of the Order of the Niger. In 2021, she was named in the *Forbes* 30 Under 30. She is popularly called "Agba Baller," which means "Legendary Footballer." In July 2023, after her performance against Australia in the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup, Oshoala became the first African female footballer with a million followers on Instagram.



H.E.R.



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Gabriella Sarmiento Wilson (born June 27, 1997), known professionally as H.E.R. (pronounced as "her" and standing for "Having Everything Revealed") is a R&B singer-songwriter. In 2021, H.E.R. won the Academy Award for Best Original Song for "Fight for You," from *Judas and the Black Messiah*, and the Grammy Award for Song of the Year for "I Can't Breathe." In 2022, she won the Children's and Family Emmy Award for her contributions to the animated children's series, *We the People*. H.E.R. has received five Grammy Awards, as well as nominations for a Golden Globe, American Music Awards, and Billboard Music Awards. H.E.R. made her acting debut as Belle on the Disney musical television special *Beauty and the Beast: A 30th Celebration*.