

## Generations

# Celebrating Black History Month

February is Black History Month in America, and it was first begun by Carter G. Woodson, a historian and professor, who began a push to establish a week in 1926 to commemorate the hard work and contributions of African-Americans to American society.

In 1976, that one week was extended to the entire month. Why February? Woodson wanted to pay tribute to two great men, Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, who were born in February. Douglass was an American social reformer, abolitionist, orator, writer and statesman.

There are so many great men and women to choose from to pay tribute for the work they have done for civil rights, beginning of course with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. However, I thought I would mention other people whom some of you may not know.

Known as arguably one of the most intelligent people to ever live, W.E.B. Du Bois was instrumental in bringing along the process of human rights for African-Americans.

In a time when prejudice and bigotry toward African-Americans was not only tolerated, it was the law. Du Bois was the first African-American to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard University. He then went on to become a founding member of what we know today to be the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People).

Macon Bolling Allen was the first African-American justice of the peace (1848) and the first African-American to pass the bar and practice law in the United States (1845). He is believed to be the first African-American to hold a judiciary position in the United States, despite not being considered a citizen throughout most of his pursuit.

Jane Bolin was the first African-American to become judge in the United States (1932), the first to

earn a law degree from Yale, the first to pass the New York State bar exam and the first to join the city's law department. She worked to end segregation in child-placement facilities and the assignment of probation officers based on race. She also helped create a racially integrated treatment center for delinquent boys.



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Dr. Ralph Johnson Bunche received the 1950 Nobel Peace Prize for his mediation efforts in Palestine during the 1940s and was the first African-American to receive the honor. He also received the Medal of Freedom from President John F. Kennedy and was directly involved in the building of the United Nations. Bunche also was a prominent advocate of the civil rights movement. He participated in the March on Washington, was present during King's "I Have A Dream" speech, and attended the Selma-to-Montgomery march that led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Christopher Gardner, a former member of the Navy, was determined to find a lucrative means of employment for his new family and willing to live on next to nothing in hopes of completing training for a brokerage program.

In five years, after training and with just \$10,000, Gardner purchased his own brokerage firm (Gardner Rich). He eventually sold his shares in the firm for several million dollars. It's his autobiography, "Pursuit of Happyness," that brought his name front and center across U.S. movie screens. His book was turned into a blockbuster film starring Will Smith that grossed over \$300 million worldwide.

His humanitarian efforts included funding \$50 million to help build the homeless low-income

housing and provide employment to homeless people in San Francisco.

Henry Louis Gates Jr. is an acclaimed historian, teacher, scholar, editor and public intellectual. His work on various PBS miniseries is eclipsed by his studies and distinguished intellectual achievements in the world of history and cultural studies.

Gates was the first African-American to receive the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Fellowship, a private foundation with focus in five core areas (higher education, museums and art conservation, performing arts, conservation and the environment and information technology with software development).

He also has been asked to give the "Jefferson Lecture," which is considered to be "the highest honor the federal government confers for distinguished intellectual achievement in the humanities."

Gates garnered national attention when he was arrested outside his home in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The officer was responding to a call of a possible breaking and entering when Gates could not gain entrance to his home.

He was arrested after a responding officer and Gates began to engage in an altercation. Newly elected President Barack Obama responded to the situation, saying the police "acted stupidly" in their apprehension of Gates.

Obama later invited the two to the White House to share a beer.

There are so many other great African-American heroes and heroines to celebrate, and I know the schools are doing an excellent job of educating our children to pay their respects not only during February, but all year long for all years to come.

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