

# CREATIVE COLOR

Celebrating African American  
artists from 1900 to today



## Table of Contents

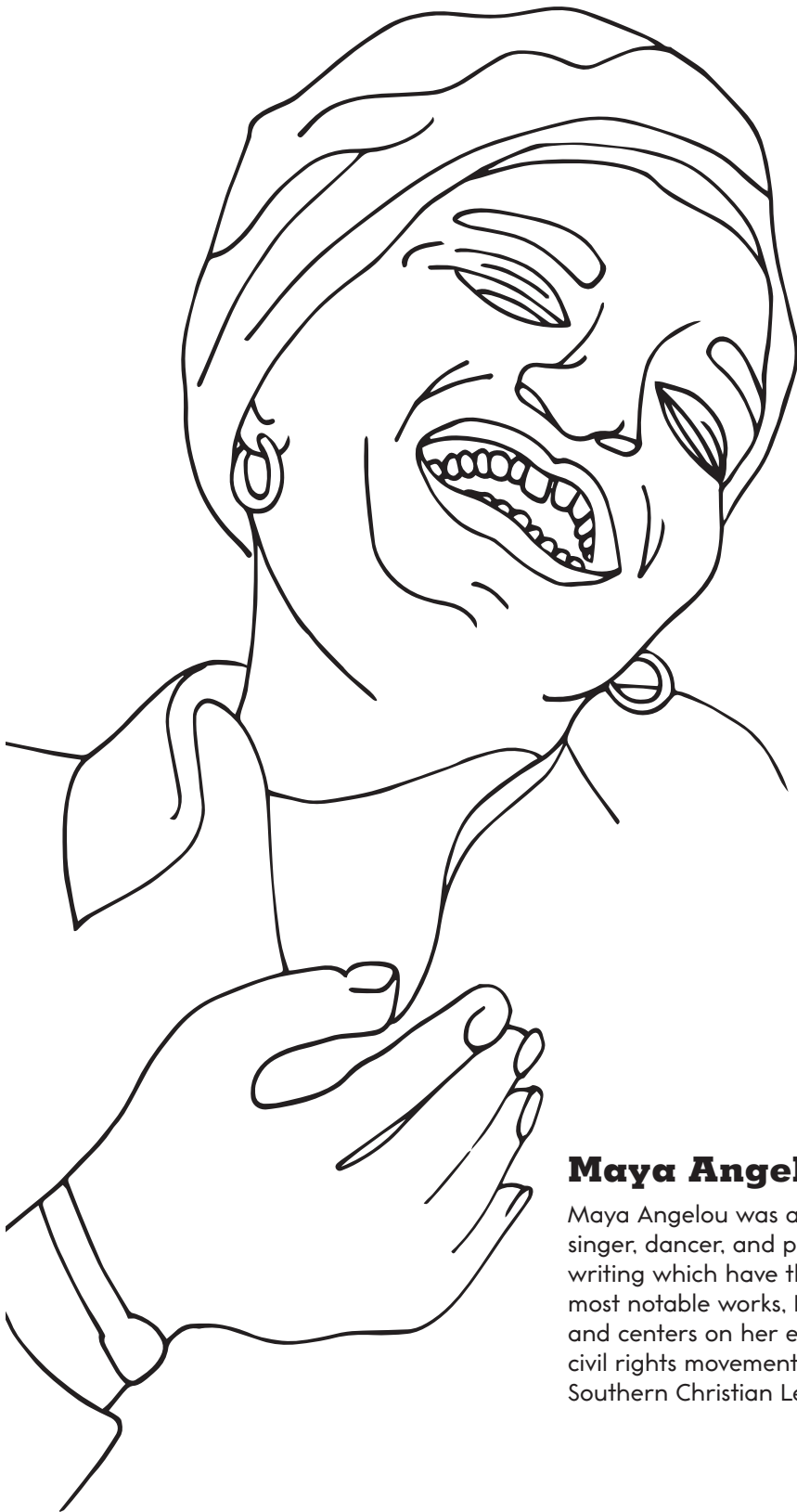
<b>4</b>	Alvin Ailey
<b>5</b>	Maya Angelou
<b>6</b>	James Baldwin
<b>7</b>	Jean-Michel Basquiat
<b>8</b>	Iona Rozeal Brown
<b>9</b>	Elizabeth Catlett
<b>10</b>	Nick Cave
<b>11</b>	Ray Charles
<b>12</b>	Misty Copeland
<b>13</b>	Laverne Cox
<b>14</b>	Angela Davis
<b>15</b>	Aaron Douglas
<b>16</b>	Emory Douglas
<b>17</b>	Wanda Ewing
<b>18</b>	Aretha Franklin
<b>19</b>	Jimi Hendrix
<b>20</b>	Billie Holiday
<b>21</b>	bell hooks
<b>22</b>	Langston Hughes
<b>23</b>	Robert Johnson
<b>24</b>	KRS-One
<b>25</b>	Nichelle Nichols
<b>26</b>	Gordon Parks
<b>27</b>	Parliament/Funkadelic
<b>28</b>	Adrian Piper
<b>29</b>	Sidney Poitier
<b>30</b>	Faith Ringgold
<b>31</b>	Kara Walker
<b>32</b>	Carrie Mae Weems
<b>33</b>	Malcolm X
<b>34</b>	Cornbread
<b>35</b>	Draw Your Own Graffiti
<b>36</b>	Draw Yourself in Your Own Career
<b>37</b>	Draw Your Own Heroes
<b>38</b>	Others to Check Out
<b>39</b>	Colophon/Credits



### **Alvin Ailey (1931-89)**

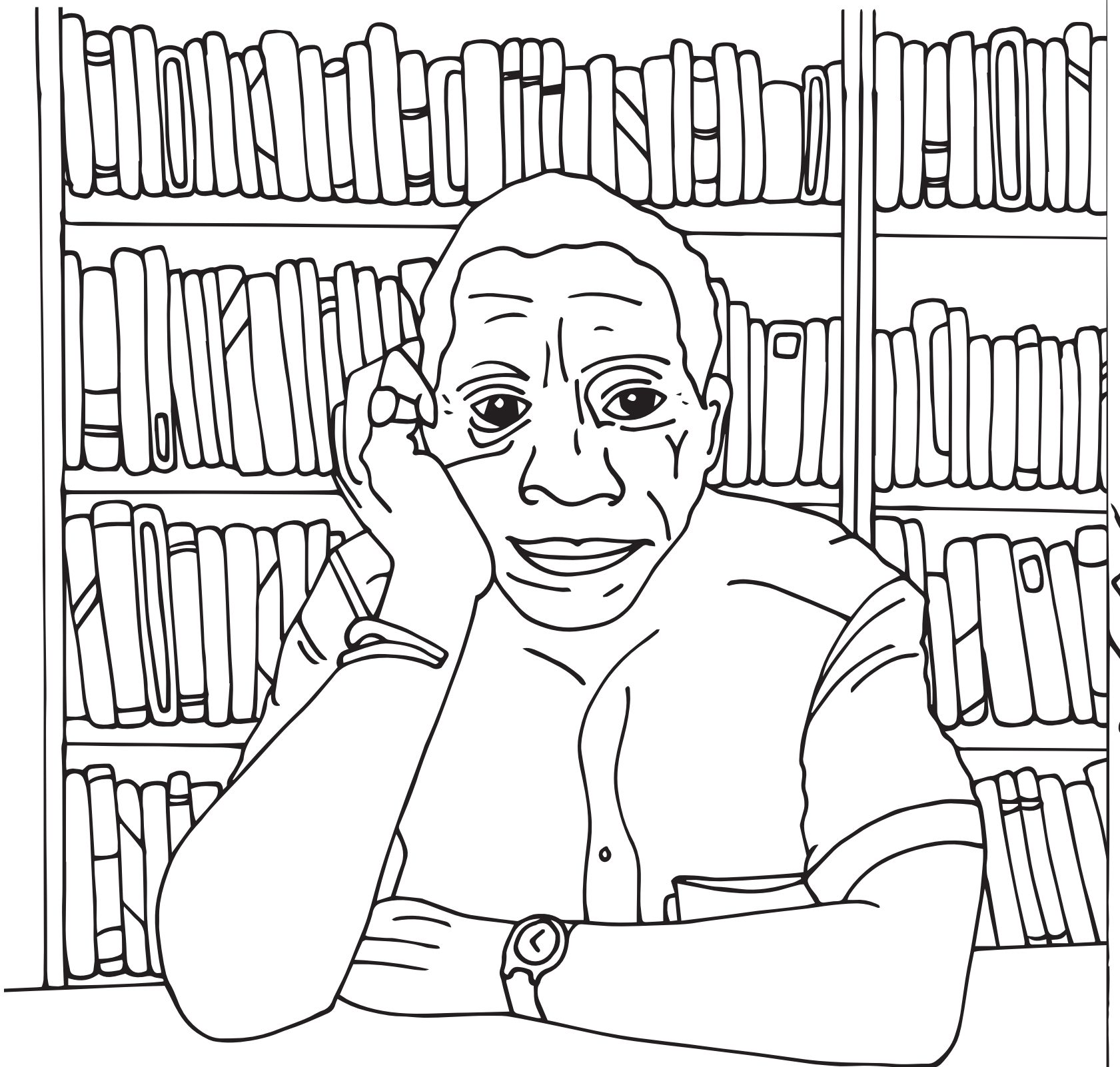
Alvin Ailey was one of modern dance's most influential figures. Born in rural Texas, Ailey's first musical experiences were in the church and local juke joints. At 12, Ailey moved to Los Angeles to study with Lester Horton and, in 1954, debuted on Broadway in Truman Capote's musical *House of Flowers*. In 1958, he founded the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, one of the first companies to integrate African-American heritage into modern dance, creating a style equal parts ballet grace and expressive energy. One of the first multi-racial dance companies, the group has performed over 200 works by over 70 choreographers across the globe, including their signature work *Revelations*. Ailey received the 1977 Spingarn Medal from the NAACP, the 1988 Kennedy Center Honors and a 2014 posthumous Presidential Medal of Freedom.

*“Our young must be taught that racial peculiarities do exist, but that beneath the skin, beyond differing features and into the true heart of being, fundamentally, we are more alike, my friend, than we are unlike.”*



**Maya Angelou (1928-2014)**

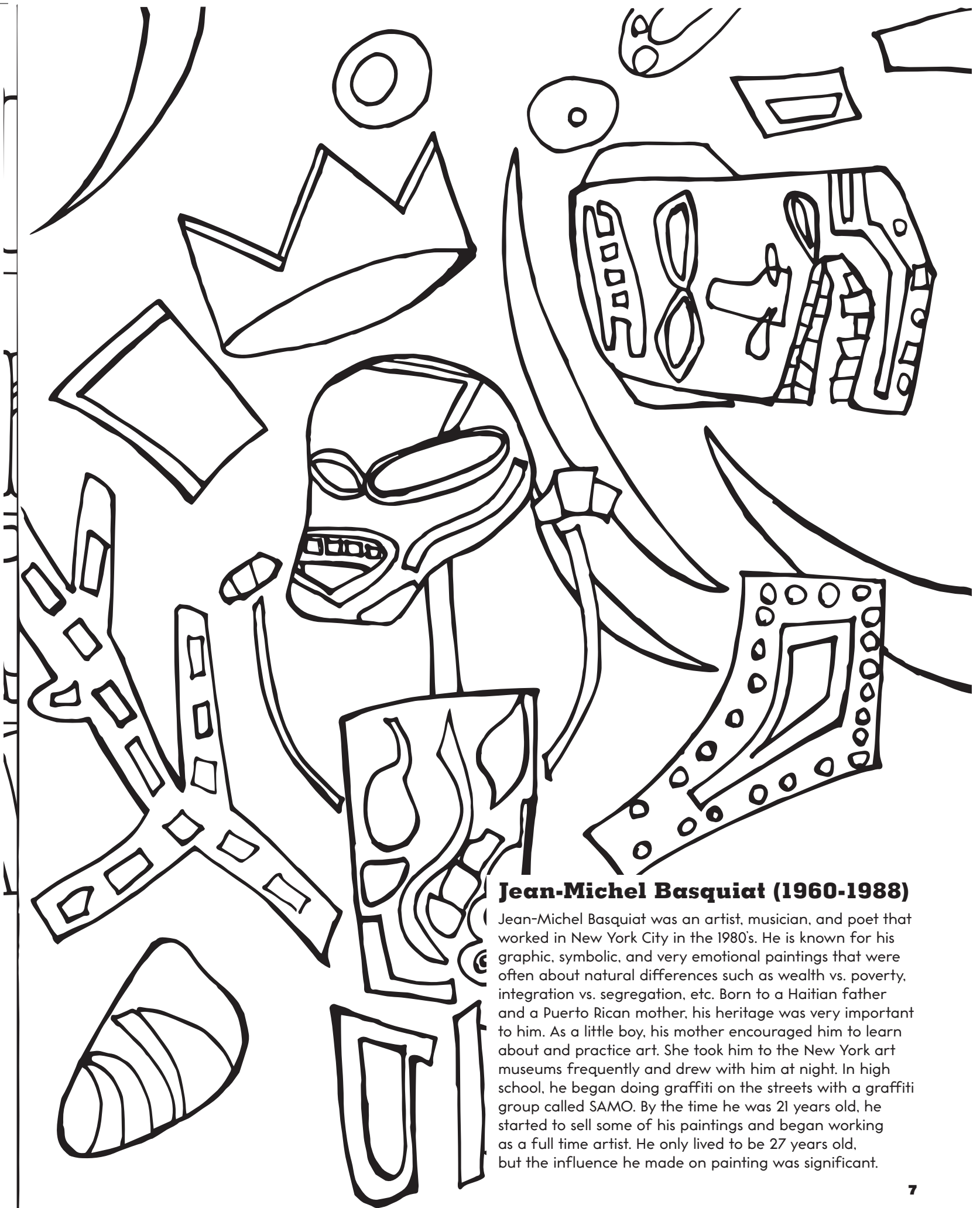
Maya Angelou was an author, poet, civil rights activist, film director, actress, singer, dancer, and professor. She is well known for her autobiographical fiction writing which have themes of racism, identity, family, and travel. One of her most notable works, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, was published in 1969 and centers on her early life until she turned 17. In 1960 she was part of the civil rights movement, joining ranks with Martin Luther King Jr. and became Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) Northern Coordinator.



### **James Baldwin (1924-1987)**

James Baldwin was a well-known writer, novelist, poet, playwright, and activist. Some of his well-known works were his semi-autobiographical novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), and *Giovanni's Room* (1956), and his essays collected in *Notes of A Native Son* (1955). He dealt with themes of racism, sexuality and western societal class distinctions of the time. Baldwin is widely known for being a spokesman during the Civil Rights movement. He appeared on the cover of *Time Magazine* in 1963.





### **Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960-1988)**

Jean-Michel Basquiat was an artist, musician, and poet that worked in New York City in the 1980's. He is known for his graphic, symbolic, and very emotional paintings that were often about natural differences such as wealth vs. poverty, integration vs. segregation, etc. Born to a Haitian father and a Puerto Rican mother, his heritage was very important to him. As a little boy, his mother encouraged him to learn about and practice art. She took him to the New York art museums frequently and drew with him at night. In high school, he began doing graffiti on the streets with a graffiti group called SAMO. By the time he was 21 years old, he started to sell some of his paintings and began working as a full time artist. He only lived to be 27 years old, but the influence he made on painting was significant.



### **iRozealB (1966-present)**

iRozealB (Iona Rozeal Brown) is known for her large scale acrylic paintings, embodies a transcultural aesthetic in her visuals and painting style by mixing issues of class, race, and gender. She's been greatly influenced by American hip hop culture, comic books, Byzantine icons, traditional Japanese woodcut prints, and has even training in the art of ukiyo-e, a genre of woodblock prints. Iona's mixed media collages, paintings, and drawings delve into how a person's identity can be shaped when various cultural ideas collide.





### **Elizabeth Catlett (1915-2012)**

Elizabeth Catlett, a sculptor and graphic artist, focused her art on the female experience in the African-American 20th century. She spent most of her career as a teacher knowing the struggles associated with finding a career as a working artist in this time. She was awarded a fellowship in 1946 and was able to work with the Taller de Grafica Popular for twenty years in Mexico City as well as head the sculpture department of the Escuela Nacional de Artes Plasticas. She conveyed social messages in her modern abstract and figurative pieces and was heavily influenced by African and Mexican art traditions.



## **Nick Cave (1959-present)**

Growing up in central Missouri with a single mother, six brothers, and not much money, Nick Cave felt a need to express his individuality by using objects he found around the house to alter hand-me-downs. He started making his 'Soundsuits' out of all kinds of fabrics, beads, and objects picked up in antique stores. The soundsuit is a crossover between costume, sculpture, and performance. He wanted to use these colorful and beautifully decorated costumes as a vehicle for change. By camouflaging or masking the body with wild decorations, he conceals race, gender, and class - the things that make us different.



### **Ray Charles (1930–2004)**

Ray Charles was blind from the age of seven, and was a singer, songwriter, and composer. Charles pioneered soul music during the 1950s by combining rhythm and blues, gospel, and blues styles into his music. He was one of the first African-American musicians to be granted artistic control by a mainstream record company.



### **Misty Copeland (1982-present)**

Misty Copeland began studying ballet at the age of 13. At 15, she won the Los Angeles Music Center Spotlight Award. She dances for the American Ballet Theatre and is only the third African-American dancer to have been promoted to soloist in the history of the company. In 2014, Copeland was named ABC World News' "Person of the Week" for her work in an Under Armor women-focused campaign.



### **Laverne Cox (1984–present)**

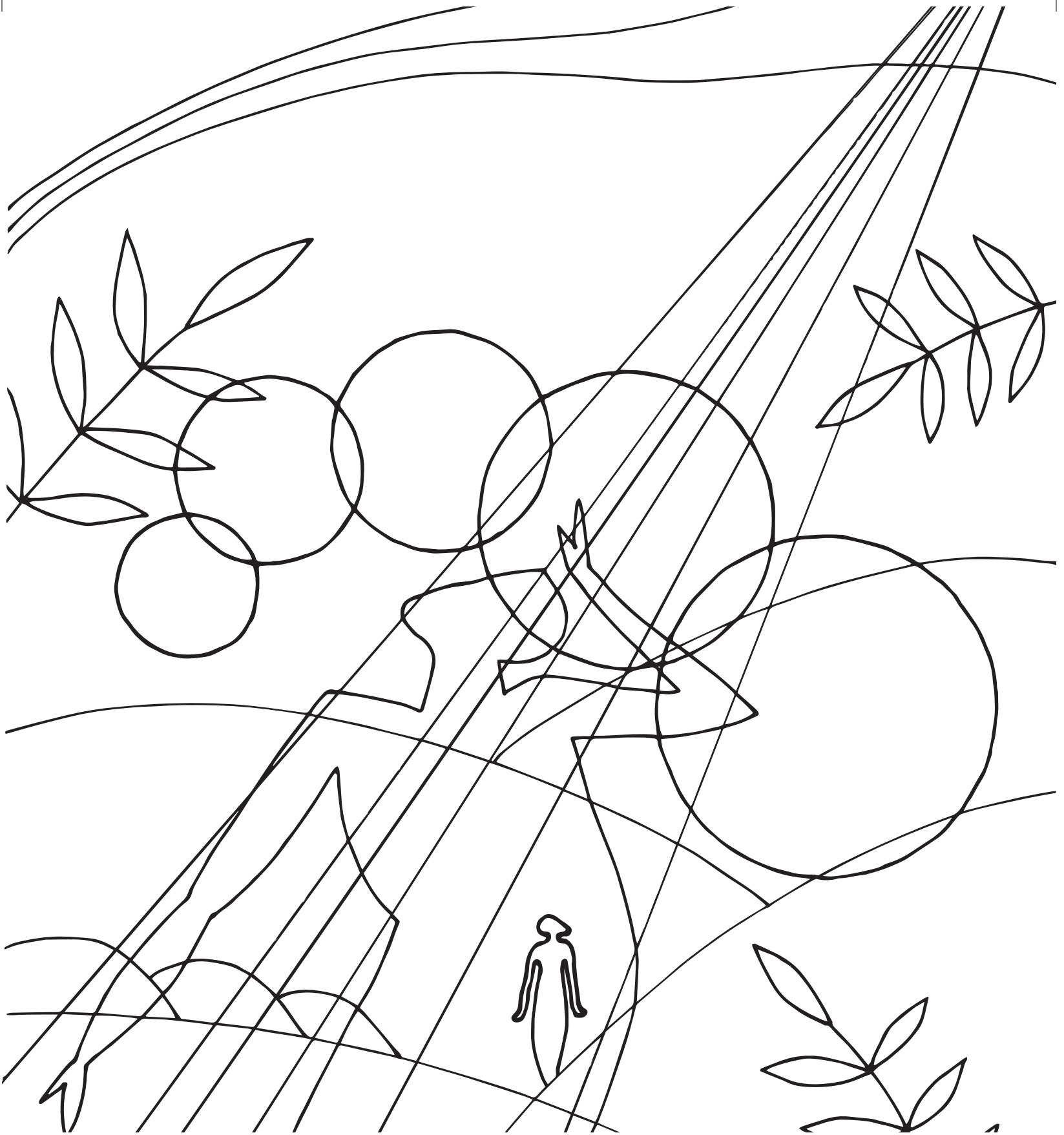
Laverne Cox is a transgender actress and television producer. She is best known for her role as Sophia Burset on the television series, *Orange Is the New Black*. In college, she studied dance, creative writing, and acting. She was the first openly transgender person to appear on the cover of *Time* magazine and the first to be nominated for an Emmy in an actor category. An active advocate for the LGBTQ community, Cox spends much of her time speaking and writing about transgender issues.



**Angela Yvonne Davis  
(1944-present)**

Angela Yvonne Davis is an activist and former professor who advocates gender equality and prison reform. In the 1960s, she was a member of both the Black Panther and Communist Party. She has written several books, including *Women, Race, and Class* and *The Meaning of Freedom*. Davis has taught at universities throughout California and now spends her time traveling, lecturing, and writing.





### **Aaron Douglas (1898–1979)**

Aaron Douglas, an African-American painter, was a major figure in the Harlem Renaissance. After receiving his B.A. from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, he moved to New York City to make works for the most important magazines related to the Harlem Renaissance, *The Crisis* and *Opportunity*. His paintings were heavily influenced by African culture and was named the "Father of African-American Arts", about which he later said "Do not call me the Father of African-American Arts, for I am just a son of Africa, and paint for what inspires me". He also illustrated books, painted murals and canvases, and was very interested in putting together a magazine specifically displaying works of younger writers and artists.

## **Emory Douglas (1943-present)**

Emory Douglas was the Minister of Culture for the Black Panther Party from 1967 until the 1980s. He is best known for his political illustrations in the newspaper, The Black Panther. His artwork called for a revolution by illustrating empowered African Americans taking a stand against the oppressive conditions imposed on their community. In 2007, a book of his art was published and since then, he has had retrospectives at museums across the country.





**Wanda Ewing (1970–2013)**

Wanda Ewing was an artist born in Omaha, Nebraska, whose work spanned printmaking, painting, collage, drawing, and multimedia. Her work is thought-provoking and addresses issues such as race, sexuality, identity, and female beauty standards. Her work was shown nationally and internationally. She was a professor at UNO, a mentor to many people, and a role model in her community. She has a scholarship named after her as well as a gallery in the Union for Contemporary Art. She will be missed but not forgotten.

**Draw Aretha's back-up singers. Be creative!**



### **Aretha Franklin (1942-present)**

Singer and musician Aretha Franklin is known as the Queen of Soul. Franklin started her career singing gospel music at her father's church. She is best known for the songs "Respect," "(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman," and "Think." In 1987, Franklin was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.



## **Jimi Hendrix (1942–1970)**

James "Jimi" Hendrix was a singer, songwriter, and guitarist. His career only lasted four years but he is widely recognized as the most influential electric guitarist in history. At the 1969 Woodstock Festival, Hendrix performed one of the most controversial renditions of the "Star Spangled Banner," in which he used ample amounts of distortion, amplifier feedback, and sustain to mimic the sounds of rockets and bombs.



### **Billie Holiday (1915–1959)**

Billie Holiday is considered one of the most skillful jazz vocalists of all time. She has been an enormous influence on many performers who have followed in her footsteps. Holiday was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2000.



## **bell hooks (1952-present)**

bell hooks is an American author and social activist, has published over thirty books. Her writings address art, history, race, class, mass media, feminism, and gender in education. She describes her focuses as being able to “produce and perpetuate systems of oppression and class domination”. Some of her most well-known books are *All About Love: New Visions*, *Where We Stand: Class Matters*, and *Bone Black: Memories of Girlhood*.





### **Langston Hughes (1902-67)**

James Mercer "Langston" Hughes was one of the leading poets of the Harlem Renaissance and a giant of African-American literature. Born in Joplin, Missouri, Hughes traveled and lived in Ohio, Mexico, Washington DC, New York, and Paris. His first book of poetry, *The Weary Blues*, was published in 1926, establishing Hughes as one of the finest portrayers of the truth and details of African-American life in mid-century America. Hughes also wrote plays, novels, and an autobiography. When he died, he was arguably America's most celebrated poet.

## **Robert Johnson (1911–1938)**

Little is known about blues singer and guitarist Robert Johnson. According to legend, Johnson sold his soul to the Devil in return for an ability to play the blues. His music has been an inspiration for many rock and folk musicians, and he has come to be known as the King of the Delta Blues. In 1986, he was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as an early influence on the rock genre.





### **KRS-One (1967–present)**

Lawrence “KRS-One” Parker is a rapper and producer. He became famous after forming the group Boogie Down Productions with DJ Scott La Rock in the late 1980s. He is noted as starting the Stop the Violence Movement, as well as including important political messages in his lyrics.



### **Nichelle Nichols (1925-present)**

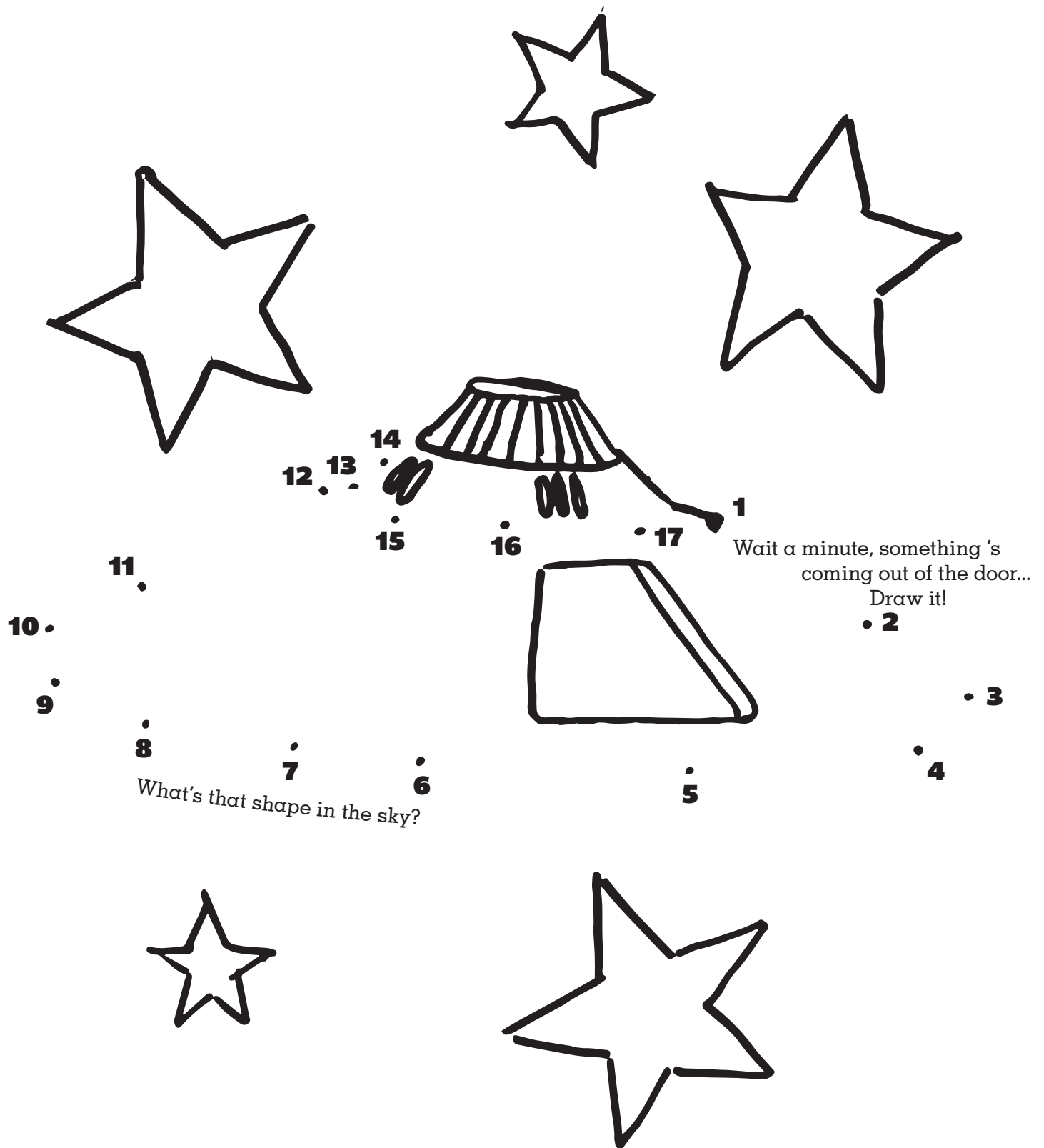
Nichelle Nichols started as a vocalist and a dancer in jazz orchestras, notably the Duke Ellington and Lionel Hampton orchestras. She then began acting in film and television. Her most famous role was from Star Trek as Uhura, the name adapted from a Swahili word, uhuru, meaning freedom. In this role she had the first interracial kiss on television with co-star William Shatner in 1968. Nichols owns a consultant firm called Women in Motion Inc.



### **Gordon Parks (1912-2006)**

Gordon Parks was one of the leading photographers of the Civil Rights era. Born in 1912 in Fort Scott, Kansas, Parks attended a segregated elementary school and faced active discrimination throughout his schooling. Parks began his photography career documenting African-American neighborhoods in Chicago and later worked for the Farm Services Administration and Vogue and Life magazines, where he documented fashion, sports, poverty, and racial segregation as well as shooting portraits of Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, and Muhammad Ali. Parks also wrote novels and books on photographic technique and directed films, most notably *The Learning Tree* and *Shaft*.





## Parliament-Funkadelic: George Clinton (1941-present) & William Earl "Bootsy" Collins (1951-present)

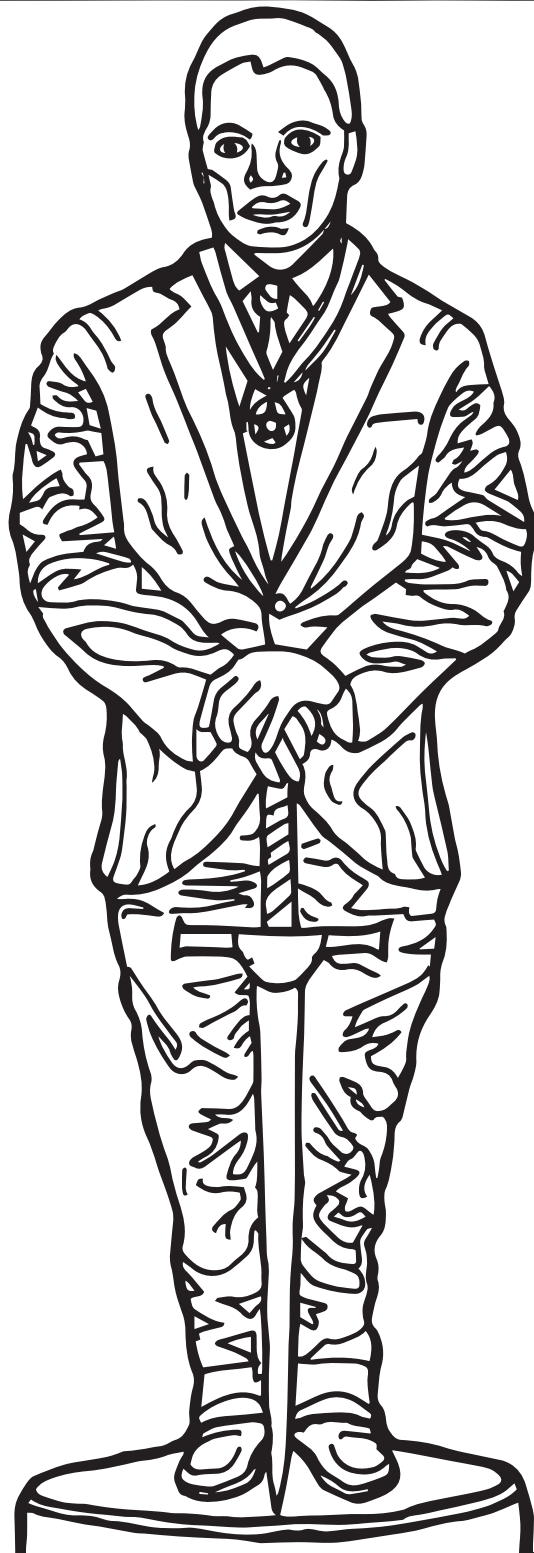
Chances are, you've either heard a song by George Clinton, or have heard a Snoop Dogg or Dr. Dre song on the radio that samples his music. George Clinton is one of the most sampled musicians of all time, right alongside James Brown. He is a key innovator of funk music, and is credited for heading Parliament Funkadelic, which is a funk, soul, and rock music collective, also known as P-Funk.

Bootsy Collins is an American singer/songwriter who worked with George Clinton and P-Funk. They are well known for their musical talent, as well as their fun, humorous, and over the top approach to their albums and live performances.



### **Adrian Piper (1948-present)**

Adrian Piper is one of the most important Conceptual and performance artists of the last fifty years. Born in New York City, Piper studied art in college before receiving a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Harvard in 1981. Working both as a scholar of Immanuel Kant's philosophy and visual artist, Piper challenges the standards of race, gender, and class in series such as *Catalysis*, *Mythic Being*, and *Calling Cards*. She has received awards from NYU, the Guggenheim and Mellon Foundations, the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities, and the Women's Caucus for Art Lifetime Achievement Award. For her 64th birthday, Adrian Piper retired from being black, asking to be called "The Artist Formerly Known as African-American," continuing her life-long challenge to our assumptions about identity.



### **Sir Sidney Poitier (1927-present)**

Sir Sidney Poitier worked as a janitor in exchange for acting lessons from the American Negro Theater in Harlem. He is the first African American to win an academy award for best actor in 1964. Sir Sidney is a Knight Commander of the British Empire giving him the title of "Sir" in 1974. Poitier has also received the Medal of Freedom the highest civilian honor from the United States in 2009.



### **Faith Ringgold (1930-present)**

Faith Ringgold combines painting, fabric, and storytelling to create fascinating and beautiful 'Story Quilts' that illustrate tough subjects. She was raised in Harlem, an area of New York City, and is inspired by fabrics her mother used as a fashion designer. Faith was an activist in several feminist and anti-racist organizations, a public school teacher, and then a college professor in NYC. When nobody would publish her books, she quilted her stories in order to be heard. Later in life, Faith illustrated 14 children's books, 11 of which she also wrote.



### **Kara Walker (1969-present)**

Imagine standing in a room-sized picture book. This is essentially what Kara Walker creates with her large installations of silhouetted caricatures made of cut black paper. Around the age of 3, she would sit on her father's lap while he worked on his art in the garage of their house. Her family moved to the south from California when she was still a kid, and it was there she experienced more hardships related to her race and her gender that inspire the art she makes today. She likes to use humor in her artwork to make people think harder about a subject. She challenges what people consider to be funny and the way we look at American history through her characters.



**Draw your family at the table  
with Carrie Mae Weems!**

### **Carrie Mae Weems (1953-present)**

Carrie is an American artist who works with text, fabric, audio, digital images, and installation video but is best known for her work in the field of photography. She explores issues of racism, gender, politics, and personal or self-identity. Some of her more well-known works are *Kitchen Table* and *Family Pictures and Stories*, which relate to gender issues and racism. Weems has received many rewards including the MacArthur Fellowship Award (2013) and the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant in Photography (2002).





### **Malcolm X (1925-1965)**

Malcolm X (Malcolm Little/el-hajj Malik el Shabazz) became minister of the Nation of Islam in Boston in 1954 and the following year in Philadelphia and New York. He founded Muhammad Speaks a newspaper for the Nation of Islam in 1957. In 1963 Malcolm was the second most sought after speaker in the United States and led the unity rally in Harlem one of the nations largest civil rights events. Malcolm X was assassinated in 1965.



### **Cornbread (1953-present)**

Darryl McCray started writing his nickname, "Cornbread" on walls in North Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1967, to get the attention of a girl he really liked. Cornbread is known as the first modern graffiti writer. From there, graffiti writing expanded to New York and throughout the rest of the world becoming the biggest art movement in the world. Graffiti writing was adopted by many youths around the world as a way to express themselves. It is now an art form that contains many levels of artistic skill focused on writing on walls.

**Draw your own graffiti!**

**Draw yourself in your own career!**

**Draw your own heroes!**

## **Others to Check Out (a list to add to):**

- 1** Afrika Bambaataa
- 2** Louis Armstrong
- 3** Hallie Berry
- 4** Michael Ray Charles
- 5** Nat King Cole
- 6** Robert Colescott
- 7** John Coltrane
- 8** Count Basie
- 9** Miles Davis
- 10** Katherine Dunham
- 11** Duke Ellington
- 12** Ralph Ellison
- 13** Fab 5 Freddy
- 14** Ella Fitzgerald
- 15** Marvin Gaye
- 16** Grandmaster Flash
- 17** Al Green
- 18** David Hammons
- 19** Lorraine Hansberry
- 20** Felix "Fox" Harris
- 21** Barkley L. Hendricks
- 22** Michael Jackson
- 23** Etta James
- 24** B.B. King
- 25** Samella Lewis
- 26** Glenn Ligon
- 27** Kerry James Marshall
- 28** Hattie McDaniel
- 29** Wangechi Mutu
- 30** William Pope.L
- 31** Prince
- 32** Otis Redding
- 33** Condaleeza Rice
- 34** Darius Rucker
- 35** Tupac Shakur
- 36** Lorna Simpson
- 37** Henry Ossawa Tanner
- 38** Mildred D Taylor
- 39** Alma Thomas
- 40** Mickalene Thomas
- 41** Alice Walker
- 42** Kehinde Wiley
- 43** Fred Wilson

## About The Union

The Union for Contemporary Art is a North Omaha-based arts non-profit committed to strengthening the creative culture of our city by providing direct support to local artists and increasing the visibility of contemporary art forms in our community. In every endeavor, we strive to unite artists and the community to inspire positive social change in North Omaha. The organization was founded on the belief that the arts can be a vehicle for social justice and greater civic engagement; we strive to utilize the arts as a bridge to connect our diverse community in innovative and meaningful ways.

## Colophon

This coloring book was created in the Spring of 2015 by students at the University of Nebraska at Omaha as a Service Learning project for their course ART4920 Art in Theory and Practice since 1900. Created in collaboration with Paige Reitz and Brigitte McQueen Shew at The Union for Contemporary Art, Omaha, NE.

Name of Page	Artist	Biographer
Title Page		
Table of Contents		
Alvin Ailey	Megan Kriegler	Adrian Duran
Maya Angelou	Megan Kriegler	Jordan Durham
James Baldwin	Megan Kriegler	Jordan Durham
Jean-Michel Basquiat	Evan Klinkacek	Samantha Taylor
Elizabeth Catlett	Elizabeth Boutin	Sarah Arnold
Nick Cave	Diane Nelson	Samantha Taylor
Ray Charles	Amanda Connole	Cassandra Sullivan
Misty Copeland	Evan Klinkacek	Natasha Bishop
Laverne Cox	Evan Klinkacek	Natasha Bishop
Angela Davis	Jordan Durham	Natasha Bishop
Aaron Douglas	Sarah Arnold	Sarah Arnold
Emory Douglas	Diane Nelson	Natasha Bishop
Wanda Ewing	Hugo Zamorano	Hugo Zamorano
Aretha Franklin	Amanda Connole	Cassandra Sullivan
Jimi Hendrix	Ashley McKeever	Cassandra Sullivan
Billie Holiday	Ashley McKeever	Cassandra Sullivan
bell hooks	Ashley Touchton	Sarah Arnold
IRozaalB	Diane Nelson	Sarah Arnold
Langston Hughes	Max Sheppard	Adrian Duran
Robert Johnson	Diane Nelson	Natasha Bishop
KRS-One	Hugo Zamorano	Cassandra Sullivan
Malcolm X	Ashley Touchton	Robert Mustard
Nichelle Nichols	Elizabeth Boutin	Robert Mustard
Gordon Parks	Elizabeth Boutin	Adrian Duran
Parliament/Funkadelic	Max Sheppard	Samantha Taylor
Adrian Piper	Ashley Touchton	Adrian Duran
Sidney Poitier	Robert Mustard	Robert Mustard
Faith Ringgold	Ashley McKeever	Samantha Taylor
Kara Walker	Ashley Touchton	Samantha Taylor
Carrie Mae Weems	Max Sheppard	Jordan Durham
Cornbread	Hugo Zamorano	Hugo Zamorano
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Draw Yourself in Your Own Career		
Draw Your Own Heroes		
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