

TIMELINE:

BLACK HISTORY THROUGH THE YEARS

1619–1865

Millions of people kidnapped from their homes across the continent of Africa are enslaved in the “New World.” In 1808, when importation of slaves from Africa is banned, there are 3.9 million slaves living in the U.S. On June 19, 1865 the last slaves are freed in Texas, more than two and a half years after President Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation.

1831

Nat Turner leads the largest slave rebellion prior to the Civil War in Southampton County, Virginia. Rebelling slaves kill more than 50 people. Turner survives in hiding for more than two months after the rebellion is stomped out.

1847

Abolitionist Frederick Douglass founds *The North Star*, an anti-slavery newspaper based in Rochester, New York. The paper eventually gains more than 4,000 readers across the U.S., Europe and the West Indies.

1849

Harriet Tubman escapes to Philadelphia and helps about 300 enslaved people escape to the North for freedom via the Underground Railroad, a network of secret routes and safe houses to aid slaves in their escape.

1857

Dred Scott, an enslaved man, sues for freedom for himself and his wife, Harriet Robinson Scott. For four years, the couple lived in Illinois and Wisconsin territory, where slavery was illegal, and laws said that slaveholders from other states gave up their rights to own enslaved people if they visited for an extended period of time. The case, *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, became a nearly decade-long fight through several courts before reaching the Supreme Court. The Court ruled 7–2 against Scott, saying that no Black person could claim citizenship in the U.S. The decision helped stoke the fire for the Civil War in 1861.

1868

The 14th Amendment, which allows Black people to be considered U.S. citizens, is ratified.

1870

The 15th Amendment is ratified, guaranteeing that the right to vote cannot be denied because of race, color or previous condition of servitude.

Hiram Rhodes Revels becomes the first Black and Native American member of Congress, representing Mississippi as a Republican.

1888

The True Reformers Bank, the first officially chartered Black-owned bank, is founded by Reverend William Washington Browne, a former slave and soldier. It opens a year later. The [Capitol Savings Bank](#) in Washington, D.C. opens in 1888 becoming the first Black-owned bank to open.

1889

Journalist and activist Ida B. Wells becomes co-owner of the *Memphis Free Speech and Headlight* newspaper [founded](#) in 1888 by the Reverend Taylor Nightingale, and launches an anti-lynching campaign.

1896

The U.S. Supreme Court rules in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that segregation doesn't violate the 14th Amendment's equal-protection clause as long as conditions provided are “separate but equal.”



Ida B. Wells (Public Domain image)

1900

William H. Carney becomes the first Black soldier to be awarded the Medal of Honor for his valiant work protecting the regimental colors during the Battle of Fort Wagner in 1863.

1909

A group of Black and white activists, including W.E.B. Du Bois and Ida B. Wells found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

1921

The Tulsa Race Massacre, also known as the Black Wall Street Massacre, takes place as mobs of white people attack the economically thriving Black neighborhood in the Greenwood District of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Hundreds of people were killed and thousands left homeless, leaving a devastating mark on Black wealth in the U.S.

1938

Singer Ella Fitzgerald releases a playfully sung version of the nursery rhyme “[A-Tisket, A-Tasket](#).” It goes on to be her first hit, staying on the pop charts for 19 weeks and sold 1 million copies.

1939

Singer Billie Holiday gives her first performance of the biting anti-lynching song “Strange Fruit,” at Café Society, New York’s first integrated nightclub. The song goes down in history as one of Holiday’s most gripping performances, and Holiday goes down in history as a jazz superstar.

1947

Jackie Robinson becomes first Black person to play Major League Baseball.

1950

Ralph J. Bunche becomes first Black person to win the Nobel Peace Prize for his work with the U.N. in the 1940s to mediate the Arab-Israeli conflict in Palestine.

1954

In *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that racial segregation in public schools violates the 14th Amendment.

1955

Rosa Parks refuses to give up her seat on a bus to a white man in Montgomery, Alabama. Her arrest leads to the Montgomery Bus Boycott, led in part by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

1957

The Little Rock Nine integrates Little Rock Central High School in Arkansas.

1959

Fifteen-year-old Diana Ross begins singing in a group called The Primettes, later to be renamed The Supremes. Though the group only lasts a few years, Ross and the Motown movement become internationally famous. Ross goes on to become one of the first major Black international superstars, having success in music, film and television.

1961

Freedom Rides begin in Washington, D.C. Activists ride buses throughout the segregated South to protest segregation on buses.

1962

Astronaut John Glenn becomes the first American to orbit Earth. Behind this achievement are thousands of people — including a group of Black women who were “human computers” calculating the precise math behind the landing. They include NASA’s first African American supervisor Dorothy Vaughan, mathematician Katherine Johnson and aeronautical engineer Mary Jackson.

1963

More than 200,000 people march on Washington, D.C.; Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gives his historic “I Have a Dream” speech.



The March on Washington (Public Domain image)

1964

President Johnson signs Civil Rights Act of 1964, giving government more power to protect citizens against race, religion, sex or national-origin discrimination.

Bahamian-American actor Sidney Poitier becomes the first Black man to win the Academy Award for Best Actor for his role as Homer Smith in *Lilies of the Field*.

1965

Malcolm X, civil rights activist and former minister in the Nation of Islam, is assassinated in New York City.

1967

Thurgood Marshall becomes first Black U.S. Supreme Court justice. Some of his notable stances include opposing the death penalty and supporting the right to abortion.

1968

Dr. King is assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee.

Democrat Shirley Chisholm becomes the first Black woman elected to the U.S. Congress, representing New York's 12th district. She goes on to become the Secretary of the House Democratic Caucus.

1969

President Richard Nixon authorizes the Office of Minority Business Enterprise — later renamed the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) — to support the expansion of minority-owned businesses.

1970

The Black Business Association is founded to support entrepreneurship and development of Black-owned businesses.

1971

Hair care company Johnson Products (founded by the husband and wife team of George and Joan Johnson) becomes the first Black-owned company to be listed on the American Stock Exchange.

1972

Democrat Shirley Chisholm becomes first Black candidate from a major party to run for president.

1984

Civil rights activist Rev. Jesse Jackson becomes second Black person to make a bid for the presidency, running as a Democrat.

1987

Dr. Clifton R. Wharton, Jr. of TIAA-CREF (now a Diversity-Inc [Top 10](#) company), becomes the first Black chairman and CEO on the Fortune 500. Roger W. Ferguson Jr., who is also Black, goes on to become the company's CEO in 2008.

1989

Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw, a legal scholar and activist, coins the term “intersectionality” to describe the specific forms of compounding discrimination people face based on their race, class, sexuality, gender and ability.

1990

Democrat Lawrence Douglas Wilder of Virginia becomes the first Black person to be elected governor.

Trumpeter, composer, vocalist and actor Louis Armstrong is inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as an early musical influence.

1991

President George H.W. Bush signs the Civil Rights Act of 1991, which strengthens laws on employment discrimination. It provided the legal right to trial by jury on claims of discrimination and the possibility of emotional distress damages, as well as limiting the monetary amount that a jury could award.

1993

Dr. Joycelyn Elders becomes first Black Surgeon General, known for her views on progressive issues such as drug legalization and distributing contraception in schools.

2001

Republican four-star General Colin Powell becomes first Black Secretary of State under President George W. Bush.

2003

Talk show host Oprah Winfrey becomes the first Black woman billionaire to be named on Forbes' "World's Richest People" list. Winfrey grew up in rural poverty and worked her way up as a news anchor to eventually host her syndicated talk show.

2009

Barack Obama becomes the U.S.'s first Black President.

2010

Beyoncé becomes the first woman to win six Grammys in one night. As of now, she has 24.

Poet and author Maya Angelou is awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom for being one of the most prolific writers and activists of her time.

2012

George Zimmerman fatally shoots 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, who was walking in a gated neighborhood unarmed. Nationwide protests begin. Zimmerman is acquitted in 2013.

2013

Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi create Black Lives Matter, a Black-centered activism movement calling for racial justice.

2014

NYPD officer Daniel Pantaleo places Eric Garner in an illegal chokehold, killing him. Garner was unarmed. His last words, "I can't breathe" become a Black Lives Matter rallying cry. Pantaleo is ultimately removed from the NYPD but federal prosecutors decided in 2019 not to bring charges against him.

2017

Lt. Gen. Stayce D. Harris, who is the highest-ranking Black woman pilot in all U.S. armed forces, gets inducted into the Women in Aviation International's Pioneer Hall of Fame.

2019

Congresswoman Maxine Waters, a Democrat from California, founds the Subcommittee on Diversity and Inclusion as part of the House Committee on Financial Services. Erica Miles is chosen to become the subcommittee's director of diversity and inclusion.

2020

After police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and many other unarmed Black people, nationwide protests against systemic racial injustice in America begin. Protestors, often faced with brutal treatment from the police, demand jurisdictions to reduce police budgets and invest instead in communities. These demonstrations trigger a reckoning, demanding politicians, business leaders and citizens to take action against racism and injustice.

California Senator Kamala Harris becomes the first Black and South Asian woman to be the Vice President-elect alongside President-elect Joe Biden. A record number of Black people vote in the 2020 election, thanks largely to the lobbying efforts of Black politicians including politician and voting rights activist Stacey Abrams, who registered 800,000 voters during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2021

Georgia runoff elections flip the Senate to a Democratic majority. Newly elected senator Raphael Warnock delivers a victory speech, talking about how his elderly mother who lived through segregation, now got to vote for her son.

Kamala Harris is sworn in as Vice President.

Rosalind Brewer becomes the CEO of Walgreens, making her the only Black woman leading a Fortune 500 company.



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