

★ Smithsonian



EXHIBITION
PROSPECTUS

Black Wings

American Dreams of Flight



Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, 1945 (Courtesy of Von Hardesty)

Exhibition at a Glance

Contents: Approximately 70 historic and contemporary photographs, film clips, 9 three-dimensional artifacts, 2 aircraft models

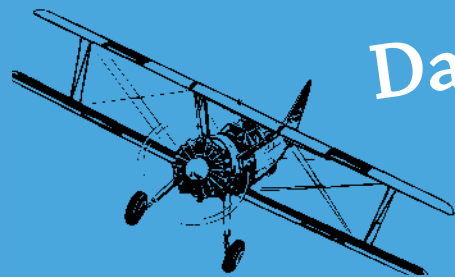
Participation Fee: \$8,000 per 12-week booking period, plus outgoing shipping

Security: Moderate

Size: Approximately 3,000 square feet

Tour Begins: July 2011

For more information: Contact Shavonne Harding at 202-633-3138, hardings@si.edu



Daring.



James Herman Banning, c. 1931
National Air and Space Museum (NASM)

Adventurous. Determined. Inspiring.

A new exhibition that celebrates the spirit of America

In the first decades of the 20th century, few things stood at the epicenter of American life more than the airplane. Its invention became a fundamental turning point in history — radically and forever changing travel, commerce, and warfare. The airplane sparked a revolution in modern technology, and created an enduring passion for all things aviation.

For African Americans, this exciting new realm was off-limits, and racial exclusion cast a shadow over the shining promise of the aviation industry. Beginning in the 1920s, however, a small group of black pilots challenged the prevailing discrimination. Through the decades a steady stream of determined pioneers defied convention, broke through the barriers, and opened up new worlds of possibility for succeeding generations of pilots and astronauts.

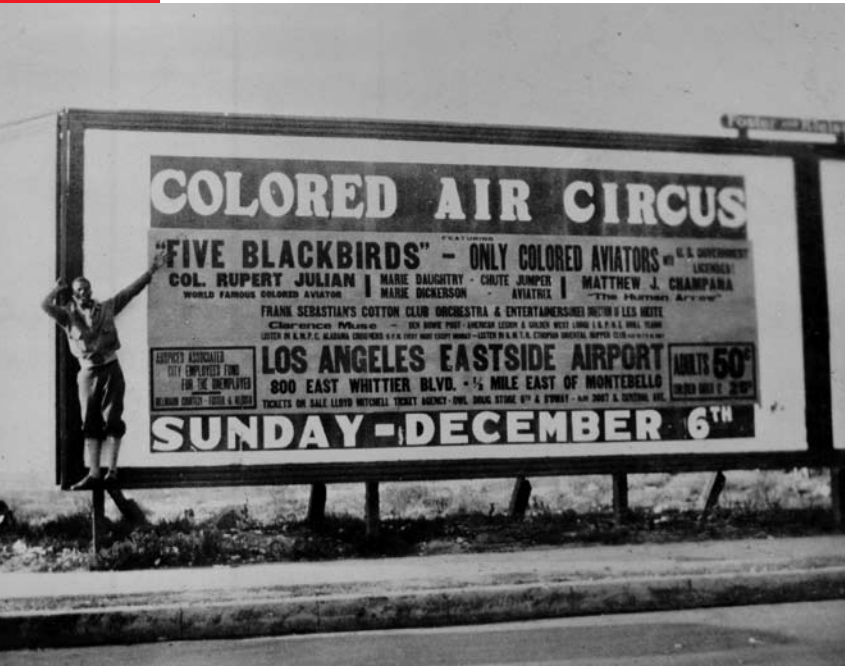


Lieutenant William "Earl" Brown, Jr., Korea, 1953 (United States Air Force)

Black Wings: American Dreams of Flight takes a closer look at the remarkable triumph and tragedy of African Americans in aerospace history. Developed by noted scholar and Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum curator Von Hardesty, the exhibition traces the history of African Americans in flight, from the thrilling barnstormers of the early 1920s to the equally daring astronauts of the 21st century. This stirring collection of historic and contemporary photographs, artifacts, first-hand interviews, and extraordinary stories offers a compelling overview of a truly inspiring saga.

"To dream doesn't become a reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination, and hard work." — COLIN POWELL

“I refused to take no for an answer.” — BESSIE COLEMAN

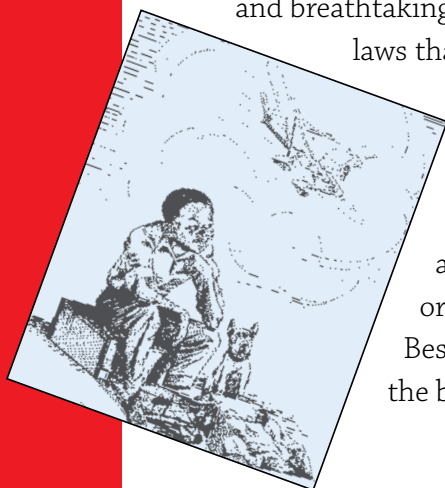


Billboard announcing air show, 1931 (NASM)

Breaking Barriers

The Wright Brothers. Charles Lindbergh. Amelia Earhart. Early aviation pioneers captivated the world with their sense of adventure and breathtaking heroism. Despite racist laws that excluded them from

flying, a handful of African Americans also made major contributions. And the passion, ambition, and talent of one extraordinary young woman — Bessie Coleman — finally broke the barrier of racial prejudice.



Cartoon, Craftsman of Aero-News, 1937
(Courtesy of Von Hardesty)

Overcoming enormous obstacles, in 1921 Coleman became the country's first black pilot, male or female. A pioneering barnstormer, Coleman thrived in the exciting world of aerial stunts and daredevil flying, and became an iconic figure. Her tragic death, while preparing for an air show in 1926, only enlarged her image, and her example inspired generations of aspiring aviators.

The extraordinary decades between 1920 and 1940 were filled with record-breaking journeys, exhilarating air shows, and memorable heroes. For African Americans, Los Angeles and Chicago became the epicenters of the flying world, and pilot William J. Powell, Jr. was one of the earliest champions. With his Los Angeles flying club, air shows, films and publication, he devoted his life to filling the sky with “black wings,” or African American pilots.

The strides made by aviators like Coleman, Powell and others established new benchmarks — most notably repudiating the myth that blacks lacked the aptitude to fly. By the end of the 1930s, however, they remained on the periphery of the American aeronautical world.



Bessie Coleman and her JN-4 Curtiss Jenny biplane, 1923 (Wolf Aviation Fund)

“Bessie Coleman . . . had a zeal for life . . . and that ephemeral daydream of adventure, strength, audacity and beauty.”

— DORIS RICH, Coleman Biographer

Tuskegee Airmen in survival gear, 1944 (Library of Congress)



“The privileges of being an American belong to those brave enough to fight for them.”

— BENJAMIN O. DAVIS JR.

Filling the Sky with Black Wings

Although they had proven their skill, black aviators in the late 1930s still faced many obstacles to flight, including segregated facilities, hostile receptions at airfields, and the refusal of some airports to service their aircraft. Things changed in March 1941, when Congress activated the first training center for black fighter pilots at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. The success and example of the Tuskegee Airmen during World War II helped lead to the eventual desegregation of the U.S. military, in 1948.



World War II eroded the older pattern of official racial barriers in military aviation, and, in the Korean and Vietnam conflicts, black military pilots played increasingly important roles. But commercial aviation in the post World War II years remained an all-white sphere, and stayed that way well into the 1960s.

For decades, aspiring black pilots, many with years of military aviation experience, were denied commercial careers. One such pilot, Marlon Green, fought the racial exclusion policies — in a landmark civil rights case that went all the way to the Supreme Court in 1965. With his hard-fought victory against Continental Airlines, Green became the first African American hired by a major passenger airline.

Above: Tuskegee patch (US Army)



Bond drive poster, 1944 (Courtesy Ted Hanady)



Air Force crew beside C-17 dubbed the Spirit of the Tuskegee Airmen
(United States Air Force)

Beyond

The late 1950s ushered in a new chapter of human flight: rocketry and space travel. As NASA's successful Mercury, Gemini and Apollo programs were followed closely by a fascinated public, African American military pilots began to join NASA's elite astronaut corps.

Dr. Guion "Guy" Bluford, a scientist and highly accomplished military pilot, became the first African American to travel into space. He joined the NASA space program in 1978, and flew his first shuttle mission in 1983. Six years later, in 1989, his NASA classmate Frederick Gregory became the first African American to command a space shuttle flight.

In time, the participation of black astronauts ceased to be a novelty, and there was less need to mark each flight of an African American as another first for NASA. This altered environment signaled the strides made by NASA to fully integrate its space flight operations. By the late 1980s, minorities and women were routinely assigned as crew for the Space Shuttle missions. For the first time, the expanded ranks of astronauts mirrored more accurately the diverse character of American society.

Over the course of a century, African Americans have become exalted military pilots and leaders, executives in commercial airlines, recreational pilots, and in 2009, Charles Frank Bolden, Jr. became the 12th Administrator at NASA. They fought long and hard to break barriers in the aviation and aerospace industries, and while progress has been remarkable, the battle for equity continues.



Above: First African American female astronaut Mae C. Jamison (NASA)

Left: Astronaut Robert Curbeam (NASA)



Above: Bernard Harris (r), first African American to walk in space (NASA)



Left: Dr. Vance Marbanks with mission control team, Kano, Nigeria, 1962 (NASM)

"I felt an awesome responsibility . . . of being a role model and opening another door to black Americans, but the important thing is not that I am black, but that I did a good job as a scientist and an astronaut."

— GUY BLUFORD, astronaut



Challenger Air Pilots' Association, Chicago, c. 1930 (Courtesy Von Hardesty)

“ . . . nothing in space is
out of reach . . .

Don't listen to people that
tell you what you can't do!

If you can dream it,
you can do it!

I am living proof of that.”

— CHARLES FRANK BOLDEN, JR.
Administrator of NASA

Registrarial Requirements

Black Wings: American Dreams of Flight has been designated moderate security and will be offered to those institutions able to meet the Smithsonian's requirements. Key requirements are listed below. For a complete list of requirements, contact Shavonne Harding, 202-633-3138 or hardings@si.edu.

Space: Exhibitors must have a limited access, gallery-type area. An open mall, hallway or lounge area is not acceptable.

Environment: Temperature, humidity, and light controls are required for exhibition and storage areas. Standard levels are 68–72° Fahrenheit, and 45–55% relative humidity. Light levels should be between 5 and 15 foot-candles. Direct sunlight should be diffused or eliminated to prevent fading of panels and photographs.

Security: Guards or other trained personnel must be present in sufficient numbers, whose sole duty is to supervise the exhibition while it is on display. Locked and/or alarmed cases for small objects may be required. Exhibition area must be locked and secure during closing hours. Alarm and/or guards during night hours are preferred but not required.

Handling: Handling of objects, if not actually by a registrar or curator, must be by preparator, exhibition technician, or other persons trained in handling museum objects.

Fire Protection: Fire protection according to local ordinances and subject to SITES' approval.



Members of the 332nd Fighter Group, Ramatelli, Italy, 1945
(Courtesy Von Hardesty)

A Complete Package

The exhibition itself is only a portion of what SITES delivers. As a host of *Black Wings*, you will also receive:

- Complete curatorial and registration information
- Complete shipping, handling, and installation instructions
- Wall-to-wall fine-arts insurance coverage under the Smithsonian's policy
- Public relations support, including sample press release, images, logos; digital graphic templates of promotional materials; and advice on promoting the exhibition and hosting special events
- Companion book, *Black Wings: Courageous Stories of African Americans in Aviation and Space History* by curator Von Hardesty
- Educational and programming resources, educator resources, speakers list, bibliography
- Exhibition website and ability to link to and from the SITES website

Project Partners

Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service

SITES has been sharing the wealth of Smithsonian collections and research programs with millions of people outside Washington, DC, for more than 50 years. SITES connects Americans to their cultural heritage through a wide range of exhibitions about art, science, and history, which are shown wherever people live, work, and play. www.sites.si.edu

Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum

The Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum (NASM) maintains the largest collection of historic air and spacecraft in the world, is a vital center for research into the history, science, and technology of aviation and space flight, and memorializes the national development of aviation and space flight. www.nasm.si.edu

Von Hardesty, Curator

A noted expert on African American aerospace history, Von Hardesty is currently a curator at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum. He curated the original *Black Wings* exhibition at the Museum in 1983. Hardesty has written a number of books, including *Black Wings: Courageous Stories of African Americans in Aviation and Space History*; *Lindbergh: Flight's Enigmatic Hero*; *Air Force One: The Aircraft that Shaped the Modern Presidency*; and *Great Aviators and Epic Flights*.



For further information and additional host requirements, please contact:

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Front cover: Film strip, William J. Powell, Jr. aloft in the mid-1930s
(*Courtesy of Von Hardesty*)

Top: The U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds
(*NASM*)

Right: Jeanine McIntosh, first black female aviator in the U.S. Coast Guard
(*United States Coast Guard*)

