



Black History Month

A Century of Black Life, History, and Culture



Black History Month, or National African American History Month, is an annual celebration of achievements by African Americans and a time for recognizing the central role they have played in U.S. history.

The story of Black History Month begins in 1915, half a century after the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery in the United States. Few could have imagined African Americans' future contributions to music, art, and literature that would be recognized by the global community.

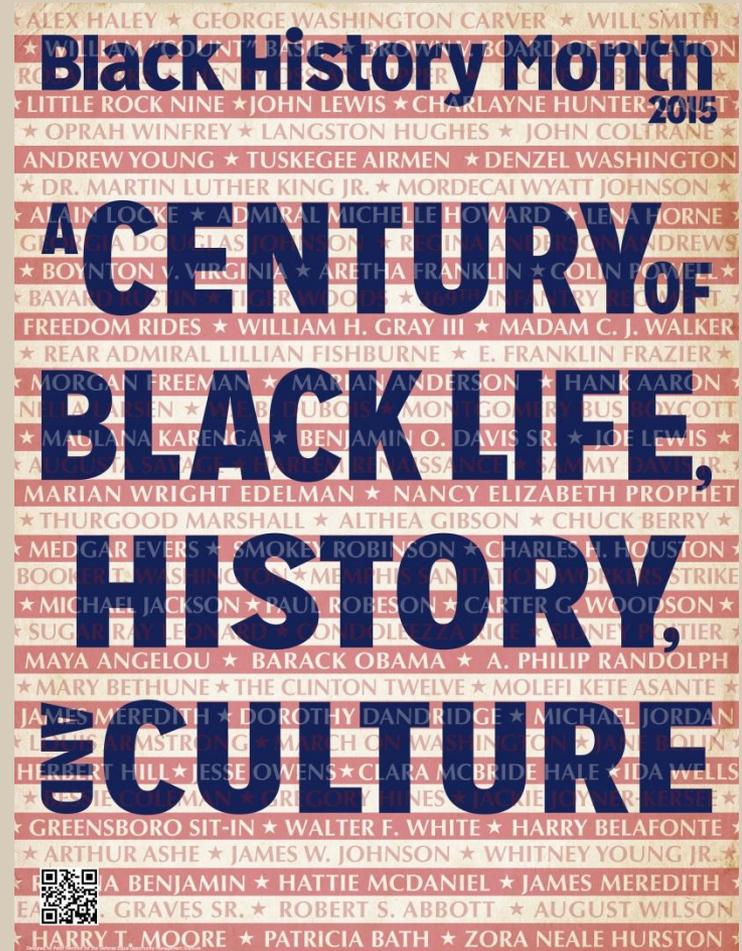
Credit for the evolving awareness of the true place of African Americans in history can, in large part, be attributed to one man: Carter G. Woodson. In 1915, he established the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History.



Woodson wanted to change the world's perception of African Americans and recognize their contribution to American society and culture.

1915

This presentation provides snapshots that briefly cover the last ten decades and some of the African Americans who advanced civil rights or made major impacts in science, government, sports, or entertainment.





The Great Migration of African Americans from the South to industrial towns in the North is underway. Millions of African Americans will have migrated north by the 1960s.



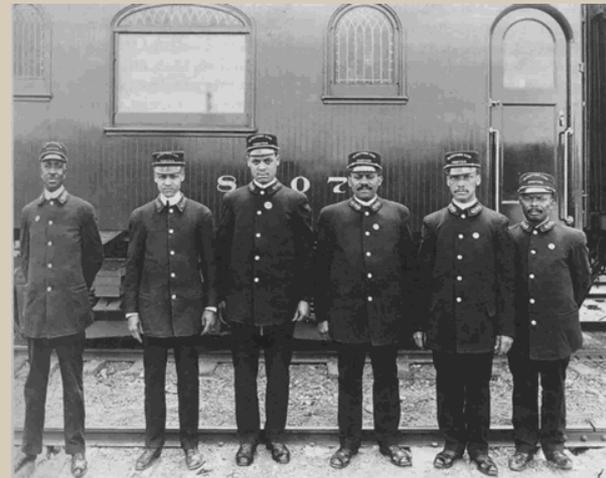
Organized by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, thousands of African Americans march down New York City's Fifth Avenue to protest racial violence and discrimination.

1920s

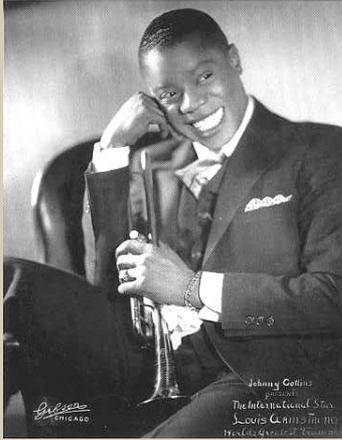


Claude McKay publishes a collection of his early poetry, *Harlem Shadows*. It becomes one of the most important early works of the Harlem Renaissance.

A. Philip Randolph organizes the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the first successful African-American trade union.

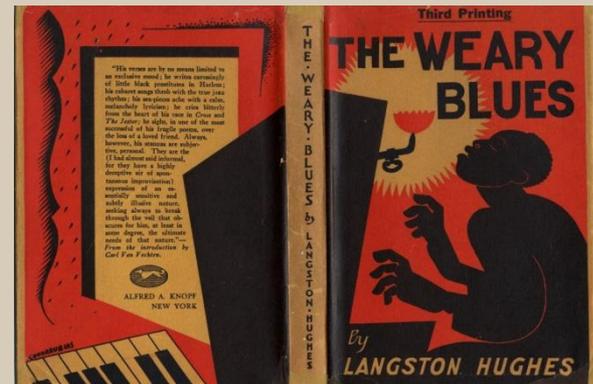


The 1920s



Jazz trumpeter and vocalist Louis Armstrong forms his band, the Hot Five. He will become a jazz legend and a cultural icon.

Langston Hughes publishes *The Weary Blues*, his first book of poetry. A pivotal force in the Harlem Renaissance, Hughes will go on to become one of the 20th century's most recognized American writers.



The 1920s

Nine African-American youths are convicted of raping two White women in Scottsboro, Alabama. The “Scottsboro Boys” case later attracts national attention as a miscarriage of justice and helps fuel the civil rights movement.



Sculptor Augusta Savage establishes the Savage Studio of Arts and Crafts in New York, the largest art center in the nation at that time.

The 1930s

Track and field athlete
Jesse Owens wins four gold
medals in the Berlin Olympics,
thwarting Adolf Hitler's plan
to use the games to demonstrate
“Aryan supremacy.”



Joe Louis, the iconic “Brown Bomber,”
becomes the heavyweight boxing
champion of the world by defeating James
J. Braddock. He will hold the belt for
nearly 12 years, a boxing record.

The 1930s



Singer Marion Anderson is denied permission by the Daughters of the Revolution to sing at their hall because she is an African American. Instead, Anderson performs at the Lincoln Memorial before an audience of 75,000.



The Supreme Court ruled in the *Norris v. Alabama* case that a defendant has the right to a trial by jury of one's peers. This ruling overturned the Scottsboro Boys' convictions.

The 1930s



The first pilot training program for African Americans is established at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. The Tuskegee Airmen serve heroically during World War II.



Benjamin O. Davis Sr. becomes the Army's first African-American general. His son, Benjamin O. Davis Jr., commander of the Tuskegee Airmen, later becomes the Air Force's first African-American general.



The 1940s



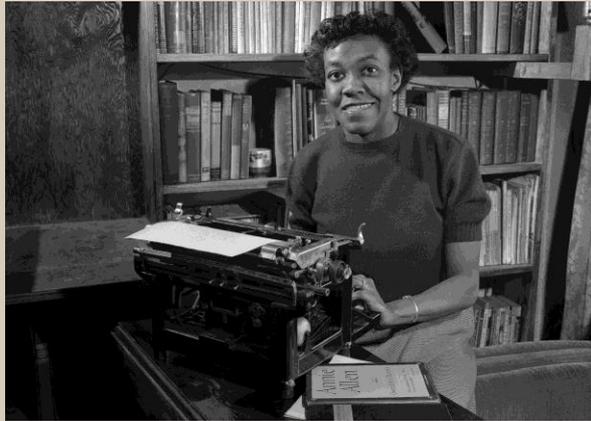
Baseball legend Jackie Robinson becomes the first African American to break the color barrier when he is allowed to play in the major league.



President Harry Truman issues Executive Order 9981 desegregating the military, and more than 2.5 million African-American men register for the draft as the U.S. enters World War II. Though they experience discrimination, they continue to rise to the challenge to serve the nation.

The 1940s

Ralph J. Bunche wins the Nobel Peace Prize for mediating the 1949 Armistice in the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East.



Gwendolyn Brooks becomes the first African American to win a Pulitzer Prize, which she receives for her poetry collection *Annie Allen*.

The 1950s



In *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court rules unanimously against school segregation, overturning its 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*.



Chuck Berry records “*Maybellene*.” A true showman, Berry will go on to write numerous rock and roll classics. He is also responsible for one of rock’s most recognizable stage moves, the duckwalk.

The 1950s



Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* is the first Broadway play by an African American playwright. The title comes from the poem "Harlem" by Langston Hughes.



Berry Gordy Jr., with an \$800 loan from his family, establishes Motown Records in Detroit, Michigan. Motown's distinctive music will play an important role in the racial integration of popular music.

The 1950s

For the first time since Reconstruction, the federal government uses the military to uphold African Americans' civil rights when soldiers escort nine students to desegregate a school in Little Rock, Arkansas.



Althea Gibson becomes the first African-American tennis player to earn a major title, winning both women's singles and doubles championships at Wimbledon.

The 1950s

Four African-American college students hold a sit-in to integrate a Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, launching a wave of similar protests across the South.



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gives his “*I Have a Dream*” speech to more than 200,000 people in Washington, D.C.



The 1960s



Four African-American girls are killed in the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. The bombing elevated worldwide sympathy for the civil rights cause.

Sidney Poitier becomes the first African-American actor to win an Oscar for Best Actor, which he won for his role in *Lilies of the Field*.



The 1960s



Thurgood Marshall becomes the first African-American Supreme Court justice. His distinctive tenure of service will last 24 years.

Shirley Chisholm becomes the first African-American woman to be elected to Congress. She will serve for seven terms.



The 1960s

Tennis player Arthur Ashe is the first African American to win the U.S. Open. He wins both the amateur and professional open national championships in the same year.



The passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965 marks a significant step toward equality for African Americans.



With the full engagement of the U.S. in the Vietnam War, African-American service members continue the tradition of serving with distinction.

The 1960s



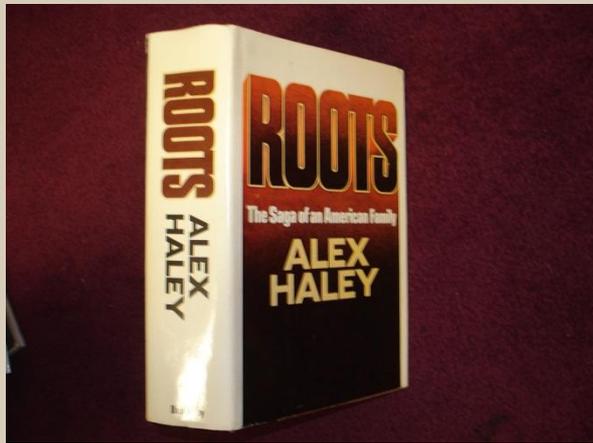
Fifteen African-American members of Congress form the Congressional Black Caucus to present a unified African-American voice.



Hank Aaron breaks Babe Ruth's record for career home runs. Aaron continues to hold many of baseball's most distinguished records today, including runs batted in (2,297), extra base hits (1,477), total bases (6,856), and most years with 30 or more home runs (15).

The 1970s

The Jefferson's, one of the first sitcoms about an African-American family, premieres. It will run for ten years, becoming one of television's longest running and most watched sitcoms.



Alex Haley receives a special Pulitzer Prize for his novel *Roots*, showing the impact of slavery on American society. The miniseries is aired the following year, achieving the highest ratings for a television program.

The 1970s

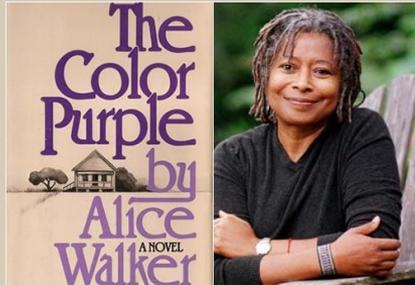
Barbara Jordan of Texas becomes the first African-American woman from the South to be elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. She will serve three terms.



Addie Wyatt becomes the first African-American woman elected International Vice President of a major labor union. In 1975, she and Barbara Jordan become the first African-American women named Person of the Year by *Time* magazine.

The 1970s

Michael Jackson, whose legendary career began with Motown Records, publishes the *Thriller* album. It becomes one of the best-selling albums of all time.



Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* wins the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. The movie receives 11 Academy Award nominations.



Spike Lee's film *She's Gotta Have It* wins him the Best New Director Award at the prestigious Cannes Film Festival.

The 1980s



Astronaut Guion “Guy” S. Bluford Jr. becomes the first African American to travel in space, as a mission specialist aboard the space shuttle *Challenger*. He will ultimately complete four shuttle missions.



Earvin “Magic” Johnson leads his team to five National Basketball Association championships. He is named the NBA’s Most Valuable Player.

The 1980s



General Colin Powell becomes the first African American to be named Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He goes on to serve as Secretary of State.



Oprah Winfrey, the first African American to head a major nationally syndicated talk show, founds Harpo Productions. She goes on to produce numerous movies and television shows.

The 1980s

W. Lincoln Hawkins, Ph.D., wins the National Medal of Technology. During his lifetime, he will secure over 140 patents and help make universal telephone service available through his work as the first African-American scientist at Bell Labs.



Rita Dove is appointed as Poet Laureate and Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress. She becomes the youngest person—and first African American—to receive this highest official honor in American letters.

The 1990s



In 1923, the Township of Rosewood was destroyed and an estimated 150 African Americans were murdered by Whites. In 1994, the Florida legislature passes the Rosewood Bill, which entitles the survivors to \$150,000 each in compensation for the massacre.

Dr. Jocelyn Elders becomes the first African-American Surgeon General. She is known as an outspoken advocate on various health-related issues.

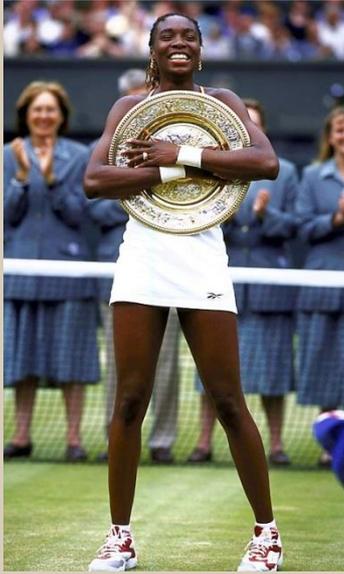


Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls win their fifth National Basketball Association championship. One of the most effectively marketed athletes of his generation, he is instrumental in popularizing the NBA worldwide.



Tiger Woods becomes the first African American—and the youngest golfer—to win the Masters tournament. He goes on to win 14 major championships.

The 1990s

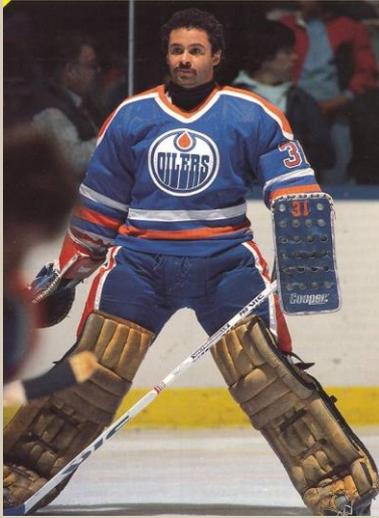


Venus Williams wins the singles title at Wimbledon, becoming the first African-American woman to do so since Althea Gibson. She and her sister Serena go on to win three Olympic women's doubles gold medals.

Condoleezza Rice is the first African-American woman to serve as U.S. National Security Advisor and the first African-American woman to serve as U.S. Secretary of State.



The 2000s



Grant Fuhr—National Hockey League goaltender and the first African American to have his name on the Stanley Cup—becomes the first African American to be inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame.

Michelle Howard is promoted to Rear Admiral. She goes on to become the first African-American woman to achieve three- and four-star rank and the first to be named Vice Chief of Naval Operations.



The 2000s



Barack Hussein Obama II becomes the 44th President of the United States and the first African American to hold the office. He is later elected to a second term.

Barbara Hillary is the first African-American woman to reach the North Pole—at age 75. She goes on to successfully reach the South Pole at age 79.



The 2000s

Carter G. Woodson wanted to change the world's perception of African Americans and recognize their contribution to American society and culture.

Woodson said, *“We should emphasize not Negro History, but the Negro in history. What we need is not a history of selected races or nations, but the history of the world void of national bias, race hate, and religious prejudice.”*

It was his efforts and those of other champions who broke down daunting barriers, finally allowing African Americans to participate as American citizens and have their stories told.

Subsequently, innumerable African Americans have seized previously unavailable opportunities to contribute to American culture and heroically defend their country during wartime.

A century later, the valuable contributions of African Americans cannot be denied. Their profound impact on America continues in a myriad of areas, including history, education, entertainment, literature, science, sports, politics, culture, and the military.



“Never underestimate the power of dreams and the influence of the human spirit. We are all the same in this notion: The potential for greatness lives within each of us.”

—Wilma Rudolph,

U.S. track and field athlete

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Sources

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Dawn W. Smith

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