

Celebrating Black History Month 2009



Carter G. Woodson
Father of Black History

History of the Black History Month

Each February, Black History Month honors the struggles and triumphs of millions of American citizens over the most devastating obstacles — slavery, prejudice, poverty — as well as their contributions to the nation’s cultural and political life.

2009 marks the 83rd annual celebration since Carter G. Woodson, a noted scholar and historian, instituted Negro History Week in 1926. He chose the second week of February to coincide with the birthdays of President Abraham Lincoln and the abolitionist Frederick Douglass.

The celebration was expanded to a month in 1976, the nation’s bicentennial. President Gerald R. Ford urged Americans to “seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history.”

Woodson, the son of former slaves in Virginia, realized that the struggles and achievements of Americans of African descent were being ignored or misrepresented. He founded the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), which supports historical research, publishes a scholarly journal and sets the theme for Black History Month each year.

The theme for 2009, “The Quest for Black Citizenship in the Americas,” honors the centennial of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and highlights “the problem of race and citizenship in American history, from the experiences of free blacks in a land of slavery to the political aspirations of African Americans today,” according to the ASALH Web site. “The centennial also provides an opportunity to explore the history of other nations in the Americas, where former slaves also sought the fruits of citizenship.”

Timeline of African-American History

1619. Twenty Africans arrive in Jamestown, Virginia, aboard a Dutch ship. They are the first blacks to be forcibly settled as slaves in the North American British Colonies.

1770. Crispus Attucks, an escaped slave, is among the five victims in the Boston Massacre. He is said to have been the first to fall.

1775. Free blacks fight with the Minutemen in the initial skirmishes of the Revolutionary War at Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts.

1777. George Washington reverses previous policy and allows the recruitment of blacks as soldiers. Some 5,000 would participate on the American side before the end of the Revolution.

1863. The Emancipation Proclamation frees all slaves in states in rebellion against the United States.

1865-1870. Constitutional Amendments recognizing African-American Rights: The 13th Amendment outlaws slavery. The 14th Amendment states that all persons born or naturalized in the United States are citizens. The 15th Amendment affirms the right of citizens to vote shall not be denied or abridged on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

1915. Carter G. Woodson establishes the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History.

1926. The Black History Week is first celebrated in February 12.

1954. In *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, the Supreme Court overturns legal school segregation at all levels.

1955. Rosa Parks refuses to change seats in a Montgomery, Alabama, bus.

1963. Civil rights protests take place in most major urban areas. In August, the March on Washington is the largest civil rights demonstration ever. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivers his “I Have a Dream” speech.

1964. Civil Rights Act asserts that Congress can ban discrimination in employment, public accommodations, and other aspects of life. The 24th Amendment forbids the use of poll taxes to prevent voting.

1965. Voting Rights Act prohibits the use of literacy tests for voters and authorizes the federal “examiners” to end the mass intimidation of potential minority voters.

1968. Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated in Memphis, TN.

1986. The first national Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday is celebrated on January 20.

2009. Barack Obama becomes the first African-American president of the United States.

Major Civil Rights Leaders

Daisy Bates (c. 1914 - 1999)



Bates is best known for her involvement in the struggle to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. As an advisor to nine black students trying to attend a previously all-white school, she was a pivotal figure in that seminal moment of the civil rights movement.

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868-1963)



An outstanding critic, editor, scholar, author, and civil rights leader, Du Bois is certainly among the most influential blacks of the twentieth century. He was one of the first male civil rights leaders to recognize the problems of gender discrimination.

Medgar Evers (1925-1963)



Evers was one of the first martyrs of the civil rights movement. He fought for the enforcement of the 1954 court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, which outlawed school segregation; he fought for the right to vote, and he advocated boycotting merchants who discriminated. His death prompted President John Kennedy to ask Congress for a comprehensive civil-rights bill, which President Lyndon Johnson signed into law the following year.

Fannie Lou Hamer (1917-1977)



Hamer was an American voting rights activist and civil rights leader. She was often called "the spirit of the civil rights movement." Her best-known quote was "I am sick and tired of being sick and tired."

Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929 - 1968)



Martin Luther King, Jr. is the 1964 Nobel Peace laureate and the individual most associated with the triumphs of the African-American civil rights movement during the 1950s and 1960s. He participated in the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott and many other peaceful demonstrations that protested the unfair treatment of African-Americans.

He was assassinated in 1968.

Rosa Parks (1913 - 2005)



Parks is known today as the "mother of the civil rights movement" because her arrest for refusing to give up her bus seat sparked the pivotal Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott. The arrest and the boycott that followed led to a U.S. Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation on city buses. The boycott also raised to national prominence a youthful, little-known minister named Martin Luther King Jr. Under his leadership, the boycott set a pattern for nonviolent, community-based protest that became a successful strategy in the civil rights movement.

Major African-American Cultural Icons

Muhammad Ali (1942 -)



Ali is a retired American boxer and former three-time World Heavyweight Champion. His battles against racial and religious discrimination are nearly as famous as his fights in the ring. He has contributed to countless, diverse charities, and causes. And his later years have found him interested in world politics as he has battled to keep Parkinson's disease at bay.

Maya Angelou (1928 -)



Angelou is a world famous poet, educator, historian, best-selling author, actress, playwright, civil-rights activist, producer and director. She is also a three-time Grammy Award winner for her autobiographical spoken-word recordings.

Duke Ellington (1899-1974)



Ellington was an American composer, pianist, and bandleader. He was recognized during his life as one of the most influential figures in jazz, if not in all American music and is widely considered as one of the twentieth century's best known African American celebrities.

Toni Morrison (1931 -)



Toni Morrison, the first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, is one of the most renowned black writers. She also won the 1988 Pulitzer Prize.

Jackie Robinson (1919-1972)



Robinson was the first African American Major League Baseball player. Robinson's 1947 Major League debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers ended approximately 60 years of baseball segregation, breaking the baseball color line, or color barrier.

Denzel Washington (1954 -)



Actor.

Washington is a renowned American actor cum director, who has been awarded two Academy Awards and three Golden Globe awards for his work. He is notable as the second African American man (after Sidney Poitier) to win the Academy Award for Best

Oprah Winfrey (1954 -)



Winfrey is the most powerful and influential woman in television and, according to *Forbes Magazine*, the world's most highly paid entertainer. Though primarily recognized as a talk show hostess, Winfrey also occasionally acts in television movies and feature films. Her accomplishments as a global media leader and philanthropist have established her as one of the most respected and admired public figures today.

For more information about these and other important African Americans, see Celebrating Black History Month at <http://beijing.usembassy-china.org.cn/prominent.html>, developed by the Information Resource Center