

## **Meet the man who created Black History Month**

By CNN Staff <https://www.cnn.com/2019/02/01/us/history-of-black-history-month-trnd/index.html>

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(CNN) February marks Black History Month, a federally recognized, nationwide celebration that calls on all Americans to reflect on the significant roles that African-Americans have played in shaping US history. But how did this celebration come to be -- and why does it happen in February?

The man behind the holiday Carter G. Woodson, considered a pioneer in the study of African-American history, is given much of the credit for Black History Month.

The son of former slaves, Woodson spent his childhood working in coal mines and quarries. He received his education during the four-month term that was customary for black schools at the time.

**Figure 1** Carter G. Woodson, an African-American historian, wrote black Americans into US history

At 19, having taught himself English fundamentals and arithmetic, Woodson entered high school, where he completed a four-year curriculum in two years. He went on to earn his master's degree in history from the University of Chicago and later earned a doctorate from Harvard.

### **How the Holiday Came about**

Disturbed that history textbooks largely ignored America's black population, Woodson took on the challenge of writing black Americans into the nation's history.

To do this, he established the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. He also founded the group's widely respected publication, the Journal of Negro History.

In 1926, Woodson developed Negro History Week. He believed "the achievements of the Negro properly set forth will crown him as a factor in early human progress and a maker of modern civilization."

In 1976, Negro History Week expanded into Black History Month.

### **Why he picked February**

Woodson chose the second week of February for his celebration because it marks the birthdays of two men who greatly influenced the black American population:

Frederick Douglass, who escaped slavery and became an abolitionist and civil rights leader; though his birthdate isn't known, he celebrated it on February 14.

President Abraham Lincoln, who signed the Emancipation Proclamation, which abolished slavery in America's confederate states; he was born on February 12.

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For his work, Woodson has been called the Father of Black History.  
A version of this story was first published in 2007.

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In conjunction with the DVD, David Barton's *America's Hidden History* Season 1; Disk 1; session 1  
"BLACK HISTORY MONTH" [*The event that changed American Black History from 1963 onward*]

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<https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/four-black-schoolgirls-killed-in-birmingham>

### September 15 **Four black schoolgirls killed in Birmingham church bombing**

On September 15, 1963, a bomb explodes during Sunday morning services in the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, killing four young girls: Addie Mae Collins (14), Cynthia Wesley (14), Carole Robertson (14) and Carol Denise McNair (11).

With its large African-American congregation, the 16th Street Baptist Church served as a meeting place for civil rights leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr., who once called Birmingham a "symbol of hardcore resistance to integration." Alabama's governor, George Wallace, made preserving racial segregation one of the central goals of his administration, and Birmingham had one of the most violent and lawless chapters of the Ku Klux Klan.

The church bombing was the third in Birmingham in 11 days after a federal order came down to integrate Alabama's school system. Fifteen sticks of dynamite were planted in the church basement, underneath what turned out to be the girls' restroom. The bomb detonated at 10:19 a.m., killing Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson and Addie Mae Collins—all 14 years old—and 11-year-old Denise McNair. Immediately after the blast, church members wandered dazed and bloodied, covered with white powder and broken stained glass, before starting to dig in the rubble to search for survivors. More than 20 other members of the congregation were injured in the blast.

When thousands of angry black protesters assembled at the crime scene, Wallace sent hundreds of police and state troopers to the area to break up the crowd. Two young black men were killed that night, one by police and another by racist thugs. Meanwhile, public outrage over the bombing continued to grow, drawing international attention to Birmingham. At a funeral for three of the girls (one's family preferred a separate, private service), King addressed more than 8,000 mourners.

A well-known Klan member, Robert Chambliss, was charged with murder and with buying 122 sticks of dynamite. In October 1963, Chambliss was cleared of the murder charge and received a six-month jail sentence and a \$100 fine for the dynamite. Although a subsequent FBI investigation identified three other men—Bobby Frank Cherry, Herman Cash and Thomas E. Blanton, Jr.—as having helped Chambliss commit the crime, it was later revealed that FBI chairman J. Edgar Hoover blocked their prosecution and shut down the investigation without filing charges in 1968. After Alabama Attorney General Bill Baxley reopened the case, Chambliss was convicted in 1977 and sentenced to life in prison.

Efforts to prosecute the other three men believed responsible for the bombing continued for decades. Though Cash died in 1994, Cherry and Blanton were arrested and charged with four counts of murder in 2000. Blanton was convicted and sentenced to life in prison. Cherry's trial was delayed after judges ruled he was mentally incompetent to stand trial. This decision was later reversed. On May 22, 2002, Cherry was convicted and sentenced to life, bringing a long-awaited victory to the friends and families of the four young victims.

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