

Trump praises Douglass, other African-Americans icons in gathering

By **JESSE J. HOLLAND**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump kicked off Black History Month on Wednesday by gathering some of his black aides and supporters at the White House for a “listening” session in which he praised the contributions of slave-turned-abolitionist Frederick Douglass and other African-American icons.

“Frederick Douglass is an example of somebody who has done an amazing job and is being recognized more and more, I notice,” Trump told the group gathered in the Roosevelt Room.

The president’s comments drew immediate backlash on social media from critics who perceived it as a reference to a still-living Douglass. Douglass, who died in 1895, was one of the country’s most influential and celebrated African-Americans.

Douglass was born a slave, and became an orator and a leading figure in the anti-slavery movement. Over the last 20 years of his life, Douglass served as marshal and recorder of deeds for the District of Columbia, as well as U.S. minister to Haiti. Black History Month originally started out as a weeklong celebration that included Douglass’ birthday along with that of President Abraham Lincoln.

White House spokesman Sean Spicer later said it would become clearer what Trump meant by having noticed Douglass being recognized “more and more.”

“I think he wants to highlight the contributions he has made,” Spicer said.

Proclamation

The White House has said Trump plans to issue an official proclamation recognizing

Black History Month, which has been recognized by every U.S. president since 1976. Other White House events are planned, including a gala and receptions, officials said.

“During this month, we honor the tremendous history of the African-Americans throughout our country, throughout the world if you really think about it, right?” Trump said. “And this story’s one of unimaginable sacrifice, hard work and faith in America.”

“Martin Luther King Jr., Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks and ‘millions more black Americans who made America what it is today,’” Trump said. “I’m proud to honor this heritage and will be honoring it more and more.”

Trump mentioned the new Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture as a place “where people can learn about Rev. King, so many other things.” He did not mention the Martin Luther King Jr. National Memorial, which also sits on the National Mall.

On hand for the listening session were Housing and Urban Development Secretary nominee Ben Carson; Paris Dennard, an official with the Thurgood Marshall College Fund; longtime Republican strategist and media owner Armstrong Williams; and White House adviser Omarosa Manigault.

Trump also said that he did better in the African-American community in his election than candidates in previous years. Among African-Americans, Trump got 8 percent of the vote, slightly better than Republican Mitt Romney’s 6 percent against then-President Barack Obama in 2012, according to national exit polls.

Things to know about Black History Month

By **JESSE J. HOLLAND**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Like his predecessors, President Donald Trump plans to commemorate Black History Month with an official proclamation, a gala and receptions inside the White House to celebrate the contributions of the United States’ black citizens.

“I’m proud to honor this heritage and will be honoring it more and more,” Trump said Tuesday as he surrounded himself with African-American supporters and government officials invited to the White House for a listening session.

Black History Month is considered one of the nation’s oldest organized history celebrations, and has been recognized by U.S. presidents for decades through proclamations and celebrations. Here is some information about the history of Black History Month.

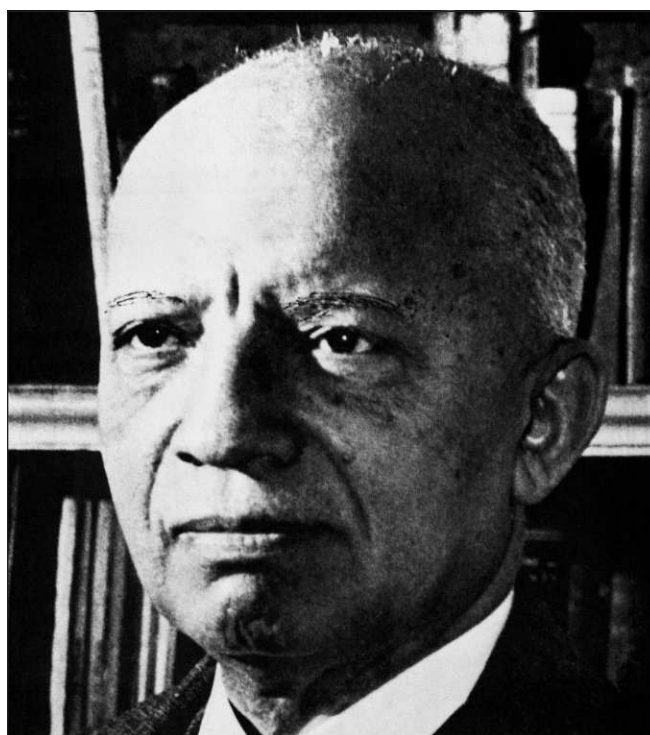
How did it start?

It was Carter G. Woodson, a founder of the Association for the Study of African American History, who first came up with the idea of the celebration that became Black History Month. Woodson, the son of recently-freed Virginia slaves, who went on to earn a Ph.D in history from Harvard, originally came up with the idea of Negro History Week to encourage black Americans to become more interested in their own history and heritage. Woodson worried that black children were not being taught about their ancestors’ achievements in American schools in the early 1900s.

“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,” Woodson said.

Why February?

Woodson chose February for Negro History Week because it had the birthdays of President Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. Lincoln was born on Feb. 12, and Douglass, a former slave, did not know his exact birthday but



AP Photo

Carter G. Woodson is a founder of the Association for the Study of African American History, who first came up with the idea of the celebration that became Black History Month.

celebrated it on Feb. 14.

Daryl Michael Scott, a Howard University history professor and former ASAAH president, said Woodson chose that week because black Americans were already celebrating Lincoln’s and Douglass’s birthdays. With the help of black newspapers, he promoted that week as a time to focus on African-American history as part of the celebrations that were already ongoing.

The first Negro History Week was announced in February 1926.

“This was a community effort spearheaded by Woodson that built on tradition, and built on black institutional life and structures to create a new celebration that was a week long, and it took off like a rocket,” Scott said.

Why a month?

Negro History Week was wildly successful, but Woodson felt it needed more.

Woodson’s original idea for Negro History Week was for it to be a time for student showcases of the African-American history they learned the rest of the year, not as the only week black history would be

discussed, Scott said. Woodson later advocated starting a Negro History Year, saying that during a school year “a subject that receives attention one week out of thirty six will not mean much to anyone.”

Individually several places, including in West Virginia in the 1940s and in Chicago in the 1960s, expanded the celebration into Negro History Month. The civil rights and Black Power movement advocated for an official shift from Black History Week to Black History Month, Scott said, and,

in 1976, on the 50th anniversary of the beginning of Negro History Week, the Association for the Study of African American History made the shift to Black History Month.

Presidential recognition

Every president since Gerald R. Ford through Barack Obama has issued a statement honoring the spirit of Black History Month.

Ford first honored Black History Week in 1975, calling the recognition “most appropriate,” as the country developed “a healthy awareness on the part of all of us of achievements that have too long been obscured and unsung.” The next year, in 1976, Ford issued the first Black History Month commemoration, saying with the celebration “we can seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history.”

President Jimmy Carter added in 1978 that the celebration “provides for all Americans a chance to rejoice and express pride in a heritage that adds so much to our way of life,” with President Ronald Reagan saying in 1981 that “understanding the history of black Americans is a key to understanding the strength of our nation.”

The White House said Trump also plans an official proclamation as well as other events.

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