

Black History Month, also known as “African American History Month” in the United States, and “Black Achievement Month” in the Netherlands, is an entire month dedicated to the culture and history of black people and their accomplishments. The United States and Canada celebrate during February, while the United Kingdom and the Netherlands celebrate in October. Before Black History Month, there was “Negro History Week,” established in 1926 by historian Carter G. Woodson and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. The second week of February was chosen in the US because both Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass have birthdays during that week. Abraham Lincoln served as the 16th president of the United States, and is most well-known for issuing the Emancipation Proclamation as a military strategy against the Confederacy. The proclamation itself did not free slaves as it claimed it would, but it was an important turning point in the Civil War, which was eventually won by the Northern States. Shortly after, the thirteenth amendment was passed by Congress, which stated that “neither slavery nor involuntary servitude...shall exist within the United States.” Frederick Douglass was an escaped slave who became a nation-wide leader of the abolitionist movement, and was known for his anti-slavery writings. The initial idea for Negro History Week was to encourage the teaching of Black History in public schools. Carter G. Woodson himself stated that reaching Black History was essential to ensure the physical and intellectual survival of the race within broader society, meaning that if a race has no history, it stands in danger of being exterminated. By 1929, the officials with the State Departments of Education for the states with large black populations had made the event known so that teachers were distributing literature associated with the event, as were churches. The idea grew in popularity for a few decades before being proposed as Black History Month by black educators and students at Kent State University in February of 1969. By 1976, Black History Month was recognized by President Gerald Ford, who urged Americans to seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of black Americans. Today there is controversy over the practicality and fairness of dedicating an entire month to learning about one race. Some argue that the celebration shouldn't be restricted to one month, and others claim that it is racist to focus on one race instead of all of them. Black History Month is celebrated in the United States by reading works of literature by black authors and figures such as Langston Hughes, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, as well as listening to Blues and Hip Hop music. It is also common for students during this time to learn about Jim Crow laws and other historical events, like the Civil Rights Movement.