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*Issue Date:* April 27, 1995

*First Day City:* Chicago, Illinois

*Designer:* Chris Calle,  
Ridgefield, Connecticut

*Engravers:* R. Everett (lettering) and  
T. Hipschen (vignette)

*Typographer:* Richard D. Sheaff,  
Norwood, Massachusetts

*Modeler:* Brian Thompson,  
Bureau of Engraving and Printing

*Manufacturing Process:* Intaglio

*Colors:* Dark gray and red

*Image Area:* 0.84 x 1.41 inches or  
21.33 x 35.81 millimeters

*Plate Numbers:* One single digit

*Stamps per Pane:* 50

*Marginal Markings:* © USPS 1994; plate position  
diagram; price


# Bessie Coleman

This stamp honors Bessie Coleman, the first African-American woman to earn an international pilot's license. Her determination and perseverance took her from a one-room cabin in Texas to Paris, France, where she earned her international pilot's license, and back to the United States, where she planned to open an aviation school for African-Americans. She fell from her plane to her death in 1926 while practicing for an exhibition.

Coleman, a model of courage and persistence for African-American women, is the 18th person to be honored in the Black Heritage stamp series.

The stamps were printed at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing in Washington, D.C., on 902 "D" combination offset-intaglio press. They are available in panes of 50.



Bessie  
Coleman   
FIRST DAY OF ISSUE





# AMERICAN COMMEMORATIVES



## BESSIE COLEMAN

Bessie Coleman, the first African American to earn an international pilot's license, was born in Texas in 1892. Even though she had little formal education, Miss Coleman's quick mind and ambitious spirit made her determined to "amount to something."

She saved her earnings from work as a laundress to put herself through a year of college, and in 1915, she moved to Chicago and discovered her love for aviation. There were no black aviators in the area, and when no white pilots would teach her to fly, she enrolled in an aviation school in France.

Miss Coleman received her F.A.I. (Fédération Aéronautique Internationale) license in 1921. After six months in Holland, France, and Germany learning aerobatics, she returned to the United States with a vision of opening an aviation school for all races. "Queen Bess," as the black press called her, thrilled spectators with stunt flights and parachute jumps; however, it was during practice for a 1926 exhibition in Jacksonville, Florida, that Miss Coleman was killed. As she and fellow pilot William Wills flew over the area in her worn-out JN4 "Jenny" from World War I, Miss Coleman leaned out to pick the site for her next-day parachute jump. Suddenly, the plane dived and then flipped over, throwing her out. Moments later the plane crashed to the ground killing Wills also.

Thousands of people attended a memorial service for Miss Coleman in Chicago, and over the years, her reputation has

grown as a heroine of African American women as well as early aviation. The vintage plane shown top center was engraved in 1929 by Harold Osborn. The allegorical vignette depicting a more modern form of aviation was engraved by Jaroslaw Kisely in 1967. Bessie Coleman is honored in these stamps, engraved by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, and issued on April 27, 1995, at Midway Airport in Chicago, Illinois. Stamp artist Chris Calle of Connecticut based his illustration on a photograph of Bessie Coleman's French pilot's license.



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PLATE POSITION

BLACK HERITAGE



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*Bessie Coleman*

*Photographs Courtesy of Marion Coleman and Arthur Freeman.*

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*Design & Layout: Roberta Wojtkowski*



*Bessie Coleman*

APRIL 27, 1995 CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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**Presiding**

Rufus Porter  
District Manager/Postmaster  
Chicago, Illinois

**Presentation of Colors**

Color Guard Unit  
Chicago District  
U.S. Postal Service

**National Anthem**

Adrienne Locke  
Letter Carrier  
Chicago District  
U.S. Postal Service

**Invocation**

Father Daniel O'Neal  
St. Gelasius Church

**Welcome and Introduction of**

**Dedication Official**  
William Good  
Vice President, Area Operations  
U.S. Postal Service  
Great Lakes Area

**Dedication of Stamp**

Robert Harris  
Vice President  
Diversity Development  
U.S. Postal Service

**Musical Selection**

Adrienne Locke

**Remarks**

Captain Beverly L. Armstrong  
Pilot, District of Columbia  
Air National Guard  
President,  
Bessie Coleman Foundation

Marion Coleman  
Niece of Bessie Coleman

The Honorable Richard M. Daley  
Mayor  
Chicago, Illinois

**Special Presentations**

Robert Harris

**Inflight Salute**

Rufus Hunt, Ken Rapier,  
Nia Gilliam,  
Chicago American  
Pilots Association

**Closing Remarks**

Rufus Porter

**Benediction**

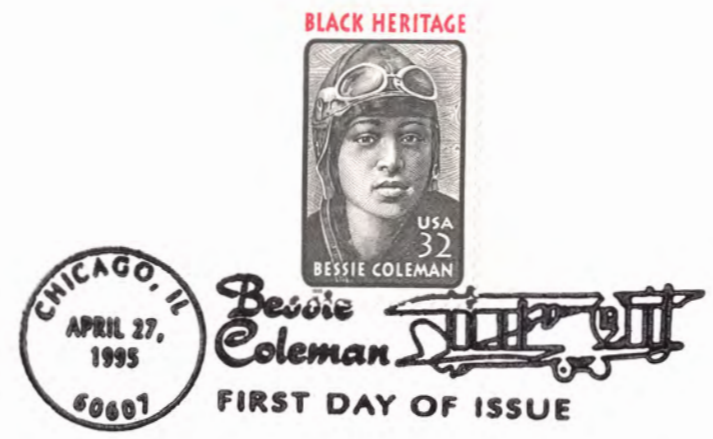
Father Daniel O'Neal

**Honored Guests**

Arthur Freeman  
Nephew of Bessie Coleman  
  
Dean Stallworth  
Nephew of Bessie Coleman

David R. Mosena  
Commissioner  
Chicago Department of Aviation

Ramon Price  
Chief Curator  
DuSable Museum

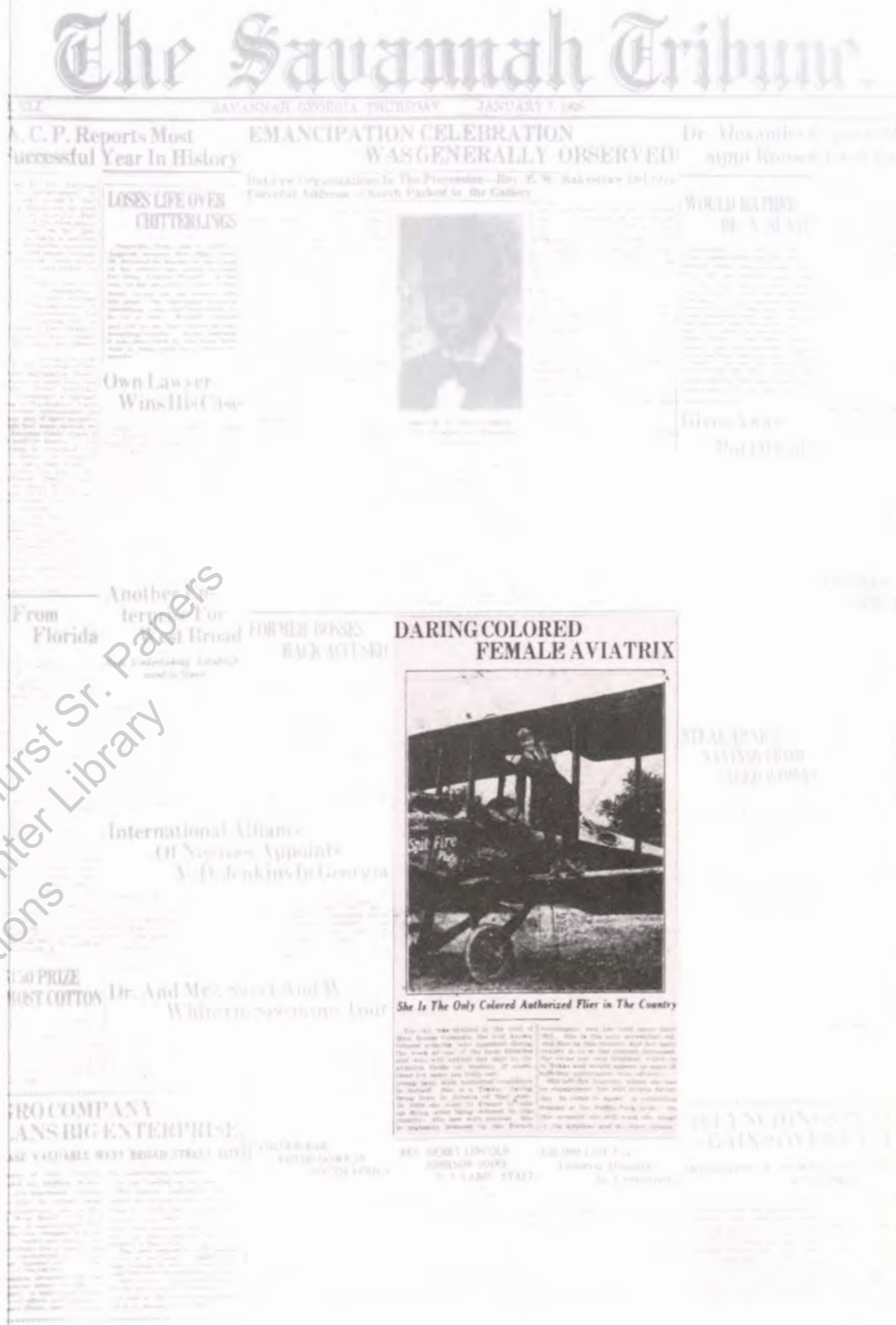


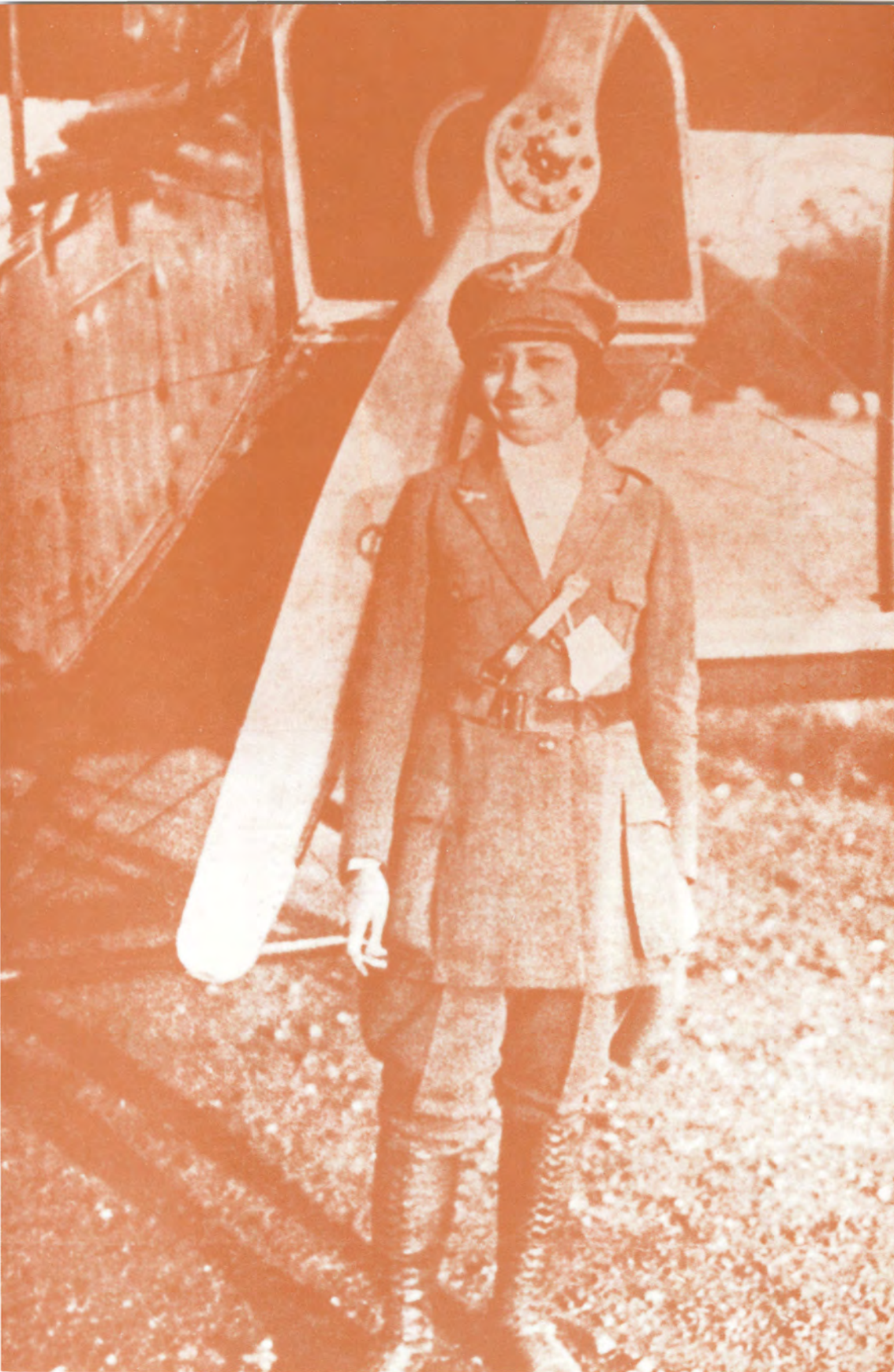
*"I point to Bessie Coleman and say without hesitation that here is a woman, a being, who exemplifies and serves as a model to all humanity: the very definition of strength, courage, integrity and beauty.*

*It looks like a good day for flying."* Mae Jemison, M.D.

Bessie Coleman was born on January 26, 1892, in a one-room cabin in Atlanta, Texas. The family later moved to Waxahacie in pursuit of a better life. In 1915, Bessie moved to Chicago, Illinois, where she discovered her love for aviation. ♦ On the advice of Robert S. Abbot, founder and editor of the *Chicago Defender*, Bessie Coleman resolved to pursue her dream in Europe, studying French at night and working days as a manicurist to earn the money. Ms. Coleman received her pilot's license in Paris by the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale on June 15, 1921. ♦ Back in the U.S., "Queen Bess" as she

became known, thrilled spectators with stunt flights and parachute jumps; however, it was on April 30, 1926, during practice for an exhibition, that she fell from her plane and was killed. Her dream of opening a school of aviation for African Americans and women was unfulfilled. ♦ Today, in the city of Chicago, a library and a street leading into O'Hare International Airport are named in her honor. And every year, others who have followed her dream fly over her grave in tribute to her legacy. ♦ The stamp, designed by Chris Calle of Connecticut, features Coleman in the leather cap and goggles she wore.





*Bessie Coleman*

*Photographs Courtesy of Marion Coleman and Arthur Freeman.*

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*Design & Layout: Roberta Wojtkowski*



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*Bessie Coleman  
Black Heritage Series*

BLACK HERITAGE



Bessie  
Coleman



FIRST DAY OF ISSUE

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# Bessie Coleman

## Black Heritage Series

**First Day of Issue:** *April 27, 1995*

**First Day City:** *Chicago, Illinois,*

*Coleman's hometown after 1915*

**Stamp Designer:** *Chris Calle,*

*Ridgefield, Connecticut*

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Bessie Coleman (1892-1926), who is honored on this U.S. stamp, pursued her dream of flying with steely determination and grit. Against all odds, she became the first black woman to fly an airplane and the first African-American to earn an international pilot's license.

Race, gender, and childhood poverty were just some of the obstacles in Coleman's path. But, having read of the exploits of World War I flying aces, nothing could deter her. When American flying schools refused to accept her because she was female and black, she went to France.

She learned to fly at the Ecole d'Aviation des Freres Caudron, and earned her pilot's license in 1921 from the prestigious Federation Aeronautique Internationale.

Coleman's license allowed her to fly anywhere in the world. Her new ambition, once she returned to the U.S., was to open her own flying school. To raise the necessary funds, she took to the skies as the barnstorming "Queen Bess." Her daring stunts and airborne acrobatics, including "figure eights" and pin-point landings, thrilled the crowds.

Coleman became a role model for African-American women. Wherever she traveled, she gave lectures on the unlimited potential of aviation and the importance of goals. Before her dream of opening a flight school was realized, she was tragically killed in a plane crash while flying over Florida.