

## “Great American Women, You’ve Never Heard of, Part 2

### Leader’s Guide

**October 2024**

This lesson consists of a dialog between a Television Reporter and seven Great American Women. The reporter interviews each of the seven women, separately. The dialog is written out for you.

You will need at least two participants, but if you wish to divide up the roles, that works also. You could have up to seven members of your Study Group play the roles of the women. You will need a table with two chairs, facing the audience. Name cards for each character would be helpful. Props would be fun. Be sure that each character is represented respectfully. These Ladies are outstanding representatives of Great American Women.

The student handout consists of a list of the seven women in the lesson with a short biography of them. I suggest you hand it out after the lesson.

Kerry Mauk

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# Great American Women, You Have Never Heard Of

## Part 2

By Kerry Mauk with the assistance of Sandie Bolyard

This lesson, Great American Women, You Have Never Heard Of, Part 2 is presented as seven separate interviews. Our Reporter will have a fictional interview with each of these women about their life and accomplishments. We have great respect for each of these women, and this lesson was written to honor them.

Baba: Welcome everyone to “Great American Women, You’ve Never Heard Of”, Part 2. I am Baba Wawa and I will be interviewing seven women from America’s past and present. These women are sitting out in our audience. You could be sitting next to one of them right now.

Baba: Today, we will be speaking with Bridget Mason, a formerly enslaved person, Lizzie Johnson Williams, also known as “The Cattle Queen of Texas.” Emily Warren Roebling, she built the Brooklyn Bridge. Marie Daugherty Webster, she revolutionized quilting design. There is also, Grace Murray Hopper, a computer scientist, mathematician, and Rear Admiral, Dickey Chapelle, a War Correspondent, and Lisa Simone, a Singer, Songwriter, and Broadway Actor.

Baba: So let’s get started. Would Bridget Mason, please come up and join me?  
Welcome Ms. Mason. (Biddy enters and sits down)

Biddy: Y’all can call me Biddy. All my friends do.

Baba: Thank you, I will. Biddy, you were born into slavery, in Georgia or Mississippi, on August 15, 1818.

Biddy: Well, my birthday and birthplace are a guess. I was sold as a small child and the records are long gone. I was sold at least two more times before I was given as a wedding present to Robert Marion Smith and his wife, Rebecca. They lived in Mississippi.

Baba: You are a Midwife and Nurse. Where did you learn these skills?

Biddy: I learned my skills from other enslaved women. They taught me about herbal medicines, and about all the difficulties that can come up when helping to birth babies. I guess I had a real knack for it because I was called to treat slaves and their masters, and their animals.

Baba: You must have been very valuable to your master?

Biddy: Yes, in more ways than one. I have three daughters and the father of my two youngest is Robert Smith.

Baba: Oh, I am sorry.

Biddy: When you are a slave, you have no choices. Slavery was profitable, and it was an easy way for a slave owner to increase the number of slaves he had. I love my daughters. They are MY daughters, not his.

Baba: Yes, you are right. Tell us how you moved from Mississippi to Salt Lake City, Utah, then to San Bernardino, California.

Biddy: Sure enough. Robert Smith converted to the Mormon Religion and decided to pack up everything and move to Salt Lake City, Utah, where there was a Mormon Settlement. He joined a 300 Wagon Caravan heading that way. It was a 1700 mile trip. His slaves walked the whole way, including me and my little girls, age 10 years, 4 years and a newborn.

Baba: Wow, what an exhausting trip. I'll bet you still had to cook and tend the livestock, while traveling.

Biddy: Yes I did. I also had to take care of Mr. Smith's six children. When we got to Salt Lake City, Mr. Smith was not happy with the quality of the dirt on his farm. He said he couldn't grow anything on it, so he decided to pack us up and move us to San Bernardino, California.

Baba: Didn't Smith receive a warning from a Prominent Mormon Leader, that slavery was illegal in California?

Biddy: Yes he did, but he did not listen. Thank the Lord. We arrived in California in 1851. I was told by a free black couple that I could contest my slavery status in a California Court.

Baba: So, did you take Smith to Court?

Biddy: I talked to Mr. Smith about it, but I didn't pursue it. Though, I must have shook him up, because he packed us all up and prepared to move us to Texas, a slave state. We got as far as Cajon Pass, California, when we were stopped by the Los Angeles County Sheriff and his Posse. Smith was arrested for illegally holding slaves.

Baba: My goodness! That was in the nick of time. How did the Sheriff know to come rescue you?

Biddy: Remember the free black couple, The Owens? They had a son who was in love with my oldest daughter, now 17. Mr. Owens contacted the Sheriff, and told him that there were slaves being illegally transported through California.

Baba: Love saves the day. That is just like a Movie!

Biddy: A what??

Baba: Oh, (grimacing) never mind. Then what happened?

Biddy: I petitioned the court for my freedom. I was freed along with 13 members of my family on January 21, 1856. And yes, the Owens boy married my daughter. We all moved to Los Angeles, where Dr. John Struthers Griffin hired me, as a Nurse and Midwife for \$2.50 a day.

Baba: Big money in those days.



Biddy: It sure was. I saved my money and began buying property in the City of Los Angeles. I became a Landlord. I did very well. I built a Church, the First African Methodist, Episcopal, Church. It was the first Black Church in Los Angeles.

Baba: You also donated to Charities, opened shelters for the poor, brought care packages to prisoners, and opened a Black Elementary School. All this, and you don't know how to read or write.

Biddy: That is true. I have a saying. "If you hold your hand closed, nothing good can come in. The open hand is blessed, for it gives, in abundance, even as it receives." I try to live by that saying.

Baba: An admirable saying. Thank you so much for coming by and telling us your extraordinary life story.

Biddy: I enjoyed the visit, very much. Bless you all.

(Biddy Exits)

Baba: Biddy died on January 15, 1891, in Los Angeles. She was buried in an unmarked grave. Her family feuded over her wealth, which was 300 thousand dollars, the equivalent today would be 10 million. When the feud was settled, Biddy's Grandson, Robert became the wealthiest Black man in Los Angeles.

In 1988, the Mayor of LA in a ceremony, placed a marker on Biddy's grave. There is now a park in Los Angeles named after her, with her story carved on an 80 foot concrete wall. Biddy's Church burned down in 1972. It was rebuilt. It now has 19,000 members.

Baba: Our next guest is Elizabeth Johnson Williams, "The Cattle Queen of Texas".  
(Lizzie enters and sits down)

Baba: Welcome and thanks for coming. May I call you Lizzie?

Lizzie: You sure may. I came all this way by train. It sure beats traveling on horseback. It's easier on the bottom.

Baba: I imagine so. Lizzie, you were born in Missouri in 1840. Your parents moved the family to Hays County, Texas, in 1844. There they opened a school, which they named "The Johnson Institute".

Lizzie: That's right. My family expected me to become a teacher for their school. So, I went to Chappell Hill Female College in Washington County, Texas. I earned my degree in 1859 and returned to teach at their school. In those days, teaching was about the only profession a respectable woman could have.

Baba: Later, you opened your own school in Austin, Texas. That is not all. You also became the bookkeeper for some prominent Cattle Ranchers in that area.

Lizzie: That was an education. I have never been one to settle, and when I saw how much money could be made in the Cattle Trade, I knew I had to be a part of it. I registered my own brand "CY", and bought ten acres of land and some cattle near Austin. This was in 1871. I discovered that I had a head for the cattle business.

Baba: In 1879, you married Hezekiah Williams. And you did something shocking for those times. You had him sign a Prenuptial Contract. How modern of you.

Lizzie: I was head over heels in love with Hezekiah, but he had no head for business and I worked too hard to lose it all to a bad business deal.

Baba: A Prenuptial Agreement guaranteed that you were the sole owner of the land and cattle that you owned before you were married. However, most everything you bought after you were married was in Hezekiah's name.

Lizzie: Yes, that was the way it was. You can bet that I kept a close eye on our business dealings. We took the cattle to market, together. We traveled along the Chisholm Trail, which started at San Antonio, Texas and ended at Abilene, Kansas. That is 1000 miles. It was hot and dusty. There were torrential rains which swelled the rivers. We battled cattle rustlers and mosquitoes and stampedes. When we crossed through Oklahoma Indian Territory, the American Indians charged us 10 cents a head for the cattle to pass. But, when we arrived in Abilene, the buyers paid us ten times what the cattle was worth in Texas.

Baba: Amazing! Did you know that you were the first woman to take her own cattle with her own brand up the Chisholm Trail?

Lizzie: How about that. I was proud to do it.

Baba: Thanks for spending time with us, Lizzie.

Lizzie: It was a hoot. (Lizzie exits)

Baba: Before Hezekiah died, he was supposed to transfer all his assets to Lizzie, but it never happened. After Hezekiah's death in 1914, Lizzie became a recluse. She was thought to be impoverished. When she died in 1924, it was discovered that she was worth a quarter of a million dollars. In 2013 Lizzie was inducted into the National Cowgirl Hall of Fame. She is known as "The Cattle Queen of Texas".

Baba: If you have ever wondered what a lady can do when she is called upon, let me introduce you to Emily Warren Roebling.

(Emily enters and sits down)



Emily: Good Morning Everyone.

Baba: Welcome, may I call you Emily?

Emily: Of course you may.

Baba: Emily, you were born on September 23, 1843, in Cold Spring, New York. You were eleventh of twelve children. You attended Georgetown Visitation Academy in Washington D.C. to become a teacher.

Emily: Yes, my brother, Gouverneur gave me the encouragement I needed to succeed. He became a Major General during the Civil War. In 1864, he invited me to visit him at his headquarters. While I was there I attended a Soldier's Ball. There I met Washington Roebling, who was a Civil Engineer.

Baba: Washington's father, John A Roebling built bridges for a living, very large bridges.

Emily: Yes, he certainly did. Washington and I were married in 1865. We moved to Europe so he could study the use of caissons in bridge building. A caisson is a water tight structure that allows workers to build piers inside it, in a dry environment, until the concrete piers are set.

Baba: You had a baby, in 1867, while we were in Germany. He was named John Roebling, after his Grandfather, who was at the time building the Brooklyn Bridge.

Emily: That is correct. Then, there was a terrible accident, at the job site. John Sr. had his foot crushed when a ferry ran into a piling he was standing on. He contracted Tetanus and passed away, in 1869. We returned to New York and Washington was made the Chief Engineer of the project.

Baba: Washington was in an accident, also.

Emily: Washington would venture under water to inspect the work being done with setting the piers. He contracted Caisson Disease.



Baba: Caisson Disease is also known as Decompression Sickness or The Bends. It occurs when there is a rapid decrease in the pressure that surrounds you. Skin divers can get it if they come up from the deep water too quickly. Nitrogen in your blood forms bubbles in your tissue and blood. It causes extreme pain in your joint and bones.

Emily: Washington was bedridden and partially paralyzed. I stepped in so the project could continue. I relayed information from Washington to his assistants. I learned about cable construction and stress analysis, and which materials were best to use. I visited the bridge site almost daily to be sure the plans were followed. I relayed any questions the supervisors and bridge crew had to my husband. I was his eyes and ears.

Baba: You were literally the day to day supervisor. You had to deal with those who supplied materials, as well as companies and politicians who wanted to take the project away from you.

Emily: I was determined that The Roeblings were going to get the Brooklyn Bridge Built.

Baba: In 1882, certain politicians and engineers wanted to remove Washington from the project. Wasn't the bridge almost completed by then?

Emily: Yes it was. I attended a meeting with those gentlemen, to defend my husband's work. I must have been convincing because he was allowed to continue as Chief Engineer.

Baba: I'll say. An article in The New York Times stated how surprised the engineers and politicians were at your knowledge of engineering and how you helped them solve the various problems they had, regarding the bridge. Well Done, Mrs. Roebling! The Brooklyn Bridge was completed in 1883 and you were chosen, by the workers, to ride in the first carriage to cross it.

Emily: That was an honor I will remember, always.

Baba: After you completed the Brooklyn Bridge, what did you do with your time?

Emily: I became active in women's rights. I helped open the Evelyn College for Women. It was the first Women's College in New Jersey. In 1899, I graduated from Woman's Law Class at New York University.

Baba: You didn't sit back on your laurels. I understand that Washington's health improved also. That is good to hear. Thank you for sharing your great achievement with us.

Emily: I was delighted to do so. (Emily exits)

Baba: Today, the Brooklyn Bridge has a plaque on it dedicated to the memory of Emily Warren Roebling, her husband and her Father in Law, John Roebling Sr. Emily died on February 28, 1903, at the age of 59. Her husband, Washington wrote of Emily. "I thought I would succumb, but I had a strong tower to lean upon, my wife, a woman of infinite tact and wisest council".

Baba: Here is a real treat for you, a lady, who created quilts that are considered art. That's right. She has quilts in Art Museums. I would like to introduce Marie Daugherty Webster. (Marie enters & sits down)

Baba: Glad to have you join us.

Marie: I am very happy to be here. Please call me Marie.

Baba: Marie, you were born July 19, 1859 in Wabash, Indiana. You were the eldest of six children. Your father was a Bank President, so I guess you lived a comfortable life.

Marie: Yes we did. However, my father would not allow me to go to college. He did not think it was necessary for girls. I did graduate from High School in 1878.

Baba: How did you get interested in quilting?

Marie: My Mother was very talented at hand sewing and she taught me. I especially liked needlepoint. I did make some quilts but I didn't begin designing them until much later in my life.

Baba: You married George Webster Jr. on Valentine's Day of 1884. Your son Lawrence was born October 29<sup>th</sup> of that same year.

Marie: George became a banker but we took time to travel all over the United States and Europe. We had a glorious time. Eventually, George's arthritis became so painful that he retired from the Bank. We stopped traveling and we settled down in Marion, Indiana. While I was caring for George, I found I needed a hobby, so I took up quilting.

Baba: Your quilts are unique. What did you do differently?

Marie: I was not satisfied with the common patterns that quilters customarily used. I wanted to use new patterns, with fresh new colors. I couldn't find what I wanted, so I created my own. I took inspiration from my flower garden. I made a quilt using a rose pattern, I designed. My friends were so impressed that they thought I should submit my quilt to "The Ladies Home Journal" magazine. So I did.

Baba: "The Ladies Home Journal" called your newly designed quilt, innovative. They asked you to write an article about quilting for their upcoming edition. You did, in the January 1911 issue. This issue included four of your new quilt designs. Your life changed, dramatically! Other women's magazines published photos of your quilts. The well known department store in Chicago, "Marshall Field", had a display of your quilts in their store. You became a celebrity.

Marie: It was amazing! I even wrote a book entitled "Quilts: Their Story and How to Make Them", published in 1915. Did you know, it was the first book, in America, written about the history of quilts?



Baba: I didn't know that. (speaking to the audience) Did you know that? Your book received favorable reviews from the major newspapers of the day.

Marie: Soon, I was overwhelmed with requests for my quilt patterns. So, I opened a mail order business, with the assistance of my son, Lawrence, and my sister, Emma. Lawrence made the blue prints. Emma made the tissue paper full sized patterns and I put the kits together and mailed them out. We sold them for 50 cents a kit. We named our business "The Practical Patchwork Company".

Baba: Your business grew. You expanded your inventory to include completed quilts, precut fabric, and of course a catalog. In 1921, you added two friends to your employ to help you out. Your business was booming! Then you retired in 1942.

Marie: It was time to retire. I was 83. My husband passed away in 1938. Emma and I moved in with my son, Lawrence, and I sold the business to my two friends.

Baba: Thank you so very much for visiting us today.

Marie: I had a lovely time. (Marie exits)

Baba: Marie died August 29, 1956 at the age of 97. She was a successful businesswoman, author and artist. Her influence on quilting, through her innovative designs, elevated quilting to an art form. This legitimized quilters as true Artists. Marie's quilts are displayed in Art Museums across the U.S. including the Indianapolis Museum of Art and the Museum of American Folk Art in New York City.

Baba: My next Great American Woman is Rear Admiral Grace Murray Hopper, Computer Programming Pioneer, Scientist, Mathematician, and Retired Rear Admiral. That is a mouthful! (Grace enters and sits down)

Grace: Next time I need a resume, I'm going to commission you to write it.



Baba: I could list all your awards, such as the National Medal of Technology and Innovation or your 40 honorary degrees, but I think the audience would rather hear your life story.

Grace: Thank Goodness. We don't want to put them to sleep. Well, I was born in 1906 in New York City. My father was a Yale graduate. He owned an Insurance Company. You could say that my father was quite successful. No pressure there. I attended Vassar College and graduated in 1928. I received a Master's Degree in 1930 and my Ph D in 1934 both at Yale University. I think that covers it.

Baba: You didn't mention that all your degrees were in Mathematics and Mathematical Physics. That is every parent's dream. So you have this outstanding education and you decide to join the Navy. Are you kidding me!

Grace: After the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and World War II began, I thought it was my duty to join the fight. However, the Navy rejected my application because I was too old, (35 years old) and I was 15 pounds under weight.

Baba: But, you persisted and the Navy relented. (turning to the audience) Get this folks, in 1943, Grace took a leave of absence from an Associate Professor position at Vassar College to become a Midshipman in the U. S. Navy Reserve.

Grace: I was proud to serve. I soon received my commission as a Lieutenant Junior Grade. I was assigned to the Bureau of Ships Computation Project at Harvard University. It was a top secret job. I worked on the Mark I computer. Mark I was the first electromechanical computer in the U. S. I wrote the 561 page manual for it.

Baba: Why on earth would you write a 561 page manual for a computer?

Grace: Because the Navy told me to.

Baba: That is a good reason. After the war, you turned down a full professorship at Vassar to continue working at Harvard in computer technology. You helped develop the Mark II and then the Mark III computers.

Grace: In 1949, the Navy ended their funding contracts with Harvard. I was out of a job and the Navy returned me to reservist status. Harvard would not allow me to stay because they had no permanent positions for women.

Baba: That same year, you were offered a position at Eckert-Mauchly Computer Corporation as a Senior Mathematician. Remington Rand acquired Eckert-Mauchly and you were promoted to Head Programmer. It seems those folks recognized your abilities.

Grace: I worked on the UNIVAC 1 computer. This was 1952. My team developed the first computer compiler. It translated mathematical code into binary code which the computer could read. By this time, I was convinced that we could develop a computer that could read words instead of symbols. By 1956, we had achieved that goal.

Baba: (turning to the audience) Do you folks realize what Grace accomplished? She developed a system that enabled us to give commands to a computer in English instead of in gobbly gook.

Grace: The language was called COBOL. And, yes it was a big step in that direction.

Baba: You remained a Navy Reservist until 1966, when the Navy retired you with the rank of Commander. You were 60.

Grace: That was the saddest day of my life. Would you believe, seven months later, they recalled me to active duty. They needed help standardizing the multitude of computer languages.

Baba: The people that worked under you nicknamed you "Amazing Grace".

Grace: They were a good crew. They were fun to work with. I trained most of them.

Baba: You remained on active duty for 19 years and retired as a Rear Admiral in 1985. You were 79. Did you know that you were the oldest active duty officer in the U. S. Armed Forces? Then you were hired as a consultant by Digital Equipment Corporation. You don't slow down, do you? Before you go, I have to know. Do you really have a clock that runs backward?

Grace: Yes, I do. All of my life, I have heard "We've always done it this way". I believe, we should go forward and not backward, the clock is a reminder of that. Thanks for inviting me to visit.

Baba: We enjoyed having you. (Grace exits)

Baba: Grace worked right up to her death on January 1, 1992. She coined the phrases, nanoseconds and debugging. In 1996, the Navy commissioned a guided missile destroyer, "The USS Hopper", in her honor. Wouldn't she be pleased. Grace was buried in Arlington Cemetery with full military honors.

Baba: Dickey Chapelle is our next guest. She is a War Correspondent for National Geographic Magazine. Please Say hello to Dickey Chapelle.

(Dickey enters and sits down)

Baba: It is a privilege to have you drop by and visit with us.

Dickey: It was great to be invited. In my line of work, I don't get the chance to experience "blanking" flush toilets very often.

Baba: I imagine not. But please remember that this is a family show.

Dickey: Oh, I'm sorry. I have been a War Correspondent for 20 years, through 7 wars. I am used to talking with soldiers and Marines. I will tone it down.



Baba: Thanks Dickey, I appreciate that. Let's see, you were born March 14, 1919 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Your birth name is Georgette Louise Meyer. How did you become Dickey Chapelle?

Dickey: Easy explanation. I became Chapelle when I married Tony Chapelle in 1940. We divorced 15 years later but I kept his name. Dickey was a nickname I had, as a child, because my hero was Admiral Richard Byrd. He was a Naval Aviator and Arctic explorer of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Baba: That explains it. I understand that you sold your first story to the U.S. Air Services Magazine, entitled "Why We Want to Fly". You were 14 years old. At 16, you were accepted to M.I.T. University. You only went to school there for two years.

Dickey: I was dying to be a pilot but I soon discovered that was not where my talents lay. So, I moved forward and decided to take photography classes. My teacher was Tony Chapelle. We married within months of meeting.

Baba: Tony was 19 years your senior. When World War II broke out, he joined the Navy. This was 1942, shortly after Pearl Harbor was bombed. He was assigned to the South Pacific. And what did the little woman do?

Dickey: In 1942, I became one of the first women war correspondents, accredited by the U.S. Military. I was sent to the South Pacific to interview nurses and wounded soldiers, on the ships. Instead, I accompanied the Marines, fighting on Okinawa and Iwo Jima. The Military found out and pulled my press accreditation. Women were not supposed to be in combat zones. Oops!

Baba: Oops, indeed. After the War, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, you and Tony traveled to all the hot spots, around the world. And I don't mean vacation destinations.



Dickey: They may have been vacation destinations before six years of war decimated them. We worked for Relief Organizations and the U.S. Department of State. We took photographs of the devastation in two dozen countries. We traveled throughout Europe and the Mid East. I witnessed people living in caves and bombed out buildings. I saw starving children wearing rags for clothes.

Baba: Wow. That must have been heart breaking.

Dickey: It was heart breaking but also, it was touching to see and record, how old enemies put aside their differences to help alleviate the suffering.

Baba: When you returned to the U.S. in 1956, you became a publicist for an airline. Pretty tame stuff. But that didn't last long. That same year you were off to report on the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Many of the Hungarian People revolted against their Government which was a puppet of the Soviet Union. They were successful until the Soviet Union brought in their troops and crushed the Revolution.

Dickey: The Revolution lasted 12 days. I was arrested and put in solitary confinement for 49 days. Tony came to my rescue and managed to buy my freedom. We were divorced by then, so I was very grateful to him. He had become ill and tired by then and preferred to remain in the U.S.

Baba: Reporting on your own, you wrote the copy and took the photos. You were there for the Algerian War of Independence. You interviewed Castro during the revolution in Cuba. You were there for the Korean Conflict and countless other conflicts around the world. And you still had time to write a book.

Dickey: I wrote an Autobiography that was published in 1961. The title is "What's a Woman Doing Here?" A phrase, I have heard countless times in my career.

Baba: Congratulations. It is a great read. Tell us what is among "the greatest experiences one can have".

Dickey: Awe, my quote. That would be parachuting out of a plane. What a rush! I was 41, at the time I jumped. I needed to accomplish it, so I could parachute into combat with the Marines, I was embedded with. When you are embedded with the Marines, you have to be ready to go when they go. You eat what they eat and sleep where they sleep. Complaining is not allowed. I love it!

Baba: In 1961, you got your first glimpse of Viet Nam. (speaking to the audience) Did you know that Dickey has seen more fighting in Viet Nam than any other American? She has been in 17 operations, there. That is Unbelievable. Thank you for dropping by and sharing your experiences with us.

Dickey: I had fun. Thanks for asking me to come. (Dickey exits)

Baba: In 1962, Dickey won the George Polk Memorial Award, which is the highest citation for bravery from the Overseas Press Club of America. On November 4, 1965, while imbedded with the U.S. Marines, near Chu Lai, Dickey was walking with her patrol unit on a mission, when they walked into a trip wire that triggered an explosion. Dickey was mortally wounded and died on the floor of a helicopter. She was the first female American Journalist to die in combat. The Marines placed a marker near the location where she died that reads "She was one of us and we will miss her". She was buried with full military honors. Her motto was, "Only you can frighten you".

Baba: Our last guest is the very talented, Lisa Simone. Welcome, Ms. Simone.

(Lisa enters and sits down)

Lisa: Glad to be here. Oh please, call me Lisa.

Baba: Your credits include singer, songwriter, and actor. You have appeared on and off Broadway in such plays as Jesus Christ Superstar, Lion King, Aida, Les Miserables and Rent. You have been an Airman, wife and mother. That is an impressive amount of accomplishments. Did I leave anything out?

Lisa: I speak French.

Baba: Of course you do. Tell us about your childhood.

Lisa: I was born September 12, 1962 in Mount Vernon, New York. My father, Andrew Stroud, was a New York City Police Detective. My mother was the famous Jazz singer, songwriter, and Civil Rights Activist of the 1960s, Nina Simone.

Baba: How was it to be the daughter of a famous icon?

Lisa: It was great until it wasn't. My early childhood was wonderful. My Mom was a caring parent. We listened to music and sang together. I would dance around the house. Mom would let me play with her costumes and wigs.

Baba: Your father quit the police force and took on the role of Manager of Nina's career. He handled her schedules and finances. He kept her organized. It must have been difficult when they divorced in 1971.

Lisa: Difficult? Impossible is more accurate. Mom was an artist, not a business woman. She could not cope on her own. My Mom was Bi Polar.

Baba: It was called Manic-Depression in those days. As I understand it, someone who is Bi Polar has extreme mood swings. One day, they are on top of the world, happy and full of energy. The next day they are depressed with no energy to do the simplest things, like get out of bed. They can become violent for no reason.

Lisa: That about sums it up. Mom's world just crashed around her, and I was a convenient punching bag. She would tell me horrible things, such as my father didn't love me. When she got real bad, I would be sent to live with relatives for a while.

Baba: In 1974, Nina moved the two of you to Switzerland. Did that improve the situation?



Lisa: No it didn't. Fortunately, at age 14, I went to visit my father in New York. I never returned to live with my Mom. She wouldn't speak to me, except to berate me. I did find out that she secretly came to my High School Graduation.

Baba: You joined the U.S. Air Force. What was that all about?

Lisa: Oh, that was partly to annoy my Mother and partly because I didn't know what I wanted to do.

Baba: You were in the Air Force for ten years. You are a Gulf War Veteran.

Lisa: Yes I am. After I was discharged, I decided to become an actress. I made my debut in theater, in the chorus of Jesus Christ Superstar. Then, I played on Broadway in Rent and Aida. I also played Nala in The Lion King.

Baba: You were busy.

Lisa: Yes but in 1998, I needed a change. I decided to devote my time to my music career. So far, I have recorded five albums. The first Album was songs my Mother originally recorded.

Baba: How was your relation with your Mother by then?

Lisa: I learned to stand up for myself. When she would start her nasty rant at me, I would tell her to call back when she felt better. Our relationship improved. She began coming to my performances with my husband. She really enjoyed them. She passed away in 2003.

Baba: I am sorry. How is your family?

Lisa: My husband is Robert Kelly. We were married in 1995. I have three children, who are all grown up now. We have tried to keep our family life private. I think that is the key to our success as a family.

Baba: You produced a documentary about your mother, Nina Simone.

Lisa: Yes, it was made in 2015, and it is titled "What Happened, Miss Simone?" It was nominated for an Oscar.

Baba: You have truly come back from adversity. Thank you for sharing your story with us.

Lisa: I hope my story gives hope to others. (Lisa exits)

Baba: Those were seven extra ordinary women. It was a delight to bring their stories to life for you. How about a hand for the actresses who brought the characters to life. Until next time, this is Baba Wawa saying Good Bye.

## Great American Women Part 2

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Christian Science Monitor: Issue dated Aug. 3, 2020

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Wikipedia.org: Chisholm Trail

womenintexashistory.org/biography/lizzie-johnson

images.indianahistory.org/digital/collection/mariewebster

history.com/news/Brooklyn-bridge-emily-roebling

freedomcenter.org/heros/bridget-biddy-mason

nsp.gov/people/biddymason.htm

austintexas.gov/blog/Elizabeth-lizzie-johnson-williams

theguardian.com/music/2023/oct/05/lisa-simone

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wikitree.com/wiki/capelli-22

What's a Woman Doing Here, a Reporter's Report on Herself by Dickey Chapelle

News.yale.edu/2017/02/10/grace-murray-hopper



## Great American Women, You Have Never Heard Of, Part 2

### Student Handout

A synopsis of the interviews with the Great American Women, part 2

Bridget “Biddy” Mason      1818-1891

Biddy was born into slavery. She was trained to be a nurse and midwife. Her last Master, Robert Smith, moved his household including Biddy to Utah and then to California. Smith was arrested for having slaves in California. Biddy petitioned the court for her freedom, and won. She moved her family to Los Angeles and worked as a Nurse and Midwife. She saved her money and bought property in L. A. She became wealthy. She built a Church and donated her time and money to the poor in her area.

Elizabeth “Lizzie” Johnson Williams      1840-1914

Lizzie was a school teacher, who was a bookkeeper for wealthy Cattlemen. She decided to purchase land and cattle for herself. She also registered her own brand. She was the first woman to take her own cattle up the Chisholm Trail to market in Kansas. She was inducted into the Cowgirl Hall of Fame. She is known as “The Cattle Queen of Texas”.

Emily Warren Roebling      1843-1903

Emily’s husband, Washington, was the Chief Engineer in charge of building the Brooklyn Bridge, in New York. He contracted a disabling disease while on the job. This disease, decompression sickness rendered him bed ridden. Emily stepped in and with her husband’s guidance, she became the Project Manager, Chief Engineer and day to day Supervisor. When the Brooklyn Bridge was completed, the bridge workers gave Emily the honor of riding on the first carriage to cross the bridge.

Marie Daugherty Webster      1859-1956

Marie was an extraordinary quilt designer, business owner, author and lecturer. She revolutionized quilt design. Her quilts are in Museums all over the U.S.

Grace Murray Hopper      1906-1992

Grace was at the forefront of computer advancement. She helped develop a system for computers to understand instructions in English. Her subordinates called her "Amazing Grace". Grace joined the Navy in 1943. She retired for the last time in 1985, at the age of 79. She was the oldest active duty officer in the U.S. Armed Forces. Her rank was Rear Admiral.

Dickey Chapelle      1919-1965

Dickey was a War Correspondent from 1942 to 1965. She reported from Iwo Jima, Korea, Cuba, Algeria, Hungary, and lastly, Viet Nam. Dickey was killed in Viet Nam. The Marines that she was patrolling with, placed a marker, near where she died which reads "She was one of us and we will miss her".

Lisa Simone Kelly      1962-current

Lisa is a Broadway Actor, Singer, Songwriter, and Air Force Veteran. She is the daughter of Nina Simone, a singer, songwriter, and Civil Rights Activist. Nina was also Bi Polar. Lisa struggled and triumphed over her troubled childhood.

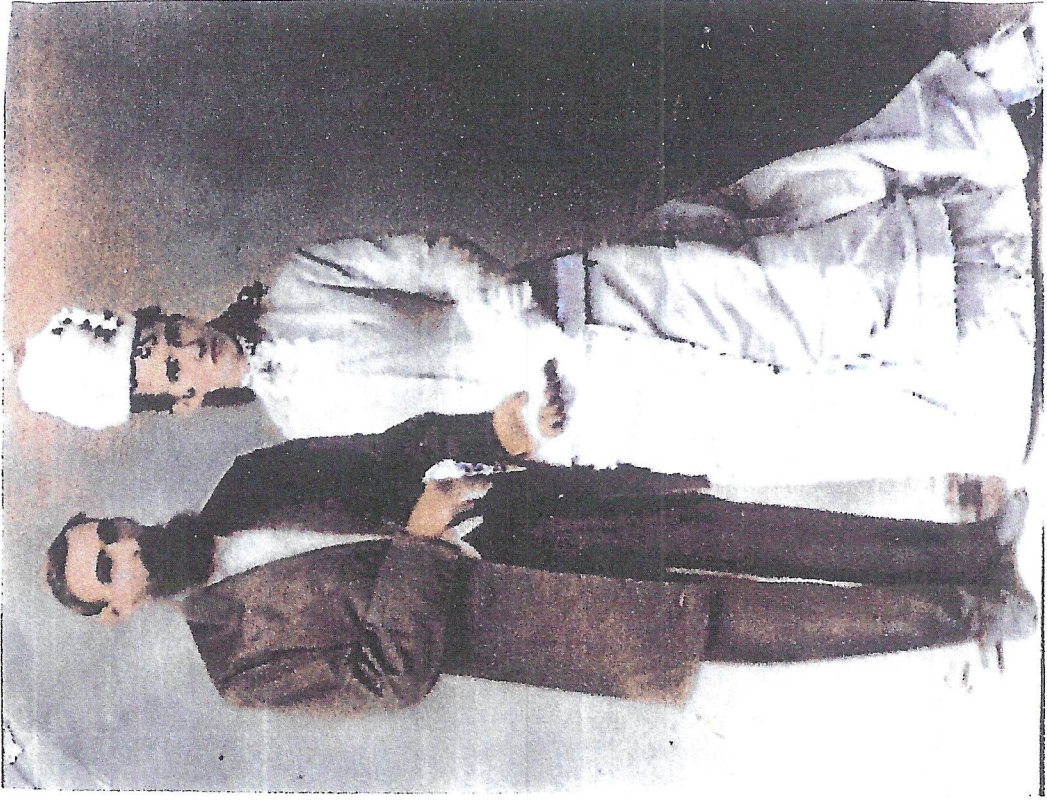
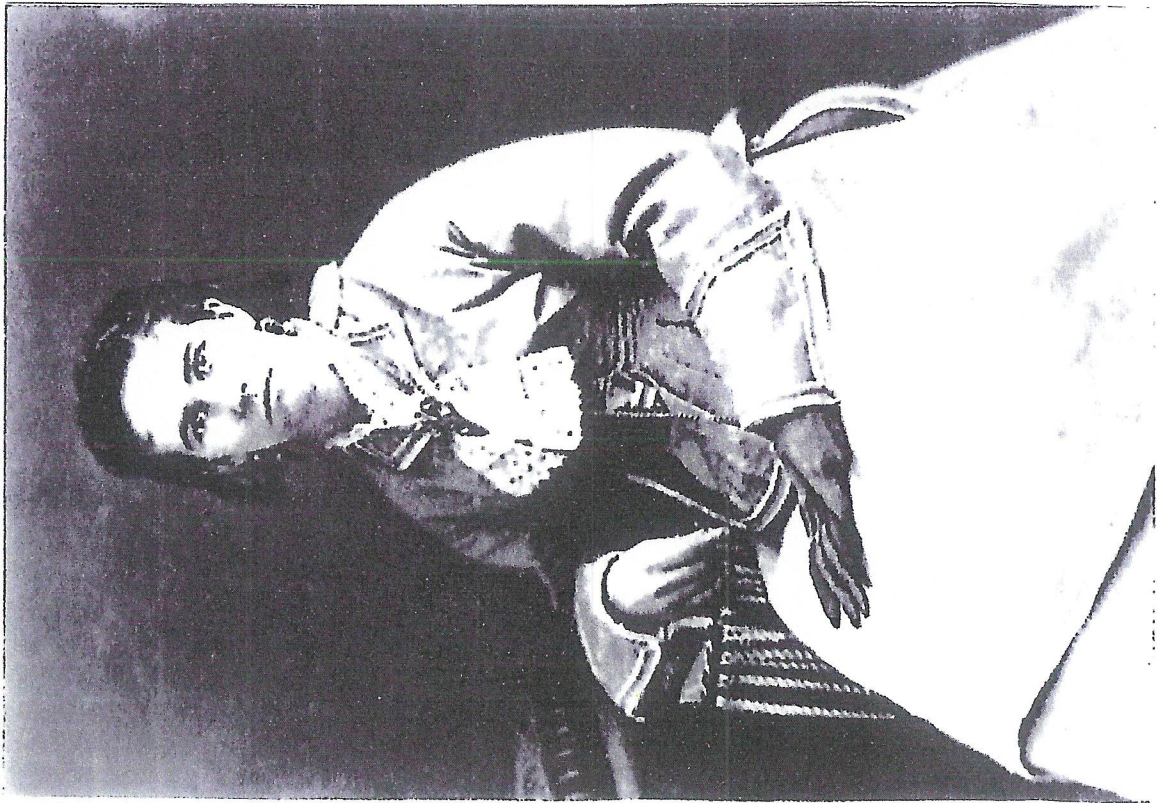




Elizabeth Colomba, "Biddy Mason," Oil on canvas (2006)



Elizabeth (Lizzie) Johnson Williams















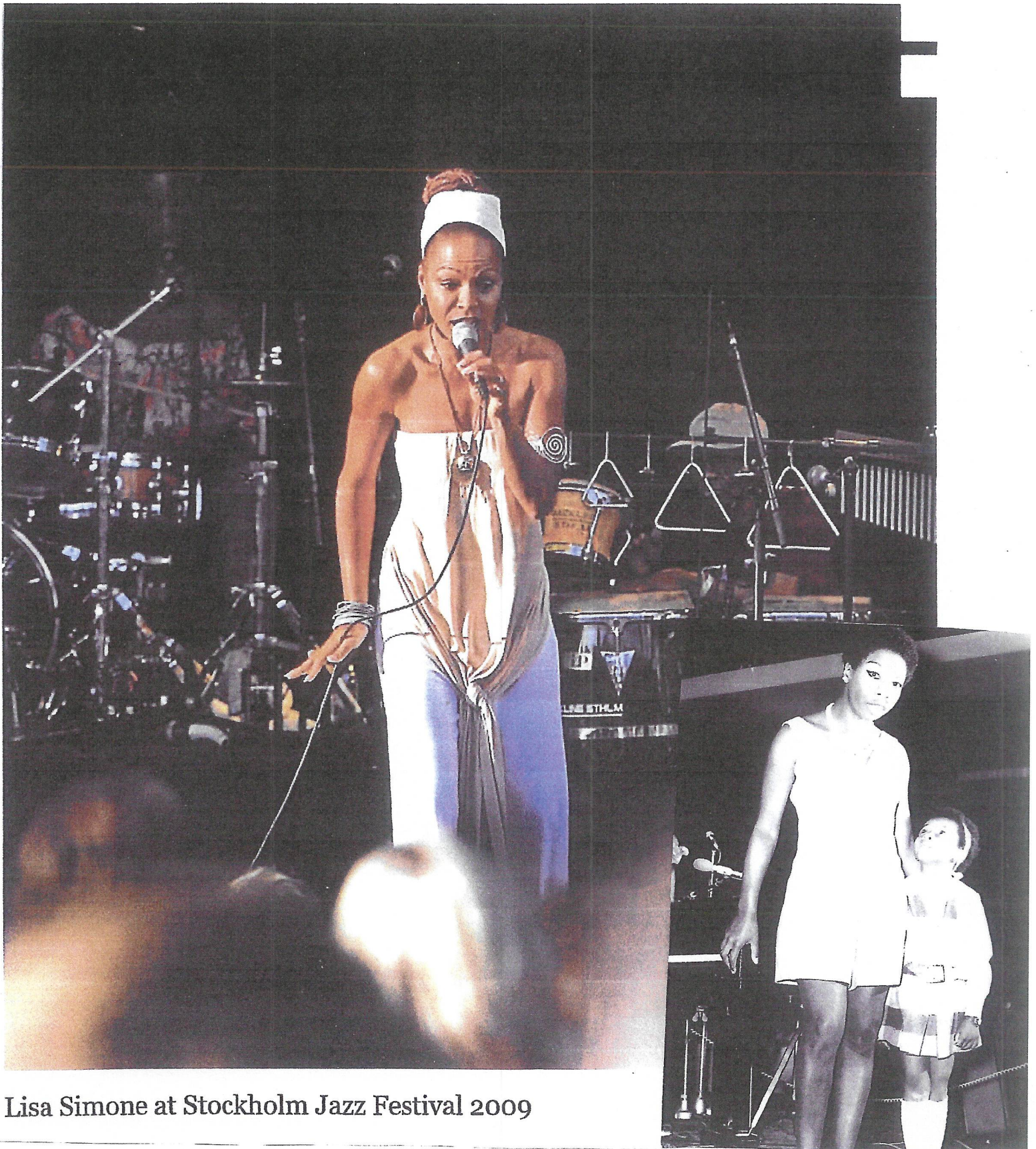
Commodore Grace M. Hopper, USN (covered).

[More details](#)









Lisa Simone at Stockholm Jazz Festival 2009