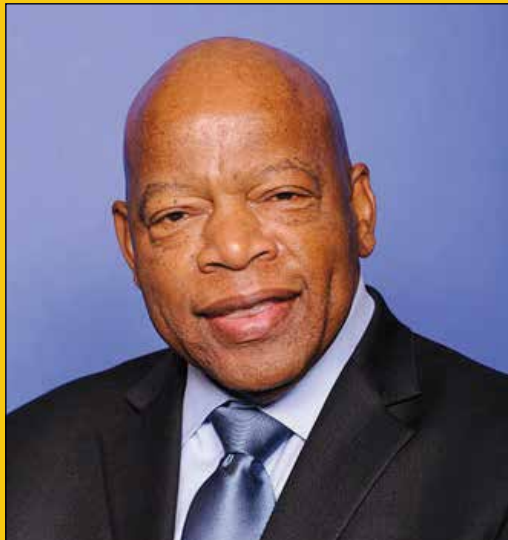


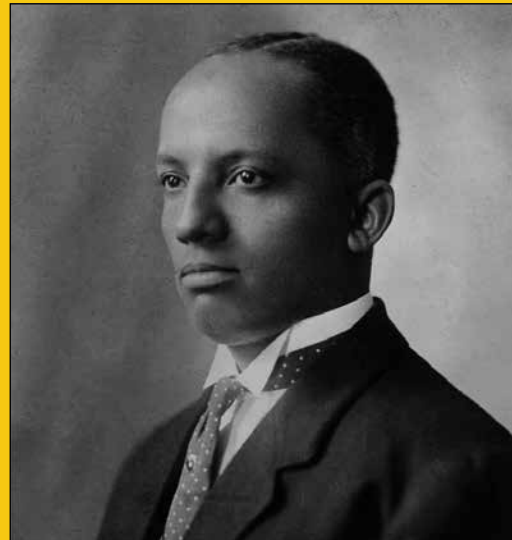
# BLACK HISTORY MONTH



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY/SMITHSONIAN



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# A Black History Month Primer



Each February, Americans join to commemorate and honor the struggles and achievements made by African Americans who shaped the country.

Learn the story of how the commemoration came to life and of those who played prominent roles to raise recognition.

## BACKGROUND

According to the Library of Congress, President Gerald Ford issued a Message on the Observance of first Black History Week in 1975. It would be the next year when the Association for the Study of African American Life and History would extend the celebration and mark the beginning of Black History Month as we know it today. Congress officially recognized the month-long occasion on Feb. 1, 1986. It urged citizens to participate in ceremonies and activities to promote awareness of the struggle of freedom and equal opportunity.

## CARTER G. WOODSON

Regarded as the “Father of Black History Month,” Woodson was born in 1875 to former slaves. After receiving a bachelor of arts degree from the University of Chicago and then a Ph.D. from Harvard, he set forward on a life of advocacy for equal rights.



In 1915, he established the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. Through this organization, he proposed and developed the February observance of Negro History Week. While his death in 1950 was long before Congress made his idea official, his hard work made him a significant contributor to the movement.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF FEBRUARY

The ASALH suggests Woodson chose February to represent Black History Month because of prominent leaders, Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, celebrate their birthdays the same month. Woodson’s vision was not to create a new tradition with his observance but to extend the pre-existing commemoration for a more in-depth way to study black history.

# In the Classroom

Teachers and administrators are in a unique position to raise Black History Month awareness in their classrooms and facilities.

Educating students and faculty about the importance of February can promote a sense of unity and pride throughout campus.

The experts at Teaching Tolerance recommend designing a lesson plan to discuss how those of African descent have contributed more than forced, free labor to the United States. Students should also be allowed to celebrate black literature, innovations and customs that have shaped the America we know today.

Here are more tips from the National Education Association.

## GRADES K-5

When educating young children about the important role African Americans have played in shaping America, you can cover many subjects while making them age-appropriate. Try to introduce little ones to the music, artists and dance routines that were prominent during the Harlem Renaissance. If your students absorb stories and read books, encourage them to write a report about their favorite influential figure. Make it a class event by inviting each one to stand in front of their peers



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and share what they have learned.

## GRADES 6-8

As students get older, you may find it beneficial to introduce them to more advanced pieces of literature, like poetry. A great workshop they can par-

ticipate in is writing poems to share with their class or the entire school at a Black History Month assembly. Challenge them to write their prose from the perspective of an iconic leader or about a monumental event.

Another eye-opening lesson

you may develop can give you, as a faculty member, a different perspective regarding how race is perceived by your student body. Ask them to write a paper about something they witnessed at school that involved racial diversity and discuss their stories as a class.

## HIGH SCHOOL

Inspire the older children to learn about great African American scientists and inventors. By participating, they will be introduced to the hard work and perseverance that made these life-changing discoveries come to life.

# How to Show Your Support

February is an ideal month for community involvement and to host Black History Month events. However, the diverse African American culture can teach us about the history of our country throughout the year.

Many times, you can learn a lot about the history of your neighborhood during trying times in the fight for civil rights by checking out locally written books in your library or bookstore.

Supporting Black History Month can be achieved by researching and spreading the word about the historical and local figures who made a difference.

This February, commit to teaching those around you of struggles and achievements in your area that shaped history. Here are some other beneficial ways you can honor black history as recommended by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

## **SUPPORT A BLACK BUSINESS**

Reward an entrepreneur in your local area for their hard work and dedication by spending money within their



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business. When you purchase services or goods from a small business in your neighborhood, you play a role in boosting the local economy. According to the organization Independent We Stand, for every \$100 spent at a locally owned business, \$68 stays in the community. When buying from a local chain, only \$43, will benefit your area.

## **DONATE TO A WORTHY CAUSE**

There are numerous worthy

causes you can donate to when celebrating Black History Month and those who are still dedicated to raising awareness for equal rights.

Finding a charity you believe in can take a little research but most foundations list donation instructions on their main website.

You also can ask your loved ones about their favorite non-profit organizations to enhance their efforts and help them spread the word on their cause.

## **SPEND TIME WITH A BLACK ELDER**

Allow yourself to sit down and talk with an African American elder who can give you their unique perspective of the civil rights movement. Ask local nursing homes or live-in facilities about their visitor's program and explain your interest. If they don't already have a visitation policy, your compassion may encourage officials to gauge their residents' interest in beginning one.

Supporting Black History Month can be achieved by researching and spreading the word about the historical and local figures who made a difference.

# Lesser-Known Civil Rights Leaders

The struggle for civil rights in America was loaded with dedicated and influential people who did their diligence for equal rights.

You are likely familiar with prominent names like Martin Luther King Jr. and Carter G. Woodson. However, there were numerous others whose activism helped influence lawmakers and officials to take notice and make much-needed changes.

During Black History Month, take the time to honor these heroes who don't always get the attention they deserve. Through leadership and perseverance, these notable activists helped give America the diverse cultures we enjoy today.

## **BAYARD RUSTIN**

Born in 1912, Rustin would gain notoriety by working as an advisor to Martin Luther King Jr. during the 1950s and 1960s. According to the Public Broadcasting Service, he was one of the major advocates who organized the March on Washington protest that would be the setting for King's famous, "I Have a Dream" speech. Rustin would go on to co-find the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and continue to peacefully protest for equal rights and fair treatment for employment.

## **JOHN LEWIS**

Lewis is a member of



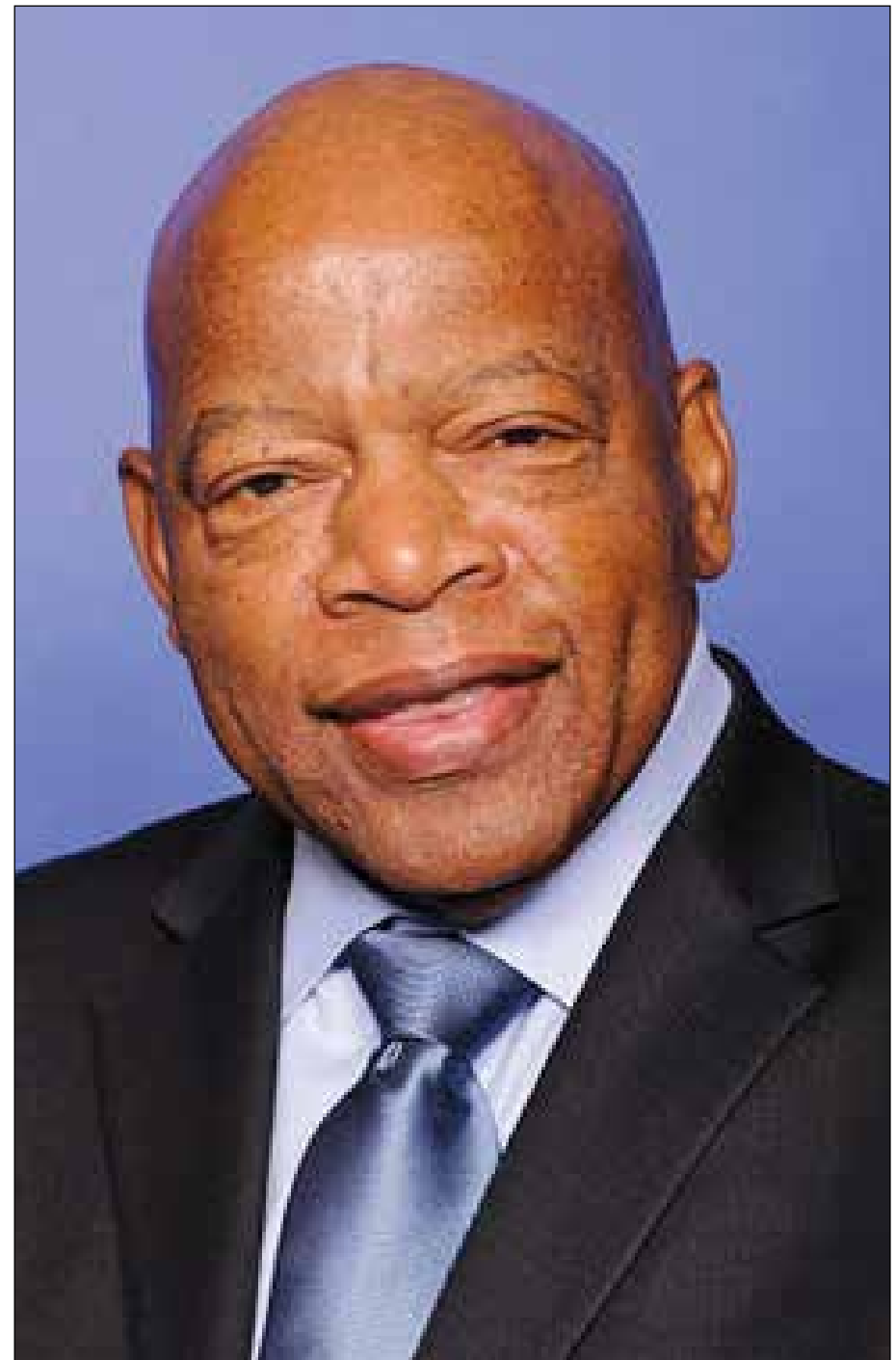
WARREN K. LEFFLER/PUBLIC DOMAIN

Congress from Georgia's 5th District. During the Civil Rights Movement, he dedicated his life to the protection of human rights, secured civil liberties and would be named chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Today, he is a bestselling author of a novel memoir, an

award-winning activist for his role in an equal America and was granted the only Profile in Courage Award for a lifetime achievement ever awarded by the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation.

## **GLORIA RICHARDSON**

Richardson was born to a



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middle-class family who owned grocery stores in the Second Ward of Cambridge, Maryland. This area was a predominantly African American neighborhood that was segregated from a nearby white community. Even as a young woman, she realized that racism in America was an issue

that demanded attention.

Through peaceful activism, Richardson became a member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's executive board. Her influence focused on improving the lives of her community members before taking her outspoken efforts to a national level.

# African Americans and the Vote

The theme for Black History Month this year is the 150th anniversary of the Fifteenth Amendment that gave black men the right to ballot after the Civil War.

Organizers of Black History Month choose a theme to encourage people to focus on a specific ideology of the movement. The Association for the Study of African American Life and History states the first idea was nominated in 1928 as “Civilization: A World Achievement.”

Throughout the years, themes ranged from celebrating arts and music to honoring civil right leaders and recognizing the struggles of African Americans. This year, the spotlight shifts to the importance of voting in the upcoming election.

## THE FIGHT TO VOTE

According to the Library of Congress, some states used tactics like poll taxes, literacy tests and intimidation to turn black people away from the voting booth. After decades of unfairness, advocates made a difference through protests and activism to inspire lawmakers to make a change. It was 1964 when the 24th Amendment banned poll taxes in federal elections. Two years later, the same fees were banished from state elections by the United States Supreme Court.

## IMPORTANCE OF VOTING

With a presidential election

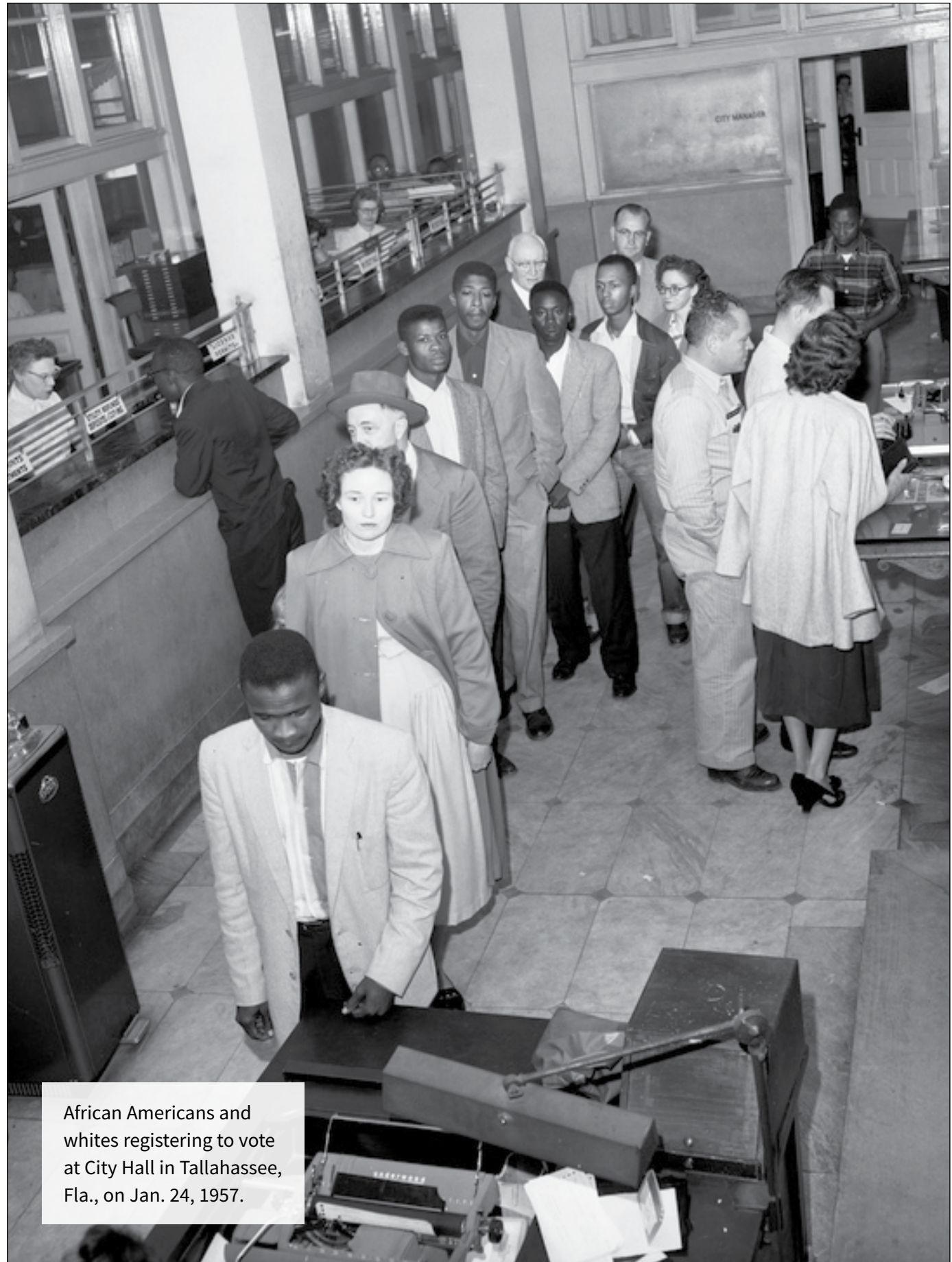
### Register to Vote

Check with your state officials for the proper methods to become registered or check out helpful online guides on [vote.org](http://vote.org) or [usa.gov](http://usa.gov).

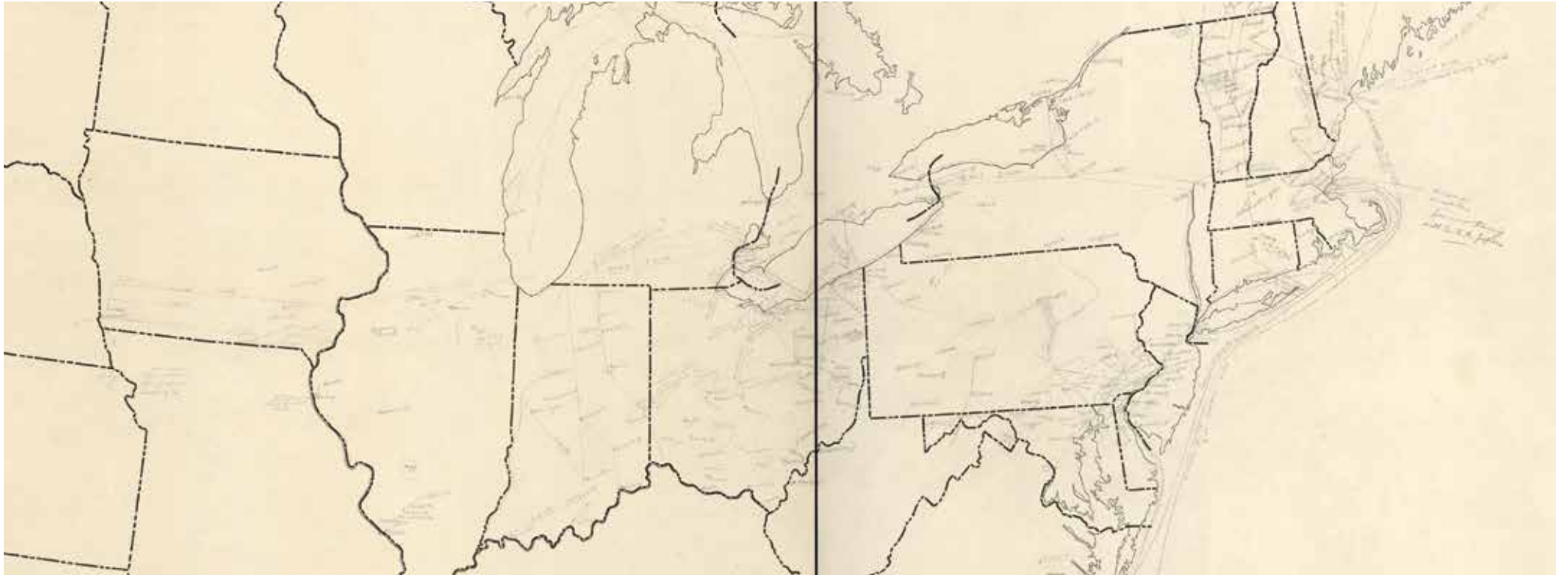
in 2020, utilizing your right to vote this year is an important duty. At the polls, Americans can make a difference by expressing their opinions about the leaders they choose to put into office. Make sure you do due diligence when researching candidates worthy of your vote. Even if the outcome of the election isn't what you had in mind, getting out to the polls is a positive way to honor and thank those who fought for the right during the civil rights movement.

### HOW TO REGISTER

If you aren't already registered (or maybe you're not sure if you are) to vote, be sure to take the proper steps far ahead of the upcoming election. Attempting to register at the last minute may cause delays as many Americans will be trying to beat the deadline. Check with your state officials for the proper methods to become registered or check out helpful online guides on [vote.org](http://vote.org) or [usa.gov](http://usa.gov).



African Americans and whites registering to vote at City Hall in Tallahassee, Fla., on Jan. 24, 1957.



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# The Underground Railroad

Considered one of the most courageous operations to free imprisoned slaves, the Underground Railroad was an important network of people and paths that assisted escapees to the north and Canada.

While the exact date of its development is unknown, experts at the Independence Hall Association estimate it coming into existence near the end of the 1700s.

The road to freedom was anything but as easily manageable as a railroad. In fact, The United States National Park Service states the slaves navigated through rough terrains, both natural and manmade. Trekking through rivers, canals and bays, escapees sought refuge through networks of safe homes and generous freedom fighters.

In addition to going north, those on the run headed for safety

in places like Mexico, the Caribbean Islands and even Europe. Thanks to the dedication from advocates, prisoners took back their freedom before slavery was officially abolished.

Celebrate Black History Month by learning more about the significance of the Underground Railroad and those who worked to keep it operating smoothly.

## HOW IT STARTED

According to the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, the 18th century Quakers are credited with forming the secret network. As members of the

Religious Society of Friends, the organized abolitionists believed slavery was against their Christian faith, encouraging them to become active in the fight for equal rights. Because the risks were so severe for those involved, they created a unique terminology to discuss participants, safe places and secret codes.

## HARRIET TUBMAN

“I was the conductor of the Underground Railroad for eight years, and I can say what most conductors can’t say — I never ran my train off the track and I never lost a passenger.”

Harriet Tubman was one of the most well-known conductors of the secret railroad. Once a slave herself, she escaped to freedom in 1849 before leading hundreds of prisoners and family members to freedom. The following year, the



Tubman

Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was enacted to make life as a conductor much more difficult and dangerous.

The NPS reports that this act was

meant to require the reporting and arrest of anyone suspected of being a runaway slave and incentivized kidnapping those of African descent. It also instilled strict penalties like fines and jail time for those involved in the network.

Tubman would continue helping her peers escape until the Underground Railroad ceased operations around 1863, during the Civil War.

# Black History Milestones

The road to civil rights in America was a long journey made possible by prominent leaders and a desire for equal rights.

Check out these instances from the past that led advocates to take charge of inequality and bring freedom for the entire country. If you're in an educational or leadership position, find ways to recognize these instances to help others learn and understand all the sacrifices made by some of America's greatest heroes. Students and employees alike can learn from these moments to possibly impact their own relationships or communities.

These accurate milestones are reported by the United States Forest Service and help show how African Americans fought and earned their liberty.

**1619:** A group of 20 Africans arrived in Jamestown, Virginia, by ship. They were the first blacks to be forced as involuntary laborers in the North American colonies.

**1849:** Harriet Tubman escaped from slavery. She would eventually return to the south at least 20 times and lead more than 300 slaves to freedom.

**1863:** The Emancipation Proclamation freed all slaves in states in rebellion against the United States.

**1865:** Congress passed the Thirteenth Amendment which outlawed slavery.



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**1870:** The Fifteenth Amendment granted African American men the right to vote.

**1915:** The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History was founded by Carter G. Woodson.

**1955:** Rosa Parks would refuse to change seats on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. This

led to many African Americans boycotting the bus system until the United States Supreme Court outlawed bus segregation in the city.

**1969:** The Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in schools would end at once.

**1973:** Thomas Bradley was elected as Los Angeles' first black mayor.

**1983:** Guion S. Bluford, Jr. became the first African American astronaut to make a space flight aboard the Challenger.

**1986:** A bronze statue of Martin Luther King Jr. debuted in the halls of Congress. It was also the first year of King's national holiday celebration.

**1990:** South African black

nationalist Nelson Mandela was freed after 27 years in prison.

**1992:** M. Joycelyn Elders became the first black person and the first woman to be United States surgeon general.

**2009:** Barack Obama began his first term as the country's first African American president.