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The Importance of Black History Month



Malcolm X

Marie Bell
Data News Weekly Contributor

The Origin and Growth of Black History Month

Black History Month, celebrated annually in February in the United States and in October in the

United Kingdom, Canada, and other countries, is a dedicated time to recognize and celebrate the contributions of African Americans and people of African descent worldwide. It originated as “Negro History Week,” created by renowned Historian Carter G. Woodson and the Association for the Study of African American Life and History in 1926. The week was chosen to coincide with the birthdays of

Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, two key figures in the history of African Americans.

The expansion from a week to a month-long celebration in the U.S. occurred in 1976, the nation’s bicentennial year, when President Gerald Ford urged Americans to “seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of Black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history.”

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Since then, Black History Month has been a time for reflection, education, and the celebration of the significant role of Blacks in American History.

The month is marked by educational events, cultural displays, and community gatherings that highlight the achievements, histories, and contributions of Black individuals and communities. It's a time when schools, universities, museums, and other institutions organize events and activities that foster an understanding and appreciation of Black History and Culture. Themes are often chosen to guide the celebrations and highlight specific aspects or individuals within Black History.

The Struggle for Justice Continues: Celebrating Black History 365 Days a Year

Black History Month also serves as a critical reminder of the ongoing struggle for Racial Justice and Equality. It's not only a celebration of past achievements but a call to action to address the disparities and injustices that continue to af-



Ida B. Wells

fect Black communities. Through storytelling, discussions, art, and cultural exhibitions, Black History Month encourages a reflective examination of the Systemic Issues that have persisted throughout history and a collective effort toward progress.



Carter G. Woodson

In recent years, the celebration has taken on new dimensions, incorporating digital and social media platforms to reach wider audiences. Virtual events, online exhibitions, and Social Media Campaigns have become integral parts of the observance, mak-



Harriet Tubman

ing Black History accessible to a global audience and fostering a broader understanding of its importance.

Black History Month is a testament to the resilience, creativity, and enduring spirit of the Black community. It underscores

the necessity of inclusive history in building a just and equitable society. As we celebrate Black History Month, it is a time to acknowledge the past's struggles and triumphs and to renew our commitment to equity, inclusion, and unity.

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Breaking Fashion Barriers

A look at Black Fashion Designers that have bridged the gap.

As we celebrate Black History Month, it is essential to recognize and appreciate the significant contributions of Black Fashion Designers throughout history. These talented individuals have not only showcased their creativity and vision but have also broken barriers and paved the way for diversity and inclusion in the fashion world.

Ann Lowe

Known for being the designer behind Jacqueline Kennedy's iconic wedding gown, Ann Lowe was the first Black Designer to achieve international recognition in the 1950s. Her intricate designs and attention to detail have solidified her place in fashion history.



Designer Ann Lowe.



Above: Dapper Dan.
Right: Dapper Dan Gucci.



Zelda Wynn Valdes

Zelda broke color lines and glass ceilings in the fashion world. Crafting the iconic Playboy Bunny Costume and dressing stars like Ella Fitzgerald and Dorothy Dandridge, she brought Black elegance to the mainstream. A trailblazer, as she was the first Black Fashion Designer to open her own boutique in New York City in 1948. Zelda was a beacon for aspiring Black Designers everywhere, fearlessly reshaping the fashion scene with her innovative designs and unwavering determination and doing it with style and elegance.

Dapper Dan

A pioneer of streetwear fashion, Dapper Dan revolutionized the industry by mixing luxury brands with street style in the 1980s. His bold and daring creations have inspired generations of designers and challenged traditional fashion norms.



Left: Singer Joyce Bryantin in a Zelda Wynn Valdes design.
Above: Playboy bunny designs by Zelda Wynn Valdes.

Patrick Kelly

A native of Vicksburg, MS, Patrick Kelly made a name for himself in the 1980s with his playful and colorful designs that challenged racial stereotypes in fashion. Kelly made history being the first American to be accepted into the French Federation of Fashion. He became known as the designer who reclaimed "Black Face" bringing political sat-

ire to the runway. With his innovative use of materials and patterns, Kelly's work continues to influence contemporary fashions today.

André Leon Talley

A prominent figure in the fashion world and a force to be reckoned; he is best known for his influential contributions as a Black Fashion Profession-

al. Talley's influence is undeniable, as he paved the way for diversity, and left a lasting mark on the industry. Talley began his career in Fashion Journalism, working for iconic publications such as Women's Wear Daily and Vogue. His unique perspective and eloquent writing style quickly set him apart, establishing him as a respected voice in the industry.

Sergio Hudson

Takes a sophisticated and modern approach when designing for the American woman. His aesthetic style embraces femininity and empowerment. Known for his sleek silhouettes, bold colors, and attention to detail, Hudson's creations have been worn by influential women, including former First Lady Michelle Obama, Beyonce and Actress, Kerry Washington.



Top: Patrick Kelly with models.
Left: Fashion by Patrick Kelly.



Top: Sergio Hudson with Keke Palmer.
Left: Fashion by Sergio Hudson.



Top: André Leon Talley with Naomi Campbell.
Left: André Leon Talley | Rihanna.

Documentary "Buried History: Finding Our Past" - February on WYES-TV

New Orleans Agenda

The video documentary *Buried History: Finding Our Past* debuts February 14, 2024, at New Orleans' PBS affiliate WYES-TV, as part of its Black History Month Programming Schedule. The half-hour documentary takes viewers on a journey with Veteran Journalist Warren Bell who discovered unknown parts of his own family history, and lesser known (but important) aspects of NOLA's unique multi-cultural history, after taking over a neglected family tomb at the historic St. Louis Cemetery II site.

Besides sharing his personal story, Bell introduces us to others who have reconnected to their own family stories at the neglected 200-year-old site rich in history but closed to the public since the COVID Pandemic. Viewers learn



Legendary broadcaster Warren Bell outside the gates of New Orleans' St. Louis Cemetery No. 2. Bell's restoration of a family tomb inside the cemetery is the linchpin of the history documentary 'Buried History: Finding Our Past,' which he wrote and produced, with David M. Jones directing.

about important contributions to the city's history and culture made by so many people interred

there. Experts also showcase resources available to anybody wishing to start their own family

research. That often begins with finding out where loved ones are buried or searching hundreds of

years' worth of notarial records.

The half-hour documentary was written, produced and narrated by Bell who also photographed most of the cemetery footage and images himself. Emmy Award Winning Director and Editor David M. Jones worked closely with Bell to render the finished documentary. Says Bell, whose S-E Louisiana Creole roots run deep - "My message is simple: the time to start asking questions of your elders is right NOW before they join the ancestors, lest you lose critical knowledge of how and why your own family (and YOURSELF) got here."

Buried History: Finding Our Past will air February 14th and through the month of February. Produced with grant support from NOTCF, the New Orleans Tourism & Culture Fund.

Commentary

Gov. Landry's Crime Session will Bring Regressive Rhetoric, Not Real Safety.



Royce Duplessis
Louisiana State Senator
District 5

To the people of New Orleans,

Despite evidence showing that crime continues to trend downward, Louisiana still has a persistently high crime rate. We all are working to solve that problem. My family and I live in a neighborhood that experiences higher rates of crime than most, and increasing public safety isn't just rhetoric for me.

But sadly, this Special Session on Crime that has been called by Governor Jeff Landry will prohibit us from actually tackling the root causes of crime and will instead force us to yet again go down the road of being tough on crime but soft on actual safety. Dangerous proposals like authorizing the concealed carrying of weapons without a permit, even for 18-year-olds, will only make us less safe.

I recognize that Gov. Landry made a campaign promise during last year's Gubernatorial Race that he would call a Special Session on Crime. Unfortunately, the call for the session was written so narrowly that it shuts off any opportunity to debate ideas that would improve the quality of life while also reducing crime and improving public safety.

I, along with several of my col-

leagues, believe we can do relatively simple things like expanding youth services and education; reducing blight and litter; and improving street lighting. We also believe in ideas that go deeper, like violence intervention and Trauma Response Programs; expanding mental health services; increasing access to housing; and reducing poverty. Notably, these proposals do not undermine necessary justice for victims and accountability for those who break the law.

Unfortunately, this special session will be a terribly missed opportunity, because we could have actually done a lot of things to prevent crime on the front end, instead of continuing to advance policies that do great for campaigns but do very little to actually prevent crime.

Sincerely,
Royce Duplessis

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Rep. James Clyburn Steps Down from House Leadership



U.S. Rep. James Clyburn D-S.C.

Stacy M. Brown
NNPA Newswire Senior
National Correspondent

Longtime South Carolina Democratic Rep. James Clyburn has announced his resignation from his House leadership position, effective immediately, while simultaneously committing to run for reelection. Clyburn, a staunch supporter of President Joe Biden, said he aims to focus on convey-

ing the message of inclusivity and unity that defines the greatness of the United States.

During an interview on Sunday, Feb. 18th, Clyburn, 83, expressed his continued disdain for former President Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" mantra, asserting that the country is already great but needs to ensure accessibility and affordability for all citizens. He encouraged Biden to emphasize his experience, wisdom, and commitment to maintaining

connections with the American people during the upcoming presidential campaign.

"I am fond of saying, this is a great country in no need of being made great. We just got to figure out ways to make this country's greatness accessible and affordable for all of our citizens. And Joe Biden is doing that. And we have got to stay focused on that," Clyburn stated emphatically.

Clyburn, who had previously announced his intention to seek

reelection, also reiterated that he's only stepping aside as Assistant Democratic Leader, which marks the end of his influential tenure in House leadership. The move comes amid years of speculation about Clyburn's retirement and the subsequent race to fill the void in the majority Black 6th Congressional District, covering substantial parts of the Interstate 95 corridor, Northeast Columbia, and North Charleston.

Expressing gratitude for the trust placed in him by colleagues throughout his career, Clyburn acknowledged the changing political landscape and his role in shaping it. Last year, he played a pivotal role in moving the South Carolina Democratic presidential primary to a leading position. He collaborated with Republican Governor Henry McMaster to expand broadband access to rural South Carolina.

The departure of Clyburn from his Assistant Democratic Leader role represents a broader shift in leadership dynamics, completing the transition from the era of former Speaker Nancy Pelosi, of California, to a younger generation led by Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York.

"I am deeply grateful for the confidence my colleagues have placed in me throughout my career," Clyburn stated.

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