

The Iowa African-American Journal Special African American History Month Edition

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February 2005

Black History Month

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The importance of Black history lies in its ability to educate, inspire and uplift all people of African descent, and to enlighten the rest of humanity about our cultures. It is a source of strength, cultural pride, and inspiration that we can draw upon to improve our nations, our communities, and our lives. When we begin to understand the heights we have achieved in the past, and the many great obstacles we have overcome, we start to realize our true potential as a people.

The fact that many aspects of our society, our technology, and our civilization, were invented by people of African descent, is something that we all need to know.

Americans have recognized black history annually since 1926, first as "Negro History Week", and later as "Black History Month." What you might not know is that black history had barely begun to be studied-or even documented-when the tradition originated. Although blacks have been in America at least as far back as colonial times, it was not until the 20th century that they gained a respectable presence in the history books.

We owe the celebration of Black History Month, and more importantly, the study of black history, to Dr. Carter G. Woodson. Born to parents who were former slaves, he spent his childhood working in the Kentucky coal mines and enrolled in high school at age twenty. He graduated within two years and later went on to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard. The scholar was disturbed to find in his studies that history books largely ignored the black American population-and when blacks did figure into the picture, it was generally in ways that reflected the inferior social position they were assigned at the

time. Mr. Woodson, always one to act on his ambitions, decided to take on the challenge of writing black Americans into the nation's history. He established the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (now called the Association for the study of Afro-American Life and History) in 1915, and a year later founded the widely respected Journal of Negro History. In 1926, he launched Negro History Week as an initiative to bring national attention to the contributions of black people throughout American history.

Woodson chose the second week of February for Negro History Week, because it marks the birthdays of two men who greatly influenced the black American population, Frederick Douglas and Abraham Lincoln to show its significance in black American history. Woodson chose the second week of February for Negro History Week because it marks the birthdays of two men who greatly influenced the black American population, [Frederick Douglass](#) and [Abraham Lincoln](#).

However, February has much more than Douglass and Lincoln to show for its significance in black American history. For example:

- **February 23, 1868:** [W. E. B. DuBois](#), important civil rights leader and co-founder of the NAACP, was born.
- **February 3, 1870:** The [15th Amendment](#) was passed, granting blacks the right to vote.
- **February 25, 1870:** The first black U.S. senator, [Hiram R. Revels](#) (1822-1901), took his oath of office.
- **February 12, 1909:** The [National](#)

Black History Month

(Continued from page 1)

[Association for the Advancement of Colored People \(NAACP\)](#) was founded by a group of concerned black and white citizens in New York City.

- **February 1, 1960:** In what would become a [civil-rights movement](#) milestone, a group of black Greensboro, N.C., college students began a sit-in at a segregated Woolworth's lunch counter.

February 21, 1965: [Malcolm X](#), the militant leader who promoted Black Nationalism, was shot to death by three Black Muslims.

State-wide African American History Month Events

| Date | Description of event | Location | Contact information |
|----------------|--|---|---|
| January 28-29 | <p>I'll Make Me a World in Iowa (IMMAWII)</p> <p>Celebration highlighting African American arts, culture and contributions through education, awareness and preservation</p> <p>Education Day – Friday, Jan. 25</p> <p>Gala Event – Friday, Jan. 25, 7:00 to 9:00 pm</p> | <p>Iowa State Historical Building 600 E. Locust St.</p> <p>Des Moines</p> | <p>I'll Make Me a World in Iowa PO Box 5182 Des Moines, 50306-5182</p> <p>www.worldiniowa.org</p> <p>Betty C. Andrews 515-987-9571</p> |
| February 17-18 | <p>2nd Annual Midwest Regional Black History Month Conference</p> <p>Commemorating the Legacy of Ida B. Well-Barnett</p> | <p>Luther College 700 College Dr Decorah</p> | <p>563-382-1014</p> |
| February 25 | <p>3rd Annual Hip-Hop Summit & Step Show</p> <p>1:00 pm to 2 am</p> <p>Speakers: Shuaib Meacham, Dr. Bryant K. Smith, Tou Ger Xiong</p> | <p>Central College Pella</p> | <p>641-628-5656 or</p> |

Black History Month

Quotes by Famous African Americans:

I am America. I am the part you won't recognize. But get used to me. Black, confident, cocky; my name, not yours; my religion, not yours; my goals, my own; get used to me.

[Muhammad Ali \(1942- \)](#)

The Greatest (1975)

Read more [quotes from Muhammad Ali](#).

Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.

I rise

I rise

I rise.

[Maya Angelou \(1928-\)](#)

"Still I rise," *And Still I Rise (1978)*

Racism is not an excuse to not do the best you can.

[Arthur Ashe \(1943-1993\)](#)

quoted in *Sports Illustrated*, July 1991

If we accept and acquiesce in the face of discrimination, we accept the responsibility ourselves and allow those responsible to salve their conscience by believing that they have our acceptance and concurrence. We should, therefore, protest openly everything . . . that smacks of discrimination or slander.

[Mary McLeod Bethune \(1875-1955\)](#)

"Certain Unalienable Rights," *What the Negro Wants*, edited by Rayford W. Logan (1944)

You're either part of the solution or part of the problem.

[\(Leroy\) Eldridge Cleaver \(1935-1998\)](#)

speech given in San Francisco in 1968

You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man.

[Frederick Douglass \(1818?-1895\)](#)

***Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas*(1845)**

The question is not whether we can afford to invest in every child; it is whether we can afford not to.

[Marian Wright Edelman \(\(1939-\)](#)

The Measure of Our Success (1992)

"We, the people." It is a very eloquent beginning. But when that document [the Preamble to the US Constitution] was completed on the seventeenth of September in 1787, I was not included in that "We, the people." I felt somehow for many years that George Washington and Alexander Hamilton, just left me out by mistake. But through the process of amendment, interpretation and court decision I have finally been included in "We, the people."

[Barbara C. Jordan \(1936-1996\)](#)

statement made before the House Committee on the Judiciary, July 25, 1974

Defining myself, as opposed to being defined by others, is one of the most difficult challenges I face.

[Carol Moseley-Braun \(1947-\)](#)

interview in *The New Republic*, November 15, 1993

Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed.

[Booker T. Washington \(1856-1915\)](#)

***Up From Slavery*(1901)**

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.

[Carter Woodson \(1875-1950\)](#)

on founding Negro History Week, 1926

Black History Month

Heroes of the Civil Rights Movement

by **Borgna Brunner**

The civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s challenged racism in America and made the country a more just and humane society for all. Below are a few of its many heroes.



Rosa Parks

On December 1, 1955, in [Montgomery, Alabama](#) Rosa Parks, an African-American seamstress, left work and boarded a bus for home. As the bus became crowded, the bus driver ordered Parks to give up her seat to a white passenger. Montgomery's buses were segregated, with the seats in the front reserved for "whites only." Blacks had to sit at the back of the bus. But if the bus was crowded and all the "whites only" seats were filled, black people were expected to give up their seats—a black person sitting while a white person stood would never be tolerated in the racist South. Rosa had had enough of such humiliation, and refused to give up her seat. "I felt I had a right to stay where I was," she said. "I wanted this particular driver to know that we were being treated unfairly as individuals and as a people." The bus driver had her arrested.

[Martin Luther King, Jr.](#), heard about Parks's brave defiance and launched a boycott of Montgomery buses. The 17,000 black residents of Montgomery pulled together and kept the boycott going for more than a year. Finally, the Supreme Court intervened and declared segregation on buses unconstitutional. Rosa Parks and the boycotters defeated the racist system, and she became known as "the mother of the [civil rights movement](#)."



Martin Luther King, Jr.

It wasn't just that Martin Luther King became the leader of the civil rights movement that made him so extraordinary—it was the way in which he led the movement. King advocated [civil disobedience](#), the non-violent resistance against unjust laws: "Non-violence is a powerful and just weapon which cuts without wounding and ennoble the man who wields it." Civil rights activists organized demonstrations, marches, boycotts, strikes, and voter-registration drives, and refused to obey laws that they knew were wrong and unjust. These peaceful forms of protest were often met with vicious threats, arrests, beatings, and worse. King emphasized how important it was that the civil rights movement did not sink to the level of the racists and hate mongers they fought against: "Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred," he urged. "We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline." King's philosophy of "tough-mindedness and tenderheartedness" was not only highly effective, but it gave the civil rights movement an inspiring moral authority and grace.



Thurgood Marshall

Thurgood Marshall was a courageous civil rights lawyer during a period when racial segregation was the law of the land. At a time when a large portion of American society refused to extend equality to black people, Marshall astutely realized that one of the best ways to bring about change was through the legal system. Between 1938 and 1961, he presented more than 30 civil rights cases before the Supreme Court. He won 29 of them.

His most important case was [Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka](#) (1954), which ended segregation in public schools. By law, black and white students had to attend separate public schools. As long as schools were "separate but equal"—providing equal education for all races—segregation was considered fair. In reality, segregated schools were shamefully unequal: white schools were far more privileged than black schools, which were largely poor and overcrowded. Marshall challenged the doctrine, pointing out that "separate but equal" was just a myth disguising racism. He argued that if all students were indeed equal, then why was it necessary to separate them? The Supreme Court agreed, ruling that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal." Marshall went on to become the first African-American Supreme Court Justice in American history.

The Little Rock Nine

The Little Rock Nine, as they later came to be called, were the first black teenagers to attend all-white Central High School in [Little Rock, Arkansas](#), in 1957. These remarkable young African-American students challenged segregation in the deep South and won.

Although *Brown v. Board of Education* outlawed segregation in schools, many racist school systems defied the law by intimidating and threatening black students—Central High School was a notorious example. But the Little Rock Nine were determined to attend the school and receive the same education offered to white students, no matter what. Things grew ugly and frightening right away. On the first day of school, the governor of Arkansas ordered the state's National Guard to block the black students from entering the school. Imagine what it must have been like to be a student confronted by armed soldiers! President [Eisenhower](#) had to send in federal troops to protect the students.

But that was only the beginning of their ordeal. Every morning on their way to school angry crowds of whites taunted and insulted the Little Rock Nine—they even received death threats. One of the students, fifteen-year-old Elizabeth Eckford, said "I tried to see a friendly face somewhere in the mob. . . . I looked into the face of an old woman, and it seemed a kind face, but when I looked at her again, she spat at me." As scared as they were, the students wouldn't give up, and several went on to graduate from Central High. Nine black teenagers challenged a racist system and defeated it.

The Little Rock Nine pictured with Daisy Bates, the president of the Arkansas NAACP.



Black History Trivia

1. In what year was the first Martin Luther King Day observed?
2. The first Jim Crow law segregated train passengers. Was it passed in Tennessee, Iowa or Maine?
3. What gold medal is awarded annually to an African-American for the highest achievement in his or her field of activity?
4. Whose firm built the heating plant and powerhouse at the University of Iowa?
5. Why did Carter Woodson choose February as the month to celebrate Negro History Week?
6. Who performed the first successful open-heart surgery, and in what year?
7. In 1946 she was elected president of the Iowa City League of Women Voters?
8. Who was the first black woman ever named to the cabinet of a U.S. President?
9. Name the 1976 novel that traced the history of a black American family to its early African origins.
10. She directed the Negro Community Center in Des Moines, later named Wilkie House, from 1922 until her death?

Answers

1. 1986 2. Tennessee 3. the Spingarn Medal 4. Archie Alexander 5. He believed that Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, both born in February, had the greatest influence on black Americans 6. Daniel Hale Williams, 1893 7. Helen Lemme 8. Patricia R. Harris in 1976 under Jimmy Carter 9. Roots 10. A. Lillian Edmunds

ICSAA News**ICSAA****Iowa Commission on the Status of African-Americans****February 8, 2005****Iowa Commission on the Status of African-Americans
to host reception with the Iowa Legislators
Legislative Dining Room****ICSAA 3rd Quarter Commission**Conference room G12, ground floor
Iowa State Capitol
9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.**Statewide Calendar of Events**

ICSAA is interested in events for African Americans taking place across the state of Iowa.

We would like information about your events to announce in the Iowa African American Journal (published quarterly) and to post on our website, www.state.ia.us/dhr/saa.

Submission must be made at least **30 days** prior to the scheduled event in order to ensure it gets published.

To submit information about your event, please provide the following information:

Organization / Business Name

Contact Name / Title

Address City / State / Zip

Telephone / Fax Number / Email Address Website

Name of Event

Date of Event

Address / Location of Event (Include city, state, zip)

Event E-mail or Web Site address (if applicable)

Please submit information to:

Iowa Commission on the Status of African-Americans
Department of Human Rights
Lucas State Office Building
Des Moines, Iowa 50319
Email: dhr.icsaa@iowa.gov
Fax: 515-242-6119

ICSAA

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