



ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LIFE AND HISTORY®

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BLACK HISTORY MONTH 2025 **We Proclaim It**

According to former GA Representative Julian Bond, Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver once said that when Rosa Parks chose to stay seated on that bus in Montgomery, Alabama, somewhere in the universe, a gear in the machinery shifted, and everything changed. A gear-shifting moment. In the history of this country, in the ongoing fight against racial oppression, against a white supremacist narrative, and against the racial apartheid laws that were passed and upheld, there have always been gear-shifting moments when individual people have taken a stand. It happened in 1850, when Harriet Araminta Tubman, a year after her self-emancipation, chose to go back to Baltimore, Maryland, to help lead her niece and her niece's two children to freedom. A gear shifted. It happened in 1770, when Crispus Attucks, a Black and Indigenous sailor and whaler, chose to get involved with the growing kerfuffle in Boston. In 1864, when the Twenty-second Infantry Regiment of the U.S. Colored Troops marched from Camp William Penn through the streets of Philadelphia on their way to fight, a gear shifted. When Mamie Till told them in 1955 to leave her son's casket open so that the world could see what those white men had done to her son, a gear in the machinery of the universe shifted. It happened again in 1966 with Kwame Ture and Mukasa Dada's declaration of Black Power at the conclusion of the "March Against Fear." And in 2014, after police officers killed unarmed Eric Garner in New York and unarmed teenager Michael Brown in Ferguson, Black people came together under the banner and hashtag of Black Lives Matter to march, protest, and demand change. Gears shift when we choose to fight, when we choose to stand up, and when we refuse to back down. The moral arc of the universe does not bend on its own toward justice, it bends because we push it and because we are willing to continue to do it until change does happen.

In 1926, when Dr. Carter G. Woodson—the founder of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), the son of formerly enslaved parents, a former

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sharecropper and miner, and the second Black person to receive a Ph.D. in History from Harvard University—sent out a press release announcing the first Negro History Week, a gear shifted. He chose February because the Black community was already celebrating the historic achievements on the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln (2/12) and Frederick Douglass (2/14). Dr. Woodson did not wait for the celebration of our history to be proclaimed, he proclaimed it. He did not wait for someone to give him permission to celebrate what we have contributed to this country, he celebrated it.

Dr. Woodson understood that Black parents had been teaching their children our history since we arrived in this country. Our stories and achievements had been carried by the wind and buried in the soil. It had been whispered as bedtime stories, spoken from the pulpits on Sunday mornings, and woven throughout our songs and poems of resistance and survival. America did not have to tell us who we were to this country; we told them. America did not have to tell us that we built this country, our fingerprints are etched into the stone. America does not have to proclaim Black History Month, we proclaim it. We live in the legacy of Dr. Woodson, and as we have done for 98 years, we will celebrate who we are and all that we have accomplished. We stand at the intersection of the past and the future; what we do at this moment will determine how the next gear shifts.

The 2025 Black History Month theme is African Americans and Labor, which focuses on the various and profound ways that work and working of all kinds – free and unfree, skilled and unskilled, vocational and voluntary – intersect with the collective experiences of Black people and the transformational work that we have done throughout the U.S., Africa, and the Diaspora. We are celebrating our visible labor—from the work we did back then to build the White House to the work we do right now to hold the White House accountable, from repairing the roads to teaching in our schools, from stocking shelves to packing and unloading trucks; from working in the federal government to our ongoing labor in the state and local offices—and, our invisible labor—from raising and teaching our children to caring for our aging family members, from finding ways to practice revolutionary self-care to finding ways to hope beyond hope in a country that frequently targets and terrorizes

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Black people. We bear witness to what it means to work hard every day and to get sick and tired of working so hard.

As the president of ASALH, one of the many legacy keepers of Dr. Carter G. Woodson, I am excited to proclaim and uplift the start of Black History Month 2025. I believe that ASALH is a lighthouse that you do not notice until you need it. When boats are caught in a storm or fog, they look for the lighthouse to help guide them safely back to the shore. We have been standing as a lighthouse proudly proclaiming the importance of Black History and helping people to understand that it is only through studying the quilted narrative of our historical journey that one can clearly see the silences, blind spots, hypocrisies, and distortions of American history. We do not celebrate because we are given permission, we celebrate because we are the permission givers. We do not wait for Black History Month to be proclaimed, we proclaim it. We do not wait to be seen, we see ourselves. We do not have to be told the story of America because we are writing it, we are telling it, we are owning it, and we are pointing the way to it. We invite you to join us as we once again celebrate and center the incredible contributions that Black people have made to this beautiful and imperfect nation.

Dr. Karsonya (Kaye) Wise Whitehead is the 30th person and the eighth woman to serve as the national president of ASALH. She is a professor of Communication and African and African American Studies at Loyola University Maryland and the host of the award-winning radio show "Today with Dr. Kaye" on WEAA, 88.9 FM. She is the author of the recently released "my mother's tomorrow: dispatches from Baltimore's Black Butterfly" and a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. She lives in Baltimore with her family. President Whitehead can be reached at kwhitehead@asalh.org.

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