



Events in African-American History

[1600](#) | [1700](#) | [1800](#) | [1850](#) | [1900](#) | [1950](#) | [2000](#)

1619

August 20. Twenty Africans arrived in Jamestown, Virginia, aboard a Dutch ship. They were the first blacks to be forcibly settled as involuntary laborers in the North American British Colonies.

1641

Massachusetts was the first colony to legalize slavery by statute.

1663

September 13. The first documented attempt at a rebellion by slaves took place in Gloucester County, Virginia.

1664

Maryland was the first state to try to discourage by law the marriage of white women to black men.

1688

February 18. The Quakers of Germantown, Pennsylvania, passed the first formal antislavery resolution.

1712

April 7. A slave insurrection occurred in New York City, resulting in the execution of 21 African Americans.

1739

September 9. The Cato revolt was the first serious disturbance among slaves. After killing more than 25 whites, most of the rebels, led by a slave named Cato, were rounded up as they tried to escape to Florida. More than 30 blacks were executed as participants.

1770

March 5. Crispus Attucks, an escaped slave, was among the five victims in the Boston Massacre. He is said to have been the first to fall.

1772

Jean Baptiste Point DuSable decided to build a trading post near Lake Michigan, thus becoming the first permanent resident of the settlement that became Chicago.

1775

April 19. Free blacks fight with the Minutemen in the initial skirmishes of the Revolutionary War at Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts.

June 17. Peter Salem and Salem Poor were two blacks commended for their service on the American side at the Battle of Bunker Hill.

1777

July 2. Vermont was the first state to abolish slavery.

November 1. The African Free School of New York City was opened.

December 31. George Washington reversed previous policy and allowed the recruitment of blacks as soldiers. Some 5,000 would participate on the American side before the end of the Revolution.

1787

April 12. Richard Allen and Absalom Jones organized the Free African Society, a mutual self-help group in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

July 13. The Continental Congress forbade slavery in the region northwest of the Ohio River by the Northwest Ordinance.

September. The Constitution of the United States allowed a male slave to count as three-fifths of a man in determining representation in the House of Representatives.

1791

Benjamin Banneker published the first almanac by a black.

1793

February 12. Congress passed the first Fugitive Slave Law.

March 14. Eli Whitney obtained a patent for his cotton gin, a device that paved the way for the massive expansion of slavery in the South.

1794

June 10. Richard Allen founded the Bethel African Methodist Church in Philadelphia.

1797

August 30. A slave revolt near Richmond, Virginia, led by Gabriel Prosser and Jack Bowley, was first postponed and then betrayed. More than 40 blacks were eventually executed.

1804

January 5. The Ohio legislature passed "Black Laws" designed to restrict the legal rights of free blacks. These laws were part of the trend to increasingly severe restrictions on all blacks in both North and South before the Civil War.

1808

January 1. The federal law prohibiting the importation of African slaves went into effect. It was largely circumvented.

1816

April 9. The African Methodist Episcopal Church was organized at the first independent black denomination in the United States.

1818

August 18. General Andrew Jackson defeated a force of Native Americans and African-Americans to end the First Seminole War.

1822

May 30. The Denmark Vesey conspiracy was betrayed in Charleston, South Carolina. It is claimed that some 5,000 blacks were prepared to rise in July.

1829

September. David Walker's militant antislavery pamphlet, *An Appeal to the Colored People of the World*, was in circulation in the South. This work was the first of its kind by a black.

September 20-24. The first National Negro Convention met in Philadelphia.

1831

August 21-22. The Nat Turner revolt ran its course in Southampton County, Virginia.

1839

July. The slaves carried on the Spanish ship, *Amistad*, took over the vessel and sailed it to Montauk on Long Island. They eventually won their freedom in a case taken to the Supreme Court.

1849

July. Harriet Tubman escaped from slavery. She would return South at least twenty times, leading over 300 slaves to freedom.

1854

January 1. Ashmun Institute, the precursor of Lincoln University, was chartered at Oxford, Pennsylvania.

1857

March 6. The Dred Scott decision of the Supreme Court denied that blacks were citizens of the United States and denied the power of Congress to restrict slavery in any federal territory.

1861

August 23. James Stone of Ohio enlisted to become the first black to fight for the Union during the Civil War. He was very light skinned and was married to a white woman. His racial identity was revealed after his death in 1862.

1862

July 17. Congress allowed the enlistment of blacks in the Union Army. Some black units precede this date, but they were disbanded as unofficial. Some 186,000 blacks served; of these 38,000 died.

1863

January 1. The Emancipation Proclamation freed all slaves in states in rebellion against the United States.

1865

December 18. The Thirteenth Amendment, outlawing slavery, was passed by Congress.

1866

Edward G. Walker and Charles L. Mitchell were the first blacks to sit in an American legislature, that of Massachusetts.

1868

July 6. The South Carolina House became the first and only legislature to have a black majority, 87 blacks to 40 whites. Whites did continue to control the Senate and became a majority in the House in 1874.

July 28. The Fourteenth Amendment was passed. It made blacks citizens of the United States.

1870

March 30. The Fifteenth Amendment, which outlawed the denial of the right to vote, was ratified.

1875

March 1. Congress passed a Civil Rights Bill which banned discrimination in places of public accommodation. The Supreme Court overturned the bill in 1883.

Tennessee passed a law requiring segregation in railroad cars. By 1907 all Southern states had passed similar laws.

1895

September 18. Booker T. Washington delivered the "Atlanta Compromise" speech at the Cotton States International Exposition in Atlanta, Georgia.

1896

May 18. In *Plessy v. Ferguson* the Supreme Court give legal backing to the concept of separate but equal public facilities for blacks.

1905

July 11-13. W. E. B. Du Bois and William Monroe Trotter were among the leaders of the meeting from which sprung the Niagara Movement, the forerunner of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

1910

April. The National Urban League was established.

1912

September 27. W. C. Handy published "Memphis Blues."

1915

September 9. Carter G. Woodson founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History.

1918

February 19-21. The First Pan-African Congress met in Paris, France, under the guidance of W. E. B. Du Bois.

1920

August 1-2. The national convention of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Society met in New York City. Garvey would be charged with mail fraud in 1923. He was convicted in 1925 and deported in 1927 after serving time in prison.

1922-1929

These are the years usually assigned to the Harlem Renaissance, which marks an epoch in black literature and art.

1925

May 8. A. Philip Randolph organized the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.

1931

April 6. Nine young blacks were accused of raping two white women in a boxcar. They were tried for their lives in Scottsboro, Alabama, and hastily convicted. The case attracted national attention.

1936

August 9. Jesse Owens won four gold medals at the Summer Olympics in Berlin.

1937

June 22. Joe Louis defeated James J. Braddock to become heavyweight boxing champion of the world.

1940

October 16. Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., became the first black general in the United States Army.

1941

June 25. President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an executive order forbidding discrimination in defense industries after pressure from blacks led by A. Philip Randolph.

1942

June. Some blacks and whites organized the Congress of Racial Equality in Chicago. They led a sit-in at a Chicago restaurant.

1944

April 24. The United Negro College Fund was founded.

October 2. The first working, production-ready model of a mechanical cotton picker was demonstrated on a farm near Clarksdate, Mississippi.

1947

April 19. Jackie Robinson became the first black to play major league baseball.

1950

September 22. Ralph J. Bunche won the Nobel Peace Prize for his work as a mediator in Palestine.

1952

After keeping statistics kept for 71 years, Tuskegee reported that this was first year with no lynchings.

1954

May 17. In *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, the Supreme Court completed overturning legal school segregation at all levels.

1955

December 1. Rosa Parks refused to change seats in a Montgomery, Alabama, bus. On December 5 blacks began a boycott of the bus system which continued until shortly after December 13, 1956, when the United States Supreme Court outlawed bus segregation in the

city.

1957

February 14. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference was formed with [Martin Luther King, Jr.](#), as president.

August 29. Congress passed the Voting Rights Bill of 1957, the first major civil rights legislation in more than 75 years.

1960

February 1. Sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina, initiated a wave of similar protests throughout the South.

April 15-17. The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee was founded in Raleigh, North Carolina.

1963

April 3. Under the leadership of [Martin Luther King, Jr.](#), blacks began a campaign against discrimination in Birmingham.

June-August. Civil rights protests took place in most major urban areas.

August 28. The March on Washington was the largest civil rights demonstration ever. [Martin Luther King, Jr.](#), delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech.

1964

January 23. [The Twenty-fourth Amendment](#) forbade the use of the poll tax to prevent voting.

March 12. [Malcolm X](#) announced his split from [Elijah Muhammad](#)'s Nation of Islam. He would be assassinated on February 21, 1965.

July 18-August 30. Beginning in Harlem, serious racial disturbances occurred in more than six major cities.

1965

January 2. The SCLC launched a voter drive in Selma, Alabama. which escalated into a nationwide protest movement.

February 21. [Malcolm X](#) assassinated in Harlem by members of the Nation of Islam.

August 11-21. The Watts riots left 34 dead, more than 3,500 arrested, and property damage of about 225 million dollars.

1966

July 1-9. CORE endorsed the concept "Black Power." SNCC also adopted it. SCLC did not and the NAACP emphatically did not.

October. The Black Panther Party was founded by Huey P. Newton and [Bobby Seale](#) in Oakland, California.

1967

May 1-October 1. This was the worst summer for racial disturbances in United States history. More than 40 riots and 100 other disturbances occurred.

1968

April 4. [Martin Luther King, Jr.](#) was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. In the following week riots occurred in at least 125 places throughout the country.

1969

October 29. The Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in schools had to end at once and that unitary school systems were required.

1970

July 1. Kenneth Gibson became the first black mayor of an Eastern city when he assumed the post in Newark, New Jersey.

August 7. There was a shootout during an attempted escape in a San Rafael, California, courthouse. Implicated in the incident, Angela Davis went into hiding to avoid arrest. Davis would be acquitted of all charges on June 4, 1972.

1971

March 24. The Southern Regional Council reported that desegregation in Southern schools was the rule, not the exception. The report also pointed out that the dual school system was far from dismantled.

1973

May 29. Thomas Bradley was elected the first black mayor of Los Angeles.

October 16. Maynard H. Jackson was elected the first black mayor of Atlanta.

1974

April 8. Henry Aaron hit his 715th home run to become the all-time leading hitter of home runs.

July 1. The largest single gift to date from a black organization was the \$132,000 given by the Links, Inc., to the United Negro College Fund.

1977

February 3. This was the eighth and final night for the miniseries based on [Alex Haley's](#) *Roots*. This final episode achieved the highest ratings ever for a single program.

1980

May 18. Racial disturbances beginning on May 17 resulted in 15 deaths in Miami, Florida. This was the worst riot since those in Watts and Detroit in the 1960s.

1982

May 23. Lee P. Brown was named the first black police commissioner of Houston, Texas.

1983

February 23. Harold Washington won the Democratic party nomination for mayor of Chicago. On April 12 he would win the election for mayor.

June 22. The state legislature of Louisiana repealed the last racial classification law in the United States. The criterion for being classified as black was having 1/32nd Negro blood.

November 2. President Ronald Reagan signed the bill establishing January 20 a federal holiday in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr.

August 30. Guion (Guy) S. Bluford, Jr. was the first black American astronaut to make a space flight on board the space shuttle *Challenger*.

1986

January 16. A bronze bust of Martin Luther King, Jr., was the first of any black American in the halls of Congress.

January 20. The first national Martin Luther King, Jr., holiday was celebrated.

1987

Frederick Drew Gregory was the first black to command a space shuttle.

1988

July 20. Jesse L. Jackson received 1,218 delegate votes at the Democratic National Convention. The number needed for the nomination, which went to Michael Dukakis, was 2,082.

November 4. Bill Cosby announced his gift of \$20,000,000 to Spelman College. This is the largest donation ever made by a black American.

1989

January 29. Barbara Harris was elected the first woman bishop of the Episcopal Church.

August 10. General Colin L. Powell was named chair of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff.

November 7. David Dinkins was elected mayor of New York, and L. Douglas Wilder, governor of Virginia.

1990

February 11. Nelson Mandela, South African Black Nationalist, was freed after 27 years in prison.

May 13. George Augustus Stallings became the first bishop of the African-American Catholic Church, a breakaway group from the Roman Catholic Church.

November 1. *Ebony* magazine celebrated its 45th anniversary.

1991

January 15. Roland Burris became the first black attorney general of Illinois.

June 18. Wellington Webb was elected mayor of Denver, Colorado.

1992

April 30. "The Cosby Show" broadcast the final original episode of its highly successful eight season run.

August 3. Jackie Joyner-Kersey was the first woman to repeat as Olympic heptathlon champion.

September 12. Mae C. Jemison was first black American woman in space on board the space shuttle *Endeavor*.

November 3. Carol Moseley Braun of Illinois was the first black woman ever elected to the United States Senate.

1993

September 7. M. Joycelyn Elders became the first black and the first woman United States Surgeon General.

October 7. Toni Morrison was the first black American to win the Nobel Prize in Literature.

1994

October 21. Dexter Scott King, the youngest son of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King, is named chief executive and chairman of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta.

1995

October 16. The Million Man March was held in Washington D.C. The march was the idea of Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, who called the event, "A Day of Atonement and Reconciliation." The march was described as a call to black men to take charge in rebuilding their communities and show more respect for themselves and devotion to their families.

November 8. Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Colin Powell, ends months of speculation by announcing that he will not run for the U.S. presidency in 1996.

December 9. Kweisi Mfume is unanimously elected as president and chief executive officer of the NAACP.

1996

April 3. Commerce Secretary Ron Brown and distinguished business leaders are killed in a plane crash in Dubrovnik, Croatia.

1997

June 23. Betty Shabazz, widow of Malcolm X and a champion of civil rights, died in New York of burns suffered in a June 1 fire in her apartment, allegedly set by her 12-year-old grandson, Malcolm.

October 25. Black American women participated in the Million Woman March in Philadelphia, focusing on health care, education, and self-help.

1998

January 15. Civil rights veteran James Farmer was one of 15 men and women awarded the Medal of Freedom from President Clinton. Born in Marshall, Texas, he was the national director of the Congress of Racial Equality during the 1960s and was one of the most influential leaders of the civil rights movement throughout its most turbulent decade.

January 18. Now an annual observance, the New York Stock Exchange closed, for the first time, in honor of the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

September 21. Track star Florence Griffith Joyner died at the age of 38. In the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games, Griffith became the first American woman to win four track and field medals — three gold and one silver — in one Olympic competition.

1999

Alan Keyes announces his candidacy in the Republican presidential primaries for election 2000. Keyes, a radio talk show host and a leader of the conservative movement also ran in the 1996 presidential elections.

January 13. After 13 seasons and six NBA championships, professional basketball star Michael Jordan retired from the game.

August. The NAACP calls for a national boycott of vacation spots in South Carolina in an attempt to force the state government to remove the Confederate flag from the dome of its statehouse. Controversy on this issue grows, involving the flying of the Confederate flag in other southern states as well.

December 2. A location for a national monument to Martin Luther King, Jr., on the mall in Washington D.C. between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument was approved by the National Capital Planning Commission. The architectural design will be determined in an international competition to be completed by November 12, 2003.

2000

January. Basketball star Michael Jordan announces his new position as partner and president of basketball operations of the Washington Wizards.

January 17. More than 46,000 protesters rally in a march on the state capitol at Columbia, South Carolina, to protest the Confederate battle flag flying atop the statehouse dome. NAACP chair Kweisi Mfume, the main speaker at the event, called it the greatest civil rights

rally since the 1960s.

February 25. Louis Farrakhan announces an end to the 25-year-long rift between the Nation of Islam and the Moslem American Society headed by Wallace Deen Mohammed. The groups split in 1975 following the death of [Elijah Muhammad](#).

May 2. South Carolina governor Jim Hodges signs a bill to make [Martin Luther King Jr.](#)'s birthday an official state holiday. South Carolina is the last state to recognize the day as a holiday.

July. At Wimbledon, tennis player Venus Williams beats her sister [Serena Williams](#) in semifinals and becomes the first black woman to win the women's title since Althea Gibson did it in 1957-58.

December. President-Elect George W. Bush announces the appointment of several African-Americans to his cabinet. [Colin L. Powell](#) will serve as Secretary of State, [Condolezza Rice](#) as foreign policy adviser, and Dr. Roderick Paige as Secretary of Education.

2001

January. Representative John Conyers of Michigan reintroduces legislation to create a commission to study the issue of slavery reparations.

May 12. Eight of the original "Freedom Riders" reenact their 1961 bus ride. In 1961, the civil rights protesters rode from Atlanta to Montgomery, stopping in facilities designated "white only," in order to test the Supreme Court ruling banning racial segregation in public facilities.

2002

March 24. Halle Berry becomes the first African-American woman to receive an Academy Award for best actress and [Denzel Washington](#) becomes only the second African-American man to win in the best actor category.

July 9. President George W. Bush awards comedian and actor Bill Cosby and baseball player Hank Aaron the nation's highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

2003

January 14. The Cincinnati Bengals hire defensive coordinator Marvin Lewis as the football team's new head coach. Lewis along with [Tony Dungy](#) and Herman Edwards are the only African-American coaches in the NFL.

January. The Montgomery bus on which [Rosa Parks](#) refused to give up her seat in 1955 is

restored and put on display at the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan.

June 23. The Supreme Court issues decisions in two cases, *Grutter v. Bollinger* and *Gratz v. Bollinger*, which challenged the use of race in admissions policy at the University of Michigan's Law School and the undergraduate College of Literature, Science and the Arts. The court upholds the concept of race as one of many factors in university admission, but rejects approaches that fail to examine each student's record on an individual basis.

September 22. Carol Mosely Braun, the nation's first African-American woman senator, announces her candidacy for United States President. However, she drops out of the race on January 14, 2004.

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