

SYLVIA Y. CYRUS

Executive Director, ASALH
The Association for the Study of African American Life and History
Washington, D.C.

Sylvia Cyrus began her tenure as the executive director of ASALH in 2003. Under her tenure as the 2nd longest serving Executive Director, Sylvia Cyrus leads the Association of African American Life and History (ASALH) whose mission is to promote research, preserve, interpret and disseminate information about black life, history and culture. Working with an organization with national profile, she uses this platform fearlessly on behalf of ASALH. She has expanded ASALH's community partnerships with established and emerging organizations. These strategic partnerships, including the National Park Service, has heightened the awareness and role of preservation of black history.

Guided by the vision of its founder Carter G. Woodson, the Father of Black History, Sylvia is honored to lead a 104-year old organization that continues to lead the vital discussion, dissemination and preservation of Black history and culture. She has formed lasting strategic partnerships with corporate and community leaders who share her vision and dream to preserve black history. The Washington Informer Charities, Inc. named Ms. Cyrus one of Washington's 50 Influencers. During her leadership, the Association received the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's Distinguished Organization Avoice Heritage Award and the Historic Achievement Award from The Historical Society of Washington, D.C. Sylvia also received the Centennial Award from the National Parks Conservation Association.

Those who knew young Sylvia had an early glimpse of the path that would lead to her current role. When she was only a child growing up in Linden, New Jersey, her thoughts and views on the importance of black history were shaped by her parents, John and Ruby Cyrus, and their backgrounds. Her mother was a public school teacher and her father, who was orphaned at a young age, only achieved an eighth grade education. Both of them, however, instilled in their daughter the value of a good education and the responsibility that she had to share the good fortune of that education with others.

Like many black children who grew up during the 60's and 70's, Ms. Cyrus was among the first to integrate a middle school in her community. She faced the challenges that came from having attended schools that were separate but far from equal, but rose to the challenges encountered in her new environment with a determination to succeed for herself, her family and community.

Ms. Cyrus attended Hampton University in Hampton, Virginia, and was graduated with honors. While employed in various business management positions in the corporate and governmental sectors for over thirty years, she has been involved in numerous community service initiatives. Ms. Cyrus, a life member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., has served as a local president for the sorority and on National and Regional committees. While president of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. she oversaw programs in part for youth, and raised scholarship funds for high school students.

Community building has also been the guiding force in Ms. Cyrus' personal and professional life. She serves on the Advisory Board for the Smithsonian National Postal Museum and is a member of the NAACP. Ms. Cyrus is a life member of the Association of Black Women Historians and a member of First Baptist Church of Glenarden in Largo, Maryland.

Ms. Cyrus also is no stranger to the National Park Service. She actively supports the African American Experience Fund and National Park Service conservation efforts. As ASALH's executive director, her profile on the national stage is large, and she uses it fearlessly on behalf of ASALH. She is often seen on major media networks promoting its cause.