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National African American History Month Speech Resources: Fact Sheet

Updated February 13, 2024

Congressional Research Service

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

R44363



R44363

February 13, 2024

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National African American History Month Speech Resources: Fact Sheet

This fact sheet links to authoritative information resources related to National African American History Month, which is also referred to as African American History Month and Black History Month. It is designed to assist congressional offices with work related to National African American History Month by providing links to legislation, CRS reports, sample speeches and remarks from the *Congressional Record*, and presidential proclamations and remarks. It also links to additional government resources and selected advocacy, educational, cultural, and military organizations.

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Introduction

National African American History Month, also referred to as African American History Month and Black History Month, is observed annually in February, in celebration of the achievements of “all that Black Americans have done to help our country.”¹ National African American History Month “provides opportunities for our Nation’s public schools, institutions of higher learning, and the public to gain a deeper understanding and knowledge of the many contributions of Black Americans to our country and the world.”²

This fact sheet is designed to assist congressional offices with work related to National African American History Month. It provides authoritative information resources on National African American History Month, including links to legislation, CRS reports, sample speeches and remarks from the *Congressional Record*, and presidential proclamations and remarks. It also links to additional government resources and selected advocacy, educational, cultural, and military organizations.

History

The origins of National African American History Month date back to 1926, when Dr. Carter G. Woodson, a noted scholar of Black history, set aside time in February to recognize the heritage, achievements, and contributions of African Americans.³ Since 1976, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), the organization founded by Dr. Woodson, has expanded the observance of Black History Week into a month-long celebration.⁴

Presidents Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and George H.W. Bush’s messages on the observance were calls to celebrate “National Afro-American (Black) History Month.”⁵ In 1992, George H.W. Bush recognized February as “National African American (Black) History Month,”⁶ and every President since Bill Clinton in 1996 has proclaimed February as “National African American History Month.”⁷

Each year, the national theme for the National African American History Month celebration is chosen by ASALH. The theme for 2024 is “African Americans and the Arts.”⁸

Legislation

P.L. 99-244—In 1986, Congress officially recognized the month of February as Black (Afro-American) History Month.

¹ P.L. 99-244

² Ibid.

³ Daryl Michael Scott, “Origins of Black History Month,” *Association for the Study of African American Life and History*, at <https://asalh.org/about-us/about-black-history-month/>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ For more information, see *The American Presidency Project*, at <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/advanced-search?field-keywords=%22National+Afro-American+%28Black%29+History+Month%22>.

⁶ George H.W. Bush, “Message on the Observance of National African-American (Black) History Month, February 1992,” presidential remarks, *The American Presidency Project*, January 29, 1992, at <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/message-the-observance-national-african-american-black-history-month-february-1992>.

⁷ For more information, see *The American Presidency Project*, at <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/advanced-search?field-keywords=%22National+African+American+History+Month%22>.

⁸ For more information on this year’s theme and past themes, see *Association for the Study of African American Life and History*, “Black History Themes,” at <https://asalh.org/black-history-themes/>.

Related CRS Reports

The Congressional Research Service has prepared numerous reports that relate to African Americans. Some of these include the following:

CRS Report RL30378, *African American Members of the U.S. Congress: 1870-2020*, by Ida A. Brudnick and Jennifer E. Manning

CRS Report R46705, *Membership of the 117th Congress: A Profile*, by Jennifer E. Manning (see “African American Members”)

CRS Report R43244, *Women in Congress: Statistics and Brief Overview*, by Jennifer E. Manning and Ida A. Brudnick (see “African American Women in Congress”)

CRS Report R43626, *The Voting Rights Act of 1965: Background and Overview*, by Kevin J. Coleman

CRS Report R44865, *Juneteenth: Fact Sheet*, by Devon Galena

CRS Report R47520, *The Voting Rights Act: Historical Development and Policy Background*, by R. Sam Garrett

Sample Speeches and Recognitions

Elected officials often deliver speeches, make floor statements, issue press releases, or enter Extensions of Remarks into the *Congressional Record* to recognize federal holidays and observances. The following are some recent examples:

Representative Donald Payne, “Celebrating Black History Month,” remarks in the House of Representatives, *Congressional Record*, vol. 169, no. 21 (February 1, 2023), p. H613.

Representative Cori Bush, “Black History Month,” remarks in the House of Representatives, *Congressional Record*, vol. 168, no. 25 (February 8, 2022), p. H1020.

Representatives Sheila Jackson Lee and Ritchie Torres, “Our Power, Our Message During Black History Month,” remarks in the House of Representatives, *Congressional Record*, vol. 167, no. 34 (February 23, 2021), pp. H573-H583.

Senator Dick Durbin, “Black History Month,” remarks in the Senate, *Congressional Record*, vol. 167, no. 33 (February 22, 2021), pp. S757-S758.

Representative Joyce Beatty, “Observing Black History Month,” remarks in the House of Representatives, *Congressional Record*, vol. 166, no. 40 (February 28, 2020), pp. H1255-H1256.

Senator Ben Cardin, “Black History Month,” remarks in the Senate, *Congressional Record*, vol. 166, no. 37 (February 25, 2020), pp. S1143-S1144.

Representative Stacey Plaskett, “Recognizing Black History Month,” remarks in the House of Representatives, *Congressional Record*, vol. 166, no. 24 (February 5, 2020), p. H775.

Representative Sheila Jackson Lee, “Commemorating Black History Month,” remarks in the Extensions of Remarks, *Congressional Record*, vol. 166, no. 23 (February 4, 2020), pp. E123-E124.

Presidential Proclamations and Remarks

One of the many uses of a presidential proclamation is to ceremoniously honor a group or call attention to certain issues or events. Some recent National African American History Month

proclamations, from the White House website and the *Compilation of Presidential Documents*, include the following:

Presidential Proclamations—Joseph R. Biden, Jr. (2021-present)

Presidential Proclamations—Donald J. Trump (2017-2021)

Presidential Proclamations—Barack H. Obama (2009-2017)

Presidential Proclamations—George W. Bush (2001-2009)

Presidential Proclamations—William J. Clinton (1996-2001)

Presidential proclamations and remarks from 1993 to the present are available through the govinfo service on the Government Publishing Office website. Earlier remarks (including selected audio and video clips) are available through The American Presidency Project, established by the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Government Resources

The African American History Month website is a joint effort by the Library of Congress, National Archives and Records Administration, National Endowment for the Humanities, National Gallery of Art, National Park Service, Smithsonian Institution, and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and contains an extensive guide to the events, exhibits, collections, audiovisual resources, and research and teaching guides on African American history and culture from their institutions.

African American Heritage Research (U.S. National Archives and Records Administration) provides guides and online access to archival records relating to African American history. These records include manuscripts, videos, and photographs from the National Archives and presidential libraries.

Facts for Features: National African-American (Black) History Month, February 2022 (U.S. Census Bureau) contains collections of statistics from the Census Bureau's demographic and economic subject areas related to African Americans.

Spotlight on Statistics: Labor Market Activity of Blacks in the United States, February 2020 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics) contains historical data and projections to provide an economic snapshot of Blacks or African Americans in the U.S. labor market. Presented in celebration of African American History Month.

Black Americans in Congress (History, Art & Archives, U.S. House of Representatives) contains "biographical profiles of former African-American Members of Congress, links to information about current black Members, essays on institutional and national events that shaped successive generations of African Americans in Congress, and images of each individual Member, supplemented by other historical photos." This website is based on the book *Black Americans in Congress, 1870-2007*.

The National Museum of African American History and Culture was established as part of the Smithsonian Institution on December 16, 2003, by the African American History and Culture Act (P.L. 108-184). A competition was held to determine the design of the building and the groundbreaking ceremony for the museum was on February 20, 2012. The purpose of the museum is to provide for the establishment of programs relating to African American life, art, and culture encompassing the periods of slavery; reconstruction; the Harlem renaissance; the civil rights movement; and other periods of African American history.

African American History Month and African American Heritage (National Park Service) highlight historic places that preserve African American history, including information about properties recognized by the National Register of Historic Places that “exemplify the contributions of African American culture and achievement.”

Spotlight: Black History Month (U.S. Department of Defense) acknowledges the contributions of Black military and civilian personnel, celebrating the “richness and diversity of their achievements.”

Nongovernment Resources

The Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), Founders of Black History Month (in 1926, originally Negro History Week), carries forth the work of its founder, Dr. Carter G. Woodson. ASALH’s mission is “to promote, research, preserve, interpret and disseminate information about Black life, history and culture to the global community.”

The Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University (DC) has one of the world’s “largest and most comprehensive repository of books, documents, and ephemera on the global Black experience.”

Archives of African American Music and Culture (AAAMC) at Indiana University (Bloomington, IN) is one of the foremost research centers for the study of Black music. The AAAMC houses African American collections and history of religious, classical, blues, gospel, R&B, and hip hop music.

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Acknowledgments

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