

FEBRUARY IS

U.S. CAPITOL
Visitor Center

African American HISTORY MONTH

African American History Week was conceived by Carter G. Woodson who hoped to raise awareness of the contributions of African Americans to civilization. It was first celebrated as a week in February 1926 encompassing the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. The celebration was expanded to the entire month of February in 1976.

African Americans in the U.S. Senate



Blanche K. Bruce

In 1870, Hiram Revels of Mississippi became the first African American senator. Five years later, Blanche K. Bruce of Mississippi took the oath of office, and he became the first African American to preside over the Senate in 1879. Nearly a century passed before another African American followed in their footsteps when Edward Brooke of Massachusetts took office in 1967.

From Illinois, Carol Moseley Braun became the first African American female senator in 1993. As of February 1, 2013, for the first time in history, two African Americans are serving in the Senate simultaneously, Tim Scott from South Carolina and William “Mo” Cowan from Massachusetts.

Alfonso E. Lenhardt was the first African American to serve as an officer of the Senate – he was the 36th Senate Sergeant at Arms, 2001 – 2003. Now he is the United States Ambassador to the United Republic of Tanzania.



Alfonso E. Lenhardt

Joseph Rainey of South Carolina Serves as First African American Representative



Joseph Rainey

A slave in his youth, Joseph Rainey of South Carolina was the first African American to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives. When Speaker James G. Blaine turned over the gavel temporarily to Rainey during a debate in 1874, Rainey became the first African American to preside over the House. Despite being a member of Congress, he was still refused service in a Virginia dining room.



Tuskegee Airmen in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda

Congressional Gold Medal of Honor Presented to Tuskegee Airmen

The Tuskegee Airmen were the first African American military aviators in the U.S. armed forces. During World War II, the American military was racially segregated, as was much of the federal government. The Tuskegee Airmen, who trained in Tuskegee, Alabama, were subjected to racial discrimination, both within and outside of the Army. Despite this, they trained and flew with distinction. Before the Tuskegee Airmen, no African American had been a U.S. military pilot. On March 29, 2007, approximately 300 Tuskegee Airmen or their widows were collectively awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda.

Montford Point Marines Honored in Emancipation Hall in the Capitol Visitor Center

In 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established a presidential directive giving African Americans an opportunity to be recruited into the Marine Corps. The African American recruits, who were from all over the country, were not sent to the traditional Marine boot camps. Instead, African American Marines were segregated and experienced basic training at Montford Point, a facility at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. Approximately 20,000 African American Marines received basic training at Montford Point between 1942 and 1949. On June 27, 2012, in

Emancipation Hall in the Capitol Visitor Center, the Congressional Gold Medal of Honor was presented to approximately 360 surviving Montford Point Marines.



Congressional Gold Medal of Honor Ceremony for the Montford Point Marines

Rosa Parks

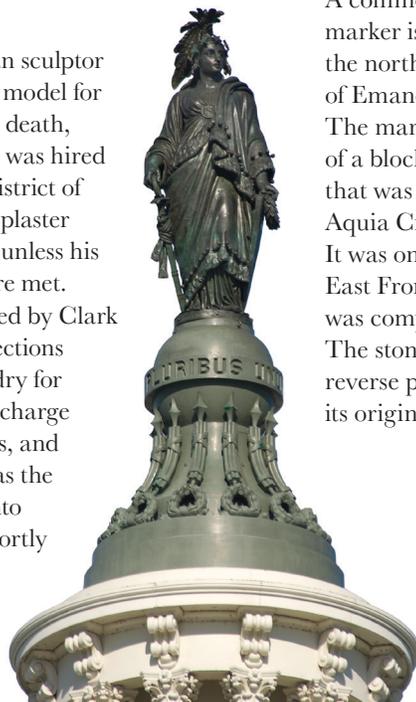
On October 31, 2005, Rosa Parks became the first woman to lie in honor in the Capitol Rotunda. Fifty years before that, on December 1, 42-year-old Rosa Parks, who worked as a seamstress, boarded a Montgomery, Alabama city bus to go home from work. On that bus on that day, by quietly but firmly refusing to give up her seat for a white man, she initiated a new era in the American quest for freedom and equality. Rosa Parks received a Congressional Medal of Honor on June 15, 1999. On February 5, 2013, the Postal Service honored Rosa Parks with a commemorative stamp on the 100th anniversary of her birth.



Rosa Parks, the first woman to lie in honor in the Capitol Rotunda

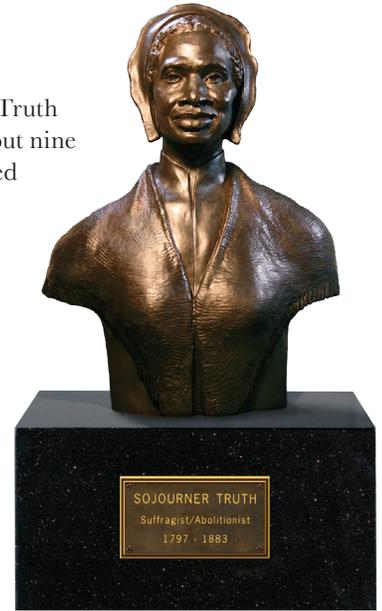
Philip Reid

In 1857, Thomas Crawford, an American sculptor working in Rome, completed the plaster model for the Statue of Freedom. After Crawford's death, another American sculptor, Clark Mills, was hired to cast the statue at his foundry in the District of Columbia. The worker who had put the plaster model together refused to disassemble it unless his unreasonable demands for extra pay were met. Philip Reid, an enslaved craftsman owned by Clark Mills, determined how to separate the sections so that they could be moved to the foundry for casting. At the foundry, Reid was put in charge of keeping the fire going under the molds, and he worked with other enslaved laborers as the sections of the plaster model were cast into bronze. Philip Reid was emancipated shortly before the completed bronze statue was moved to the Capitol Grounds in 1862, and he was a free man when the last piece was put in place on the Dome on December 2, 1863.



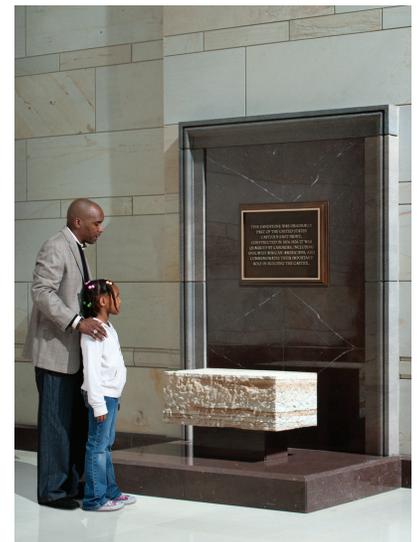
Sojourner Truth

Born into slavery as Isabella Baumfree in 1797, Sojourner Truth was first sold at auction at about nine years old. Isabella was enslaved to five owners by the age of 30 but in 1826 courageously walked away to be free. Inspired by her religious beliefs, Isabella changed her name to Sojourner Truth and began preaching about abolition and women's rights. Sojourner Truth's bust by Artis Lane is the first sculpture to honor an African American woman in the U.S. Capitol and was unveiled in Emancipation Hall in 2009. The bust is located near the entrance to Exhibition Hall on the lower level of the Capitol Visitor Center.



Emancipation Hall in the Capitol Visitor Center

On December 18, 2007, Congress passed legislation to name the Capitol Visitor Center's central space "Emancipation Hall" to recognize the contributions of enslaved laborers who helped build the U.S. Capitol. From the time the Capitol's cornerstone was set in 1793 until the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, enslaved laborers performed many skilled construction jobs, such as quarrying the stone that comprises many of the Capitol's floors, walls, and columns. A commemorative marker is located in the northwest corner of Emancipation Hall. The marker is made up of a block of sandstone that was quarried from Aquia Creek in Virginia. It was once a part of the East Front portico, which was completed in 1826. The stone is presented in reverse position to feature its original chisel marks.



Slave Labor Commemorative Marker