



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education

DATE: January 24, 2020
TO: Division Superintendents
FROM: James F. Lane, Ed.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction
SUBJECT: **Black History Month Resources**

As our nation observes Black History Month, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) is pleased to provide school divisions with Black History Month resources that honor African Americans and celebrate their achievements and contributions to America.

In 1925, Carter G. Woodson and the organization he founded—the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH)—conceived and announced Negro History Week. Expanded to a month in 1976, ASNLH, now the [Association for the Study of African American Life and History \(ASALH\)](#), continues to promote the study of Black history all year.

Each year, the ASALH establishes a Black History Month theme that emphasizes important developments relevant to the Black experience; the [2020 theme](#) is African Americans and the Vote, which recognizes that although 2020 marks the centennial of the Nineteenth Amendment granting women the right to vote, as well as the sesquicentennial of the Fifteenth Amendment granting Black men the right to vote, the African American struggle for equal access to voting rights has continued well into the 21st century. Through voting-rights campaigns and legal suits from the turn of the twentieth century to the mid-1960s, African Americans made their voices heard, highlighting the synonymous nature of Black history and American history.

Local school divisions are encouraged to seek and develop instructional and community programming that highlights Black history not only during February, but also throughout the entire year. For greater understanding and deeper connection, activities should aim to:

- a) Engage students, teachers, parents and the community at large;
- b) Align with the national theme for Black History Month; and
- c) Provide opportunities for ALL staff to enhance their understanding of the role of African Americans in helping to build America.

In 2016, 44th President, Barack Obama expressed his sentiments regarding Black History Month, noting that Black history is integral to America's story:

...Black History Month shouldn't be treated as though it is somehow separate from our collective American history or somehow just boiled down to a compilation of greatest hits from the March on Washington, or from some of our sports heroes... we know that this should be more than just a commemoration of particular events... It's about the lived, shared experience of all African Americans, high and low, famous and obscure, and how those experiences have shaped and challenged and ultimately strengthened America.

Lending credence to the essence of the aforementioned quote, the materials enclosed emphasize an interdisciplinary approach that extends Black History Month and the Black narrative beyond merely twenty-eight days of highlights to creating inclusive, year round lesson plans. The resources below support local school division's instructional programming:

- The [National Museum of African American History and Culture](#) is the only national museum devoted exclusively to the documentation of African American life, history, and culture Established by Act of Congress in 2003, following decades of efforts to promote and highlight the contributions of African Americans.
- [Association for the Study of African American Life and History \(ASALH\)](#), publishing several scholarly works and establishing Negro History Week, the precursor to Black History Month.
- The [Library of Congress](#), [National Archives and Records Administration](#), [National Endowment for the Humanities](#), [National Gallery of Art](#), [National Park Service](#), [Smithsonian Institution](#), and [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#) join in paying tribute to the generations of African Americans who struggled with adversity to achieve full citizenship in American society at [February is African American History Month](#) and [National Archives Black History](#).
- The Library of Virginia focuses on topics in Virginia history and includes [African American History Sites](#).
- The [Virginia's Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission](#) website includes the following resources:
 - [Emancipation Proclamation Sesquicentennial](#)
 - [RESOURCES from the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Commission](#)
 - [RESOURCES from the Abraham Lincoln Subcommittee](#)
 - [RESOURCES from the 50th Anniversary of Public School Closings in Virginia](#).
- Virginia's [2019 AMERICAN EVOLUTION™ commemoration](#) - highlights the significance and modern relevance of several important events that occurred in Virginia in 1619. Explore the 2019 commemoration's [education resources](#), including primary source materials, videos, and innovative lesson ideas to use in your classroom all year long!
- [Civil Rights and Racial Healing](#) - Classroom discussions about Civil Rights struggles in historic places can help communities toward racial healing. In honor of the American pursuit of justice, The National Park Service highlights Teaching with Historic Places lesson plans that focus on Civil Rights and Racial Healing. Created by interpreters,

preservation professionals, and educators, these lessons are free and ready for immediate classroom use and are adaptable for most grade levels

Additionally, on August 24th, Governor Ralph Northam established the [Commission on African American History Education](#). The group is charged with examining and making recommendations on the professional development supports needed to equip all teachers for culturally competent instruction and reviewing Virginia's history standards, instructional practices, content, and resources currently used to teach African American history in the Commonwealth.

Parents, students, educators, leaders, and all interested community members are encouraged to share their needs, goals and insights as to how best to achieve the commission's goals during a series of public listening sessions. Listening sessions begin in February; the symbolic backdrop of Black History Month offers important context that highlights the greater significance of the commission's work. Additional sessions to be held in March will be announced at a later date.

Sessions are scheduled for:

Tuesday, February 11, 2020 Roanoke, Virginia Harrison Museum of African American Culture 6:00PM-7:30PM <i>Educator Panel</i>	Wednesday, February 12, 2020 Richmond, Virginia Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia 6:00PM-7:30PM <i>Parents and Stakeholder Panel</i>	Thursday, February 13, 2020 Danville, Virginia J.M Langston High School Danville Public Schools 6:00PM-7:30PM <i>Student Panel</i>
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Virginians who wish to contribute to the conversation but are unable to attend sessions physically may submit feedback to edequityva@doe.virginia.gov. All feedback will be shared with members of the commission.

For more instructional support and information, please contact the [Division of Learning and Innovation](#) or call (804) 225-2034. For more information regarding programming for community engagement, please contact Jenné Nurse in the office of Equity and Community Engagement at jenne.nurse@doe.virginia.gov.

JFL/TMM/ldw