

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

As we observe Black History Month throughout February, one name you may hear often mentioned is that of Dr. Carter G. Woodson. Dr. Woodson is considered to be the father of African American history, not only for his creation of an annual African American history observation, but also for his efforts to make the study of African American history in America a serious academic field.

Carter Woodson was born in Virginia in 1875, a decade after the end of the Civil War. As a young man he worked in a coal mine and was unable to attend high school until he was 20 years old. But after taking college courses while he worked, Woodson ended up going to the prestigious University of Chicago and eventually to Harvard University, where he got his doctorate.

After getting his degree from Harvard, Dr. Woodson found that there was no serious research of African American culture and history. As a result, in 1915 he founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (known today as the Association for the Study of African American Life and History). Dr. Woodson went on to write such college textbooks as *The Negro in Our History* and *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861*.

As part of his efforts to raise awareness of African Americans' contributions to American history, Dr. Woodson came up with the idea of having a Negro History Week every year in February. It is this tradition that eventually became today's Black History Month.

The election in 2008 of Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States will be, for many, the most significant event of African American history in their lifetime. Obama's successful campaign for the Democratic Party's nomination, followed by his convincing victory over his Republican opponent, John McCain, only set the stage for his opportunity to govern the nation. The launching of the first U.S. administration headed by an African American is cause for looking forward. But the past remains hugely significant, as Obama said in his Inaugural Address on January 20, 2009:

Our challenges may be new, the instruments with which we meet them may be new, but those values upon which our success depends, honesty and hard work, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and patriotism—these things are old.

These things are true. They have been the quiet force of progress throughout our history.

What is demanded then is a return to these truths.

President Obama also called on Americans to "choose our better history"—but in order to so choose, we must know that history, or learn that history. Black History Month is an opportunity to grow in our knowledge of American history and of the special contributions that African Americans have made. The following links provide numerous jumping-off points for exploration.

Related Links

- [**BHM: The Official Guide to Black History Month**](#) (external link)
Learn how—and when—Black History Month is observed in the United Kingdom.
- [**Celebrating Our Black History**](#) (external link)
Explore this interactive site to learn more about prominent African Americans in U.S. history and see video segments featuring African American leaders of today. From Biography.com.
- [**We Shall Overcome: Historic Places of the Civil Rights Movement**](#) (external link)
This National Park Service (NPS) travel itinerary lists 49 places associated with the modern civil rights movement, including the Selma-to-Montgomery March route.
- [**The HistoryMakers**](#) (external link)
The HistoryMakers[®], a nonprofit educational institution, preserves and provides easy access to an internationally recognized archive of African American video oral histories.
- [**National Museum of African Art**](#) (external link)
Learn about Africa's rich heritage as the cradle of humanity through exhibitions at the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art.

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