

Black History Month: A Century of Black History Commemorations
A Celebration of Contributions by Notable Activists and Civil Rights Pioneers
By William H. Kerr, Ed.D.

Dr. Carter G. Woodson was an American historian who first opened the long-neglected field of African American History to scholars and opened the door for lessons and teaching in communities, schools, and colleges across the United States.

In 1912, Dr. Woodson earned his PhD in history from Harvard University, becoming the second African American to do so. In 1915, he established the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, Inc. and in 1926, he created "Negro History Week," which later became "Black History Month." Due to these efforts, he came to be known as the "Father of Black History." (National Museum of African American History and Culture)

President Gerald R. Ford officially recognized Black History Month in 1976, calling 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."

Today, Black History Month is a time to honor the contributions and legacy of African Americans across U.S. history and society—from activists and civil rights pioneers such as Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Marcus Garvey, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X and Rosa Parks to leaders in industry, politics, science, culture and more.

According to the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), the 2026 theme – "**A Century of Black History Commemorations**," – marks 100 years since the formal recognition of Black History Month and focuses on the impact of commemorations on modern Black identity and history.

"The theme encourages reflection on how celebrating Black history has transformed perceptions and empowered communities over the past century."

ASALH offers key aspects of the theme:

- **Centennial Celebration:** It honors the founding by Dr. Woodson and its evolution into a national observance.
- **Impact & Transformation:** The theme examines the power of Black history commemorations in shaping Black identity, challenging narratives, and driving social change.
- **Memory & Momentum:** It connects the past, present, and future of Black history, encouraging ongoing efforts to preserve and share Black stories.

National Black History Month is acknowledged by the Duquesne City School District annually through Board Resolution; however, it is important to note that throughout the school year students have numerous opportunities to learn and honor the lives and contributions of notable activists and civil rights leaders.

During Black History Month, morning announcements will highlight influential Black leaders and their impact on American history. A central student activity will be a classroom door-decorating contest designed to elevate student voices, encourage creativity, and engage the broader school community.

The contest celebrates the rich history and achievements of Black Americans. Students will collaborate to design and create a visual display that highlights Black excellence while gaining valuable academic knowledge about their chosen topic.

Following the February 24 School Board meeting, the School District will host a community-wide Black History Month program. Students will speak about individuals who have made meaningful contributions at the local, state, and national levels. The student-led program will feature history lessons, musical selections, live performances, and student-produced video presentations.

As school districts across the Commonwealth acknowledge Black History Month through learning and celebration, it is my hope that the strength of our communities and the legacy shared will endure. May the stories explored continue to inspire unity, understanding, and positive, interactive dialogue throughout the year.

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