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The books, articles, and web sites described in the Article Alert present a diversity of views in order to keep our IRC users abreast of current issues and concerns in the United States. These items represent the views and opinions of the authors and do not necessarily reflect official U.S. Government policy.

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<http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/elections-in-brief/states.htm>

Free and fair elections are the keystone of any democracy. They are essential for the peaceful transfer of power.



When voters elect representatives, they elect the leaders who will shape the future of their society. This is why elections empower ordinary citizens: they allow them to influence the future policies of their government, and thus, their own future.

The United States has been a representative democracy since the ratification of the U.S. Constitution in 1787 - although the electoral tradition began during the Colonial era and had its roots in British history. This book discusses the nature of the modern American electoral process, and how it works at the federal, state, and local levels. The process, complicated and sometimes confusing, has evolved to ensure universal suffrage to all men and women who are U.S. citizens — 18 years-of-age, or older.



More contents on:

- Elections in the United States
- The Role of Political Parties
- Presidential Nominations
- Congressional Elections
- Polls and Pundits
- Financing Campaigns
- U.S. Elections Procedures

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Information Resource Center

# Article Alert

No. 2, February 2008

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Copies of articles listed in *IRC's Article Alert* are available from the Information Resource Center, Public Affairs Section, U.S. Embassy Jakarta. Should you wish to receive a photocopy of an article, please complete the ARTICLE ALERT REQUEST FORM (page 3) and return it to us. We will mail or fax the requested articles directly to you, at no cost.

## NATIONAL AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY MONTH, 2008



Originally established as Negro History Week in 1926 by Carter G. Woodson, a noted African-American author and scholar, this event evolved into the establishment of February as "Black History Month" in 1976. This commemoration also has been referred to as "African-American History Month." Both names are currently in use.

When Woodson established Negro History week, he realized the importance of providing a theme to focus the attention of the public. The intention never has been to dictate or limit the exploration of the Black experience, but to bring to the public's attention important developments that merit emphasis.

Since 1926, The Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History (ASALH) has established the national theme for the monthlong celebration. The National Theme for the celebration in the year 2007 is "From Slavery to Freedom: The Story of Africans in the Americas"

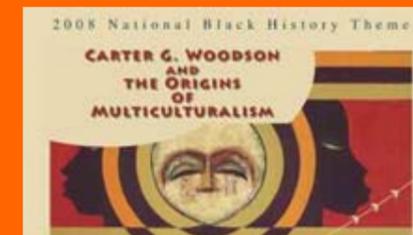
To commemorate and celebrate the contributions to our nation made by people of African descent, American historian Carter G. Woodson established Black History Week. The first celebration occurred on Feb. 12, 1926. For many years, the second week of February was set aside for this celebration to coincide with the birthdays of abolitionist/editor Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln. In 1976, as part of the nation's bicentennial, the week was expanded into Black History Month. In 2000, President Clinton proclaimed February as National African American History Month. (Source: [http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/facts\\_for\\_features\\_special\\_editions/010969.html](http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/010969.html))

### MORE INFORMATION ABOUT AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY MONTH:

Presidential Proclamation on National African American History Month  
<http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2008/January/20080130180130eafas0.9380457.html>

About African American History Month  
<http://www.loc.gov/topics/africanamericans/about/>

The Association for the Study of African American Life and History  
<http://www.asalh.org/>



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## DEMOCRACY AND GLOBAL ISSUES

1. Gagnon, Geoffrey THE LAST GREAT LAND GRAB (Wired, vol. 16, no. 2, February 2008, pp. 86-89)

Nations around the world face a deadline to make new territorial claims on the continental shelf that extends from their shorelines out into the sea. The U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea will allow nations to stake claims to territory on the shelf, but they must submit undersea maps of their claim within 10 years of their ratification of the treaty. So far, few nations have done so, but more are likely to submit their claims to a U.N. adjudicating panel soon. The rights to hundreds of millions of square kilometers and the oil and mineral rights that go with them are at stake. Gagnon follows a U.S. marine geologist on a mapping expedition and explains some of the technical points of the mapping process that will determine how greatly some nations may be able to expand their boundaries.

## ECONOMIC SECURITY

2. Shoven, John B. NEW AGE THINKING (Foreign Policy, no. 164, January-February 2008, pp. 82-83)

Will the worldwide tidal wave of aging baby boomers create a fiscal burden that will devastate the global economy? No, says Shoven. Our conception of "old" has itself become old-fashioned, he writes. He recommends using modern mortality risk measurements -- or the chance a person has of dying within the next year -- to measure age. The higher the mortality risk, the "older" a person is. Today's 65-year-old man can expect to live another 17 years and has the same mortality risk a 59-year-old man did in 1970 or a 56-year-old man did in 1940. (Women, on average, live longer than men.) So, if one looks at the fraction of the U.S. population with a mortality risk higher than 1.5 percent, the growth of the "elderly" population is not that dramatic. By 2050, Shoven says, only 62.5 million Americans, or about 1.5 percent of the population, will have a mortality risk greater than 1.5 percent. Nonetheless, the average length of retirement for today's 65-year-old man has stretched to more than 19 years. To keep the costs of ever-lengthening retirements under control, Shoven recommends altering retirement ages and pensions to reflect current mortality risks.

## INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

3. Fuller, Graham E. A WORLD WITHOUT ISLAM (Foreign Policy, no. 164, January-February 2008, pp. 46-53)

To many, Islam seems to lie behind a broad range of international disorders. But a world without Islam would leave the world exactly where it is today, says Fuller. Terrorism, for example, in the name of Islam or any other religion is hardly unique, Fuller says. Religion is the best banner for oppressed peoples seeking to glorify their cause and has been used frequently across the centuries. Rather than being the source of confrontation, religion is the vehicle used by radical groups to articulate grievances. Even without Islam, the face of the Middle East is complex and conflicted, Fuller says; struggles over power, territory, influence and trade existed long before Islam arrived. "At rock bottom," he writes,

"conflict between East and West remains all about the grand historical and geopolitical issues of human history: ethnicity, nationalism, ambition, greed, resources, local leaders, turf, financial gain, power, interventions and hatred of outsiders, invaders, and imperialists. Faced with timeless issues like these, how could the power of religion not be invoked?"

4. Ikenberry, G. John THE RISE OF CHINA AND THE FUTURE OF THE WEST (Foreign Affairs, Vol. 87, No. 1, January-February 2008)

China appears poised to overtake the United States as a world power, but the transition need not be a bloody one, according to Ikenberry, professor of politics and international affairs at Princeton University. China will face not a single power but the entire Western order of democratic capitalist states. That order, built around rules and market openness, creates the conditions for China and other rising powers to gain status and play a role in global governance. "The road to global power, in effect, runs through the Western order and its multilateral economic institutions," Ikenberry says. The coming power shift can occur peacefully and on terms favorable to the United States, but only by the United States reinforcing the Western order's system of global governance, first by reestablishing itself as its foremost supporter.

## U.S. SOCIETY & VALUES

5. Sellers, Patricia MELINDA GATES GOES PUBLIC (Fortune, vol. 157, no. 1, January 21, 2008, pp. 44//56)

In this interview, Melinda Gates, wife of Microsoft Corp. founder Bill Gates, talks about her husband, working in partnership with Warren Buffett, and her role in the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and its new approach to philanthropy. In 2005, the foundation increased its giving for global health, including more than \$436 million in grants through its Grand Challenges in Global Health, a public-private partnership to develop health technology for the developing world that is easy to transport and use, and effective. The Gates Foundation has adopted a practical, get-it-done approach; where government-based one-size-fits-all efforts fail, the foundation instead assembles the right partners and the specific expertise required to solve a given problem. Depending on the issue, the foundation might work with governments, nonprofit organizations, businesses, or individuals. These efforts have created new incentives for corporate involvement and redefined traditional public-private boundaries, all in the name of having "the greatest impact for the most people."

## U.S. PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

6. Clinton, Hillary Rodham SECURITY AND OPPORTUNITY FOR THE TWENTY CENTURY (Foreign Affairs, November/December 2007)

The next U.S. president will have a moment of opportunity to reintroduce America to the world and restore our leadership. To build a world that is safe, prosperous, and just, we must get out of Iraq, rediscover the value of statesmanship, and live up to the democratic values that are the deepest source of our strength.

7. Huckabee, Michael D. AMERICA'S PRIORITIES IN THE WAR ON TERROR ISLAMIST, IRAQ, IRAN AND PAKISTAN (Foreign Affairs, January/February 2008)

The Bush administration's arrogant bunker mentality has been counterproductive at home and abroad. American foreign policy needs to change its tone and attitude, open up, and reach out. In particular, it should focus on eliminating Islamist terrorists, stabilizing Iraq, containing Iran, and toughening its stance with Pakistan.

8. McCain, John AN ENDURING PEACE BUILT ON FREEDOM SECURING AMERICA'S FUTURE (Foreign Affairs, November/December 2007)

America needs a president who can revitalize the country's purpose and standing in the world and defeat terrorist adversaries who threaten liberty at home and abroad. There is an enormous amount to do. The next U.S. president must be ready to show America and the world that this country's best days are yet to come and be ready to establish an enduring peace based on freedom.

9. Romney, Mitt RISING TO A NEW GENERATION OF GLOBAL CHALLENGES (Foreign Affairs, July/August 2007)

America needs a president who can revitalize the country's purpose and standing in the world and defeat terrorist adversaries who threaten liberty at home and abroad. There is an enormous amount to do. The next U.S. president must be ready to show America and the world that this country's best days are yet to come and be ready to establish an enduring peace based on freedom.

10. Obama, Barack RENEWING AMERICAN LEADERSHIP (Foreign Affairs, July/August 2007)

After Iraq, we may be tempted to turn inward. That would be a mistake. The American moment is not over, but it must be seized anew. We must bring the war to a responsible end and then renew our leadership -- military, diplomatic, moral -- to confront new threats and capitalize on new opportunities. America cannot meet this century's challenges alone; the world cannot meet them without America.

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