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# CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY

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# THE ORIGINS OF BLACK HISTORY MONTH

BY KRISTIN HOCKER, EdD

Many Americans recognize February as a time to celebrate Black History Month, but do you know the origins of this celebration?

It is attributed to historian Carter G. Woodson, who is known as the "Father of Black History Month." Motivated to celebrate the accomplishments of African Americans, Woodson founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in 1915. The son of former enslaved parents, Woodson became the second Black American to earn a PhD from Harvard (the first being sociologist and prolific scholar, W.E.B. DuBois).

Throughout his education career, Woodson noticed a significant absence in the public knowledge concerning the contribution of African Americans to American history. In addition to running the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, Woodson was an educator in public schools as well as in higher education. He served as the Dean at the School of Liberal Arts and Head of Graduate Faculty at Howard University from 1919-1920, and as Dean at the West Virginia Collegiate Institute. In 1916, Woodson initiated *The Journal of Negro History* and in 1937, *The Negro History Bulletin*; but he is most notable for his book, *The Miseducation of the Negro*, published in 1933.

In 1926, Woodson helped to establish the first Negro History Week in the second week of February to honor the birthday of abolitionist and diplomat, Frederick Douglass, and former president Abraham Lincoln. After decades of advocacy Black History Month was formally established as an official U.S. celebration in 1976, by then-president Gerald Ford.



Photo Source: Unknown, NPGallery

The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History evolved into the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH). In addition to upholding the tradition of scholarship Woodson had established, ASALH designates the annual theme of Black History Month. This year's theme is *The Black Family: Representation, Identity, and Diversity*. However, several social media influencers and higher education institutions have reframed Black History Month into Black Legacy Month.

Sources:

Bolden, M. (2021, February 6). "If a race has no history... it stands in the danger of being exterminated." Meet Carter G. Woodson, the "Father of Black History."

CBS: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/carter-g-woodson-father-of-black-history-month/>

National Park Service. (2020, July 17). Carter G. Woodson. NPS.gov.  
<https://www.nps.gov/cawo/learn/carter-g-woodson-biography.htm>

## A CELEBRATION OF BLACK NURSES IN CONGRESS

*DID YOU KNOW?*

Did you know that our Congress has three nurses in residence, all of whom are African American women?



Congresswoman Lauren Underwood (D-IL-14), is the youngest African American woman to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives.



Newly elected Congresswoman Cori Bush (D-MO-1), is the first Black woman to represent the state of Missouri in Congress.



Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX-30), has the distinction of being the first nurse elected to US Congress.

## SUPPORTING THE ROCHESTER BLACK NURSES ASSOCIATION (RBNA)

You can support the success of Black nurses here in Rochester by supporting the Rochester Black Nurses Association (RBNA). The RBNA started locally in 2018 as a chapter of the National Black Nurses Association (NBNA), organized in 1971 and representing 150,000 African American registered nurses, licensed vocational/practical nurses, nursing students, and retired nurses throughout the U.S., the Eastern Caribbean, and Africa. There are 92 chartered chapters of NBNA in 35 states. One way to support RBNA is through donations by designating RBNA for Amazon Smile donations. Another is to become involved in their work to identify ways to support Black nurses in the profession; visit RBNA's website to learn more. The University of Rochester School of Nursing is the supporting university of the RBNA.



# BLACK POETS & AUTHORS



Photo Source: Kelia Anne/Sun Literary Arts via AP



Photo Source: Stephanie Mitchell/Harvard Staff Photographer, *The Harvard Gazette*

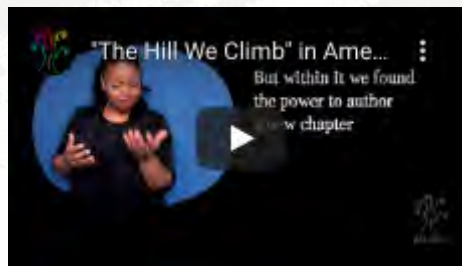
## WHO IS AMANDA GORMAN?

Born and raised in Los Angeles, California, Amanda Gorman was named the first-ever National Youth Poet Laureate of the United States. A graduate from Harvard University (2020), Gorman is the author of *The Hill We Climb: An Inaugural Poem for the Country*, the poetry collection *The Hill We Climb*, and *The One for Whom Food is Not Enough*. She is also founder and executive director of One Pen One Page, an organization providing free creative writing programs for underserved youth. Gorman was the youngest poet to have read the Inaugural poem, having been selected by President Biden to read her original poem "The Hill We Climb" for his Inauguration on January 20, 2021.

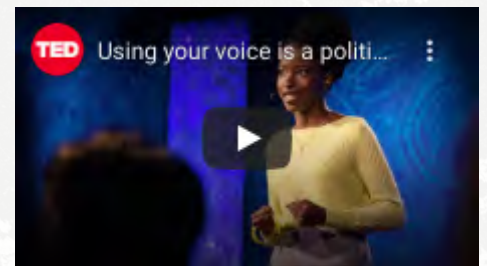
Source: [poets.org/poet/amanda-gorman](https://poets.org/poet/amanda-gorman)



WATCH: Amanda Gorman reads "The Hill We Climb" at the Inauguration of President Biden on Jan. 20, 2021.



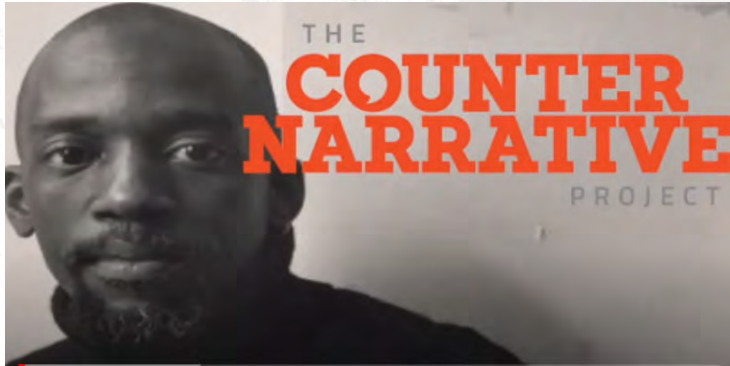
WATCH: A performance of "The Hill We Climb" provided in American Sign Language.



WATCH: Amanda Gorman discuss using your voice as a political choice.

**NOTE: You may have to disconnect from the University of Rochester's VPN in order to view YouTube videos.**

# BLACK AMERICAN POETS



WATCH: Cory Bradley read "For My Own Protection," by Essex Hemphill (pictured above). Essex Hemphill (1957-1995) was known for voicing issues central to the African American gay community.

Source: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/essex-hemphill>



WATCH: Tracy K. Smith read an excerpt from her long poem, "I will tell you the truth about this, I will tell you all about it." Smith was Poet Laureate of the United States from 2017 - 2019.

Source: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/tracy-k-smith>



LISTEN: Hear Nikki Giovanni read "Ego Tripping". Nikki Giovanni is one of America's most renowned poets and currently is a University Distinguished Professor at Virginia Tech.

Source: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/nikki-giovanni>

## ENGAGE WITH THE WORKS OF BLACK AUTHORS

In observance of Black History Month, the SON Council on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusiveness (CoDEI) would like to encourage you to curl up with a good book.

The four collections of short stories and poetry below represent a small sampling of the vast world of black authorship.

*The Thing Around Your Neck* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

*Bloodchild and Other Stories* by Octavia Butler.

*The 100 Best African American Poems* by Nikki Giovanni.

*You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* by Alice Walker.

Copies of these books can be found online or at your local library. Physical copies in libraries may be limited, but there are digital copies available for each of the short story collections through OverDrive and Hoopla (available through the Monroe County Library System). The poetry collection is currently only available in physical copy.

If you choose to purchase a physical copy of the book, we encourage you to source it from a black-owned book seller. There are a lot of great lists of these online. One such list can be found [here](#).

To participate in a Black authors reading group with fellow members of the SON community, please click [here](#), or contact Jonathan Wetherbee at [jwetherbee@urmc.rochester.edu](mailto:jwetherbee@urmc.rochester.edu).