

February is
**African American History
Month.**

After we recognize Carter G. Woodson, the founder of the month, and the Coretta Scott King Award given each year to an African American author and illustrator, you will learn about iconic people and places in Memphis, Tennessee.



Carter G. Woodson

THE FATHER OF
BLACK HISTORY

Carter G. Woodson (1875-1950)

American historian Carter G. Woodson established the second week in February as Black History Week in 1926. He chose that week because it included the birthdays of U.S. President Abraham Lincoln (born February 12), who issued the Emancipation Proclamation, and African American abolitionist, author, and orator Frederick Douglass (born February 14). The week was set aside for the event until 1976, when it was expanded to a month. Since then, all U.S. presidents have proclaimed February as National African American History Month. Canada celebrates African American History Month in February, and the United Kingdom celebrates the month in October.



The Coretta Scott King Book Awards are given annually to outstanding African American authors and illustrators of books for children and young adults. The chosen books demonstrate an appreciation of African American culture and universal human values. The award commemorates the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who was assassinated in Memphis in 1968. The award also honors his wife, Mrs. Coretta Scott King, for her courage and determination to continue her husband's work for peace and world brotherhood. Our library has a poster of the winners of this prestigious award and the age-appropriate books which received the award.



The National Civil Rights Museum is a complex of museums and historic buildings in Memphis, Tennessee. Its exhibits trace the history of the civil rights movement in the United States from the 17th century to the present. The museum is built around the former Lorraine Motel, which was the site of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968. Two other buildings, also connected with the King assassination, have been acquired as part of the museum complex.

In 2014, the museum underwent major renovations to increase the number of multi-media and interactive exhibits, including numerous short movies. The museum is owned and operated by the Lorraine Civil Rights Museum Foundation, which is based in Memphis. In 2016, the museum was honored by becoming a Smithsonian Affiliate museum. It is also on the National Register of Historic Places.



Beale Street is in downtown Memphis and runs from the Mississippi River to East Street, about 1.8 miles. It is a significant location in the city's history, as well as in the history of blues music. Today, the blues clubs and restaurants on Beale Street are major tourist attractions. Festivals and outdoor concerts bring large crowds to the street and its surrounding areas.

Beale Street was created in 1841 by entrepreneur and developer Robertson Topp (1807–1876). It was named for a Mexican American War military hero, Edward Fitzgerald "Ned" Beale.

In 2020, the Beale Street Historic District was added to the U.S. Civil Rights Trail and is one of 150 locations across 15 states on the trail.



Robert Reed Church, Sr. (June 18, 1839 – August 29, 1912) was an African American entrepreneur, businessman, and landowner in Memphis, Tennessee.

He rose to prominence during the American Civil War and became the first African American millionaire in the South. Church built a reputation for great wealth and influence in the business community. He founded, the first African American owned bank in the city Solvent Savings Bank, which gave credit to African Americans so they could buy homes and develop businesses. As a philanthropist, Church used his wealth to develop a park, playground, auditorium and other facilities for the African American community. Though he generally stayed behind the political scene, he had great political influence in Memphis and nationally. He was chosen as a delegate for the future President William McKinley for the 1900 Republican Convention.



William Christopher (W. C.) Handy (1873 - 1958) was an African American blues composer, known as "The Father of the Blues." Born in Florence, Alabama, 1909, Handy and his band moved to Memphis, Tennessee, in 1909, where they played in the clubs on Beale Street.

Handy was a trained musician who used folk material in his compositions. He carefully documented the sources of his works, often combining work from several performers. He loved this simple early music. Still, it is unquestioned that he brought his own touch to it. His most famous composition is "The Memphis Blues," written in 1909 and published in 1912.

Handy was a founder of Black Swan Records, the first African American owned record company. He received a Grammy Trustees Award for lifetime achievement in 1993.



Built by freed slaves, the First Baptist Church at 379 Beale Street (also known as Beale Street Baptist Church and “The Mother of Black Churches”) is more than just a place of worship. It served as a place of refuge for escaping slaves during and after the Civil War. The foundation stone was laid in 1869 and was constructed between 1871 and 1885. In the late 1880s, the church also housed the newspaper office of Ida B. Wells, the famous civil rights journalist. Over the years, Ulysses S. Grant and Teddy Roosevelt made visits to the church. The church also became a popular meeting place for those involved in the civil rights movement of the fifties and sixties and was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1971. Sunday School at 9 am and 11 am Worship Services continue today.



Ida B. Wells Barnett

NAACP CO-FOUNDER

Ida B. Wells Barnett (1862-1931)

As we learned yesterday, Barnett had offices in the First Baptist Church on Beale Street where she where she was part-owner and wrote articles for *The Memphis Free Speech*, an African American newspaper. In 1910, she co-founded the NAACP.

Born to slaves in Holly Springs, Mississippi, Wells earned degrees from Rust College and Fisk University. Her earliest job was teaching in Memphis. She traveled across the country and in Europe to expose racial injustice. Wells was the most famous African American female journalist of her time writing articles for *The New York Age*, *The Chicago Defender*, *the Memphis Watchman*, *Detroit Plain Dealer*, *Indianapolis World*, *Little Rock Sun* and Chicago's *The Conservator*, a paper jointly owned by her husband, Ferdinand Barnett.



Slave Haven Underground Railroad Museum

The underground railroad helped African Americans fleeing a life of slavery. This 19th-century-house-turned-museum at 826 N. Second Street in downtown Memphis played an important part in this brave plan of escape. The museum is run by Elaine Lee Turner, who along with her sisters, were active members of the Civil Rights Movement. They were arrested numerous times for their many acts of defiance. Visitors to Slave Haven can see the secret doors and dark cellars that once were used to hide escaping slaves and walk around to get a true feel of what it would have been like in this home during that period in history.



Stax Museum of American Soul Music

In the fifties and sixties, Stax Records was a powerful force in bringing soul music to the attention of all of America. With its roots in the gospel songs of the African American experience, soul music was the soundtrack to most American youth at the time and was undeniably the soundtrack to the civil rights movement as well. Otis Redding and Isaac Hayes were just a couple of the amazingly talented artists who recorded at this legendary Memphis studio, producing hit after hit.

The museum has an impressive collection of musical artifacts. One of the highlights is Isaac Hayes' gold-plated Cadillac Eldorado that has a refrigerated mini-bar, television, and floorboards covered in white fur carpeting.



The Four Way Restaurant

This restaurant at 998 Mississippi Boulevard in Memphis is a popular soul food diner that serves southern food like fried chicken, turnip greens, and fried green tomatoes. But the real main course served in this restaurant is its historic role in the Civil Rights Movement. The diner acted as an important meeting place for civil rights leaders planning protests and activities in Memphis. It was one of Dr. Martin Luther King's favorite places to meet, talk, and eat "soul food." The diner was also a favorite lunch spot for artists at Stax Records like Aretha Franklin and B.B. King.



Bronze statue of Tom Lee rescuing a drowning passenger

This riverfront park is named for Tom Lee, an African American river worker. On May 8, 1925, the M.E. Norman steamboat filled with sightseers capsized and sank in the swift current of the Mississippi River 15 miles downriver from Memphis at Cow Island Bend. Although he could not swim, Lee, the only witness to the sinking, used his small boat to rescue 32 people in five trips to the shore. Lee acted quickly, calmly and with no regard for his own safety, continuing to search for survivors after night fell. Because of his efforts, only 23 people died.

In October 2006, a bronze sculpture was erected in the park to commemorate the event and to honor the hero. The sculpture depicts the rescue of a survivor saved from drowning in the Mississippi River.



The Orange Mound neighborhood in Memphis was the first neighborhood in the history of America, to be built by and for African Americans. “The Mound” became an official part of Memphis in 1919.

The land was developed in the 1890s to provide affordable property where African Americans could build houses, schools, churches and businesses. Lots were sold for less than \$100.

Orange Mound not only has a strong sense of pride among its natives but is also rooted in civil rights history and progress. Located in Orange Mound, Mt. Pisgah C.M.E. Church, Mount Moriah Missionary Baptist Church, and Beulah Baptist Church all played important roles in the Civil Rights Movement by assisting and supporting various activists in their work and providing a place of refuge during segregation.

In 2016, Michelle Obama proclaimed Orange Mound as a Preserve America Historic Neighborhood.



B.B. King, was an African American blues musician. After serving in World War II, Riley B. King, better known as B.B. King, became a disc jockey in Memphis, Tennessee, where he was dubbed "the Beale Street Blues Boy." That nickname was soon shortened to "*B.B.*" King cut his first record in 1949. His innovative style quickly turned him into a local and then national success.

King released 75 hit R&B singles between 1951 and 1992. Among his greatest hits is "The Thrill is Gone." King has influenced many musicians who came after him. His legacy lives on even after his death in 2015, as his music continues to be played in the clubs on Beale Street and around the world. Third Street has been renamed "B.B. King Boulevard" in his honor. He was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2006, The Kennedy Center Honors in 1995, and was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES IN THE CHURCH OF GOD IN CHRIST



BISHOP C.H. MASON

#BLACKHISTORY | #COGICHISTORY | #OURSTORY

Charles Harrison Mason, Sr. (September 8, 1864 – November 17, 1961) was born in 1866 to former slaves. From those humble beginnings, he rose to become an American Pentecostal–Holiness pastor and minister and was the founder and first Senior Bishop of the Church of God in Christ (C.O.G.I.C.).

In 1945, Mason dedicated the Mason Temple in Memphis as the church's national meeting site and the international headquarters of the Church of God in Christ.

At the time of Mason's death on Nov. 17, 1961, COGIC had a membership of more than 400,000 and more than 4,000 churches in United States as well as congregations in Europe, South America, Africa, and Asia.

Today, it has an estimated 6.5 million members. C.O.G.I.C. can be found in every state in the United States and in more than 60 countries around the world.



The Mason Temple

Yesterday, we learned about Bishop C. H. Mason, who founded The Church of God in Christ (C.O.G.I.C.).

The Mason Temple, named for Bishop Mason, is located at 930 Mason St. in Memphis and is the global headquarters of The Church of God in Christ. Built between 1940 and 1945 as the C.O.G.I.C. administrative and spiritual center, the temple is now the centerpiece of a group of six buildings.

It served as a focal point of civil rights activities in Memphis during the 1950s and 1960s.

Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his prophetic "Mountaintop" speech in this church in Memphis, Tennessee, on the eve of his assassination, April 3, 1968.



Civil Rights pioneer Benjamin Lawson Hooks was born in Memphis on January 31, 1925. A graduate of Howard University and DePaul University Law School, Hooks practiced law in Memphis and in 1965 became the first African American Criminal Court Judge in Shelby County. Hooks was also the first African American to serve on the Federal Communications Commission when he was appointed by President Richard M. Nixon in 1972. He was elected executive director of the NAACP in 1977 and led the organization until his retirement in 1993.

In recognition of his dedicated public service, the Benjamin L. Hooks Central Library was named in his honor on October 27, 2005.

On November 5, 2007, Dr. Hooks was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civil award. President George W. Bush said "The nation best remembers Benjamin Hooks as the leader of the NAACP. For 15 years, Dr. Hooks was a calm, yet forceful voice, for fairness, opportunity, and personal responsibility. He never tired or faltered in demanding that our nation live up to its founding ideals. His testimony had special power for the words that he spoke and for the example that he set as a man of decency and rectitude."



Al Green at Kennedy Center in 2014

Al Green is currently one of the most famous ministers in Memphis. However, before beginning his ministry, he was one of the most popular soul singers of the 1970s. One of his many hit songs is

“Let’s Stay Together.”

In 1976, Green became a Baptist minister and bought the Full Gospel Tabernacle Church at 787 Hale Road in Memphis. Reverend Green still preaches at his church. Sunday morning services start at 11:30 a.m., and all are welcome to attend.

Honors:

Inducted into Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1995

Inducted into Songwriters Hall of Fame in 2004

Kennedy Center Honoree in 2014



Lt. G. W. Lee Home

Lt. George W. Lee was known on the streets of early twentieth century Memphis as “Lieutenant Lee,” both for his army service as a lieutenant in World War I, and because he was the lieutenant for the powerful African American Republican Party leader Robert Church, Sr.

Lee was one of the earliest historians of the Bluff City’s African American culture writing novels and short stories. Two of his books *Where the Blues Began* (1934) and *River George* (1937) were named Book of the Month Club alternate selections. As a result of his many contributions to Tennessee, his portrait hangs in the rotunda of the State Capitol in Nashville. In Memphis, the George W. Lee Post Office on Mississippi Blvd. was dedicated July 9, 1956. It was the first such facility to be named after an African American. In addition, the George W. Lee Homes Subdivision was dedicated to him in 1955.

Lee’s home at 563 Stephens Place in Memphis was placed on the National Register of Historic Places on May 2, 1994.



Jerry C. Johnson, legendary LeMoyne-Owen basketball coach and Athletic Director died in his sleep on Sunday, Jan. 24, 2021. He was 102. Johnson was the first African American and only Tennessee basketball coach to win a Division III national title, and LeMoyne-Owen became the first Historically Black College and University to accomplish the feat. When Johnson retired in 2005, he was one of only six NCAA coaches with more than 800 wins. Johnson coached or mentored eight players at LeMoyne-Owen who went on to play in the NBA, as well as former Memphis mayor Willie Herenton, former Memphis city councilman Myron Lowery, seven future college coaches, six future high school or junior high school coaches, and four future principals, among others. The keynote speaker at Johnson's 100th birthday celebration in 2018 was Memphis Tigers coach Penny Hardaway. He said, "The knowledge that you passed along will always be with me." Former Memphis coach John Calipari said, "When I was in the city of Memphis, I got to meet one of the great coaches of our time, Jerry Johnson. He coached at LeMoyne-Owen College. A gentleman who truly cared about the game and the kids."