

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HOLLY J. MITCHELL

January 25, 2022

Proclaiming African American History Month in the County of Los Angeles

African American History Month, also known as Black History Month, is an annual global observance which originated in the United States to recognize the importance of the contributions of Black Americans. This observance began in 1926 as Negro History Week, initiated by what is now known as the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, then led by Harvard-trained historian, Dr. Carter G. Woodson. The second week in February was selected for this observance to coincide with the birthdays of former President Abraham Lincoln and African American abolitionist, Frederick Douglass.

In addition to celebrating Black American achievement, Dr. Woodson recognized a sobering reality that necessitated this observance. Crucially, he argued that the preservation of Black history – and, by extension, the preservation of traditions – was essential to the physical and intellectual *survival* of Black Americans. In 1926, Dr. Woodson explained the danger of Black Americans becoming, "...a negligible factor in the thought of the world." As many schools, churches, and other institutions took up the work of teaching Black history, Dr. Woodson had managed to cement the tradition of honoring Black history as a critical means for fighting oppression. Several decades later, then President Ronald Reagan honored Black History Month to make "all Americans aware of this struggle for freedom and equal opportunity."

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This continued struggle makes the observance of African American History Month even more important. While it is true that Black history should be recognized as American history, and its focus should be year-round and not limited to one month, it becomes the role and responsibility of leaders in the corporate, non-profit, and governmental sectors, to remind all of its importance and value, and to view history through the lens of equity and justice.

This year's theme, "Black Health and Wellness," calls attention to the sobering and urgent reality of health disparities in African American communities. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers [found](#) that despite federal health programs, Black adults have a higher mortality rate from several chronic health conditions than white adults. In addition, an October 2021 [study](#) found persisting disparities in COVID-19 deaths for Black Americans. In addition, it is important to raise awareness of the history of exploitation in medicine so that we learn from troubling instances like the gynecological [experiments](#) performed on enslaved women; the [harvesting](#) of HeLa cells without Henrietta Lacks' consent; and the [experimentation](#) with radiation on African American participants in Lyles Station, Indiana. While protections are in place today to help prevent such exploitation from occurring again, it is important to learn from and preserve this history so that medical research is more ethical and equitable.

In celebration of African American History Month, the Natural History Museum will launch its newest digital project [Kneaded: L.A. Bread Stories](#), which will highlight local eats from Leimert Park's Ackee Bamboo Jamaican Cuisine's, Dulan's Soul Food Kitchen, and the African Chop Truck. In addition, the Los Angeles County Library will host [In Conversation: Patrisse Cullors and Angela Davis](#), a discussion on how to be a modern-day abolitionist. The Library will also host story time [events](#), and, starting February 1st, will provide virtual activities and resources on its [website](#), including [Tattooing the African Diaspora](#) and [Power in Poetry](#). The Los Angeles County Museum of Art will continue to host the Black American Portraits [exhibit](#) through April 17, 2022, which all visitors can see for [free](#) on the second Tuesday of each month, as well as free admission every day for youth 17 years of age and under.

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It is through the lessons of history where we are challenged to reflect on our individual contributions towards the work of eliminating the barriers of racial inequality faced by many of our fellow Angelenos; and empowered to build a more just and equitable society. It is important to take the time to study the history of African Americans, celebrate accomplishments, and understand the persisting hurdles, including the legacy of the covenants, as well as health, education, and economic disparities.

I THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

1. Proclaim February 2022 as “African American History Month” in the County of Los Angeles (County);
2. Recognize the Los Angeles County African American Employees Association, whose motto is “Elevate, Educate, Empower” for their dedication and commitment of its members to provide critically needed services to all residents in the County and for providing programs throughout the year to focus on the professional development of its members; and
3. Encourage all County residents to learn more about African American history by accessing resources and programs available online through the County’s Public Library, parks, and museums, as well as the National Archives and [Library of Congress](#).

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