

African Heritage Month is a period dedicated to the recognition, learning, and celebration of Black History, culture and achievements in North America. The history of Black people in Nova Scotia is especially long and distinguished, making February particularly special in our province.

The month-long celebration emerged from Negro History Week, which was started in 1926 by Carter G. Woodson (1875-1950), a Black historian, educator and publisher from New Canton, Virginia. Woodson attended Bere College, the University of Chicago, Harvard and the Sorbonne in Paris. In 1915 he was a pioneer organizer of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. The Association was the sole professional agency concerned with preserving the historical record of the blacks in American life. Woodson organized the Association Publishers in 1916 in order to produce textbooks and other supplementary material on blacks which, at the time, was not readily accepted by most publishers. Many of Woodson's books have become the foundation upon which most contemporary historians have based their own research.

Woodson inaugurated Negro History Week to honour, primarily in schools, the leaders of the black freedom struggle. The week in February was initially chosen because the birthdays of U.S. President Abraham Lincoln, who signed the Emancipation Proclamation, and the emancipator/orator Frederick Douglas fell on February 12 and 14 respectively. Negro History Week eventually became known as Black History Week, and in 1976 the entire month of February was designated Black History Month.

In 1995, a unanimous motion was passed in the House of Commons to designate every February to be Black History Month across Canada. The motion affirmed the contributions of people of African descent in Canada and stated:

"That this House take note of the important contribution of Black Canadians to the settlement, growth and development of Canada, the diversity of the Black Community in Canada and its importance in the history of the country."

In recent years we have moved from the name Black History Month to the name African Heritage Month. However, even with the change of name the focus will always be to celebrate the richness and diversity of the African culture in North America, and Nova Scotia in particular.

AFRICAN HERITAGE MONTH

A brief history
of the
celebration

