



A newsletter from the Holmes Cultural Diversity Center and the Office of Diversity and Equity Programs

## National African American History Month February 1 – February 29

### THE DIRECTOR'S CORNER

Aretha Jones-Cook and Carson C. Cook, Jr.

Happy New Year and welcome to the third edition of *Diversity Matters*. In this issue of the newsletter, we recall and celebrate the positive contributions made by people of African descent. African Americans have played central roles in some of the most triumphant and courageous moments in our Nation's history. During National African American History Month, we honor the rich heritage of African Americans and pay tribute to their many contributions to our Nation's accomplishments. This year, the theme for National Black History Month is "Celebrating 50<sup>th</sup> Years of Brown vs. Board of Education," which reminds us of the successes and challenges of our past. Half a century ago, the Supreme Court declared in [Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas](#) that racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional deprived students of equal educational opportunities. This ruling paved the way for significant opportunities in our society—especially for equal justice, fairness, and education.

We owe the celebration of Black History Month, and more importantly, the study of black history to Dr. Carter G. Woodson. Born to parents who were former slaves, he spent his childhood working in the Kentucky coal mines and enrolled in high school at age twenty. He graduated within two years and later went on to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard University.

In 1915, Dr. Carter Godwin Woodson recognized the need for our country to gain a more complete and informed understanding of our past. He founded the [Association for the Study of Negro Life and History](#), and established the first Negro History Week. Today, through the pioneering efforts of Dr. Woodson and the hard work of the Association, this national observance has been expanded to encompass the entire month of February. In 1976, as part of the nation's bicentennial, the week was officially expanded into Black History Month.

For generations, African Americans have strengthened our Nation by urging reforms, overcoming obstacles, and breaking down barriers. We see the greatness of America in those who have risen above injustice and enriched our society; greatness reflected in the resolve of Jackie Robinson, the intellect of [W.E.B. DuBois](#), and the talent of Louis Armstrong. We also gain a deeper appreciation for the African American experience in the writings of James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, and Zora Neal Hurston, as well as in the music of Mahalia Jackson, Billie Holiday, Duke Ellington, and countless others.



[Dr. Carter G. Woodson](#)

African Americans reflect a proud legacy of courage and dedication that has helped to guide our Nation's success and prosperity. Visionary leaders like [Frederick Douglass](#), Thurgood Marshall, and Martin Luther King, Jr., possessed a clarity of purpose and were instrumental in exposing and addressing the issues that threatened our founding principles. The battle for freedom, equality, and opportunity was fought on the front lines by strong figures such as Harriet Tubman and Fannie Lou Hamer, as well as many other everyday heroes who helped to lead this Nation to a more hopeful and just society.



As we recall these remarkable individuals, we also recognize that, despite our progress, racial prejudice still exists in America. As a Nation and as individuals, we must be vigilant in responding to discrimination wherever we find it. By promoting diversity, understanding, and opportunity, we will continue our efforts to build a society where every person, of every race, can realize the promise of America.

**African American history is American history!**

## MSU BLACK HISTORY MONTH



**Martin Luther King, III**

Keynote Speaker

**New Date!**

Martin Luther King, III  
Columbus, MS  
African Social Change Center

Monday, February 9, 2004

at 7:00 p.m.

MSU Colvard Union Ballroom

presented by the  
Holmes Cultural Diversity Center

Free and Open to the Public

### **!WOW! Facts (U.S. Census Bureau)**

- In March 2002, 36.0 million people in the United States or 13.3 percent of the total population claimed their racial identity as black or black in combination with one or more other races. The majority of Blacks (55 percent) live in the south.
- The 10 states with the largest African American populations in 2000 were New York (3.1 million), California (2.5 million), Texas (2.5 million), Florida (2.5 million), Georgia (2.4 million), Illinois (1.8 million), North Carolina (1.7 million), and Maryland, Louisiana and Michigan (1.4 million each). These were also the top 10 in 1990.
- In 2002, 33 percent of all Blacks were under age 18, compared with 23 percent of non-Hispanic Whites. Only 8 percent of Blacks were age 65 and older, compared with 14 percent of non-Hispanic Whites.
- In 2001, 27 percent of all African-American married-couple families had incomes of \$75,000 or more.
- The proportion of African-Americans aged 25 and over who had at least a high school diploma increased almost 20 percentage points between the 1980 and 2000 censuses, while the proportion with at least a bachelor's degree almost doubled. Nearly 1.1 million African Americans have an advanced degree (e.g., master's, Ph.D., M.D. or J.D.).
- More than 800,000 businesses across the country are owned by African-Americans. During 2002 these businesses generated more than 70 billion dollars in revenues. Nearly 4-in-10 African-American-owned firms are owned by women, and that's a higher percentage of female owners than any other minority race or ethnic group. [Read more](#)

### **Local Historic Foundation to sponsor Black History Tours Feb.7**

Columbus, MS Historic Foundation, in partnership with several area organizations, will focus on Columbus' African American heritage with the February 7 Black History Month Tour. Tours will be conducted at 9 a.m., 11 a.m., and 1 p.m. They will begin at the Tennessee Williams Welcome Center at 300 Main Street in Columbus. Each tour is free and transportation is provided, but reservations are required.

Tour sponsors include WCBI, the Columbus-Lowndes Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science, Missionary Union Baptist Church, Columbus Air Force Base, and Mississippi University for Women.



[Visit the Black Inventor Online Museum](#)

## *African American Origins in Mississippi*



When the government of the United States established the Mississippi Territory in 1798, the region around Natchez, which held the bulk of the population, contained about 5,000 whites and 3,500 slaves

In 1817, Mississippi had a population of about 40,000 whites and 30,000 African Americans. By 1860 African Americans made up 50% of Mississippi's total population of approximately 791,000 people. The African American's place was solidly established, regulated by legal codes and fueled by the institution of slavery.

The African American population was concentrated in the sections where the agricultural plantation was most prominent. The general feeling in the state was that their labor was essential to maintaining the plantation economy. However, large numbers of slaves also lived permanently in town, serving in a wide variety of occupations. In addition to the house servants, there were mechanics, draymen, hostlers, laborers, and washwomen. Some served as apprentices or helpers to white mechanics and builders, or worked in small factories catering to the local market.

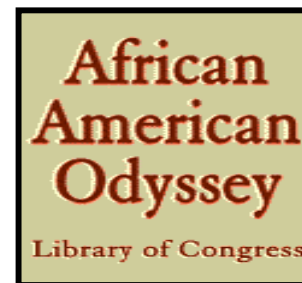
Free African Americans living in Mississippi reached their greatest number around 1840, when the census listed 1,336, and they declined steadily, numbering only 775 in 1860. A majority were in the southwestern counties, with 255 in Adams County alone.

In 1860, during the last years of institutionalized slavery, African Americans in Mississippi numbered 437,303, compared with 353,901 whites. They were owned by 30,943 slaveholders, who possessed an average of 14.1 slaves each.

### **STAMP ON BLACK HISTORY**

Throughout the years, the United States Postal Service has tried to preserve America's rich history and culture through its commemorative stamp program. The Postal Service has issued Black History-related stamps to commemorate black men and women who have contributed to America's history and who have made a difference.

In 1940, Booker T. Washington became the first black American to be honored on a U.S. postage stamp issue. Since then, other black Americans have been honored as individuals and/or depicted as representatives of their race in different categories such as civil rights, sports, science, and music on U.S. stamps. In the past 63 years, 79 accomplished Black Americans have been honored with U.S. postage stamps. ([Alphabetical listing of stamps](#))



### **The African American Odyssey**

This Special Online Presentation of the Library of Congress exhibition, *The African-American Odyssey: A Quest for Full Citizenship*, showcases the Library's incomparable African-American collection of important and rare books, government documents, manuscripts, maps, musical scores, plays, films, and recordings.

### **Internet Links to Black History Month Articles and Timelines**

Civil Rights Timeline - Milestones in the modern civil rights movement  
<http://www.infoplease.com/spot/civilrightstimeline1.html>

Timeline of Affirmative Action Milestones  
<http://www.infoplease.com/spot/affirmativetimeline1.html>

Events in African-American History  
[http://www.galegroup.com/free\\_resources/bhm/timeline.htm](http://www.galegroup.com/free_resources/bhm/timeline.htm)



What was the [Harlem Renaissance](#)?

From 1920 until about 1930 an unprecedented outburst of creative activity among African-Americans occurred in all fields of art. Beginning as a series of literary discussions in the lower Manhattan (Greenwich Village) and upper Manhattan (Harlem) sections of New York City, this African-American cultural movement became known as "The New Negro Movement" and later as the Harlem Renaissance. More than a literary movement and more than a social revolt against racism, the Harlem Renaissance exalted the unique culture of African-Americans and redefined African-American expression.

One of the factors contributing to the rise of the Harlem Renaissance was the great migration of African-Americans to northern cities (such as New York City, Chicago, and Washington, D.C.) between 1919 and 1926. Black urban migration, combined with trends in American society as a whole toward experimentation during the 1920s, and the rise of radical black intellectuals — including Marcus Garvey,

founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), and W. E. B. Du Bois, editor of *The Crisis* magazine — all contributed to the particular styles and unprecedented success of black artists during the Harlem Renaissance period.

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### ***Did you know that...?***

- On August 20, 1619, twenty Africans arrived in Jamestown, Virginia, aboard a Dutch ship. They were the first blacks to be forcibly settled as involuntary laborers in the North American British Colonies.
- In 1641, Massachusetts was the first colony to legalize slavery by statute.
- In 1772, Jean Baptiste Point DuSable decided to build a trading post near Lake Michigan, thus becoming the first permanent resident of the settlement that became Chicago.
- On July 2, 1777, Vermont was the first state to abolish slavery.
- On August 23, 1861, James Stone of Ohio enlisted to become the first black to fight for the Union Army during the Civil War. He was light skinned and was married to a white woman. His racial identity wasn't revealed until after his death in 1862. Some 186,000 blacks served in the Union Army during the Civil War and of these, 38,000 died.
- On August 9, 1936, Jesse Owens won four gold medals at the Summer Olympics in Berlin, Germany.
- On October 16, 1940, Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., became the first black general in the United States Army.
- On November 2, 1983, President Ronald Reagan signed the bill establishing January 20 as a federal holiday in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr.
- On August 30, 1983, Guion (Guy) S. Bluford, Jr. became the first black American astronaut to make a space flight on board the space shuttle Challenger.