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National African American History Month Speech Resources: Fact Sheet

name redacted

Senior Technical Information Specialist

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Introduction

National African American History Month, also referred to as African American History Month and popularly as Black History Month, is observed annually in February, in celebration of the achievements of black Americans. Black History Month recognizes the central role of African Americans in U.S. history.

This fact sheet links to authoritative information resources on National African American History Month. It is designed to assist congressional offices with work related to Black History Month, providing links to legislation, CRS reports, sample speeches and remarks from the *Congressional Record*, and presidential proclamations and remarks. It also links to additional government web resources and selected advocacy, educational, cultural, and military, organizations.

History

The origins of National African American History Month date back to 1926, when Dr. Carter G. Woodson, a noted scholar of black history, set aside time in February to recognize the heritage, achievements, and contributions of African Americans. Since 1976, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), the organization founded by Dr. Woodson, has expanded the observance of Black History Week into a month-long celebration.

Presidents Jimmy Carter and George H. W. Bush’s proclamations were calls to celebrate “National Black (Afro-American) History Month.” In even earlier proclamations the words “African-American” and “black” were often interchanged. However, every president since Bill Clinton in 1996 has proclaimed February simply as National African American History Month.

Each year the national theme for the Black History Month celebration is chosen by ASALH. The theme for 2017 is “The Crisis in Black Education.”

Legislation

P.L. 99-244—In 1986, Congress officially recognized the month of February as Black (Afro-American) History Month.

CRS Reports

The Congressional Research Service has prepared numerous reports that relate to African Americans. Some of these include

CRS Report R43869, *Membership of the 114th Congress: A Profile*, by (name redacted) (see “African American Members”)

CRS Report RL30378, *African American Members of the United States Congress: 1870-2012*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted)

CRS Report R43626, *The Voting Rights Act of 1965: Background and Overview*, by (name redacted)

Sample Speeches and Recognitions

Elected officials often deliver speeches, make floor statements, issue press releases, or enter Extensions of Remarks into the *Congressional Record* to recognize federal holidays and observances. The following are some recent examples:

Representative Sheila Jackson Lee, “Commemorating Black History Month,” *Congressional Record*, February 3, 2017

Representative Peter Visclosky, “Recognizing Black History Month,” *Congressional Record*, February 1, 2017

Senator Kristin Gillibrand, “Senate Resolution 379- Celebrating Black History Month,” *Congressional Record*, February 29, 2016

Senator Cory Booker, “A Resolution Celebrating Black History Month,” *Congressional Record*, February 23, 2015

Representative Charles Rangel, “Black History Month,” *Congressional Record*, February 12, 2015

Presidential Proclamations and Remarks

One of the many uses of a presidential proclamation is to ceremoniously honor a group or call attention to certain issues or events. Some recent African American National History Month proclamations, from the White House website and the *Compilation of Presidential Documents*, include

Proclamation 9573: President Donald Trump, February 2, 2017

Proclamation 9392: President Barack Obama, January 29, 2016

Proclamation 9230: President Barack Obama, January 30, 2015

Proclamation 9080: President Barack Obama, January 31, 2014

Proclamation 8930: President Barack Obama, January 31, 2013

Proclamation 8776: President Barack Obama, January 31, 2012

Proclamation 8627: President Barack Obama, February 1, 2011

Proclamation 8476: President Barack Obama, February 1, 2010

Proclamation 8345: President Barack Obama, February 2, 2009

Proclamation 8218: President George W. Bush, January 29, 2008

Government Resources

National African-American History Month: February 2017 (U.S. Census Bureau). Contains collections of statistics from the Census Bureau’s demographic and economic subject areas related to African Americans.

Economic Snapshot of African Americans in the United States, 2010 latest available (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). Data presented as an economic snapshot of African Americans and employment, industries, and education.

The National Park Service has numerous park sites dedicated to African American history and culture.

The Library of Congress provides a resource guide to its African American collections by way of “The African-American Mosaic: A Library of Congress Resource Guide for the Study of Black History and Culture.” The resource guide includes information on the Civil Rights Act, African Americans in the military, special events at the Library, and resources for teachers.

The National Museum of African American History and Culture was established as part of the Smithsonian Institution on December 16, 2003, by the African American History and Culture Act (P.L. 108-184). A competition was held to determine the design of the building and the groundbreaking ceremony for the museum was on February 20, 2012. The purpose of the museum is to provide for the establishment of programs relating to African American life, art and culture encompassing the periods of slavery; reconstruction; the Harlem renaissance; the civil rights movement and of other periods of African American history.

On September 24, 2016, President Barack Obama dedicated the museum at its official opening. According to the Smithsonian Institution, as of December 2016, over 700 thousand people had visited the museum.

Nongovernment Resources

The Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), Founders of Black History Month (in 1926, originally Negro History Week), carries forth the work of its founder, Dr. Carter G. Woodson. ASALH's mission is "to promote, research, preserve, interpret and disseminate information about Black life, history and culture to the global community."

The Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University (DC) has one of the world's largest and most comprehensive repositories for the documentation of the history and culture of people of African descent in Africa, the Americas, and other parts of the world.

Archives of African American Music and Culture (AAAMC). One of the foremost research centers for the study of black music is Indiana University (Bloomington, IN). The AAAMC houses African American collections and history of religious, classical, blues, gospel, R&B, and hip hop music.

The Infoplease.com's Black History Month website contains biographies, quizzes, crosswords, facts, and statistics.

Information on African Americans in military history is available on the following websites:

- Black Men in Navy Blue During the Civil War
- African Americans in the U.S. Army
- Buffalo Soldiers & Indian Wars

Author Contact Information

(name redacted)
Senior Technical Information Specialist
-redacted@crs.loc.gov7-....

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