

The Coalition of Labor Union Women Celebrates Black History Month

Black History Month offers us space to learn about Black and African-Americans' contributions to our society. Such stories had been largely forgotten and continue to be a neglected part of the national narrative.

Black History Month's first iteration was Negro History Week, created in February 1926 by Carter G. Woodson, known as the "father of Black history". This historian helped establish the field of African American studies and his organization, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, aimed to encourage "people of all ethnic and social backgrounds to discuss the Black experience".

His organization was later renamed the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) and is currently the oldest historical society established for the promotion of African American history.

February was chosen by Woodson for the week-long observance as it coincides with the birthdates of both former US President Abraham Lincoln and social reformer Frederick Douglass. Both men played a significant role in helping to end slavery.

Woodson also understood that members of the Black community already celebrated the births of Douglass and Lincoln and sought to build on existing traditions. He was asking the public to extend their study of Black history, not to create a new tradition.

So February has become a celebration of those who have impacted not just the country but the world with their activism and achievements. This is an opportunity for us to engage with Black histories, discussions of racism and slavery and highlight Black leaders and accomplishments.

And importantly, we in the labor movement must always recognize the various and profound ways that work of all kinds – free and forced, skilled and unskilled, vocational and voluntary – intersect with the collective experiences of Black people.

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