

African-American History Month: Birth of the Celebration

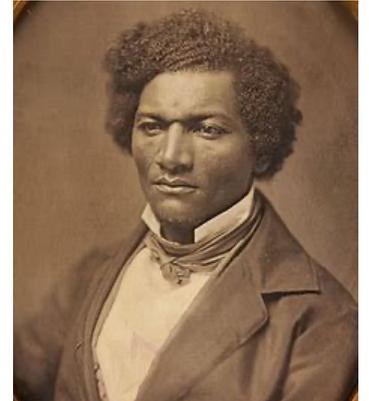
By Mary Lyle, Director of Education

February was chosen as “African-American History” month in honor of two of the most important figures in the fight for the abolition of slavery, Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. Both men played a pivotal role in advocating for the abolition of slavery, and both men were born in February. How and when did this annual celebration start?

The idea started in 1926 when author and historian Carter G. Woodson, created “Negro History Week.” Woodson, the son of former slaves grew up in poverty. Unable to attend school, like Lincoln and Douglass, he was basically self-taught. At the age of 21, Woodson finally got the opportunity to attend at Douglass High School (named for Frederick Douglass) where he graduated in two years. He continued his studies culminating with a PhD from Harvard University. Woodson was the second African American (after W.E.B Du Bois) to earn his PhD from that esteemed institution.

Carter G. Woodson became a teacher, a principal and served as Education Superintendent in the Philippines. After returning to the United States, Woodson helped to found the “Association for the Study of Negro Life and Culture.” He felt that there was a void in the academic realm concerning the history of African-Americans and that for the most part, contributions made by African-Americans had been overlooked or ignored. Woodson made it his life’s work to study and preserve the history of the African-American community.

It was in the nineteen seventies that a group of educators decided to expand the week-long celebration Woodson had created to the entire month of February. Carter G. Woodson, known as the “Father of Black History,” deserves to be recognized this and every African-American History month.



Frederick Douglass



Carter G. Woodson

Source:

Knowing the past opens the door to the future the continuing importance of Black History Month. (2018, February 20). Retrieved February 05, 2021, from <https://nmaahc.si.edu/blog-post/knowning-past-opens-door-future-continuing-importance-black-history-month>