

Susie Skarl

This is your life

A collection of online biographical resources

Authoritative biographical web sources covering both living and deceased persons, notable persons in particular countries, persons in specific fields or occupations, celebrities, and government leaders, provide students with a wealth of information and starting points for presentations and research assignments. These websites, from nonprofit organizations, hall of fame associations, universities, government institutions, and media organizations, can offer students another useful discovery tool in the research process.

While this guide to online biographical resources is by no means comprehensive, it represents some of the key general and subject-specific authoritative websites that focus on the lives, struggles, triumphs, and accomplishments of noteworthy individuals throughout history and current times.

General biographical websites

- **Academy of Achievement.** The Academy of Achievement is a unique nonprofit foundation that brings students into direct personal contact with pre-eminent leaders. Under the “Achiever Gallery” section of the site, biographies, profiles, and interviews are featured on the organization with leaders from the arts, business, public service, science and exploration, and sports. The site also provides links to podcasts and resources for teachers. *Access:* <http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/pagegen/index.html>.



- **BBC–History: Historical Figures.** The British Broadcasting Company’s website provides an A-to-Z list of selective concise biographies on famous and notable historical figures for site visitors to explore. *Access:* http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/.

- **Biography.com.** The website of A & E’s *Biography* television series includes a searchable text of 15,000 entries from *The Cambridge Biographical Encyclopedia*. This resource is useful for current or popular personalities and includes video clips of some individuals. *Access:* <http://www.biography.com/>.

- **Infoplease.com.** The Infoplease.com website provides access to over 30,000 biographies. Site visitors can search the wide variety biographies via the search box, the A-to-Z list, and category (such as politics and government, people in the news, recent deaths, etc.). *Access:* <http://www.infoplease.com/people.html>.

- **Legacy.com.** Legacy.com is one of the leading companies in the online obituary market, hosting more than 20 million obituaries worldwide. In addition to searching obituaries by name or keyword, the site includes regularly updated biographical sections such as “Obituaries in the News” and

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“Legends and Legacies.” *Access:* <http://www.legacy.com/ns/>.

- **PBS.org—Biographies and Profiles.**

On PBS.org, visitors can explore historical biographies and profiles from a wide variety of PBS programs, including documentaries, feature films, and interviews about famous people or historical figures. *Access:* <http://www.pbs.org/topics/history/biographies/>.

- **TIME 100: The 100 Most Influential People.** TIME 100 is an annual list of the 100 most influential people in the world assembled by the news magazine, *Time*. Those recognized on the list fall into one of five categories: titans, pioneers, artists, leaders, and icons. Each entry includes biographical information, in addition to insight as to why the person is influential. Site visitors can sort the list by gender, age, birthplace, or profession. *Access:* 2014: <http://time.com/time100-2014/>; Archive: 2004-2013: <http://time100.time.com/2013-2/>.

African Americans

- **The Black Renaissance in Washington, D.C., 1920-1930s.** The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s was a period characterized by the outpouring of literature by African Americans; however, this resource notes that the cultural renaissance was evident in other parts of the country as well, including Washington, D.C. This website provides links to several African Americans who were noteworthy during this period in Washington, D.C., including Duke Ellington, Langston Hughes, and Zora Neale Hurston. *Access:* <http://029c28c.netsolhost.com/blkren/>.

- **BlackPast.org.** In its mission statement, BlackPast.org states that the organization “is dedicated to providing the inquisitive public with comprehensive, reliable, and accurate information concerning the history of African Americans in the United States and people of African ancestry in other regions of the world.” The website has over 1,500 biographical and other encyclopedia entries, full-text transcripts of speeches, and links to digital archives dating

back to the 18th century. *Access:* <http://www.blackpast.org/>.

- **The Faces of Science: African Americans in the Sciences.** From University of California-Irvine, this site includes biographical information and highlights the contributions of African American men and women who are chemists, biologists, inventors, engineers, and mathematicians. Although this site has not been updated since 2007, the biographical profiles from the past several decades can still be considered useful for researchers. *Access:* <https://webfiles.uci.edu/mcbrown/display/faces.html>.

- **The History Makers.** A nonprofit research and educational institution, The History Makers is committed to preserving the untold personal stories of African Americans, in addition to making these stories widely accessible. The site includes biographical information, along with audio and video clips about African Americans who have influenced history. Site visitors can access biographical information via a search box or by exploring the “Makers” categories, such as “EducationMakers,” “LawMakers,” and “MedicalMakers.” *Access:* <http://www.thehistorymakers.com/>.

Arts, music, entertainment, and sports

- **All About Jazz—Musicians.** Along with biographies of more than 3,600 jazz musicians, this comprehensive site includes jazz news, reviews, festivals, interviews, audio downloads, and photos. *Access:* <http://musicians.allaboutjazz.com/>.

- **ESPN—Top North American Athletes of the 20th Century.** As part of the SportsCentury retrospective, ESPN has selected and profiled the top 100 athletes of the 20th century. The list includes biographical information for athletes in baseball, basketball, football, golf, tennis, and several other sports. *Access:* <http://espn.go.com/sportscentury/athletes.html>.

- **IMDb (Internet Movie Database).** IMDb is especially useful when looking for background information on a film (such as significant dates, directors, and working

titles). For biographical information on actors and directors, site visitors need to go to the “Advanced Search” link and search for biographies using the “Name Text Search” box. In addition to biographical information, users will find a filmography and interesting trivia about individuals. *Access:* <http://www.imdb.com/search/>.

- **Music Academy Online—Composer Biographies.** Along with a weekly video podcast and a wide variety of links and resources about classical music, performers, and ensembles, this site provides an extensive list of detailed composer biographies from the Medieval era through the present age. Each entry contains a list of references for further reading. *Access:* <http://www.musicacademyonline.com/period.php>.

- **Rock and Roll Hall of Fame—The Inductees.** This resource focuses on biographical information on the inductees of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame from its beginning in 1986 through the present. The site provides searching for inductees alphabetically and by year of induction. Along with biographical information of the members, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame site includes information about the museum, exhibits, education initiatives, and its library and archives. *Access:* <http://www.rockhall.com/inductees/>.

- **The van Gogh Gallery—Artist Biographies.** The van Gogh Gallery site defines itself as “the definitive reference for information about the life and work of Vincent van Gogh.” The site also includes information on the lives and works of 250 other prolific artists. *Access:* <http://www.vangoghgallery.com/artistbios/>.

Authors

- **The Academy of American Poets.** Founded in 1934, the Academy of American Poets was created to support American poets at all stages of their careers and to foster the appreciation of contemporary poetry. The website includes biographies of more than 500 poets, in addition to thousands of poems, essays about poems, and more. *Access:* <http://www.poets.org/>.

- **Native American Authors.** Developed by the Internet Public Library, this website provides information on Native North American authors with bibliographies of their published works, biographical information, and links to other online resources including interviews, online texts, and tribal websites. The site is browsable by author, title, and tribe. *Access:* <http://www.ipl.org/div/natam/>.

Inventors, scientists, and mathematicians

- **Biographies of Women Mathematicians—Agnes Scott College.** This website is part of an on-going student project at Agnes Scott College in Atlanta, Georgia, to illustrate the achievements of women in the field of mathematics. In addition to an alphabetical index and a chronological index for searching biographies, the site provides extensive resources and links to websites on women mathematicians and scientists. *Access:* <http://www.agnesscott.edu/lriddle/women/women.htm>.

- **Eric Weisstein’s World of Scientific Biography.** This electronic encyclopedia from the World of Science allows visitors to explore and research scientific figures alphabetically, by branch of science (astronomy, chemistry, mathematics, and physics), by gender/minority status, by historical periods, by nationality, and by prize winners. *Access:* <http://scienceworld.wolfram.com/biography/>.

- **Invention Dimension (MIT).** The Invention Dimension website from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) highlights a different American inventor each week with a biographical sketch describing his or her accomplishments and impact on society. Profiles of inventors from previous weeks are available in an archive. The site also provides resources to inventors, such as information about copyright, patents, and funding opportunities. *Access:* <http://web.mit.edu/invent/>.

- **MacTutor History of Mathematics Archive.** From the School of Mathematics and Statistics at the University of St. Andrews

in Scotland, this regularly updated archive includes a collection of over 1,000 biographies of mathematicians. Visitors can search by time period, by an A-to-Z list, by topic (such as algebra and mathematical astronomy), and by culture (such as Arabic mathematics). *Access:* <http://www-history.mcs.st-and.ac.uk/>.

- **National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Astronaut Biographies.** This NASA website provides biographical information and photos of current astronauts, management astronauts, astronaut candidates, former astronauts, international astronauts, and cosmonauts. *Access:* <http://www.jsc.nasa.gov/Bios/>.

- **The National Inventors Hall of Fame.** This website provides biographical sketches of the great inventors of United States and the world. American inventors highlighted include George Eastman, Thomas Edison, and Samuel Morse, just to name a few. The site also includes information about the Hall of Fame programs and activities at its museum in Alexandria, Virginia. *Access:* <http://invent.org/>.

United States and world leaders (past and present)

- **Biographical Dictionary of the United States Congress, 1774-Present.** This dictionary provides biographical information on the more than 13,000 persons who have served in the U.S. Congress. Users can search by name, state, party, year, or Congress. *Access:* <http://bioguide.congress.gov/biosearch/biosearch.asp>.

- **De Imperatoribus Romanis: An Online Encyclopedia of Roman Emperors (DIR).** DIR is an online encyclopedia focusing on the rulers of the Roman Empire from Augustus (27 BC–AD 14) to Constantine XI Palaeologus (1449–1453). The encyclopedia includes an index of all the emperors who ruled during the Empire's 1,500 years, a number of biographical essays on the individual emperors, and family trees of imperial dynasties. Each essay, written by a scholar, is peer reviewed and is accompanied by a bibliography, illustrations, and footnotes. *Ac-*

cess: <http://www.luc.edu/roman-emperors/>.

- **The Official Website of the British Monarchy.** This website provides biographical information about the rulers of the United Kingdom and other commonwealth realms of the past. In addition, the site includes the latest news and information regarding the Royal Family. *Access:* <http://www.royal.gov.uk/>.

- **POTUS: Presidents of the United States.** This comprehensive website on the American presidency includes biographies, speeches and writings, election results, presidency highlights, and links to other sites from George Washington through Barack Obama. *Access:* <http://www.potus.com/>.

- **White House Residents Biographies.** Each of the 44 Presidents of the United States has a biography on this site, in addition to links for more information about their spouses and presidential libraries. The Presidential biographies on WhiteHouse.gov are from "The Presidents of the United States of America," by Frank Freidel and Hugh Sidey (2006). *Access:* <http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents>.

Women

- **Distinguished Women of Past and Present.** This resource provides biographical sketches and links to biographies about female "writers, educators, scientists, heads of state, politicians, civil rights crusaders, artists, entertainers, and others." This site has been selected to be archived by the Library of Congress to preserve its content for the future. *Access:* <http://www.distinguished-women.com/>.

- **National Women's Hall of Fame.** The National Women's Hall of Fame describes itself as "the nation's oldest membership organization dedicated to recognizing and celebrating the achievements of great American women." Thus far, there have been 247 women inducted into the organization and the site includes detailed biographical information about each inductee. *Access:* <http://www.greatwomen.org/>.

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the United States. Since 1966, Hanging Loose Press has published poetry, books, and *Hanging Loose Magazine*, which grew out of the short-lived literary journal *Things*, published in the early 1960s by two Columbia students, Emmet Jarrett and Ron Schreiber. The magazine took its name from the format of its earliest issues: loose sheets of paper in a 6x9-inch envelope. The press began publishing books in 1972, and has since produced more than 200 titles. Still in operation today, the press is run by a collective of editors in Boston and Brooklyn, including Robert Hershon and Dick Lourie, who have been involved since the first issue. The editors review all submitted unsolicited manuscripts, which has resulted in the publication of many first books. Among many notable authors, Sherman Alexie and Ha Jin have been published by the press. The press is also known to publish writers from under-represented groups, including high school students and incarcerated poets. The archive includes production files for each book and issue of the journal, notes from editorial meetings, and detailed records of the organization's acquisition process. Many of the records

are paper and ink, even those produced in the 21st century, an unusual practice for modern literary presses.

Author Pat Conroy's complete literary archive has been acquired by the University of South Carolina Library's Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections. Covering everything from his earliest high school literary efforts through his most recent books, the collection is a complete documentary record. Conroy, a graduate of the Citadel in Charleston, took a poetry class at the University of South Carolina in the early 1970s with author-in-residence James Dickey. "I thought he was the greatest poet that ever lived," Conroy says. "He changed my life." That notebook, along with the manuscripts and drafts of Conroy's 11 books, his personal journals and diaries, screenwriting work, correspondence, and family photo albums and scrapbooks, are now housed in the Ernest F. Hollings Special Collections Library and will be open to research next year. "My papers belong here. I wanted them here, I am happy they're here, I am proud that they're here," Conroy says. "And I will try to add to them for the rest of my writing life." ❧

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• **United States House of Representatives—History, Art and Archives—Women in Congress.** This online exhibit, based on the book, *Women in Congress, 1917–2006*, contains biographical profiles of former female Members of Congress, links to information about current female members, essays on the institutional and national events that shaped successive generations of Congresswomen, and photos. *Access:* <http://history.house.gov/Exhibition-and-Publications/WIC/Women-in-Congress/>.

• **United States Senate—Women in the Senate.** To date, 44 women have served in the United States Senate, with 20 serving currently. This resource provides biographi-

cal information about all women who have served as Senators, in addition to links focusing on origins and developments, Senate firsts, oral histories, and photographs. *Access:* <http://www.senate.gov/reference/Index/Women.htm>.

• **The White House—The First Ladies.** Hosted by WhiteHouse.gov, this site offers biographies on the First Ladies from the 18th century beginning with Martha Washington through the present First Lady, Michelle Obama. The biographies of the First Ladies on WhiteHouse.gov are from *The First Ladies of the United States of America*, by Allida Black (2009). *Access:* <http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/first-ladies>. ❧