



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Media Contact:**

Zebulon Miletsky

[marketingpr@asalh.org](mailto:marketingpr@asalh.org)

### **ASALH Kicks Off Black History Month at its First Virtual Black History Month Festival**

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Association for the Study of African American Life and History invites you to its inaugural virtual Black History Month Festival. In these extraordinary times, ASALH has shifted from its traditional in-person luncheon to the virtual monthlong celebration of its 2021 Black History theme, **“The Black Family: Representation, Identity and Diversity.”** The festival’s stellar events offer an exciting opportunity for you to join with ASALH in commemorating the crucial role of Black people in shaping our nation and world. As America confronts its past, we affirm the resiliency of people of African descent, demonstrated over generations by the Black Family.

The Black History Month Festival’s marquee event — **“Finding Our Roots in African American History: A Conversation with Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham”** — occurs on February 20, 2021. In dialogue with his Harvard colleague and ASALH’s national president Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Professor Gates will share insights and stories from his work on the award-winning PBS television show “Finding Your Roots.” He will discuss the practice of genealogy and genetic testing as tools for excavating Black History through the heritage of African American families. This event will be hosted by the legendary radio personality Joe Madison of SiriusXM Radio. Rev. William H. Lamar IV, pastor of Metropolitan AME Church will provide the invocation. Tickets for the marquee event begin at \$50 and can be purchased at [asalh.org/festival](http://asalh.org/festival). All other events are free.

The U.S. Postal Service will present the video from the **“First Day of Issue Ceremony”** held January 28th, in which playwright August Wilson was honored with a commemorative Forever stamp in the Black Heritage series. Dr. Joshua D. Colin, Vice President of Delivery Operations for the U.S. Postal Service, will unveil the **2021 Black Heritage commemorative Forever stamp**, honoring the Pulitzer Prize winning writer during the Marquee event. The new Forever stamp features an oil painting of Wilson based on a 2005 photograph. Behind him, a picket fence alludes to the title “Fences.”

You won’t want to miss any of the festival’s fascinating events throughout Black History Month. The panel on “Foodways”—the study of how food influences and drives culture—is sure to be a delicious experience taking place February 6th. The panel **“From the Continent to the Americas: Foodways, Culture and Traditions in the African American Family,”** will feature Gina Paige, CEO and founder of African Ancestry; Carla Hall, author and celebrity chef; Stephanie Evans, scholar and author, Georgia State University; and Daphne Maxwell Reid, of “Fresh Prince of Bel Air” and author of *Grace, Soul and Mother Wit*.

On Feb 3rd, we invite young people, and people of all ages to **“A Celebration of African American Life and History: Trailblazer Dr. Mae Jemison,”** a conversation with the first African American woman to travel into space when she served as a mission specialist aboard the Space Shuttle Endeavour. With engaging humor, confidence, warmth and sense of wonder, Dr. Mae shares personal accounts of moments from her life that led from growing up on the Southside of Chicago—not only to become an engineer, physician and astronaut—but also to work in rural East Africa, choreograph dance productions, appear on StarTrek and lead the 100 Year Starship initiative.

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Another event specially designed with youth in mind, “**Diving with a Purpose**” presents Black “divers,” who will tell of their remarkable efforts to preserve the heritage of Black people through discovering and investigating wreckages of slave ships and salvageable artifacts. The panel, taking place February 24th will feature: Justin Dunnivant, leader, Society of Black Archaeologists; Alexandra Jones, founder and CEO, Archaeology in the Community; Kamau Sadiki, Leader, National Black Scuba Divers; Ric Powell, co-founder & member of the board of directors of NABS; and Mary Elliott, a Curator at the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

On Sunday, February 28th “**A Special Conversation with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o,**” will close out the festival. Scholar Sundiata Cha-Jua at the University of Illinois and acclaimed poet and novelist Nubia Kai will lead a discussion with the renowned Kenyan author about his latest book, *The Perfect Nine: The Epic of Gĩkũyũ and Mũmbi*, described as a “dazzling, genre-defying novel in verse.” The event is co-sponsored with PBS Books.

Also taking place on the 28th, a special branch program will feature Dr. Charlene Dukes, speaking on “**The Black Family and Education.**” This event is brought to you by ASALH’s Prince George’s County Truth Branch and Maple Springs Baptist Church Cultural Education Experience Ministry (CEEM) which will host this joint ASALH Branch program on the Black Family.

In partnership with the **105 Voices of History**, the Festival will feature music from the Black experience performed by choirs from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The performance of “Lift Every Voice and Sing” by HBCU students and choirs will also be aired during the Festival.

This year also brings a new tradition to ASALH, with the announcement on February 10th of the winner of the **Inaugural ASALH Book Prize Award** in a ceremony presided over by Jarvis Givens of Harvard University and LaShawn Harris of Michigan State University. Finally, there is more to come from our ASALH branches whose programs include film screenings, planned discussions, and the sharing of family recipes.

Dr. Carter G. Woodson. initiated Negro History Week in the second week of February 1926 to recognize the central role of African Americans in history. In 2021, as the keepers of this proud tradition, ASALH will mark the 95th observance of what has become Black History Month. This festival continues and expands the tradition of our annual Black History luncheon. The virtual events will be broadcast throughout the month of February on our YouTube channel [ASALH TV](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCASALHTV). For the complete schedule, visit [asalh.org/festival](https://asalh.org/festival).

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