



## CIVICS IN REAL LIFE

*Civics is all around us. There is a lot to know about the government and how "We the People" interact with the government and each other. Let's help each other expand our civic literacy.*

# Black History Month

Every year, in the month of February, people across the United States celebrate [Black History Month](#). This special month, which originated in the United States, is a chance to remember and learn about important people and events in African-American history. It has since spread to a worldwide celebration of the achievements, history, and culture of Black people.



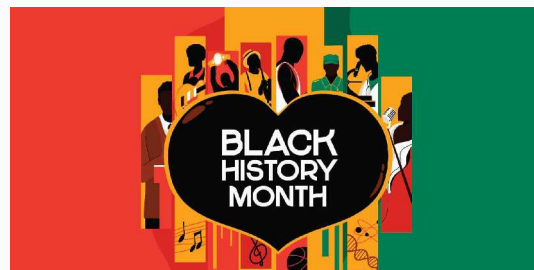
The origin story of this celebration begins in 1915, when a historian named [Carter G. Woodson](#) founded the [Association for the Study of Negro Life and History](#), an organization "dedicated to researching and promoting achievements by Black Americans and other peoples of African descent." In 1926, the organization sponsored a national Negro History Week. They chose to place the celebration during the second week in February to coincide with the birthdays of [Abraham Lincoln](#) and [Fredrick Douglass](#). People celebrated in schools and communities with a variety of events. In the years that followed, city mayors continued to issue proclamations to celebrate Negro History Week.

In 1976, the celebration was [officially expanded](#) into Black History Month by President Gerald Ford. President Ford called upon the public to "seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of Black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history." Then, in 1986, Congress passed [Public Law 99-224](#), which designated February as National Black (Afro-American) History Month. Since it began, every U.S. president has officially proclaimed February as Black History Month. Annual proclamations serve as a renewed public endorsement of the observance. They help raise awareness, encourage participation, and show that the issue or group being honored remains important to the nation or state. By issuing proclamations yearly, leaders can tailor the message to reflect current events, achievements, or themes. For example, a governor might highlight local Black leaders or initiatives that are especially relevant that year. This flexibility allows the observance to stay fresh and meaningful rather than becoming a routine or overlooked event. Many observances, like Black History Month, are established by law but still receive annual proclamations as part of tradition. It's a formal way to kick off the celebration, often involving ceremonies, speeches, or special events.

Black History Month is more than just a celebration—in the [words of President Ronald Reagan](#), "the foremost purpose of Black History Month is to make Americans aware of this struggle for freedom and equal opportunity." It is a time to "celebrate the many achievements of African Americans in every field from science and the arts to politics and religion." While the name of the celebration and the population group it refers to have changed over the years, most commonly today, we use the phrase "Black History Month." The term "Black" has a broader and more inclusive connotation as it includes African Americans, Afro-Caribbeans, Afro-Latinos, and African immigrants with a shared global experience. From ancient times to modern-day leaders and artists, the Black story is rich and varied. Black History Month is a time to appreciate the diversity and strength that Black cultures bring to the United States. It reminds us that our country is strengthened by the many voices and stories that comprise its history.

### You can celebrate by:

- Learning about famous and lesser-known Black Americans like [John Mercer Langston](#), [Claudette Colvin](#), [Thurgood Marshall](#), [George Washington Carver](#), [Hiram Revels](#), [Shirley Chisholm](#), [Jackie Robinson](#), [Madam C.J. Walker](#), [Hattie McDaniel](#), [Robert Johnson](#), or [Barack Obama](#)
- Exploring cultural music, food, and art
- Reading books by Black authors
- Attending local events or school programs



### To Think and To Do:

Choose one aspect of Black History Month that interests you—such as a historical figure, a historical event, a cultural tradition, or a form of art or music—and research it further.

### LEARN MORE

- [National Museum of African American History & Culture](#)
- [CRLs](#)



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