



Black History Month began as “Negro History Week,” which was created in 1926 by Carter G. Woodson, a noted African American historian, scholar, educator, and publisher. It became a month-long celebration in 1976. The month of February was chosen to coincide with the birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln.

1. Cathay Williams was the one and only female Buffalo Soldier, posing as a man named William Cathay to enlist in the 38th infantry in 1866. She served for two years before a doctor discovered that she was a woman, leading to her discharge.
2. Both Condoleezza Rice and Martin Luther King, Jr. started college when they were just 15 years old. She studied political science at the University of Denver; he majored in sociology at Morehouse College in Atlanta.
3. Journalist Ida Wells-Barnett refused to give up her railcar seat for a white man in 1884, and bit a conductor on the hand when he tried to force her. She was dragged off the train. She sued the railroad and initially won, but the decision was overturned.
4. In 2008, Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt became the first man to ever set three world records in a single Olympic games.
5. The media made the Black Panthers notorious for their Afros, dark apparel, and willingness for armed self-defense, but their manifesto for change launched programs that benefited black communities nationwide, like free dental care, breakfast for low-income children, even drama classes.
6. Lincoln University in Pennsylvania is the first institution of higher education founded for African-Americans. It paved the way for the 104 other historically black colleges, which have produced distinguished alums like Thurgood Marshall, Spike Lee, and the almighty Oprah.

7. Black ingenuity helped devise creative — and effective — plans to escape enslavement. In 1848, husband-and-wife team William and Ellen Craft made it to the North, and eventually England, when she dressed as a white man and he posed as one of her slaves. A year later, Henry “Box” Brown literally mailed himself to freedom in a shipping box during a 27-hour trip from Richmond to Philadelphia.

8. Liberia was founded and colonized by expatriates. The West African country is one of two sovereign states in the world started as a colony for ex-slaves and marginalized blacks. Sierra Leone is the other.

9. Jesse Jackson does more than make up words: he negotiated the release of Lt. Robert O. Goodman, Jr., a black pilot who had been shot down over Syria and taken hostage in 1983.

10. Before he was a blockbuster actor, Will Smith was The Fresh Prince and, along with partner Jazzy Jeff, won the first-ever Grammy for Best Rap Performance. They boycotted the awards because the category was barred from television.

11. The hair brush, lawn mower, cellphone, refrigerator, and — thank heavens — the air conditioner were all the fruits of African-American inventors’ creative laboring.

12. Baseball legend Jackie Robinson had an older brother, Matthew Robinson, who was also a star athlete in his own right. He won a silver medal in the 200-yard dash in the 1936 Olympics — coming in second to Jesse Owens.

13. Shirley Chisholm was the first black woman elected to Congress and the first black major-party presidential candidate survived three assassination attempts during her 1972 campaign.

14. Eatonville, Florida, the childhood home of writer and cultural anthropologist (and my all-time favorite author!) Zora Neale Hurston, is also the first town in the country to be incorporated by African-Americans.

15. In 1948, multitalented actor, singer, and civil rights activist Paul Robeson was considered for a U.S. vice presidential spot on Henry A. Wallace's Progressive Party ticket.

16. The still-reigning King of Pop, Michael Jackson, snagged several Guinness World Records, including highest annual earnings for a pop star, best-selling album of all time for his classic, Thriller, and most

Grammy Awards won in a year (he took home 8). Incidentally, Beyonce holds that record for the ladies — she took home six in 2010.

17. Tice Davids, a runaway slave from Kentucky, was the inspiration for the first usage of the term “Underground Railroad.” When he swam across the Ohio River to freedom, his former owner assumed he’d drowned and told the local paper if Davids had escaped, he must have traveled on “an underground railroad.” (Davids actually made it alive and well.)

18. In 1739, the Stono Rebellion in South Carolina became the largest slave revolt in colonial America — some of the men who participated had been soldiers in Africa before being sold into slavery.

19. Uncle Tom’s Cabin is a real place, so to speak. The home of Josiah Henson, whose life is generally believed to have been an inspiration for the novel, has been restored and added to the National Register of Historic Places in North Bethesda, Maryland.

20. Maya Angelou stopped celebrating her birthday for many years following the assassination of her friend, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., on the same day. She annually sent flowers to Mrs. King to commemorate that day.

21. At age 42, Satchel Paige became the oldest rookie to play Major League Baseball and continued to play until he was 47.

22. In 1967, Robert H. Lawrence, Jr. became the first African-American to be trained as an astronaut. He unfortunately died in a plane crash during flight training before he could be sent on his first space mission. Sixteen years later, Guion “Guy” Bluford carried on Lawrence’s legacy by becoming the first black man in space.

23. Langston Hughes’ daddy discouraged him from being a writer and only agreed to pay for his college education if he studied engineering.

24. Architect Paul Williams mastered the art of drawing upside down so that he could sit across from — not next to — white clients who didn’t want to sit side-by-side with a black person.

25. Barack Obama is a lot of firsts, but he's also a Grammy award winner. His audio books, *Dreams from My Father* and *The Audacity of Hope*, won Best Spoken Word Album in 2008.

26. According to a survey by 20/20, "Imani" and "DeShawn" are the "blackest" names for a baby girl and boy. Imani is a Swahili word meaning "faith."

27. After retiring from baseball, Jackie Robinson helped establish the African-American owned and controlled Freedom Bank.

28. Being mischievous was Thurgood Marshall's gateway to the law. For punishment, he was forced to copy the Constitution. It eventually piqued his interest.