

**Mahalia Jackson** (b. 10/26/11, d. 1/27/72) was born Mahala Jackson in the Uptown neighborhood of New Orleans, Louisiana, and began singing at the Mount Mariah Baptist Church there at the age of 4. She grew up in a very poor household, which contained thirteen people and a dog in a three-room dwelling. Her stage name “Mahalia” stems from her childhood nickname “Halie”.

In 1927, at the age of 16 she moved to Chicago, Illinois in the midst of the Great Migration. She intended to study nursing, but after joining a local church she became a member of the Johnson Gospel Singers. She performed with the group for a number of years. She then started working with Thomas A. Dorsey, the gospel composer of “Precious Lord, Take My Hand”, and the two performed around the U.S., which helped tremendously in cultivating a future audience for her. While she made some recordings in the 1930’s, her first major success came with “Move On Up A Little Higher” in 1947, which sold millions of copies and became the highest selling gospel single in history. Her career blossomed, and on October 4, 1950 she became the first gospel singer to perform at Carnegie Hall, and she did so to a racially integrated audience. Also in the 1950’s she became an international star, being especially popular in France and Norway. Back at home, she made her debut on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in 1956, and appeared with Duke Ellington and his Orchestra at the Newport Jazz Festival in 1958. That same year she recorded with Ellington on his tone portrait of the African-American people, *Black Brown and Beige*, which was released on Columbia Records.

Jackson was an active supporter of the Civil Rights Movement. In 1956, she met Ralph Abernathy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at the National Baptist Convention. At their request she sang in Montgomery, Alabama at a rally to raise funds for the Montgomery Bus Boycott. She also sang at the March on Washington at King’s request in 1963, performing “I Been ‘Buked and I Been Scorned.” After King’s death in 1968, Jackson sang at his funeral and then largely withdrew from public political activities.

In her later years Mahalia Jackson suffered from severe health problems, and she gave her final concert in 1971 in Munich, Germany. She died of a heart attack on January 27, 1972.