



FEBRUARY marks the beginning of **Black History Month** — an annual celebration that has existed since 1926. But what are the origins of Black History Month?

Much of the credit can go to Harvard Scholar Dr. Carter G. Woodson, who was determined to bring Black History into the mainstream public arena. Woodson devoted his life to making “the world see the Negro as a participant rather than as a lay figure in history.”

In 1926 Woodson organized the first annual Negro History Week, which took place during the second week of February. Woodson chose this date to coincide with the birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln — two men who had greatly impacted the black population.

Over time, Negro History Week evolved into the Black History Month that we know today — a four-week-long celebration of African American History. The following are stories of remarkable lives that have impacted our nation, the world, and our lives.

William Carney was born in New Bedford, Massachusetts. He was a member of Company C, 54th Massachusetts Colored Infantry. On July 18, 1863, during the Battle of Fort Wagner, South Carolina, nearly 37 years after the Civil War, he was cited for military valor. During the engagement by the all-Black 54th and 55th Massachusetts Colored Regiments, Commander Robert G. Shaw was shot down. A few feet from where he fell laid Sergeant Carney. Summoning all of his strength, Carney held aloft the colors and continued the charge. Having been shot several times, he kept the colors flying high, and miraculously retreated his regiments. Although he made of his comrades did not. For in the deadly battle, over 1,500 Black troops died. On this day in 1900, Sergeant William H. Carney was issued the Congressional Medal of Honor, making him the first Black to ever win the coveted award. It should be noted that sixteen other Black soldiers and four Black sailors eventually received the Congressional Medal of Honor for their heroics during the tragic epic in American history.



Rosa Parks 1913—2005
Pioneer of Civil Rights

Most historians date the beginning of the modern civil rights movement in the United States to December 1, 1955. That was the day when an unknown seamstress in Montgomery, Alabama refused to give up her bus seat to a white passenger. This brave woman, Rosa Parks, was arrested and fined for violating a city ordinance, but her lonely act of defiance began a movement that ended legal segregation in America, and made her an inspiration to freedom-loving people everywhere.

Rosa Parks was born Rosa Louise McCauley in Tuskegee, Alabama to James McCauley, a carpenter, and Leona McCauley, a teacher. At the age of two she moved to her grandparents'

farm in Pine Level, Alabama with her mother and younger brother, Sylvester. At the age of 11 she enrolled in the Montgomery Industrial School for Girls, a private school founded by liberal-minded women from the northern United States. The school's philosophy of self-worth was consistent with Leona McCauley's advice to "take advantage of the opportunities, no matter how few they were."

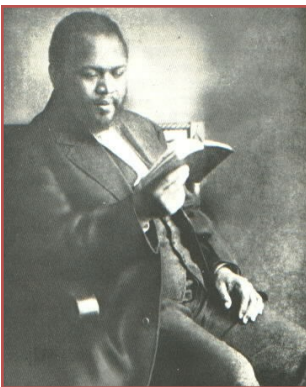
Opportunities were few indeed. "Back then," Mrs. Parks recalled in an interview, "we didn't have any civil rights. It was just a matter of survival, of existing from one day to the next. I remember going to sleep as a girl hearing the Klan ride at night and hearing a lynching and being afraid the house would burn down." In the same interview, she cited her lifelong acquaintance with fear as the reason for her relative fearlessness in deciding to appeal her conviction during the bus boycott. "I didn't have any special fear," she said. "It was more of a relief to know that I wasn't alone."

After attending Alabama State Teachers College, the young Rosa settled in Montgomery, with her husband, Raymond Parks. The couple joined the local chapter of the NAACP and worked quietly for many years to improve the lot of African-Americans in the segregated south. "I worked on numerous cases with the NAACP," Mrs. Parks recalled, "but we did not get the publicity. There were cases of flogging, peonage, murder, and rape. We didn't seem to have too many successes. It was more a matter of trying to challenge the powers that be, and to let it be known that we did not wish to continue being second-class citizens."

The bus incident led to the formation of the Montgomery Improvement Association, led by the young pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The association called for a boycott of the city-owned bus company. The boycott lasted 382 days and brought Mrs. Parks, Dr. King, and their cause to the attention of the world. A Supreme Court Decision struck down the Montgomery ordinance under which Mrs. Parks had been fined, and outlawed racial segregation on public transportation.

In 1957, Mrs. Parks and her husband moved to Detroit, Michigan where Mrs. Parks served on the staff of U.S. Representative John Conyers. The Southern Christian Leadership Council established an annual Rosa Parks Freedom Award in her honor.

Here is a look at one African American minister who's devotion to God changed the course of history...



WILLIAM JOSEPH SEYMOUR (May 2, 1870 - September 28, 1922) was an African American minister, and an initiator of the Pentecostal religious movement.

Seymour was born the son of freed slaves in Centerville, Louisiana. As a grown man he became a student at a newly formed bible school founded by Charles Parham in Houston, TX in 1905. It was here that he learned the major tenets of the Holiness Movement. He developed a belief in glossolalia ("speaking in tongues") as a confirmation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He later moved to Los Angeles to minister in churches. As a consequence of his new found Pentecostal doctrine he was removed from the parish where he had been appointed. Looking for a place to continue his work, he found a run-down building in downtown Los Angeles located on Azusa Street, and preached his doctrinal beliefs there.

The result was the Azusa Street Revival. Seymour not only rejected the existing racial barriers in favor of "unity in Christ", he also rejected the then almost-universal barriers to women in any form of church leadership. This revival meeting extended from 1906 until 1909, and became the subject of intense investigation by more mainstream Protestants. Some left feeling that Seymour's views were heresy, while others accepted his teachings and returned to their own congregations to expound them. The resulting movement became widely known as "Pentecostalism", likening it to the manifestations of the Holy Spirit recorded as occurring in the first two chapters of Acts as occurring from the day of the Feast of Pentecost onwards.

Most of the current charismatic groups can claim some lineage linking them to the Azusa Street Revival and William Seymour. While the movement was largely to fracture along racial lines within a decade, the splits were in some ways perhaps less deep than the vast divide that seems often to separate many white religious denominations from their black counterparts. Probably the deepest split in the Pentecostal movement today is not racial, but rather between Trinitarian and "Jesus Only" theologies.



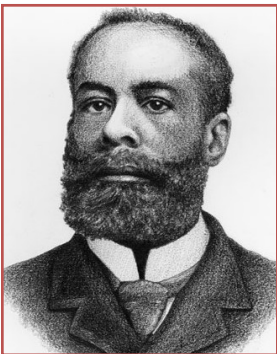
Azusa Street Mission Leaders



The Mission at 312 Azusa Street

While there had been similar manifestations in the past (the Cane Ridge, Kentucky revival a century before in the Second Great Awakening being one such example), the current worldwide Pentecostal and charismatic movements are generally agreed to have been in part outgrowths of Seymour's ministry and the Azusa Street Revival.

William Seymour died of a heart attack in 1922. A play commemorating him and the revival, *Miracle on Azusa Street*, is sometimes produced by Pentecostal churches both to teach their own members about their religious origins and as an outreach to those outside. A feature film on Seymour's life entitled *Azusa Street* began production in 2006, the centennial anniversary of the Azusa Street revival. The film is written and directed by Richard Rossi.



Here we look at some **African American Inventors** who's inventions changed the course of history!

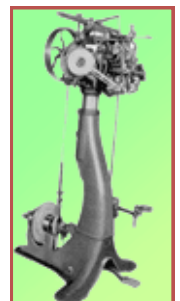
Elijah McCoy (1843–1929), a mechanical engineer, held 57 U.S. patents, including one for an oil-dripping cup for trains. Other inventors tried to copy McCoy's invention but none worked as well as his, so customers started asking for "The Real McCoy." That's where the expression comes from.



Lewis Latimer (1848–1928) invented an important part of the light bulb — the carbon filament. Latimer worked in the laboratories of both Thomas Edison and Alexander Graham Bell. He helped to install the first electric plants in Philadelphia, New York City and Montreal and oversaw the installation of lighting in railroad stations, government building and major thoroughfares in Canada, New England and London.



Jan Ernst Matzeliger (1852–1889) invented a shoemaking machine that increased shoemaking speed by 900%! Matzeliger left behind a legacy of taking on what was thought to be an impossible task — making shoes affordable for the masses. In 1992, the U.S. made a postage stamp his honor.





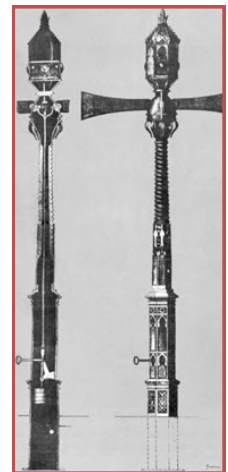
Madam C. J. Walker (1867–1919) invented a hair-growing lotion and other beauty products. Walker grew up poor. But she became the first female African- American millionaire. Her company is still in operation today.



George Washington Carver (1860–1943) developed crop rotation methods, peanut butter and over 400 other plant products! Carver was born a slave. He didn't go to college until he was 30.



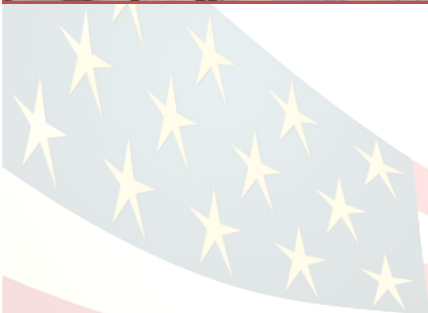
Garrett Morgan (1877–1963) invented the gas mask. The Morgan gas mask was later refined for use by U.S. Army during World War I. After witnessing an accident on a roadway, Morgan invented the first traffic signal. The rights were eventually bought by the General Electric Company.



Dr. Patricia. E. Bath (1949–) invented a new device and technique for cataract surgery know as laserphaco that has helped many blind people to see. Dr. Bath has been nominated to the National Inventors Hall of Fame.

Lonnie G. Johnson (1949–)

This inventor of thermodynamic systems for NASA became most famous for inventing the world-famous watergun, the Supersoaker®.





In this final tribute to Black History Month, we highlight three African American ministers, all well-known and even nationally known, all extremely effective, and all contributing greatly to the growth of American Christianity.



The Rev. "Black Harry" Hoosier (1750-1810)

Harry Hoosier was born a slave in North Carolina, but toward the end of the American Revolution he obtained his freedom, converted to Methodism, and became a preacher. In 1781, he delivered a sermon in Virginia entitled "The Barren Fig Tree" – the first recorded Methodist sermon by an African American. Despite the fact that Hoosier was illiterate, he became famous as a traveling evangelist and was considered one of the most popular preachers of his era.

In fact, after hearing Harry preach in and around Philadelphia, Dr. Benjamin Rush (1745-1813), a signer of the Declaration of Independence and an evangelical Christian, declared that accounting for his illiteracy, Hoosier was "the greatest orator in America." the Rev. Henry Boehm (1775-1875) reported: "Harry. . . was so illiterate he could not read a word but he would repeat the hymn as if reading it, and quote his text with great accuracy. His voice was musical, and his tongue as the pen of a ready writer. He was unboundedly popular, and many would rather hear him than the bishops." Harry also traveled and preached with other popular bishops of that era, including the Rev. Richard Whatcoat (1736- 1806), the Rev. Freeborn Garretson (1752-1827), and the Rev. Thomas Coke (1747-1814). The Rev. Coke said of Asbury that, "I really believe he is one of the best preachers in the world. There is such an amazing power that attends his preaching . . . and he is one of the humblest creatures I ever saw."

Hoosier ministered widely along the American frontier and is described by historians as "a renowned camp meeting exhorter, the most widely known black preacher of his time, and arguably the greatest circuit rider of his day." However, he was unpopular in the South for two reasons: first, frontier Methodists such as Hoosier tended to lean Arminian in their theology, contrasted with the denominations of the South that were largely Calvinistic (e.g., Presbyterians, Reformed, Episcopalians, Baptists, etc. – yes, the Baptists of that day were largely Calvinistic!); second, Methodists were outspoken against slavery whereas the majority of the South supported slavery. Therefore, southern groups such as the Virginia Baptists came to use the term "Hoosiers" as an insulting term of derision that they applied to Methodists like Black Harry Hoosier, meaning that they were anti-slavery in belief and Arminian in theology.

Fisk University history professor William Piersen believes that this is the source of the term "Hoosier" that was applied to the inhabitants of Indiana. Piersen explains, "Such an etymology would offer Indiana a plausible and worthy first Hoosier – 'Black Harry' Hoosier – the greatest preacher of his day, a man who rejected slavery and stood up for morality and the common man."



The Rev. Andrew Bryan (1737-1812) was a slave and minister who organized one of the oldest African-American congregations in North America. In 1782, after being baptised, he began preaching in Chatham County in Georgia. In 1788 he purchased his freedom and formed a congregation in Savannah, Georgia, which was chartered under the name of Bryan Street African Baptist Church. On September 4, 1793 he obtained the lot where the church now stands. By 1800, when the congregation had grown to about 700, they reorganized themselves as the First African Baptist Church. Later in 1832 a dispute over doctrine caused the church to split. The second church became known as First Bryan Baptist Church. Both congregations are descendants of Bryan's original congregation. The congregation of First African Baptist Church were significantly involved in the affairs of the African-American community of Savannah. Andrew Bryan died in Savannah in 1812.



The Rev. John Marrant (1755-1891) was one of the first African-American preachers and missionaries. He wrote three books about his experiences as a preacher, including *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, A Black*. Marrant was born in New York City, moving to Charleston, S. Carolina after his father's death. At the age of 13 he was taken to hear Methodist preacher George Whitefield and was converted. After disagreements with his family about this, he wandered in the wilderness, relying on God to feed and protect him. He was found by a Cherokee hunter and taken to a Cherokee town, where he was sentenced to death. However, he was spared, due to the miraculous conversion of the executioner. Marrant lived with the Cherokees for two years before returning to Charleston, where his own family didn't recognize him. He continued his missionary work with slaves, despite the objection of their owners, until the start of the American

Revolution. He became an ordained minister in 1787 and ministered in Nova Scotia to several thousand African Americans who had fled north during the fighting.

