



Oprah Gail Winfrey

American television host, actress, producer, philanthropist and entrepreneur Oprah Gail Winfrey was born on January 29, 1954, in Kosciusko, Mississippi. After a troubled adolescence in a small farming community, where she was sexually abused by a number of male relatives and friends of her mother, Vernita, she moved to Nashville to live with her father, Vernon, a barber and businessman. She entered Tennessee State University in 1971 and began working in radio and television broadcasting in Nashville.

In 1976, Oprah Winfrey moved to Baltimore, Maryland, where she hosted the TV chat show *People Are Talking*. The show became a hit and Winfrey stayed with it for eight years, after which she was recruited by a Chicago TV station to host her own morning show, *A.M. Chicago*. Her major competitor in the time slot was Phil Donahue. Within several months, Winfrey's open, warm-hearted personal style had won her 100,000 more viewers than Donahue and had taken her show from last place to first in the ratings. Her success led to nationwide fame and a role in Steven Spielberg's 1985 film *The Color Purple*, for which she was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress.

Winfrey launched the *Oprah Winfrey Show* in 1986 as a nationally syndicated program. With its *placement on 120 channels and an audience of 10 million people, the show grossed \$125 million* by the end of its first year, of which Winfrey received \$30 million. She soon gained ownership of the program from ABC, drawing it under the control of her new production company, Harpo Productions ('Oprah' spelled backwards) and making more and more money from syndication.

According to Forbes magazine, Oprah was the richest African American of the 20th century and the world's only Black billionaire for three years running. *Life* magazine hailed her as the most influential woman of her generation. In 2005, Business Week named her the greatest Black philanthropist in American history. Oprah's Angel Network has raised more than \$51,000,000 for charitable programs, including girls' education in South Africa and relief to the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Winfrey is a dedicated activist for children's rights; in 1994, President Clinton signed a bill into law that Winfrey had proposed to Congress, creating a nationwide database of convicted child abusers. She founded the Family for Better Lives foundation and also contributes to her alma mater, Tennessee State University. In September 2002, Oprah was named the first recipient of the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences' Bob Hope Humanitarian Award.

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