Black History Month

WHY
WE
CONTINUE...
1926:
- **Carter G. Woodson**, an American Historian and *The Association for the Study of Negro Life & History* announced the 2nd week of February to be: “Negro History Week”, which coincided with the birthdays of **Abraham Lincoln** (February 12th) & **Frederick Douglass** (February 14th) of which black communities had celebrated together since the late 19th century. As a result, emphasis was placed on encouraging the coordinated teaching of American Black history in the nation’s public schools.

“If a race has no history, if it has no worthwhile tradition, it becomes a negligible factor in the thought of the world, and it stands in danger of being exterminated” (Carter G. Woodson).

1969:
- In February of 1969 a transition from *Black History Week* to *Black History Month* was proposed by the Black United States Students of Kent State University.

1970:
- The 1st celebration of Black History month occurred exactly 1 year later at Kent State University.
1976:

- As part of the United States Bicentennial, the expansion of *Negro History Week* to *Black History Month* was officially recognized by the U.S. Government.

- An annual debate occurs annually regarding the usefulness and fairness of a designated month dedicated to the history of one race. Many people hold concerns about *Black History* being delegated to a single month and the “Hero Worship” of some of the historical figures recognized.

“Seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history” (President Gerald Ford).
January 15th: Michael Luther King, Jr. was born in Atlanta, Georgia; a new son to Reverend Michael Luther King Sr. and Alberta Williams King.

Michael became the middle child of 3 children with an: Older sister Willie Christine King and younger brother Alfred Daniel Williams King

1934:

During a trip to the 5th Baptist World Alliance Congress in Berlin, Germany, Reverend King chose to change both his and his sons name to: Martin Luther King in honor of the German reformer Martin Luther.

As a young child Martin played with a little boy whose family owned a business near their home. At the age of 6 they were separated due to educational segregation.
Martin Luther King, Jr.
Childhood Continued

1939:
- Martin sang with his church choir at the Atlanta premier of *Gone with the Wind*. During his adolescence he received attention for singing “I Want to Be More and More like Jesus” and at a later date he joined the junior choir at his church.
- His mother was the choir leader and an accomplished organist.
- Aside from racial discrimination, Martin suffered physical abuse by the hands of his father, who whipped him until the age of 15, in order to “make something of him even if he had to beat him to death”.

1941:
- Martin lived a life of depression due to “racial humiliation”.
- At the age of 12 he tried to commit suicide because of he blamed himself for his grandmother’s death. He jumped out a 2nd story window and survived.
1942:

- At the age of 13 Martin was skeptical of Christianity’s claims. He later concluded that the Bible has “many profound truths which one cannot escape” and decided to enter the seminary.
- He attended *Booker T. Washington High School* and was a member of the debate team.
- Martin was the youngest assistant manager of a newspaper delivery station for the Atlanta Journal.
- His junior year he won first prize in an oratorical contests sponsored by the Negro Elks Club in Dublin, Georgia.
- On the ride back from the contest Martin and his sister were forced to stand on the bus so that white students could sit.
1944:
- At the age of 15 and in his junior year of high school, Martin passed the entrance exam for Morehouse College.

1947:
- At 18 Martin chose to enter the ministry, wherein he felt the church offered the way to answer his “inner urge to serve humanity”.
- Martin graduated with a B.A. in sociology from Morehouse College.
**1948:**
- Martin enrolled in *Crozer Theological Seminary* in Chester, Pennsylvania. During which time he was elected President of the student body.
- During his third year he fell in love with an immigrant German woman working as a cook in the cafeteria. Deeply in love, Martin intended to marry her, but was persuaded by his friends that the interracial marriage would cause a negative reaction within society and might destroy his chances of pastoring a church in the South. He caved and cut ties with the girl; emotionally he never recovered from the break-up.

**1950s:**
- Bayard Rustin served as Martin’s main advisor and mentor. He was a Christian pacifist and student of Gandhi’s teachings. He taught Martin to “dedicate himself to the principles of non-violence” instead of self-defense.

**1951:**
- Martin graduated with a B.Div. Degree in 1951 from Crozer Theological Seminary.
1953:

- On June 18th Martin married Coretta Scott on the lawn of her parents’ house in Heiberger, Alabama. He later fathered four children with her: Yolanda Denise (born 1955), Martin Luther III (born 1957), Dexter Scott (born 1961) and Bernice Albertine (born 1963).
1955:

- The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), an African-American civil rights organization was formed and Martin was its first President.
- On December 1st Rosa parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat.
- December 5, The Montgomery Bus Boycott led by Martin soon followed, lasting 385 days and resulting in Martin’s home being bombed. Martin was arrested and the United States District Court ruling of Browder v. Gayle ended racial segregation on all Montgomery public buses.
- This boycott transformed him into a national figure and best known spokesperson in the civil rights movement.
1959:
- In April Martin visited India with assistance from the American Friends Services Committee, in which he gained a greater understanding of nonviolent resistance and his commitment to America’s struggle for civil rights.

1960s:
- Martin’s chose to distance himself from his advisor, Bayard because of his open homosexuality, support of democratic socialism and former ties to the USA Communist Party; however, Martin assigned him as a main organizer of the 1963 March on Washington.
In April in Birmingham, Alabama a campaign against racial segregation and economic injustice was enacted and consisted of: sit-in’s and marches that openly violated the laws they considered unjust. Men, women, old and young were involved. National television revealed to the world footage of the Birmingham Police Department, led by Eugene “Bull” Connor, using high-pressure water jets and police dogs against children. The campaign was successful: Connor lost his job and the “Jim Crow” signs came down.

During the campaign Martin was arrested (13th time) and from his cell he wrote the famous “Letter from Birmingham Jail”, which discussed the movement for social change, arguments about the urgent crisis of racism with references to the Boston Tea Party and his frustration with white moderates and clergymen too timid to oppose an unjust system.
First, I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Councilor or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a "more convenient season." (Martin Luther King, Jr., April 1963)
1963: continued

- On August 28th, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom occurred, organized by the “Big Six”: Martin Luther King, Jr. (SCLC); Roy Wilkins (National Associate for the Advancement of Colored People); Whitney Young (National Urban League); A. Philip Randolph (Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters); John Lewis (SNCC); and James L. Farmer, Jr. (Congress of Racial Equality). It was the largest gathering of protesters in D.C. history.

- Martin’s previous advisor was the primary logistical and strategic organizer of the movement (Bayard Rustin). With the aid of President Kennedy and his enlistment of additional church leaders the UAW union to mobilize demonstrators with an estimate of 250,000 attendees.
1963: continued

- The march originally intended to dramatize the desperate condition of blacks in the southern U.S. to share concerns and grievances and to denounce the federal government for its failure to safeguard their civil rights and physical safety of black workers. Presidential pressure influences the event and took on a far less strident tone. Civil rights activist felt it presented an inaccurate, sanitized pageant of racial harmony. Malcom X titled it the “Farce on Washington”
  - Demands of the March: an end to racial segregation in public schools; meaningful civil rights legislation, including a law prohibiting racial discrimination in employment; protection of civil rights workers from police brutality; a $2 minimum wage for all workers; and self-government for Washington, D.C., then governed by congressional committee.

- The March was a success, as well as the declaration of Martin’s 17-minute famous “I Have a Dream” speech.
“With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith, we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day…Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksand’s of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children.”

(Martin Luther King, Jr., March 1963).
1964:

- On October 14 Martin received the Nobel Peace Prize for combating racial inequality through nonviolence. He hailed the “successful precedent” of using nonviolence and “he struggled only with weapons of truth, soul force, non-injury and courage”
- Another important influence on Martin was literature from his childhood, an essay *On Civil Disobedience* Henry David Thoreau’s, which revealed the idea of refusing to cooperate with an evil system.
- Other important influences: Protestant theologians: Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich, as well as Walter Raeschenbusch’s *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. 
1965:

- March 7th marked the first attempt of a march from Selma to Montgomery enacted through the collaboration of Martin, Bevel, SCLC and SNCC but was aborted because of mob and police violence against the demonstrators; the brutality nationally broadcast created public outrage and the day has become known as – “Bloody Sunday”.

- March 9th marks the second attempt but a judge used an order blocking the march until after a hearing occurred. King led marchers to Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, said a short prayer session and dispersed the group as not to violate the court order.
March 25th marked the third and successful march from Selma to Montgomery. Martin delivered a speech that is known today as “How Long, Not Long”, in which he states that equal rights for African Americans could not be far away, “because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice”.

1965: continued
I know you are asking today, "How long will it take?" (Speak, sir) Somebody’s asking, "How long will prejudice blind the visions of men, darken their understanding, and drive bright-eyed wisdom from her sacred throne?" Somebody’s asking, "When will wounded justice, lying prostrate on the streets of Selma and Birmingham and communities all over the South, be lifted from this dust of shame to reign supreme among the children of men?" Somebody’s asking, "When will the radiant star of hope be plunged against the nocturnal bosom of this lonely night, plucked from weary souls with chains of fear and the manacles of death? How long will justice be crucified, and truth bear it?" I come to say to you this afternoon, however difficult the moment, however frustrating the hour, it will not be long, because "truth crushed to earth will rise again." (Martin Luther King, Jr. March 1965)
1968:

- Just after 6 p.m. on April 4, Martin Luther King Jr. was fatally shot while standing on the balcony outside his second-story room at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee.
- The civil rights leader was in Memphis to support a sanitation workers' strike and was on his way to dinner when a bullet struck him in the jaw and severed his spinal cord. King was pronounced dead after his arrival at a Memphis hospital. He was 39 years old.
As the leaders of tomorrow, we are inevitably dependent on one another in matters of the future. It is our mission to lead by example for our children.

As stated by the NAACP:

50 years ago, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People stood alongside Martin Luther King, Jr., Congressman John Lewis, and other civil rights icons to redefine equality and economic justice for African Americans and other underrepresented minorities. Today, as we look at the great strides that have been made in the last five decades, the statistics are a constant reminder that there is still great work to be done. As a nation, we have come a long way from the Jim Crow era and segregated schools. However, we must continue fighting for the rights of African Americans and other underrepresented minorities until we are not statistically below Whites, but statistically equivalent.