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National African American History Month Speech Resources: Fact Sheet

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February 2, 2018

Congressional Research Service

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R44363

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. National African American 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 National African American History Month by 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 National African American History Month celebration is chosen by ASALH. The theme for 2018 is “African Americans in Times of War.”

Legislation

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

Related CRS Reports

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

CRS Report R44762, *Membership of the 115th 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 Ted Yoho, “African American History Month,” remarks in the House of Representatives, *Congressional Record*, vol. 163, no. 35 (February 28, 2017), p. H1361.

Representative Adriano Espaillat, “Recognizing Black History Month,” remarks in the Extension of Remarks, *Congressional Record*, vol. 163, no. 25 (February 13, 2017), p. E182.

Senator Dick Durbin, “Black History Month,” remarks in the Senate, *Congressional Record*, vol. 163, no. 28 (February 16, 2017), p. S1392-S1393.

Representative Sheila Jackson Lee, “Commemorating Black History Month,” remarks in the Extensions of Remarks, *Congressional Record*, vol. 163, no. 19 (February 3, 2017), p. E138-E139.

Representative Evan Jenkins, “Honoring Dr. Carter G. Woodson,” remarks in the Extension of Remarks, *Congressional Record*, vol. 163, no. 17 (February 1, 2017), p. E117.

Senators Cory Booker and Thad Cochran, “Celebrating Black History Month,” remarks in the Senate, *Congressional Record*, vol. 161, no. 33 (February 26, 2015), p. S1134-1135.

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 National African American History Month proclamations, from the White House website and the *Compilation of Presidential Documents*, include

“African American History Month and the Bonds of Patriotism” (from Whitehouse.gov, February 1, 2018)

Presidential Proclamation—Donald J. Trump (2018)

Presidential Proclamation—Donald J. Trump (2017)

Presidential Proclamations—Barack H. Obama (2009-2016)

Presidential Proclamations—George W. Bush (2001-2008)

Presidential Proclamations—William J. Clinton (1996-2000)

Presidential proclamations and remarks from 1993 to the present are available through the Federal Digital System (FDsys) on the Government Publishing Office website. Earlier remarks (including selected audio and video clips) are available through The American Presidency Project, established by the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Government Resources

Facts for Features: National African-American (Black) History Month: February 2018 (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 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics)—contains 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.

Sources for Images on African American History (Library of Congress) provides reference aids and links to the photographs and prints held in the Prints and Photographs Division that relate to African American history from slavery to the civil rights era.

Black Americans in Congress (History, Art & Archives, U.S. House of Representatives) contains “biographical profiles of former African-American Members of Congress, links to information about current black Members, essays on institutional and national events that shaped successive generations of African Americans in Congress, and images of each individual Member, supplemented by other historical photos.” This website is based on the book *Black Americans in Congress, 1870-2007*.

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 2017, over 2.4 million people had visited the museum.

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

- Black Men in Navy Blue During the Civil War (The Navy & Marine Living History Association)
- African Americans in the U.S. Army (The U.S. Army Center of Military History)
- The Proud Legacy of Buffalo Soldiers (National Museum of African American History & Culture)

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.

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