



Joseph Rainey



Todd Duncan

# SELECTED FIRSTS

## IN BLACK HISTORY

**GOVERNMENT** Originally born a slave, Joseph Rainey became politically active after the Civil War, working tirelessly for civil rights. In 1870 he became the first black U.S. Representative, eventually serving five terms as the representative for South Carolina.

**SCIENCE AND MEDICINE** In 1940, Charles Drew invented the blood bank, the method for collecting and storing large amounts of blood plasma for later use. In 1941 Drew also became the director of the first American Red Cross Blood Bank.

**LITERATURE AND PUBLISHING** In 1773, Phillis Wheatley published her book *Poems on Various Subject, Religious and Moral*. She is considered the founder of African-American literature.

**FILM** In 1919, Oscar Micheaux wrote, directed, and produced the film *The Homesteader*. Between 1919 and 1948, Micheaux produced and directed more than 45 films, and was one of the few independent filmmakers to have such a long and successful career outside of Hollywood.

**MUSIC** In 1945, Todd Duncan became the first African-American singer in the New York City Opera. He later went on to create the role of Porgy in Gershwin's famous musical *Porgy and Bess*.

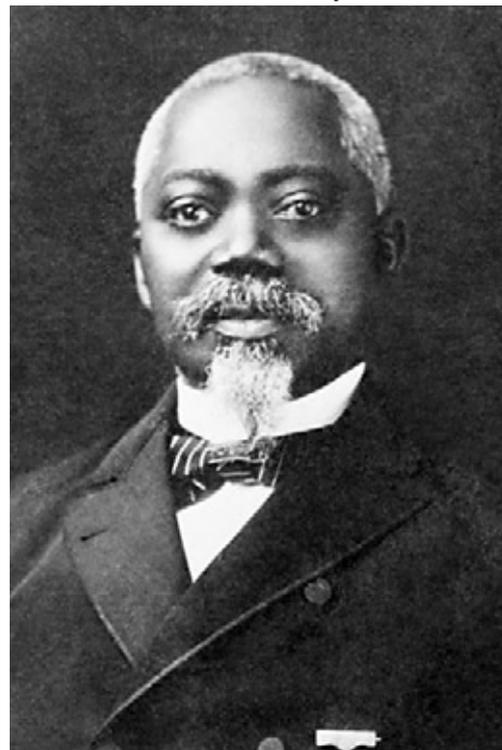
**AIR AND SPACE** Robert H. Lawrence became the first black astronaut in 1967, but died in a plane crash before his first trip into space. In 1983, Guion Bluford became the first black astronaut to travel into space.

**MILITARY** Sergeant William H. Carney received the Congressional Medal of Honor for bravery during the Civil War. During the battle at Fort Wagner, South Carolina, in 1863, Carney took over the position of flag-bearer from a wounded soldier, safely delivering the flag through the battle. His deed is depicted on the Saint-Gaudens Monument in Boston, Massachusetts.

**SPORTS** Jackie Robinson became the first black major league baseball player in 1947, when he joined New York's Brooklyn Dodgers. In 1962, Robinson also became the first African American to be elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame.



Phyllis Wheatley



William Carney

# BLACK HISTORY MONTH

F E B R U A R Y

**B**LACK HISTORY MONTH is one of the most widely-celebrated of federal months. It was originally established in 1926 as Negro History Week by noted African-American author and Harvard University scholar, Dr. Carter G. Woodson. Dr. Woodson's hope was that this special observance would remind all Americans of their ethnic roots, and that the commemoration would increase mutual respect. In 1976 the celebration was expanded to include the entire month, and it became known as Black History Month, also called African American History Month. The month of February was chosen since it contains the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglas. Lincoln is honored because of the Emancipation Proclamation (see page 16) that freed the slaves, and Douglas is honored as one of the most influential moral leaders, orators, and authors of American history.

One aim of Black History Month is to expose the harmful effects of racial prejudice; another is to recognize significant contributions made by people with African heritage, including artists, musicians, scientists, political figures, educators, and athletes. During February, cities, communities, and educational establishments feature speakers and community events, often focusing on the Civil Rights Movement. In classrooms, the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King (see page 7) is commonly a part of the curriculum. Dr. King focused his energy on organizing peaceful protest demonstrations and marches, mostly in the American southern states. He led the great march on Washington, D.C. in 1963 where he gave his famous "I Have A Dream" speech (see page 9). Dr. King advocated a non-violent approach to social change following the philosophy of

Mohandas Gandhi. Another community activist whose life is often a part of school curricula is Rosa Parks (see pages 7–8 ). In 1955, Rosa Parks refused to surrender her seat on the bus to a white passenger. By forcing the police to remove her, and then arrest and imprison her, she brought national attention to the civil rights movement. This incident later became a test case for repealing segregation laws.

## Glossary

**noted:** *adj.* important

**root(s):** *n.* origin

**mutual:** *adj.* two or more people feeling the same thing or doing the same thing to each other

**orator(s):** *n.* a person who gives skillful or effective public speeches

**expose:** *v.* to uncover; to allow to be seen

**feature:** *v.* to include as a special item

**activist:** *n.* a person who actively works for a political party or for political change

**surrender:** *v.* to give up

**repeal(ing):** *v.* to make a law no longer have any legal force