

**MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HOLLY J. MITCHELL**

**January 26, 2021**

**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 in 1926 as Negro History Week, initiated by what is now known as the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, led by the celebrated Harvard-trained historian, Dr. Carter G. Woodson. The second week in February was selected for this observance as it coincided with the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, and the goal of the observance was to recognize the importance of the contributions of Black Americans. Dr. Woodson believed that the truth of these accomplishments and contributions could not be denied and reason would prevail over prejudice.

Black History Month was first proposed by Black educators and students at Kent State University in 1969, and radiated from Ohio throughout the United States, initially to educational institutions, schools, and centers of Black culture. President Gerald Ford recognized Black History Month in 1976 as part of the nation’s centennial celebration, thus acknowledging, on a national level, the importance of not only recognizing the accomplishments and history of African Americans, but expanding this observance beyond schools.

In additional, several Presidential Proclamations were made, often with themes, such as recognizing Black Women, and Black Americans in the Civil War. Notably,

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President Ronald Reagan called out Black History Month to make “all Americans aware of this struggle for freedom and equal opportunity.”

It is this continued struggle which makes the recognition 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 influencers, educators, and leaders in the corporate, non-profit, and governmental sectors, to remind all within their sphere of influence of its importance and value, not to re-write history, but to view history through the lens of equity and justice.

Here in Los Angeles County, many do not know that African Americans were among the founding settlers of Los Angeles, and that Pio Pico, California’s last governor under Mexican rule, was of mixed Spanish, Native American, and African ancestry. The racially restrictive housing covenants which governed where African Americans and other people of color could own homes, go to school or even swim in a public pool, may be gradually forgotten with each passing generation.

It is from our history where we can gain knowledge and learn from our mistakes, thus building a more just and equitable society. Therefore, it is important to take the time to delve into the history of African Americans, to appreciate and laud accomplishments, individuals, and organizations, and understand their continuing hurdles, recognize the legacy of the covenants, address the health, education, and economic disparities, so that work can progress to overcome these liabilities.

**I THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:**

1. Proclaim February 2021 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 the dedication and commitment of its members to provide critically needed services to all residents

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in the County, especially during these difficult times, 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 and other Library systems, including the National Archives.

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