

February is Black History Month

Black History Month had its beginnings in 1926 in the United States, when historian Carter G. Woodson and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History announced the second week of February to be "Negro History Week". This week was chosen because it marked the birthday of both Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. Woodson created the holiday with the hope that it eventually be eliminated when black history became fundamental to American history. Negro History Week was met with enthusiastic response; it prompted the creation of black history clubs, an increase in interest among teachers, and interest from progressive whites. Negro History Week grew in popularity throughout the following decades, with mayors across the United States endorsing it as a holiday.

In 1976, the federal government acknowledged the expansion of Black History Week to Black History Month by the leaders of the Black United Students at Kent State University in February of 1969. The first celebration of Black History Month occurred at Kent State in February of 1970. Six years later during the bicentennial, the expansion of Negro History Week to Black History Month was recognized by the U.S. government. Gerald Ford spoke in regards to this, urging Americans to "seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history."

Black History Month was first celebrated in the United Kingdom in 1987. This establishment of Black History Month is generally attributed to the work of Ghanaian analyst Akyaaba Addai-Sebo, as well as the Greater London Council.

In 1995, after a motion by politician Jean Augustine, Canada's House of Commons officially recognized February as Black History Month. In 2008, Senator Donald Oliver moved to have the Senate officially recognize Black History Month, which was unanimously approved.

Criticism

Black History Month sparks an annual debate about the continued usefulness and fairness of a designated month dedicated to the history of one race. Many people hold concerns about black history being delegated to a single month and the "hero worship" of some of the historical figures often recognized. Morgan Freeman, a critic of Black History Month, said: "I don't want a black history month. Black history is American history."

References

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