



A PROCLAMATION

In 1926, during the nadir of Black history, 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 sharecropper and miner, and the second Black person to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard University—launched the first Negro History Week. He intentionally chose February because the Black community had already set aside the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln (February 12) and Frederick Douglass (February 14) to recognize and celebrate their contributions to emancipation and abolition.

The goal of Negro History Week was to study, teach, and promote the significant contributions that Black people had made to American society. From our writers to our inventors, our politicians to our teachers, our artists to our musicians—it was designed to document our lives from American slavery to freedom and to fill the historical gaps deliberately overlooked to miseducate our children. In 1976, Negro History Week, which by then had evolved into Black History Month, was officially recognized and proclaimed by President Gerald Ford. We are now at a moment where we are celebrating a century of Black History Commemorations—50 years of Negro History Week and 50 years of Black History Month.

America is a complicated place. It is, as Dr. Charles H. Long once asserted, a “hermeneutical situation,” in that it is diverse and complex. Its history is both beautiful and bloody. The study of it requires constant and continuous interpretation, upkeep, meaning-making, and evaluation. The understanding of it requires us, as Black people, to see ourselves and our history only through our eyes and not, as W.E.B. Du Bois argued, simultaneously through our eyes and through the eyes of an oppressive, dominant white culture. We must move beyond both the white gaze and the fragmentation (the idea of “two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings” fighting to exist in one body) that comes from double consciousness and into a space where we fully recognize who we are and what we have contributed to this country.

We built this country. We tamed the land, and we cultivated the crops. Our unpaid labor and the buying and selling of our bodies are the cornerstone of America and of American capitalism. Our blood is mixed with the soil, and the wind carries forward our tears of both sorrow and joy. We fought in the wars for democracy abroad and at home. James Baldwin once wrote, in an open letter to Bishop Desmond Tutu, that the fight for Black freedom makes white freedom possible. “Indeed,” he notes, “our freedom, which we have been forced to buy at such a high price, is the only hope of freedom that they have.” To celebrate America at this moment requires us to fully situate ourselves within the narrative, not as a footnote, but as main characters who have helped shape this American experience and the American story.

Black history is American History, and as we have done every year since 1926, we will proclaim and celebrate Black History Month!

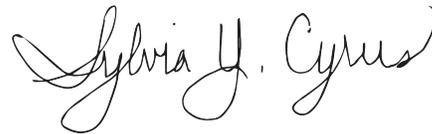
Our 2026 theme is **A Century of Black History Commemorations**, and it is fitting for this moment that we take time to look back so we can push back and push forward. We stand in the House of Woodson, and just as he did, with the work of so many others, we will uplift our history. We will protect it. We will promote it. And we will preserve it. We will plant our trees of truth, the ones that tell our story, right beside where they are planting their trees of lies, the ones that seek to erase and distort our story. We will teach our children, future generations, how to choose the path of truth and how to stand tall in moments of adversity, how to bring clarity in moments of confusion, and how to choose and embrace love instead of hate.

Black History Month belongs to us—we do not celebrate because they see us, we celebrate because we see ourselves. We do not ask for permission to center ourselves; we write the stories where we are centered, and then we tell that story. We do not sing songs of freedom because they are playing the music; we sing because we are the music makers, and we carry the songs of our ancestors and bring that music to our people. We do not wait for anyone to write our story; our history has already been written, as we are the history seekers and the truth speakers.

NOW THEREFORE, I, KARSONYA WISE WHITEHEAD, National President of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, on behalf of the Executive Council and the ASALH members, do hereby acknowledge and recognize **FEBRUARY 2026 AS BLACK HISTORY MONTH** and urge everyone to recognize and observe this month by hosting and/or participating in Black History Month activities, and by taking up the shared work of protecting, promoting, and preserving Black History as a significant part of the American story.



Karsonya Wise Whitehead
ASALH National President



Sylvia Cyrus
ASALH Executive Director