

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

HALLOWED GROUNDS:

Sites of African American Memories

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“Those who have no record of what their forebears have accomplished lose the inspiration which comes from the teaching of biography and history.”

—Dr. Carter G. Woodson

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Black History Month, also known as National African American History Month, is an annual celebration of achievements by African Americans and a time for recognizing the central role they have played in the history of the United States.

The Association for the Study of African American Life and History has selected the theme, *Hallowed Grounds: Sites of African American Memories*.

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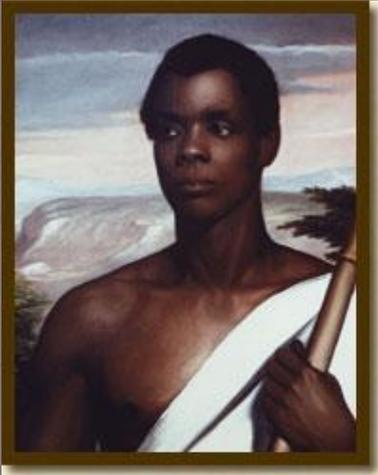
The history of African Americans unfolds across the canvas of America, beginning before the arrival of the Mayflower and continuing to the present.

From port cities where Africans disembarked from slave ships to the battle fields where their descendants fought for freedom, from the colleges and universities where they pursued education to places where they created communities during centuries of migration, the imprint of Americans of African descent is deeply embedded in the narrative of the American past.

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One cannot tell the story of America without preserving and reflecting on the places where African Americans have made history. This presentation prompts us to remember the people and places that over time have become hallowed grounds, and the people who helped define them.

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Joseph Cinque and 53 others were abducted from their home in Sierra Leone by Portuguese slave traders aboard the schooner Amistad. Cinque led a successful revolt against the crew. In 1841, the U.S. Supreme Court freed the 35 Africans who survived the ordeal and cleared their passage back to their home on the West African coast. This event helped inspire the beginnings of the abolitionist movement.

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Harriet Tubman (Moses) was an abolitionist, humanitarian, and leader of the Underground Railroad. The Railroad was a loosely organized network of connections for slaves escaping to the North.

Homes, or “stations” would provide food and shelter for escaping slaves, and the leader of the group, or “conductor”, ensured that they moved safely from station to station. It is estimated that close to 100,000 fugitive slaves used the railroad between 1810 and 1860.

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The largest plantation house in Florida is the Kingsley Plantation on Fort George Island. The main house was built by slaves in 1738, and was sold to Zephaniah Kingsley and his African wife, Anta Madgigine Jai in 1815.



Kingsley fought against laws that greatly prohibited the activities of slaves and free Blacks. Even though he owned slaves, he was a strong believer in treating people according to their abilities, not their color.

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African Americans have served honorably from the Civil War to the establishment of Black only regiments in the active Army (Buffalo Soldiers), to Tuskegee Airmen, to full integration today.



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In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously in *Brown v. Board of Education* that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional.



Many Southern political leaders claimed the desegregation decision violated states' rights. They responded with defiance, legal challenges, delays, or token compliance. By the end of the 1950s, less than 10 percent of Black children in the South were attending integrated schools.

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Little Rock High School was the scene of one of the most tumultuous tests of the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. Three years after the trial, a federal court ordered Little Rock to comply and desegregate the school.

Nine students –known as the “Little Rock Nine”—were met with mobs of angry White protesters swarming the front steps.



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Ralph David Abernathy, Sr. was a leader of the African-American Civil Rights Movement, a minister, and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s closest friend.

In 1955, he collaborated with King to create the Montgomery Improvement Association, which would lead to the Montgomery Bus Boycott. In 1957, he co-founded, and was an executive board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference . He led the Poor People's Campaign March on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. in 1968.

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In May 1961, the Congress of Racial Equality, led by James Farmer, organized integrated Freedom Rides to defy segregation in interstate transportation.

The Freedom Riders arrived in Montgomery, Alabama, on an integrated Greyhound bus from Birmingham. They were met with violence as a large mob attacked them. Despite the violence, additional Freedom Rides continued throughout the South.



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The Mary McLeod Bethune Council House National Historic Site preserves the house of Mary McLeod Bethune, located in Washington, D.C. She was an American educator, life rights leader, and founder of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW).

In 1994 the National Park Service acquired the Council House, Bethune's last official residence and the original headquarters of NCNW.

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In 1930, Thurgood Marshall was denied admission to the University of Maryland Law School because he was Black. After getting accepted to Howard University Law School, he began to develop an impressive track record of winning court cases against states that aimed to continue practicing discrimination.

He later became the first Black American to sit on the Supreme Court, from 1967 to 1991. His distinctive tenure of service lasted 24 years.

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During African American History Month, we celebrate these formative leaders and sites of the civil rights movement, as well as innumerable others who have contributed immeasurably to the tapestry of America, helping shape our nation and the world. African American History Month is a time to reflect on our nation's history and progress, and recommit to advancing equal opportunity for all.

SOURCES

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