

Background Material #2

Black History Month: Learning True History through Culture

February is National African American/Black History Month which was first recognized in 1926, when Dr. Carter G. Woodson, an African American historian and educator, established Negro History Week. The observation was changed to a month-long event in 1976, the 200th anniversary of the United States Constitution.

Today, National African American/Black History Month is observed all over America, as schools, churches and communities honor the countless contributions that African Americans have made to our society.

Each year, a theme is established for the Month and there are activities based on the theme throughout the month.

This year, the theme for the month is “*Hallowed Grounds: Sites of African American Memories.*”

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. These sites prompt us to remember and over time became hallowed grounds.

One cannot tell the story of America without preserving and reflecting on the places where African Americans have made history. The Kingsley Plantation, DuSable’s home site, the numerous stops along the Underground Railroad, Seneca Village, Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church and Frederick Douglass’ home — to name just a few — are sites that keep alive the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in our consciousness.

They retain and refresh the memories of our forbears’ struggles for freedom and justice. Similarly, the hallowed grounds of Mary McLeod Bethune’s home in Washington, D.C., 125th Street in Harlem, Beale Street in Memphis, Sweet Auburn Avenue in Atlanta, and Central Avenue in Los Angeles tell the story of the African American struggle for equal citizenship during the 20th century.

The Association for the Study of African American Life & History has selected this annual theme to bring attention to the centennial celebration of the National Park Service and the more than twenty-five sites and the Underground Railroad Network to Freedom that are part of America’s hallowed grounds, including the home of the father of black history, Dr. Carter G. Woodson.