



Black History Month

2008 Celebration



Carter Goodwin Woodson saw African American history in the history of the United States as a painful, speechless void in a sea of beautiful voices. Filling this void was his imperative, the sole purpose of his life. He understood that lack of recognition of contributions would lead to misconceptions and lack of appreciation for a people and ultimately to its devaluation whether deliberate or accidental. In his research he found that achievements of those of African descent were overlooked, ignored or even suppressed by writers of history textbooks.



Prior to 1915, America had no knowledge nor acknowledgment of the contributions and achievements of its black citizens. In 1915, Dr. Carter G. Woodson founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. Later in 1926, he created Negro History Week which grew to be Black History Month.

For the majority of his life, he dedicated his life to researching and recording the facts of African and African American history. He sacrificed health, happiness and professional gain to write what he felt was the single most barren, impoverished chapter in the wealth known as history. By the end of his life in 1950, Woodson had lived to see his dream and life's work result in black history being celebrated by parades, speeches, recitations, and banquets across the country as well as libraries, schools and museums offering booklets, books and research on the subject.

Blacks in the Fledgling Aviation Industry

When the United States set up licensing laws in 1926, James Herman Banning was the first black pilot to be licensed. Bessie Coleman was the first black woman pilot; she died tragically in 1926. Coleman's dream of a flying school for African Americans became a reality when William J. Powell established the *Bessie Coleman Aero Club* in Los Angeles, California in 1929.

Banning and another pilot, Thomas Allen became the first black pilots to fly coast-to-coast from Los Angeles to Long Island, NY, in 1932. Using a plane pieced together from junkyard parts, they made the 3,300 mile trip in less than 42 hours aloft. However, the trip actually required 21 days to complete because the pilots had to raise money for gas each time they stopped.



Banning was a passenger in a biplane, sitting in the front without controls, during a San Diego air show. The Navy pilot at the controls, trying to impress his more accomplished passenger, pulled the nose of the tiny plane up into a steep climb. The plane stalled and fell into a fatal spin in front of hundreds of horrified spectators. Ironically, Banning was refused the use of an airplane by the Airtech Flying school, because the flying school instructor claims he did not believe him to be a capable pilot.



Colonel Guion "Guy" Bluford, Ph.D.

Colonel Guy Bluford was the first black American to enter space. The Soviet Union was the first to send an African-descended person into space with its black Cuban cosmonaut, Col. Arnaldo Tamayo-Mendez.

Bluford was born in Philadelphia in 1942. His mother was a teacher and his father an engineer. In school, he was an Eagle Scout. In high school, a school counselor encouraged him to learn a trade, since he was not college material. Bluford balked at the suggestion and went to college. He received a bachelor's degree in aerospace engineering from the Pennsylvania State University in 1964 where he was enrolled in ROTC. He went into the Air Force and attended flight school, earning his wings in 1966. After a stint in Vietnam, Bluford taught as a flight instructor. Afterwards he earned a master of science degree with distinction in aerospace engineering from the Air Force Institute of Technology in 1974, then a doctorate in aerospace engineering with a minor in laser physics in 1978. That year, he applied for and was accepted into NASA's Astronaut Training Program. He and 34 others were selected from among 33,000 applications. His first mission was STS-8 aboard the space shuttle Challenger, which launched from Kennedy Space Center on Aug. 30, 1983. Bluford flew other missions and retired from NASA and the Air Force in 1993. Based on the NASA website and space.about.com/



John A. Davis, Sr.

John A. Davis Sr. was the leader of New Negro Alliance. In mid 1930s he boycotted hamburger stand that had fired its black workers to hire Caucasian replacements even though its clientele was black. Davis' slogan "Buy Where You Can Work" proved a mobilizing force for the community. Under which, Davis organized the Alliance to pressure other business to hire blacks. The businesses sought an injunction against them. The case went to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1938 which upheld the Alliance's right to picket. This victory would later prove useful legal basis for the Civil Rights Movement. Later, Davis led the staff that compiled historical and legislative facts for the famed legal case, Brown vs. Board of Education which eventually ended discrimination in public education. Davis graduated from Williams College in 1933. He received a master's degree from University of Wisconsin then earned a Ph.D. from Columbia University in political science. He taught at Howard and later at the City University of New York. He died in 2002 at 90. Based on a *New York Times* article by Wolfgang Saxon.

Rep. Charles Rangel, J.D.

Charles Rangel grew up in New York City and had a childhood that never pointed to greatness. He was a high school dropout who would earn a GED and make a living in a minimum wage job. Then he was drafted during the Korean War and sent to Korea. Shortly after arrival, he and his company ran into fierce enemy fire. He survived and won the Bronze Star for valor.



He would go on to graduate from New York University and St. John's University School of Law. Rangel entered public services as an Assistant U.S. attorney then was elected to the New York State Assembly. He was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1970 and has served there since then. Rangel is now the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee and founded the Congressional Black Caucus. He is credited with sponsoring legislation to help the poor, elderly, veterans and ex-offenders.

For more information, read his autobiography, [I Haven't Had a Bad Day Since](#). Based on the House of Representatives website

Marian Anderson



Marian Anderson grew up in Philadelphia. At an early age she exhibited extraordinary vocal talent. Her father bought a piano for her when she was 8 but the family could not afford music lessons. She taught herself. When she was 15, she began voice lessons with Mary Saunders Patterson, a prominent black soprano. Shortly afterwards, the Philadelphia Choral Society held a benefit concert to raise money for her to study with leading contralto Agnes Reifsnnyder. Her neighbors were so taken and convinced of her promise that they raised enough money for her to study under Giuseppe Boghetti, a legendary voice teacher. She had been rejected because of her race from a local music school. From there, Anderson won a New York Philharmonic Society contest.

Then she received a Julius Rosenwald scholarship to study abroad.

As a contemporary of the fiery Paul Robeson, she was a sharp contrast, dealing with adversity and racism with a quiet, firm demeanor. She is best remembered for the 1939 incident in which the Daughters of the American Revolution refused to let her sing in Constitution Hall. That rejection led to a public outrage in which then First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt resigned from the organization in protest. In keeping with her personality, a quiet but effective rebuke took place when the Secretary of the Interior arranged a free open-air concert for her at the Lincoln Memorial. She volunteered with the United Nations Trusteeship Committee which helped people in Africa and the South Pacific. She died in 1993 at 96.

(based on the Kennedy Center website, www.lkwdpl.org; for more information read her autobiography [My Lord What a Morning](#))

