

Giants of Europe



Alessandro de Medici The Grand Duke of Florence

Alessandro de Medici was born in Florence, Italy in 1510 to a mother who was a servant girl. His mother served the de Medici family, his father was said to be Pope Clement VII, the nephew of Lorenzo de Medici "The Magnificent." Alessandro was nicknamed the "Moor" by his peers because of his prominent African features. He was appointed regent of Florence in 1523 after Pope Clement was forced to relinquish his power. Clement assigned Alessandro as regent to maintain his influence. In 1527 Emperor Charles VII sacked Rome forcing Alessandro and members of his family to flee for safety. The city remained under siege until 1530 when Pope Clement mended his relationship with Emperor Charles. The emperor used his military power to restore the Medici family as heads of state. The emperor also used his power to appoint Alessandro as Duke of Florence.

He began his reign in 1531 and within six months was made hereditary duke by the emperor. This move helped the Medici's overthrow the opposing republican government. The Duke's reign was not received very well by his enemies and those exiled by Emperor Charles. Alessandro and his supporters were viewed as oppressive and incompetent by those that despised their position. The people of Florence didn't agree with the many actions of the Duke. His cousin Ippolito was sent to appeal his reign to Emperor Charles. Upon his journey Ippolito was killed and Alessandro was suspected of orchestrating his death. Pope Clement died in 1534 creating an opportunity for Alessandro's enemies to attack him. In 1536 he married Emperor Charles' daughter to help cement Alessandro as the absolute Prince of Florence.

Months after Alessandro's marriage, he was assassinated by his cousin Lorenzo De Medici. They lured him into bed with another woman, assassinated him, and quietly moved his body to a designated burial ground. Emperor Charles held a small funeral in the memory of Alessandro in his courts. Lorenzo later fled to Venice where he was killed by supporters of the Medici family. The family remained in power by ensuring Cosimo De Medici became Duke of Florence. Alessandro and his family was an example of the African diaspora in Europe, rising to prominence. The family was able to survive the sacking of Rome by Emperor Charles, and the uprising of a Republican government to remain the rulers of Florence. Alessandro was not well liked or highly thought of by his enemies, but he was effective in helping to maintain his family's power. Alessandro de Medici, we stand on your shoulders.

J.A. Ward.

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Ignatius Sancho

Ignatius Sancho was born in 1729 on a slave ship deporting Africans out of Africa to England; this

On the Shoulders of Giants

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marked the beginning of the life of a great man. His mother died as a result of inhumane conditions in New Granada; his father refused to live as a slave so he chose to die. Sancho was alone and was later shipped to England to become a slave for maiden sisters in Greenwich, from 1731 to 1749. Sancho caught the attention of John Montague, who was the 2nd Duke of Montague; John taught and encouraged Sancho to read, and also lent Sancho his own personal books to read from. By 1749 Sancho's educational level was increasing, he was beginning to understand that he was being dehumanized and decided to escape from Greenwich and flee to live with the Montagu's. He became the butler of Mary Montagu until her death, but he spent his time learning music, poetry, reading and writing. In 1751 Mary Montagu died and Sancho was awarded 30 pounds, which was a year's salary. Sancho met and married Ann Osborne and fathered six children with her. His reputation was growing, not as a slave but as a man of distinction; his reputation was growing because of his education and exposure to the royal lifestyles of the Montagu's.

In 1766 Sancho wrote a letter to Laurence Sterne, he wanted Sterne to foyer for the abolition of the slave trade. Sterne received the letter and responded by writing *Tristram Shandy*, in his writing he brought light to the oppression of a black servant girl. Sterne's writings were publicized throughout Britain and became an important piece of 18th century abolitionist literature. Sancho earned the title of "King of Letters" because of the letter he wrote to Sterne. In 1774 Sancho opened a grocery store; this allowed him to share his literature with many more people. The sharing of his literature actually attracted people to his grocery store. Sancho would later write and publish *Theory of Music*; he also would write and publish two plays. Sancho was listed as an independent male householder in Britain and this listing gave him the right to vote. In 1774 Sancho became the first person of African origin to vote in the history of Britain. He continued to write his letters and he also began writing in newspapers using the alias "Africanus."

Sancho's Grocery store attracted many people, but one important person it attracted was Charles James Fox. Fox was a Statesman and abolitionist; in 1806 he oversaw a Foreign Slave Trade Bill prohibiting British subjects from contributing to the slave trade. This bill eliminated two-thirds of the slave trade passing through Britain. In December of 1780, Ignatius Sancho died of complications with gout; his literary genius however would live on. Sancho became the first person of African origin to be given an obituary in the British Press newspaper. Sancho gained notoriety for his writings of his eye-witness accounts of the Gordon Riots. In 1782 Frances Crewe and a friend arranged 160 of Sancho's letters into a two volume book entitled, *The Letters of the Great Ignatius Sancho, an African*. The book sold well and Sancho's widow was able to receive over 500 pounds in royalties.

Sancho's son William Leach Osborne inherited his father's shop and transformed it into a printing and book-selling business. Osborne printed the fifth edition of the *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho with Memoirs of His Life by Joseph Jekyll*; in his father's shop. In 2007 a plaque in the memory of Sancho was unveiled on the remaining wall of the Montague House in Greenwich Park. Sancho was the catalyst behind the heightened consciousness of the horrors of the slave trade

through Britain. His outstanding writings caused people to pay attention to slavery and Sancho's brilliant writing style. Mr. Ignatius Sancho, we stand on your shoulders.

J.A. Ward.

click below to view Ignatius Sancho video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_2Qgeu-t4bk



Alexander Pushkin

Alexander Pushkin was born June 6, 1799 in Moscow, Russia to a family of Russian nobility. His great-grandfather on his mother's side-Abram Gannibal- was brought from Africa as a slave and rose to become an aristocrat. At the age of fifteen Pushkin published his first poem, and upon graduating from grade school he gained notoriety for his literary talents. His graduating class was the first graduating class of the Imperial Lyceum in Tsarskoe Selo. In 1820 he published his first long poem titled *Ruslan and Lyudmila* a poem that sparked much controversy. He became a mainstay within the literary scene of St. Petersburg, Russia; his stance on social reform made him an opponent of the Russian Government.

In 1820 he was transferred from St. Petersburg to the Caucasus, then to Crimea, then Kamenka, and Chisinau, while in Chisinau he committed himself to freemasonry. Pushkin aligned himself with a secret organization called Filiki Eteria; the group was created to overthrow the Ottoman rule of Greece. When war was waged against the Ottomans, Pushkin kept a diary of the events. Pushkin left Chisinau in 1823 but not before he wrote two romantic poems that brought him national

acclaim. The two poems were titled, *The Captive of the Caucasus* and *The Fountain of Bakhchisaray*. In 1823 while in Odessa Pushkin was again exiled by the government until 1826, while in exile he wrote love poems to Elizaveta Vorontsova the wife of the General-Governor. Pushkin was given permission to visit Tsar Nicholas to petition for his release from exile, he gained his freedom but was under strict government control because of previous poems.

He was not able to publish his poems unless he was given permission by the government. Pushkin also wrote his most famous play during exile, *Boris Godunov* but could not publish it until five years later because he was exiled. That play would not be staged until 2007. In 1828 Pushkin met a 16 year old beauty named Natalya Goncharova he offered her a marriage proposal in 1830, she accepted it under the condition that he would not get persecuted by the government. They were officially married on February 18, 1831. Pushkin would once again begin building a legendary reputation as a writer; he is considered the greatest Russian poet and the founder of modern Russian Literature. His most famous work of art is the verse novel *Eugene Onegin*; he composed other masterpieces such as *The Bronze Horseman*, *The Stone Guest*, *Don Juan* and *Mozart and Salieri*. *Mozart and Salieri* was the inspiration behind Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*.

Pushkin also had an influence on the Russian operas; the composer Glinkas created the pieces *Ruslan and Lyudmila* because of Pushkin. Tchaikovsky created the opera *Eugene Onegin* after Pushkin's verse novel; he also created the opera *The Queen of Spades* because of Pushkin. Other operas were influenced by Pushkin such as *Boris Godunov*, *Rusalka*, *The Stone Guest*, *Mozart and Salieri*, *Tale of Tsar Saltan*, *The Golden Cockerel*, *Prisoner of the Caucasus* and many more. Ballets, cantatas and songs were also created because of the literary works Pushkin created, he is also considered to be the central figure of Russian romantic literature. Pushkin's writings combined all the contemporaneous elements needed to create Russian literature.

Pushkin later created Russian magazine culture, and he also inspired the genre of Russian folk tales. Pushkin died in 1837 as a result of a fatal wound while dueling with the man accused of sleeping with his wife. Upon his death Pushkin managed to restructure and create new elements of Russian literature. His vision and his writing styles kept him in trouble with the Russian government but inspired a whole country and generations to come. Russian literature and literature across the world owes a debt of gratitude to Pushkin for his influence on writings, music and operas. Mr. Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin; we stand on your shoulders.

J.A. Ward.

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