

Years of Black History



Congress ratifies the 13th Amendment, and establishes the Freedmen's Bureau.

1866 - Massachusetts

Edward G. Walker and Charles L. Mitchell are elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives, thus becoming the first Negroes to serve in a legislative assembly in the United States.

1866 - Tennessee

Opening of Fisk University in Nashville.

1867 - Atlanta, Georgia/Washington, D.C.

Opening of Morehouse College and Howard University, respectively.

1868 - Louisiana

Ex-slave Oscar J. Dunn becomes lieutenant governor of Louisiana—at that time the highest elective office ever held by an American Negro.

1869 - Haiti

Ebenezer Don Carlos Bassett, believed to be the first Negro to receive an appointment in the diplomatic service, becomes Minister to Haiti.

1870 - Washington, D.C.

Joseph H. Rainey is seated as the first Negro in the House of Representatives.

1870 - Washington, D.C.

Hiram Revels, the first Negro senator in the history of the U.S., delivers his first speech before the Senate on March 16—"...I maintain that the past record of my race is a true index of the feelings which today animate them.... They aim not to elevate themselves by sacrificing one single interest of their white fellow-citizens."

1870 - Washington, D.C.

Ratification of the 15th Amendment, guaranteeing to all citizens the right to vote.

1871 - Nashville

The renowned Fisk Jubilee Singers go on an international tour to raise money for the college and to expose Negro spirituals to wider and ever-growing audiences.

1874 - Washington, D.C.

Rev. Patrick F. Healy, S.J., is named president of Georgetown, the oldest Catholic university in the United States.

1881 - Tuskegee, Alabama

Booker T. Washington opens Tuskegee Institute.

1891 - Chicago, Illinois

The incorporation of Provident Hospital—with the first training school for Negro nurses in the United States.

1895 - Atlanta, Georgia

Booker T. Washington delivers his famous "Atlanta

Compromise" address at the Cotton Exposition—"To those of my race who depend on bettering their condition in a foreign land, or who underestimate the importance of cultivating friendly relations with the Southern white man...I would say: 'Cast down your bucket where you are...'"

1900 - Boston

Founding of the National Negro Business League.

1905 - Buffalo

Militant Negro intellectuals from 14 states organize the Niagara Movement, (a forerunner of the NAACP) in opposition to the conciliatory policies of Booker T. Washington, as expressed in his 1895 Atlanta speech. Delegates to the convention demand the abolition of all distinctions based on race.

1908 - Washington, D.C.

The first Negro sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha, is founded at Howard University.

1909 - New York City

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is founded in New York on the 100th anniversary of Lincoln's birth. The signers of the original charter of incorporation include Jane Addams, John Dewey, Dr. W.E.B. DuBois, William Dean Howells, and Lincoln Steffens.

1909 - North Pole

Matthew Henson, a Negro member of Admiral Peary's expedition, places the flag of the United States at the North Pole.

1910 - New York City

Founding of the National Urban League, with Eugene Kinckle Jones as its first executive secretary.



1914 - New York City

Joel E. Spingarn of the NAACP institutes the Spingarn awards, to be given annually to American Negroes for unique and distinguished achievement.

1915 - Southern states

Dr. Carter G. Woodson establishes the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, and also launches the Journal of Negro History, with himself as its editor.

1919 - Paris

W.E.B. DuBois organizes the first Pan-African Congress at the Grand Hotel—"The Natives of Africa must have the right to participate in the government as fast as their development permits..."

1920 - New York City

Marcus Garvey opens the national convention of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) at Liberty Hall in Harlem. The UNIA, a pioneer black nationalist group, reaches the peak of its influence from 1920 to 1921.

1926 - Washington, D.C.

Negro History Week is introduced by Dr. Carter G. Woodson and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History.

1928 - Illinois

The election of Oscar De Priest—the first Negro Congressman from a Northern state.

1934 - Chicago

Arthur Mitchell becomes the first Negro Democrat of the 20th century to be elected to Congress.

1935 - New York City

Founding by Mary McLeod Bethune of the National Council of Negro Women.

1936 - Berlin, Germany

Jesse Owens wins four gold medals in the 1936 Olympics.

1937 - Chicago

Joe Louis becomes heavyweight champion of the world, defeating Jim Braddock for the title.

1938 - Pennsylvania

Crystal Bird Fauset of Philadelphia, the first Negro woman state legislator, is elected to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives.

1939 - Washington, D.C.

Marian Anderson, denied the use of Constitution Hall by the Daughters of the American Revolution, sings on Easter Sunday before 75,000 people assembled at the Lincoln Memorial.

1939 - New York City

Jane Bolin is appointed judge of the Court of Domestic Relations in New York City—thus becoming the first Negro woman judge in the United States.

1941 - Pearl Harbor

Dorrie Miller, messman aboard the USS Arizona, mans a machine gun during the Pearl Harbor attack; downs four enemy planes, and wins the Navy Cross.

1942 - Chicago

Founding of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), a civil rights group dedicated to a direct-action, non-violent program.

1944 - New York City

Election of Adam Clayton Powell Jr., the first Negro Congressman from the East.

1948 - Washington, D.C.

President Truman issues Executive Order 9981 directing "equality of treatment and opportunity" in the Armed Forces.

1950 - Chicago

Gwendolyn Brooks is awarded a Pulitzer prize for poetry—the first Negro so honored.

1950 - Oslo, Norway

Ralph Bunche named winner of the Nobel Peace prize.



1954 - Washington, D.C.

May 17, Chief Justice Earl Warren delivered the unanimous opinion of the Supreme Court declaring that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional.

1955 - Montgomery, Alabama

The Montgomery Bus Boycott, a 382-day-long protest movement in which "direct action" was effectively used for the first time in the South.

1963 - Washington, D.C.

Largest single protest demonstration in the history of the United States occurred on August 28, 1963 on the occasion of the March on Washington. More than 200,000 Americans of all races, colors and creeds, and from all walks of life, converged on Washington to stage a civil rights protest on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

It was also the occasion of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech.

1964 - Oslo, Norway

On December 10, at age 35, Martin Luther King Jr. became the youngest man in history to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

1965 - Selma, Alabama

Martin Luther King Jr. and thousands of civil rights supporters made a five-day 54-mile march from Selma to the state capital in Montgomery to protest the denial of voting rights to Blacks who had tried to register in Selma.

1965 - New York City

Malcolm X, Black nationalist leader and former member of the Black Muslims, is assassinated.

1965 - Washington, D.C.

July 13, Thurgood Marshall is nominated Solicitor General of the United States, the first Black to hold this office.

1966 - Washington, D.C.

January 13, Robert Weaver is named head of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)—the first Black appointed to serve in a presidential cabinet in U.S. history.

June 13, Thurgood Marshall becomes the first African American associate justice of the Supreme Court.

1968 - Memphis, Tennessee

April 4, Martin Luther King Jr. is assassinated by a sniper's bullet.

1969 - Chapel Hill, North Carolina

May 6, Howard Lee is elected first Black mayor of this predominantly White city.