

# The History We Share, The History We Must Honor

By Rita Thompson

Black history is not a separate chapter -- it is woven into the very foundation of the United States. You cannot tell the story of America without the contributions, struggles, brilliance, and resilience of Black Americans. Recognizing Black history is simply recognizing the full truth of American history.



Black History Month began with the vision of Dr. Carter G. Woodson (1875-1950). He believed that a people's history is essential to their dignity and progress. Born to formerly enslaved parents in Virginia, he worked in coal mines as a teenager before pursuing education with extraordinary determination, eventually earning a Ph.D. from Harvard.

In 1915, Dr. Woodson founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (now ASALH -- the Association for the Study of African American Life and History) to preserve and promote African American achievements. His most enduring legacy came in 1926 when he created Negro History Week, the precursor to today's Black History Month. He chose February as the opportune month because it included the birthdays of both Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. Fifty years later, coinciding with the nation's bicentennial in 1976, and in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, President Gerald Ford decreed a national observance and called upon the people to "seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of Black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history."

Woodson's mission was simple but revolutionary: to ensure that Black history was studied, taught, and celebrated as an integral part of American history. One hundred years later, the 2026 national theme selected by ASALH -- "A Century of Black History Commemorations" -- honors that legacy.