A Celebration of Black History
In 1915, Dr. Carter G. Woodson founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. Woodson started the Journal of Negro History in 1916. Shortly afterward, the historian and educator began pushing for a "Negro History Week" to explore the contributions of African Americans. His dream was fulfilled in 1926. Woodson chose the second week of February because that's when two people whom he felt had significantly affected the lives of African Americans were born: Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. The week evolved into Black History Month in 1976.
Too poor to stay in college, Bessie took a job as a manicurist in a barber shop, where she overhead stories about the adventures of pilots returning from WWI. She also met some influential men at the barber shop, including founder and publisher of the influential Chicago Defender, who encouraged Bessie to take up aviation and helped her get to France to study, knowing that no American flight schools would accept her.

“Because of Bessie Coleman,” wrote Lieutenant William J. Powell in Black Wings 1934, “we have overcome that which was worse than racial barriers. We have overcome the barriers within ourselves and dared to dream”.

Bessie Coleman

“First Licensed African American Pilot in the World”
Dr. Guion Bluford

“First African American Astronaut in Space”

1942-Present

Dr. Guion Stewart “Guy” Bluford, Jr., is an engineer, NASA astronaut, and the first African American in space. Before becoming an astronaut, Bluford was a Colonel in the U.S. Air Force. He participated in four Space Shuttle flights between 1983 and 1992. In 1983, as a member of the crew of the Space Shuttle Challenger on the mission STS-8, Bluford became the first African American in space.
On September 12, 1992, Dr. Mae C. Jemison became the first female African-American astronaut to blast off into space. As a crew member aboard the space shuttle Endeavour, she was the mission's acting science specialist. Jemison had dreamed of becoming an astronaut ever since she was a child living in Chicago. Jemison also is a chemical engineer, physician, and a teacher.
Dr. Charles Richard Drew

“Medical Pioneer”

1904-1950

“A lifesaving discovery”

While researching blood transfusions, Dr. Charles Richard Drew realized that blood, like other liquids, could be preserved. His method, now known as blood banking, revolutionized medicine and changed the way doctors work in remote areas or during times of war. Dr. Drew went on to form the Red Cross Blood Bank.
In 1851, 32-year-old slave Biddy Mason moved to California with her master, his family and her three young daughters. Biddy's master made the move to California to pursue a better life for his family. Little did he know, Biddy had dreams for her family, too.

They settled in the San Bernardino valley. One year before their arrival, California outlawed slavery. Biddy's master could not afford to lose his slaves, so he tried to move again, this time to Texas, where slavery was still legal.

Biddy stood up for her right to liberty and sued him in a California court. The court ruled in her favor and she won freedom for herself and her family. Later, she got a job in Los Angeles as a practical nurse making $2.50 per day. She lived frugally and managed to accumulate a nest egg of $250,000. With that money, she began to purchase real estate -- land that is today considered some of the most valuable in Los Angeles. In short order, she amassed a fortune.
He was the first African-American to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court. But as a kid, he was mischievous, and was once forced to write copies of the Constitution as punishment for his misbehavior. He later said that punishment piqued his interest in the Constitution. As a young adult, he applied to his hometown law school at the University of Maryland, but was denied entrance because of being Black. He later sued the school and won. And before he became a judge, he was a successful attorney who, most famously, won the landmark Brown vs. Board of Education case, which ended school segregation.

“Today's Constitution is a realistic document of freedom only because of several corrective amendments. Those amendments speak to a sense of decency and fairness that I and other Blacks cherish.” ~Thurgood Marshall
Patrick Francis Healy

“President of Georgetown University”

1834-1910

He was the nation's first black to earn a Ph.D. He and the rest of his five siblings contributed greatly to the world through their service as religious and civic leaders. Throughout his lifetime Healy received numerous medals and commendations. He was the 29th president of the prestigious Georgetown University from 1873-1882.

In the 1960s the history of Healy's mixed-race ancestry became more widely known, and he was recognized as the first American of African ancestry to earn a PhD; the first to become a Jesuit priest; and the first to be president of a predominantly white college.
Otis Boykin created over 28 different electronic devices, including electrical resistors that are used in home computers, television sets, radios, and guided missiles. He also invented the pacemaker.
Elijah McCoy

“The Real McCoy”

1843-1929

The next time you’re running through the sprinkler, remember that it was invented by Elijah McCoy. Ever heard the expression “the real McCoy”? It comes from another invention by McCoy that allowed trains and other machines to be lubricated while running. When many imitations showed up, people insisted on the “Real McCoy”!
The next time you’re waiting at a red light, remember it was invented by Garrett Morgan. Morgan’s other invention, the gas mask, also saves lives. Many soldiers survived the First World War thanks to the gas mask, which prevented deadly mustard gas from entering their lungs.

Garret Morgan

“Inventor”
Love Peanut Butter? Peanut Butter was invented by George Washington Carver, who discovered 400 uses for peanuts, soybeans, sweet potatoes, and pecans. In the process, he transformed lunchtime sandwiches forever. Yum!
Paul R. Williams

“Architect”

1894-1980

When Paul was two years old his father died, and two years later his mother died. The children were placed in separate foster homes. Paul was fortunate to grow up in the home of a foster mother who devoted herself to his education and to the development of his artistic talent. He simultaneously pursued architectural education and professional experience with Los Angeles’ leading firms, never settling for less than perfection in his work and dignity in his relationships with clients and colleagues. Earning academic accolades, competition prizes and the respect of his employers, Williams was able to open his own practice in 1922 and become the first African American member of the American Institute of Architects in 1923.

During the 1920s and 1930s (including the depression, which had little effect on his firm), his great success was in designing homes for wealthy clients in the elite hillside subdivisions like Bel Air, Brentwood, and Beverly Hills. Sought by entertainment industry leaders, Williams became known as “Architect to the Hollywood Stars.” Although residential design remained an important aspect of his practice, commercial and institutional commissions became increasingly significant as did his work beyond Southern California, across the nation and the world. In the course of his five-decade career, Williams designed approximately 3000 buildings, served on many municipal, state and federal commissions, was active in political and social organizations and earned the admiration and respect of his peers. In 1957, he was the first African American elected a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects.
Samuel Coleridge Taylor

“Composer”

1875-1912

Coleridge-Taylor was an English composer who composed chamber music, cantatas, anthems, and the African Dances for violin, among other works. The Petite Suite de Concert is still regularly played. He set one poem by his near-namesake Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Legend of Kubla Khan.

He was greatly admired by African Americans; in 1901, a 200-voice African-American chorus was founded in Washington, D.C., named the Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Society. He visited the USA three times, receiving great acclaim, and earned the title "the African Mahler" from the white orchestral musicians in New York in 1910. There is a school named after him in Louisville, Kentucky: Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Elementary School.
Louis Armstrong

“Musician”

1900-1971

Louis “Satchmo” Armstrong was one of the most influential artists of all time. He transformed jazz into an art form, and his trumpet style is still imitated today. His two international hits, “Hello Dolly” and “What a Wonderful World,” are still often heard today.
In 1936, William Grant Still became the first black to conduct a professional symphony orchestra in the United States. He conducted the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra. As America's first African-American classical composer, Still also was the first black to write a symphony or to conduct a radio orchestra. His varied compositions were marked by simple harmonies and orchestration and the use of jazz, blues and other folk idioms.
Fredrick Douglas
“Orator”
1818-1895

Frederick Douglass, a former slave and eminent human rights leader in the abolition movement, was the first black citizen to hold a high U.S. government rank.

“The lesson of all the ages on this point is, that a wrong done to one man is a wrong done to all men. It may not be felt at the moment, and the evil day may be long delayed, but so sure as there is a moral government of the universe, so sure will the harvest of evil come.”
– Frederick Douglass
Harriet Tubman

“Activist”

Every great dream begins with a dreamer.
Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.

~Harriet Tubman

1820-1913

Harriet Tubman was born a slave but later escaped to Philadelphia, only to return to Maryland to rescue her family. But she didn’t stop there. She earned the name Moses because she risked her life traveling at night helping hundreds of Southern slaves escape to the north and Canada through a network of safe people and safe houses called the Underground Railroad.
Jean Baptiste Pointe DuSable founded the city of Chicago. DuSable was born around 1745 in Haiti to a white French sea captain and a black former slave. After his mother died, he went to France with his father to be educated. Later he worked as a seaman on his father's boats. At 20, he sailed to America.

Soon, DuSable settled in Illinois and became a fur trader. He married an American Indian woman and developed a very successful business. When traveling from Canada, where he trapped furs, DuSable would stop at a place the Indians called Eschikcago or "place of smelly waters." In 1779, DuSable decided this would be a great place to build a trading post. Many white men had tried it before, but they found a great deal of resistance from the Indians. DuSable, though, did not have that problem. In fact, he was adopted into his wife's clan. Soon, his successful trading post developed into the settlement now known as Chicago.
Woodrow Wilson Woolvine Strode

“Athlete/Actor”

1914-1994

Known as "Woody" Strode a decathlete and football star who went on to become a pioneering African-American film actor. Strode and fellow UCLA alumnus Kenny Washington were two of the first African-Americans to play in major college programs and later the modern National Football League, playing for the Los Angeles Rams in 1946. No black men had played in the NFL from 1933 to 1946. He was nominated for a Golden Globe award for Best Supporting Actor for his role in Spartacus in 1960. He served in the United States Army during World War II.
Cooper was also the first African-American to be drafted by an NBA team, as the first pick of the second round by the Boston Celtics. He and two others, Nat "Sweetwater" Clifton and Earl Lloyd, became the first African American players in the NBA in 1950.
The first Black player in Major League Baseball. Robinson didn’t have it easy, often getting bottles and insults hurled his way. But over 10 seasons, Robinson played in six World Series and contributed to the Dodgers’ 1955 World Championship. He was selected for six consecutive All-Star Games, from 1949 to 1954 and MLB Rookie of the Year Award in 1947, and won the National League Most Valuable Player Award in 1949 — the first black player so honored.

Jackie Robinson

“First African American Major League Baseball Player”

“There is not an American in this country free until everyone of us is free.” ~Jackie Robinson
Military Service

Although African Americans had participated in every major U.S. war, it was not until after World War II that President Harry S. Truman issues an executive order integrating the U.S. armed forces.

African American women have long been a visible and important part of the American defense team. Here, Maj. Charity E. Adams and Capt. Abbie N. Campbell inspect the first contingent of black members of the Women's Army Corps assigned to overseas service in WWII.
In Plessy v. Ferguson, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that segregated, or "separate but equal," public facilities for whites and African Americans are legal. The ruling stands until 1954.
“Greensboro Four”

Four black students in Greensboro, North Carolina, begin a sit-in at a segregated Woolworth's lunch counter (Feb. 1, 1960). Six months later the "Greensboro Four" are served lunch at the same Woolworth's counter. The event triggers many similar nonviolent protests throughout the South.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) is founded, providing young blacks with a place in the civil rights movement (April 1960).
James Meredith becomes the first black student to enroll at the University of Mississippi (October 1, 1962). President Kennedy sends 500 federal troops after rioting breaks out protesting his enrollment.
The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom is attended by about 250,000 people, the largest demonstration ever seen in the nation's capital. Martin Luther King delivers his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. The march builds momentum for civil rights legislation.
On June 6, 1966, James Meredith started a solitary March Against Fear for 220 miles from Memphis, Tennessee, to Jackson, Mississippi, to protest against racism. Soon after starting his march he was shot by a gunman with shotgun, injuring him. When they heard the news, other civil rights campaigners, including SCLC's Martin Luther King, SNCC's Stokely Carmichael, Cleveland Sellers and Floyd McKissick, as well as the Human Rights Medical Committee and other civil rights organizations decided to continue the march in Meredith's name. Ordinary people both black and white came from the South and all parts of the country to participate. By June 26, when the march entered Jackson, it was estimated to be 15,000 strong.
Barrack Obama

“First African American President”

1961-Present

Barack Obama is the 44th and current President of the United States, and the first African American to hold the office. Obama is a graduate of Columbia University and Harvard Law School, where he served as president of the Harvard Law Review. He was a community organizer in Chicago before earning his law degree. He worked as a civil rights attorney and taught constitutional law at the University of Chicago Law School from 1992 to 2004. He served three terms representing the 13th District in the Illinois Senate from 1997 to 2004. In 2009, he won the Nobel Peace Prize.