

A CEREMONIAL RESOLUTION

25-174

COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

February 6, 2024

To celebrate the legacy, achievements, and contributions of African Americans in the District of Columbia, to recognize the important role African Americans played in American history and to celebrate February as Black History Month.

WHEREAS, in 1926 scholar and historian, Dr. Carter G. Woodson and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (currently known as the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH)) initiated the celebration of "Negro History Week" during the second week of February;

WHEREAS, Black History Month was first proposed by Black educators and the Black United Students at Kent State University in February 1969, and the first celebration of Black History Month took place at Kent State one year later, in February 1970;

WHEREAS, this tradition became a nationally recognized occurrence during the United States Bicentennial celebration in 1976. President Gerald Ford said the nation should "seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of Black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history";

WHEREAS, Black History Month is celebrated in several countries around the world, including Canada, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands;

WHEREAS, Africans were first brought involuntarily to the shores of the now United States by the Spanish as early as the 16th century when Spanish King Charles V gave Hernando DeSoto permission to bring 50 African slaves to Florida;

WHEREAS, in 1776, people envisioned the United States as a new nation dedicated to the proposition stated in the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness ...";

WHEREAS, in contravention of those stated ideals, African Americans suffered enslavement and subsequently faced the injustices of lynch mobs, segregation, and denial of the basic and fundamental rights of citizenship;

ENROLLED ORIGINAL

WHEREAS, in 2024, African Americans still suffer from the effects of those injustices and inequalities, which remain apparent in the society of the United States;

WHEREAS, in the face of injustices, people of good will and of all races in the United States have distinguished themselves with a commitment to the noble ideals on which the United States was founded and have fought courageously for the rights and freedom of African Americans and others;

WHEREAS, Washington, DC has an abhorrent history of slavery and racial segregation;

WHEREAS, The DC Compensated Emancipation Act of 1862, signed by President Abraham Lincoln on April 16, 1862, ended slavery in Washington, DC, freed 3,100 individuals, reimbursed those who had legally owned them and offered the newly freed women and men money to emigrate;

WHEREAS, in spite of its history, Washington, DC serves as a center of African American culture and the epicenter of the historical struggles for abolition, civil rights, and racial equity;

WHEREAS, Washington, DC is home to countless destinations devoted to educating visitors from around the world on Black history and the accomplishments of Black Americans, including the National Museum of African American History and Culture, National Museum of African Art, Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial, Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, the Anacostia Community Museum, the District's African American Heritage Trail, and the African American Civil War Museum and Memorial;

WHEREAS, Howard University and Howard University School of Law were founded in Washington, DC as historically Black institutions of higher education to offer high-quality education to African American students at a time when they were not welcome at other educational institutions;

WHEREAS, in 1870, the Preparatory High School for Negro Youth (now Dunbar High School) was founded as the first public high school for African Americans in the United States;

WHEREAS, in 1871, Frederick Douglass was appointed by President Ulysses S. Grant to serve on the eleven-member Legislative Council of the District of Columbia, and U.S. Marshal for the District of Columbia. In 1877, Mr. Douglass became the first African American confirmed for a presidential appointment by the United States Senate;

ENROLLED ORIGINAL

WHEREAS, in 1896, Mary Church Terrell, educator and civil and women’s rights advocate, was the first Black woman appointed to the District of Columbia Board of Education. In that same year, she became the founding president of the National Association of Colored Women, and also was a founder of the NAACP in 1909;

WHEREAS, world renowned jazz music pioneer Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington was born in Washington, DC on April 29, 1899 and is honored with 14 Grammy Awards, a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award, and the Presidential Medal of Freedom;

WHEREAS, by 1900, District of Columbia had the largest African American urban population in the United States;

WHEREAS, in 1933, the New Negro Alliance launched the “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work,” campaign to protest discriminatory hiring practices in white-owned businesses in Washington, D.C.;

WHEREAS, Marvin Gaye, born in Washington, DC on April 2, 1939 at Freedmen’s Hospital, now Howard University Hospital, and educated at Cardozo High School, is honored with a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award and induction into the Rhythm and Blues Music Hall of Fame, the Songwriters Hall of Fame, and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame;

WHEREAS, Chuck Brown, guitarist, bandleader, singer, and Godfather of Go-Go, moved to the District in the 1940s and developed DC’s own musical genre, Go-Go, which continues to influence artists and music across the country. Go-go has become a rallying cry to defend and preserve local culture, and was designated as the official music of DC in 2020;

WHEREAS, in the early 1940’s, Mary McLeod Bethune, educator, stateswoman, and philanthropist, operated the National Council of Negro Women in Washington, DC, and led Franklin Roosevelt’s Black Cabinet, advising his administration on issues facing Black people in America;

WHEREAS, in the landmark case of *Bolling v. Sharpe*, the Supreme Court of the United States held unanimously that the due process clause in the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution prohibits segregated public schools in the District of Columbia. The case involved a group of parents who petitioned the D.C. Board of Education to open the John Philip Sousa Junior High School as an integrated school, and the Supreme Court’s decision was delivered on the same day as that of *Brown vs. Board of Education* – May 17, 1954;

WHEREAS, in 1957, Washington, DC’s African American population grew to over 50 percent, making it the first predominantly Black major city in the nation, leading a nationwide trend;

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WHEREAS, on August 28, 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his renowned “I Have a Dream” speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC;

WHEREAS, in 1967, the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum (now the Anacostia Community Museum) was founded as part of the Smithsonian Institution to provide access to exhibits and artifacts relevant to the history and experience of the local community;

WHEREAS, on March 30, 1971, the Congressional Black Caucus was established in Washington, DC. The 13 founding members included the District’s then-delegate to the U.S. House of Representatives -- Walter E. Fauntroy; and

WHEREAS, Washington, DC’s Black residents have produced and sustained a rich culture that permeates life in the District -- a culture that all residents and visitors can still access, experience, appreciate, and benefit from today.

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this resolution may be cited as the “Black History Month Recognition Resolution of 2024”.

Sec. 2. The Council of the District of Columbia recognizes the exceptional contributions of African Americans to the United States and to the District of Columbia, honors the countless African Americans who have shaped the District’s history, and celebrates February as Black History Month.

Sec. 3. This resolution shall take effect immediately.