

# BLACK HISTORY NOW

Black History Biographies from the Black Heritage Commemorative Society

## *15 Rare Black History Facts You've Never Heard*

1. [Carter G. Woodson](#) was the son of former enslaved Africans James and Eliza Riddle Woodson. He gained a master's degree at the University of Chicago in 1908, and in 1912, he received a Ph.D. in history from Harvard University. Woodson, known as the "Father of Black History" started Negro History week in 1926, which later became Black History Month.



2. [Woodson](#) believed rather than only focusing on a few men and women in America, the Black community should focus on the countless Black men and women around the world who had contributed to the advancement of human civilization.



3. Actor Morgan Freeman says a month dedicated to Black history is "ridiculous." In an 2005 interview on "60 Minutes," Freeman said, "You're going to relegate my history to a month? I don't want a Black history month. Black history is American history."

4. As a child Muhammad Ali was refused an autograph by his boxing idol, Sugar Ray Robinson. When Ali became a prizefighter, he vowed never to deny an autograph request, which he honored throughout his career.



5. In 1976, 50 years after the first celebration, President Gerald Ford officially expanded Negro History Week to Black History Month.

6. During the 1930s, painter Charles Alston founded the 306 group, which convened in his studio space and provided support and apprenticeship for African-American artists, including [Langston Hughes](#); sculptor Augusta Savage; and mixed-media visionary Romare Bearden.



7. Before Wally Amos became famous for his "Famous Amos" chocolate chip cookies, he was a talent agent at the William Morris Agency, where he worked with the likes of the Supremes and Simon & Garfunkel.



8. [Martin Luther King, Jr.](#) was assassinated on friend Maya Angelou's birthday, on April 4, 1968. Angelou stopped celebrating her birthday for years afterward, and sent flowers to King's widow, Coretta Scott King, for more than 30 years, until Coretta's death in 2006.



9. [Louis Armstrong](#) learned how to play the cornet while living at the Colored Waif's Home for Boys.

10. After a long career as an actress and singer, [Pearl Bailey](#) earned a bachelor's degree in theology from Georgetown University in 1985.

**11.** February was chosen as the month to observe Black history because it is the birth month of abolitionist and writer [Frederick Douglass](#) (Feb. 14) and President Abraham Lincoln (Feb. 12).

**12.** After African-American performer [Josephine Baker](#) expatriated to France, she famously smuggled military intelligence to French allies during World War II. She did this by pinning secrets inside her dress, as well as hiding them in her sheet music.



**13.** Scientist and mathematician [Benjamin Banneker](#) is credited with helping to design the blueprints for Washington, D.C.



**14.** Before becoming a professional musician, Chuck Berry studied to be a hairdresser.



**15.** In 1938, first lady Eleanor Roosevelt challenged the segregation rules at the Southern Conference on Human Welfare in Birmingham, Alabama, so she could sit next to African-American educator and activist [Mary McLeod Bethune](#). Roosevelt would come to refer to Bethune as "her closest friend in her age group."



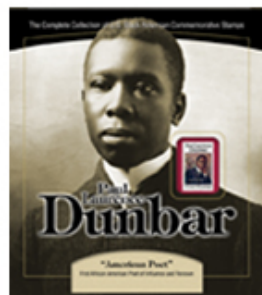
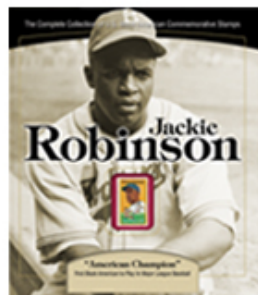
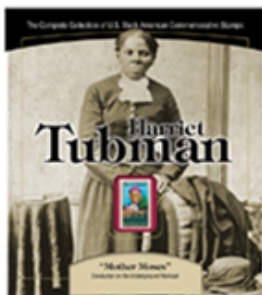
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