

## February Diversity Tip Sheet: Remembering Black History

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Why is Black History Month important? It is important to remember the contributions so many African-Americans made to and for our country. After all, the United States of America is a melting pot of people from different ethnic backgrounds and cultures. I know I am proud of my culture and it is of great importance to educate others on understanding and being inclusive of other cultures.

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 in 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 whose 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
- Madam CJ Walker was America's first self made woman to become a millionaire
- John Mercer Langston was the first black man to become a lawyer in Ohio when he passed the Bar in 1854.
- Thurgood Marshall was the first African-American ever appointed to the United States Supreme Court. He was appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson, and served on the Supreme from 1967 to 1991.
- George Washington Carver developed 300 derivative products from peanuts, among them cheese, milk, coffee, flour, ink, dyes, plastics, wood stains, soap, linoleum, medicinal oils and cosmetics.
- Hiram Rhodes Revels was the first African American ever elected to the United States Senate. He represented the State of Mississippi from February 1870 to March 1871.
- In 1940, Hattie McDaniel was the first African-American performer to win an Academy Award (the film industry's highest honor) for her portrayal of a loyal slave governess in *Gone With the Wind*.
- In 1992, Dr. Mae Jemison became the first African American woman to go into space aboard the space shuttle Endeavor. During her 8-day mission she worked with U.S. and Japanese researchers, and was a co-investigator on a bone cell experiment.

### We can't live without it!

Below are a few items we see around us every day, 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
- Garrett A. Morgan – mechanical traffic light in 1923
- George "Speck" Crum – potato chip
- Air conditioning – Frederick M. Jones in 1949

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.

The black population of the United States in 1870 was 4.8 million; in 2007, the number of black residents of the United States, including those of more than one race, was 40.7 million. In 2013, there were 45 million black residents in the United States.