

February Diversity Tip Sheet: Remembering Black History

Diversity

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Carter G. Woodson, son of two former slaves, was born on December 19, 1875 and with him was born our modern history. Harvard educated, and only the second African-American to receive a doctorate degree, Woodson is credited with numerous achievements in American studies, but none as well known as the month we now celebrate: Black History Month.

Woodson's focus throughout his career was on African American history and studies. Woodson discovered that throughout the then-modern history, African-American contributions to society and culture "were overlooked, ignored, and even suppressed by the writers of history textbooks and the teachers who used them." In an effort to educate society on the importance of African-American history on modern culture, Woodson pioneered "Negro History Week" to take place on the second week in February. What started in 1926 as a week-long event is now a month-long celebration which affords all of us the opportunity to celebrate the achievements, accomplishments, and continual contributions of African-Americans on our world.

Important African-Americans throughout history

While there are hundreds of famous figures throughout history, and countless millions who sacrifice much for equality and inclusion, below are important African-American figures with whom not all of us are familiar.

- Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784) – First African-American poet who's works were published
- Benjamin O. Davis Sr. (1877-1970) – First African-American general in Army
- Jack Johnson (1878-1946) – First African-American heavyweight boxing champion
- Bessie Coleman (1892-1926)– First African-American licensed pilot in the world
- Ralph Bunche (1904-1971) – First African-American to win Nobel Prize
- Edward Brooke III (1919-) First African-American elected into the U.S. Senate
- Shirley Chisholm (1924-2005) first African-American woman elected to Congress.

We can't live without it!

Below are a few items we see around us everyday, yet fail to realize who invented it. Check out which African-American inventors created your favorite items!

- Nathaniel Alexander – Folding Chair
- Henry Brown – Strong boxes
- Alfred Cralle – First ice cream scoop
- Mark Dean – USB – Bus Controls for computers
- Dr. George Franklin Grant – Golf tee
- Lewis Latimer – Filament for light bulbs (without this, there is no light)
- John Love – Pencil sharpener
- Alexander Miles – Electric elevator
- L.P. Ray – Dust pan
- George T. Sampson – Clothes dryer

Black History Month is a time to reflect on all of those who have gone before us to set the way to a brighter future. It is a time for continuing education for our children and grandchildren. Heroes have gone before us, and as a result, we have the opportunity to give thanks for the many things which we now have and often take for granted. Most importantly, it is a time to remember that no matter the differences among us, we are all equal. We can, and always will, continue to contribute to a society which is made stronger by our individual efforts. ■

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