Fun Facts: African American (Black) History Month

Origin of African American History Month

American historian Carter G. Woodson established Black History Week (then called “Negro History Week”) nearly a century ago to spotlight the accomplishments of African Americans. It was first celebrated during the second week of February in 1926 to coincide with the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln (February 12) and abolitionist/editor Frederick Douglass (February 14). In 1976, as part of the nation’s bicentennial, the week was expanded to a month. Since then, U.S. presidents have proclaimed February National African American History Month.

Population of African Americans

About 12% or 41 million – The number of African Americans in the United States in 2020. These places have among the highest percentage of African American residents:

- **41%** District of Columbia
- **37%** Mississippi

Birthplace Populations of Famous African Americans

- **Kenny Washington** – Los Angeles, California (Pop. ~ 3,898,747) First Black NFL player.
- **Benjamin O. Davis Sr.** – Washington, D.C. (Pop. ~ 689,545) First African American general in the U.S. Army.
- **Norbert Rillieux** – New Orleans, Louisiana (Pop. ~ 383,997) Most noted for inventing an energy-efficient means of evaporating water.
- **Ella Fitzgerald** – Newport News, Virginia (Pop. ~ 186,247) Jazz singer known as the “First Lady of Song;” winner of 13 Grammy awards.
- **Harriet Wilson** – Milford, New Hampshire (Pop. ~ 9,212) First African American of either gender to publish a novel on the North American continent.
- **Bessie Coleman** – Atlanta, Texas (Pop. ~ 5,433) First Black person to earn an international pilot’s license and the first Black woman to hold a pilot’s license.

What’s the Age?

Roughly 35 years – The median age of the African American population in 2019.

Occupations

Held by African Americans 16 years old and older:
- About 3 out of 10 (32%) work in management, professional and related occupations.
- About 2 out of 10 (24%) work in service occupations.
- About 2 out of 10 (21%) work in sales and office occupations.
- About 1 out of 10 (17%) work in production, transportation, and material moving occupations.

Education on the Rise

Percent of the Black population 25 and over who completed high school or college:
- 2020 ~ 89%
- 2010 ~ 84%
- 2000 ~ 79%
- 1990 ~ 66%

Notes: All the data on this page, except the birthplace populations, are for the Black or African American alone population. Data are rounded for educational attainment and occupations and may not equal 100%.