Meet the man who created Black History Month

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Carter G. Woodson, an African-American historian, wrote Black Americans into U.S. history. (Bettmann Archive/Getty Images/CNN)

February marks Black History Month, a federally recognized, nationwide celebration that calls on all Americans to reflect on the significant roles that African-Americans have played in shaping U.S. history. But how did this celebration come to be -- and why does it happen in February?

THE MAN BEHIND THE HOLIDAY

Carter G. Woodson, considered a pioneer in the study of African-American history, is given much of the credit for Black History Month.
The son of former slaves, Woodson spent his childhood working in coal mines and quarries. He received his education during the four-month term that was customary for black schools at the time.

At 19, having taught himself English fundamentals and arithmetic, Woodson entered high school, where he completed a four-year curriculum in two years. He went on to earn his master's degree in history from the University of Chicago and later earned a doctorate from Harvard.

**HOW THE HOLIDAY CAME ABOUT**

Disturbed that history textbooks largely ignored America's Black population, Woodson took on the challenge of writing black Americans into the nation's history.

To do this, he established the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. He also founded the group's widely respected publication, the Journal of Negro History.

In 1926, Woodson developed Negro History Week. He believed "the achievements of the Negro properly set forth will crown him as a factor in early human progress and a maker of modern civilization."

In 1976, Negro History Week expanded into Black History Month.

**WHY HE PICKED FEBRUARY**

Woodson chose the second week of February for his celebration because it marks the birthdays of two men who greatly influenced the Black American population:

- Frederick Douglass, who escaped slavery and became an abolitionist and civil rights leader; though his birthdate isn't known, he celebrated it on February 14.
- U.S. President Abraham Lincoln, who signed the Emancipation Proclamation, which abolished slavery in America's confederate states; he was born on February 12.

For his work, Woodson has been called the Father of Black History.

**Backstory:**

_A version of this story was first published in 2007._
People gather for the unveiling of a new portrait created by Marshall graduate Sassa Wilkes of Dr. Carter G. Woodson, the Father of Black History, on Monday, February 1, 2021, inside the Charles W. and Norma C. Carroll Gallery in downtown Huntington.

Hoping to further expand the area's recognition of Carter G. Woodson, Marshall University's Woodson Lyceum Monday unveiled a new portrait of the Father of Black History.
Mary Fields (1832-1914) stood six-feet tall in her stocking feet, weighed 200 pounds, smoked cigars, cursed like a sailor, and would knock out any cowboy that gave her excess amounts of back talk. She was also the first black woman employed as a mail carrier in the United States, and the second woman to work for the US Postal Service.

Mary was born into slavery in Hickman County, Tennessee. She was freed when Republican President Abraham Lincoln issued his emancipation proclamation. She worked in the home of Judge Edmund Dunne and when the judge’s wife died in 1883 in San Antonio, Florida, Fields escorted the family’s five children to live with their aunt, Mother Mary Amadeus, Mother Superior of an Ursuline convent in Toledo, Ohio.

The next year, Mother Amadeus was sent to Montana territory to establish a school for Native American girls at St. Peter’s Mission, west of Cascade. Upon learning that Mother Amadeus was ill, Mary Fields hastened to her side and helped nurse her back to health. After that, Mary Fields remained at St. Peter’s Mission hauling freight, doing laundry, growing vegetables, tending chickens, repairing buildings, and eventually becoming a forewoman.
St. Peter’s Mission was not altogether peaceful with Mary Fields about. Her gruff style and penchant for colorful language raised eyebrows. Not long after her arrival, someone asked about her journey. She answered that she was ready for a good cigar and a glass of strong whiskey. Her nature was, for the most part, difficult and she didn’t mind tussling with the nuns over her wages, either. This was a peculiar behavior in those days because no one expected a Negro to be so sassy.

In 1894, someone made an official complaint about Mary Fields. Apparently, there was an incident involving a former male employee and Mary’s guns. The complaint came at an inopportune time because it had a cumulative effect on the Bishop. He was already out of sorts with Mary about her drinking, smoking, cursing, shooting guns, and wearing men’s clothing, so when she was accused of pointing guns at the former male janitor during an argument, the Bishop made her leave the convent. Mother Amadeus helped her to establish a restaurant in nearby Cascade. The problem was that Mary Fields would feed anyone, irrespective of whether they could pay. The restaurant went broke in ten months.

Native Americans referred to Fields as White Crow. She acted in a manner somewhat similar to white women but was black as a crow. Local whites hardly knew what to think of Mary Fields. One local Democrat wrote, “She drinks whiskey, and she swears, and she is a Republican and this makes her a low, foul creature.” It is amazing how little Democrats have changed since the 1880s.

In 1895, Stagecoach Mary was hovering around sixty years of age. This is when Fields was hired as a mail carrier; she could hitch a team of six horses quicker than anyone. She became a “star route” carrier, an independent contractor who carried mail using a stagecoach donated by Mother Amadeus. The position suited Mary Fields to a tee because as a star carrier, her job was to protect the mail from thieves and bandits.
Some said that she actually prayed for someone to try and rob her stage, which she drove with horses and a mule she named Moses. Stagecoach Mary (sometimes Black Mary) never missed a day, and it was her reliability, and her kindness toward children, that earned her the respect and admiration of locals. And Mary was tough: If the snowfall was too deep for the horses, Mary Fields strapped on snowshoes, hoisted the bags of mail on her shoulders, and delivered the mail. She did this sort of thing for eight years, until finally, age caught up with her.

When Mary retired from the mail route, the community rallied to support her—even in spite of the occasional dust-ups she had with her neighbors. Local restaurant owners gave her free meals, and she regularly chatted with saloon customers (so long as they bought her a drink of whiskey).

Mary Fields died of liver failure in 1914. Her funeral was one of the largest turnouts in Cascade’s history. Mary was one tough lady, and she didn’t mind having an outsized reputation, either. Actor Gary Cooper, a native of Montana, remarked of Mary Fields, “Born a slave somewhere in Tennessee, Mary lived to become one of the freest souls ever to draw a breath—or a .38.”
Today in Black History we salute the journey of Bessie Coleman

Bessie Coleman was an early American civil aviator. She was the first African-American woman and first Native-American to hold a pilot license. She had to learn French and get her pilots license in France because flight schools in the US at the time would not admit African Americans or women. She earned her pilot license from the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale on June 15, 1921, and was the first black person to earn an international pilot's license. She was flying at the same time as Amelia Earhart.
Today in Black History we salute the journey of Congressman Elijah E. Cummings

CUMMINGS, ELIJAH EUGENE, a Representative from Maryland; born in Baltimore, Md., January 18, 1951; graduated from Baltimore City College High School, Baltimore, Md., 1969; B.S., Howard University, Washington, D.C., 1973; J.D., University of Maryland School of Law, Baltimore, Md., 1976; lawyer, private practice; chief judge, Maryland Moot Court Board; member of the Maryland state house of delegates, 1983-1996, and speaker pro tempore, 1995-1996; elected as a Democrat to the One Hundred Fourth Congress, by special election, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of United States Representative Kweisi Mfume; reelected to the twelve succeeding Congresses and served until his death (April 16, 1996-October 17, 2019); chair, Committee on Oversight and Reform (One Hundred Sixteenth Congress); died on October 17, 2019, in Baltimore, Md.; lay in state in National Statuary Hall, October 24, 2019.

Today in Black History we salute the journey of Congressman Kweisi Mfume

Kweisi Mfume, on May 5th, I traveled to the United States Capitol, alongside my wife Tiffany, to take the oath of office as a newly-elected member of the 116th Congress. I was honored to once again represent the people of the 7th District and fill the seat left by my friend of 42 years, the late Congressman Elijah Cummings. It has always been my belief that the best ideas come from the bottom up, not the top down. That's why throughout this term, I've aimed to be the Representative that this District deserves - someone who is accessible and has a legislative agenda that is informed by the community. I've responded to hundreds of your constituent inquiries and held virtual town halls to discuss plans and ideas for addressing your most pressing issues. There is still much more work to be done, but I'm proud of what we've already accomplished. I've taken my direction from you and am humbled by the opportunity to represent you. The following report highlights some of the progress we've made both in Maryland and Washington, DC. I look forward to building on the progress we've made and remain committed to creating a new vision for the 7th District of Maryland, one where opportunity is available and abundant for all of those who call it home.
Today in Black History we salute the journey of Activist Louis Farrakhan

Farrakhan was born Louis Eugene Walcott on May 11, 1933, in The Bronx, New York City, the younger of two sons of Sarah Mae Manning (January 16, 1900 – November 18, 1988) and Percival Clark, immigrants from the Anglo-Caribbean islands. His mother was born in Saint Kitts, while his father was Jamaican. Walcott received his first violin at the age of five and by the time he was 12 years old, he had been on tour with the Boston College Orchestra. A year later, he participated in national competitions and won them. In 1946, he was one of the first black performers to appear on the Ted Mack Original Amateur Hour, where he also won an award. Walcott and his family were active members of the Episcopal St. Cyprian's Church in Roxbury.

Walcott attended the Boston Latin School, and later the English High School, from which he graduated. He completed three years at Winston-Salem Teachers College, where he had a track scholarship.

In February 1955, he was headlining a show in Chicago, Illinois, called Calypso Follies. There he first came in contact with the teachings of the Nation of Islam (NOI) through Rodney Smith, a friend and saxophonist from Boston. Walcott and his wife Betsy were invited to the Nation of Islam's annual Saviours' Day address by Elijah Muhammad. Prior to going to Saviours' Day, due to then-Minister Malcolm X's media presence, Walcott had never heard of Elijah Muhammad, and like many outside of the Nation of Islam, he thought that Malcolm X was the leader of the Nation of Islam. July 1955, Walcott received a letter of approval from the Nation of Islam acknowledging his official membership as a registered Muslim/registered believer/registered laborer in the NOI. As a result, he received his "X." The "X" was considered a placeholder, used to indicate that Nation of Islam members' original African family names had been lost. The summer after Farrakhan's conversion, Elijah Muhammad stated that all
musicians in the NOI had to choose between music and the Nation of Islam. Louis X did so only after performing one final event at the Nevele.

That year in October, Farrakhan convened a broad coalition of what he and his supporters claimed was one million men in Washington, D.C., for the Million Man March. The Million Man March was a large gathering of African-American men in Washington, D.C., on October 16, 1995. Called by Louis Farrakhan, it was held on and around the National Mall.

The event was organized by Louis Farrakhan, the often controversial leader of the Nation of Islam, and directed by Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr., the former executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, to bring about a spiritual renewal that would instill a sense of personal responsibility in African American men for improving the condition of African Americans. Among other prominent African Americans who supported and spoke at the event were Jesse Jackson, Rosa Parks, Cornel West, and Maya Angelou, along with Marion Barry and Kurt Schmoke, then the mayors of Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, Md., respectively. “Let our choices be for life, for protecting our women, our children, keeping our brothers free of drugs, free of crime,” Schmoke told the crowd, which assembled on the Mall. It was reported that in response to the march some 1.7 million African American men registered to vote.
A 2021 historical calendar pays tribute to extraordinary and trailblazing African American families. Included are the following family members: The King Family, Venus & Serena Williams, The Jackson 5 and Muhammad Ali.
Stacey Abrams nominated for Nobel Peace Prize

“Abrams’ work follows in Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s footsteps in the fight for equality before the law and for civil rights,” Haltbrekke said.

Abrams’ voting rights organization Fair Fight Action was widely credited with boosting Black voter turnout in Georgia in the last election cycle.

“Abrams’ efforts to complete King’s work are crucial if the United States of America shall succeed in its effort to create fraternity between all its peoples and a peaceful and just society.”
The Black Lives Matter movement has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize

Norwegian MP Petter Eide nominated the global movement “for their struggle against racism and racially motivated violence,” he wrote in his official nomination papers, which were obtained by CNN.

"BLM's call for systemic change have spread around the world, forcing other countries to grapple with racism within their own societies," he said.

How Black Lives Matter went from a hashtag to a global rallying cry

The Black Lives Matter protest movement, rekindled in the days after an unarmed George Floyd was killed by police in Minneapolis last May, continues to shine a light on what it calls systemic racism and police brutality from America’s small towns to its urban centers.
Today in Black History we salute the journey of Misty Copeland

Rising star Misty Copeland makes history as an American ballet dancer for the American Ballet Theatre, one of the three leading classical ballet companies in the United States. On June 30, 2015, Copeland became the first African American woman to be promoted to principal dancer in ABT's 75-year history. As the first African American principal dancer at the American Ballet Theatre, Misty Copeland has been breaking down all kinds of barriers in the world of dance.

A bestselling and prize-winning memoir by African-American ballerina Misty Copeland, “Life in Motion” is the vividly told story of her journey to the world-class.

Date of first publication: December 6, 2016
Today in Black History we salute the journey of Dominque Dawes

Dawes was a member of the 1996 Gold Medal Olympic Team where she also became the first African-American to win an individual event medal with her bronze on floor. Dawes won the 1996 Olympic Trials and all four events at the 1996 Coca-Cola National Championships. A 1992 Olympic Bronze Medalist and a four-time World Championships medalist, she has won more national championships since 1963 (15) than any other athlete, male of female. She swept the 1994 Coca-Cola National Championships, winning the all-around and all four event titles, the first gymnast to accomplish this feat since Joyce Tanac Schroeder won the all-around and all four events at the 1969 AAU National Championships. Dawes won the 1995 Arch McDonald Award, presented by the Touchdown Club of Washington, D.C. She also won the 1995 Henry P. Iba Citizen Athlete Award, presented annually to two outstanding athletes who have demonstrated good citizenship. She was named 1994 Sportsperson of the Year by USA Gymnastics and was a finalist for the 1994 AAU Sullivan Award which recognizes the USA’s top amateur athlete.
Today in Black History we salute the journey of Doug Williams

Doug Williams, the first black QB to win a Super Bowl

Doug Williams traveled a long road, not to mention an atypical one, to become the first black quarterback to win a Super Bowl.

He starred at a historically black college, Grambling, before the Tampa Bay Buccaneers picked him in the first round of the 1978 draft -- on the recommendation of then-offensive coordinator Joe Gibbs. Nine seasons later, he helped Gibbs and the Washington Redskins win Super Bowl XXII.

Williams, the subject of an upcoming sports movie biopic, put together the best quarter in Super Bowl history with four touchdown passes and earned MVP honors.

His final NFL season came in 1989, and he has spent much of the past decade in league front offices, first with the Buccaneers and since 2014 in various roles with the Redskins. Williams is currently Washington's senior vice president of player development. He has helped mentor a number of African American quarterbacks over the years, including Jameis Winston and Dwayne Haskins.

In the wake of George Floyd's death at the hands of Minneapolis police and the subsequent protests around the world, Williams opened up to ESPN about experiences from his childhood and playing days and shared his unique perspective on the current social unrest.
Kobe Bryant, American Basketball Player, National Basketball Association (NBA) to five championships (2000–02 and 2009–10).

Bryant’s father, Joe (“Jelly Bean”) Bryant, was a professional basketball player who spent eight seasons in the NBA and eight more playing in Italy, where Bryant went to school. When his family returned to the United States, Bryant played basketball at Lower Merion High School in Ardmore, Pennsylvania, where he received several national Player of the Year awards and broke the southeastern Pennsylvania scoring record set by Wilt Chamberlain with 2,883 points. Bryant opted to forgo college and declared himself eligible for the NBA draft when he graduated from high school. The Charlotte Hornets chose him with the 13th pick of the 1996 draft. He was traded to the Lakers shortly thereafter and became the second youngest NBA player in history when the 1996–97 season opened. He quickly proved his merit with the Lakers and was selected for the NBA All-Star Game in just his second season, becoming the youngest All-Star.

Bryant led the league in scoring during the 2005–06 and 2006–07 seasons, and in 2008 he was named the league’s MVP for the first time in his career. Bryant won his fourth NBA title in 2009, and he was named the finals MVP after averaging a stellar 32.4 points per game in the series. He led the Lakers to their third straight Western Conference championship in 2009–10, and he was once more named NBA finals MVP after the Lakers defeated the Boston Celtics in a seven-game series. The Lakers won division titles in each of the following seasons but were eliminated in the second round of each postseason.

In addition to his professional accomplishments, he was a member of the gold medal-winning U.S. men’s basketball teams at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and the 2012 London Olympic Games. In 2015 Bryant wrote the poem “Dear Basketball,” and two years later it served as the basis for a short film of the same name, which he also narrated. The work won an Academy Award for best animated short film. In 2018 Bryant published the book The Mamba Mentality: How I Play, in which he described his approach to basketball; the title reflected a nickname he bestowed upon himself during his playing days, “The Black Mamba.”

On January 26, 2020, Bryant and his 13-year-old daughter were among a group traveling to a girls basketball game in a helicopter when it crashed, killing all nine people aboard.
Commending the 1st Black Cinderella Story with Diverse Cast

➢ Airing this Friday, February 12th on Disney Plus ◀

**Rodgers & Hammerstein's Cinderella** (also known as simply Cinderella) is a 1997 American musical fantasy television film produced by Walt Disney Television, directed by Robert Iscove and written by Robert L. Freedman. Based on the French fairy tale by Charles Perrault, the film is the second remake and third version of Rodgers and Hammerstein’s musical, which originally aired on television in 1957. Adapted from Oscar Hammerstein II’s book, Freedman modernized the script to appeal to more contemporary audiences by updating its themes, particularly re-writing its main character into a stronger heroine. **Co-produced** by Whitney Houston, who also appears as Cinderella's Fairy Godmother, the film stars Brandy in the titular role and features a racially diverse cast consisting of Jason Alexander, Whoopi Goldberg, Bernadette Peters, Veanne Cox, Natalie Desselle, Victor Garber and Paolo Montalban.

**Rest in Heavenly BAPS:** Natalie Ann Desselle-Reid (July 12, 1967 – December 7, 2020) Performed in several films, including B.A.P.S., Def Jam’s How to Be a Player, Set It Off and Cinderella, and the television series Built to Last, For Your Love, and Eve.
Recognizing Black Pioneers

Best Actors

He was the first. Sidney Poitier (1963) Lilies of the Field
Forest Whitaker (2006) The Last King of Scotland

Best Supporting Actor

Louis Gossett, Jr. (1982) An Officer and a Gentlemen
Cuba Gooding Jr. (1996) Jerry Maguire

First time same in the category for a Black Actor

Mahershala Ali (2016) Moonlight

Best Actress

Halle Berry (2001) Monster’s Ball

Best Supporting Actress

She was the First. Hattie McDaniel (1939) Gone With the Wind
Whoopi Goldberg (1990) Ghost
Mo’Nique (2009) Precious
Octavia Spencer (2011) The Help
Lupita Nyong’o (2013) 12 Years a Slave
Viola Davis (2013) Fences
Regina King (2018). If Beale Street Could Talk

**Best Animated Feature**

**Best Costume Design**

**Best Documentary Feature**
T.J. Martin (director 2012). Undefeated

**Best Documentary Feature**

**Best Documentary Short Subject**
Roger Ross Williams (2009)

**Best Original Score**
Herbie Hancock (1989). Round Midnight

**Best Original Song**
Isaac Hayes. (1972). Shaft
Irene Cara (1983). Flashdance…What a Feeling”

**Best Picture**
Steve McQueen (2013). 12 Years a Slave. First Black director and producer to win Best Picture
Barry Jenkins (2014). Moonlight

**Best Production Design**

**Best Animated Short Film**
Kobe Bryant (2017). Dear Basketball. First Black to win in this category.
Matthew A. Cherry (2019). Hair Love. 2nd former professional athlete to be nominated for and to win this award.

**Best Sound**
Russell Williams, II (1989). Glory
Russell Williams, II (1990). Dances with Wolves

**Best Adapted Screenplay**
Geoffrey Fletcher (2009). Precious
John Ridley (2013). 12 Years a Slave

Barry Jenkins & Tarell McCraney (2016). In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue. 1st to have 2 Black screenwriters nominated.


**Best Original Screenplay**

Jordan Peele (2017). Get Out. 1st African American to win for Best Writing (Original Screenplay) and the nomination overall, for debut film.

**Special Awards**

James Baskett (1948) Characterization of Uncle Remus in Song of the South. 1st African American male to receive Oscar.


Sidney Poitier (2001). Honorary Award “Extraordinary performances and unique presence on the screen and for representing the industry with Dignity, Style and Intelligence.”


Spike Lee (2015). Honorary Award. “Filmmaker, Educator, Motivator, Iconoclast, Artist and a Champion of Independent Film and an Inspiration to young filmmakers.”

Charles Burnett (2017). Honorary Award

Cicely Tyson (2018). Honorary Award
Our very own Wanda Manigo-Cartwright, Co-Chair shares her memoir moment of when she worked for the NAACP for 10 years. During her time there, she did a lot of traveling and met Bill Clinton (when he was running for President the 1st time), Jessie Jackson, John Sally (basketball player) and her 2 favorites: Rosa Parks and Nelson Mandela. Also, at the National Office in Baltimore, she met Cicely Tyson, Farrakhan and Myrlie Evers (Medgar Evers’ wife).

FYI: The NAACP is the TRUE Black Lives Matter. Started in 1909.

Our very own Judith Thomas, Co-Chair shares her memoir moment of when she worked for the Radio Mutual Broadcasting & CNN Larry King Live. Muhammad Ali hosted a book party for her former boss Larry King who she worked as an Associate Producer for both and as well as Executive Director of Larry King Cardiac Foundation and Assistant/VP of Larry King Enterprises for over 18 years. Judith is also included in 7 of his books.