

Celebrating Black History Month through education

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
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Black History Month, or National African American History Month, is an annual celebration of achievements by black Americans and a time for recognizing the central role of African Americans in American history. Gallup doesn't have a huge quantity of black Americans, but prior to the building of Interstate 40, the city, like its nearby sister cities Holbrook and Winslow, boasted a lot more.

The historic month grew out of Negro History Week, the brainchild of noted historian Carter G. Woodson and other prominent African Americans. Since 1976, every U.S. president has designated February as Black History Month and the time is typically honored with marches and gatherings that commemorate the date. Some people suggest that February was chosen because it's the shortest month of the year, which is untrue but, nevertheless, has developed into a running series of jokes across the U.S.

Technically, Black History Month began in 1915, half a century after the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery in the United States. The Harvard-educated Woodson, and the Ohio-born prominent minister and civic activist Jesse Moorland founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, an organization dedicated to researching and promoting achievements by black Americans and other peoples of African descent. Moorland went on to be an ordained Congressional minister and headed up the Washington, D.C., branch of the YMCA.

Woodson's and Moorland's history group sponsored a Negro History Week in 1926, choosing the second week of February to coincide with the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and abolitionist Frederick Douglass. The event inspired schools and communities nationwide to organize local celebrations, establish history clubs sponsor performances and lectures. Since then every American president has designated February as Black History Month.

Around Gallup, the Octavia Fellin Library holds historical lectures and is known to provide an art exhibit – including one this year by Boston-transplant and former college professor Dana Chandler. The annual Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., march, put together in January by resident Mona Frazier, is well-attended by kids and adults from the area.

Here 's to those, dignitaries and regular folk, who share in the education of Black History Month.

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