



MUMBAI

**BLACK HISTORY MONTH  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN**

**1619:** The first Africans arrive in America; among them is a woman named Isabel who gives birth to the first African-American.

Each year, the United States celebrates February as Black History Month. In the limited space available in this bulletin, we are featuring two African-American women to recognize their accomplishments, as well as the contributions African-Americans have made to building the nation.

**Mary McLeod Bethune (1875-1955)**



Mary McLeod Bethune, an African-American teacher, was one of the great educators of the United States. She was a leader of women, a distinguished adviser to several American presidents, and a powerful champion of racial equality.

Mary McLeod was born in Mayesville, South Carolina. Her parents, Samuel and Patsy McLeod, were former slaves; Mary was the fifteenth of 17 children. She helped her parents on the family farm and first entered a Presbyterian mission school when she was 11 years old. Later, she attended Scotia Seminary, a school for African-American girls in Concord, North Carolina, on a scholarship, and graduated in 1893. Though she had a serious turn of mind, it did not prevent her from being a lively dancer and developing a lasting fondness for music. Dynamic and alert, she was very popular and the acknowledged leader of her classmates. After graduating from Scotia Seminary, she attended the Moody Bible Institute.

**Career as an Educator**

After her graduation from the Moody Institute, she wished to become a missionary in Africa. However, she was unable to pursue this end. She was an instructor at the Presbyterian Mission School in Mayesville in 1896 and later an instructor at Haines Institute in Augusta, Georgia, in 1896-1897. While she was an instructor at Kindell Institute in Sumpter, South Carolina, from 1897-1898, she met Albertus Bethune, whom she later married. Bethune began her career as an educator in earnest when she rented a two-story frame building in Daytona Beach, Florida, and began the difficult task of establishing a school for African-

American girls. Her school opened in October 1904, with six pupils – five girls and her own son. There was no equipment; crates were used for desks and charcoal took the place of pencils, and ink came from crushed elderberries. Thus began the Daytona Literary and Industrial School for Training Negro Girls, in an era when most African-American children received little or no education.

At first, Bethune was teacher, administrator, comptroller, and custodian. Later, she was able to secure a staff, many of whom worked loyally for many years. To finance and expand the school, Bethune and her pupils baked pies and made ice cream to sell to nearby construction gangs. In addition to her regular classes, Bethune organized classes for the children of turpentine workers. In these ways, she satisfied her desire to serve as a missionary.

As the school at Daytona progressed, it became necessary to secure an adequate financial base. Bethune began to seek financial aid in earnest. In 1912, she interested James Gamble of the Proctor and Gamble Company of Cincinnati, Ohio, who contributed financially to the school and served as chairman of its board of trustees until his death. In 1923, Bethune's school for girls merged with the Cookman Institute of Jacksonville, Florida, a school for boys, and the new coeducational school became known as the Bethune-Cookman Collegiate Institute, soon renamed Bethune-Cookman College. Bethune served as President of the college until her retirement as President Emeritus in 1942. She remained a trustee of the college until the end of her life. By 1955, the college had a faculty of 100 and a student enrollment of over 1000.

**Other Activities**

Bethune's business activities were confined to the Central Life Insurance Company of Tampa, Florida, of which she was president for several years; the Afro-American Life Insurance Company of Jacksonville,

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American Center  
Булетин

FEBRUARY

2008

**The American Center**  
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(Monday through Friday)

**HOLIDAYS**

**February 18: Presidents' Day**

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## A WORD FROM THE CENTER

February is “Black History Month” in America, also occasionally referred to as “African-American History Month.” During this month in the United States, and also here at the American Center, we take time to acknowledge and remember the importance of African-American history and culture in our country.

Black History Month first began in 1926 as “Negro History Week” thanks to the efforts of Dr. Carter Woodson. Born in Kentucky to former slaves, Dr. Woodson worked as a child in a coal mine, but later earned a Ph.D. in History from Harvard University. It was at Harvard that Dr. Woodson observed the dearth of information about African-Americans in his history books, despite the major role that they had played shaping the country during and after slavery. He created Negro History Week to correct this oversight. It was not until the 1960s, however, that the public embraced his idea and transformed it into “Black History Month” using the more common terminology for African-Americans at the time.

For Dr. Woodson, February was the best month to recognize African-Americans because it held the birthdays of both Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln, two early champions of African-American rights. Incidentally, February is also the month of other significant events in African-American history, such as the birthdays of the poet Langston Hughes and the black scholar W. E. B. Du Bois; the month when the 15th Amendment was added to the Constitution giving blacks the right to vote; the day when Malcolm X was assassinated; and the week when the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was founded.

Today, thanks in part to Black History Month, the history, literature, and culture of African-Americans are much better integrated into the general study of “American” history, literature, and culture. Effectively, in the United States, we now learn African-American history not just in February, but also throughout the year as the stories of African-Americans continue to be incorporated into curricula at universities and high schools. Despite this increased awareness, however, Black History Month still should be celebrated. It gives us a chance to highlight the achievements of African-Americans in our country. Yet, most importantly, it continues to serve as a reminder that we must always remember to incorporate the history of minority groups into the national historical and literary canon.

Amanda Zafian  
Foreign Service Officer

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which she served as director; and the Bethune-Volusia Beach Corporation, a recreation area and housing development she founded in 1940. In addition, she wrote numerous magazine and newspaper articles and contributed chapters to several books. In 1932, she founded and organized the National Council of Negro Women and became its president. By 1955, this organization had a membership of 800,000.

Bethune gained national recognition in 1936, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed her director of African-American affairs in the National Youth Administration and a special adviser on minority affairs. She served for eight years and supervised the expansion of employment opportunities and recreational facilities for African-American youth throughout the United States. She also served as Special Assistant to the Secretary of War during World War II. In the course of her government assignments, she became a close friend of Eleanor Roosevelt. During her long career, Bethune received many honorary degrees and awards,

including the Haitian Medal of Honor and Merit (1949), the highest award of the Haitian government.

Bethune died in Daytona Beach on May 18, 1955, of a heart attack, and was buried on the campus of Bethune-Cookman College.

### Crystal Bird Fauset (1894-1965)



As the European relief effort of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC, a service organization affiliated with the Religious Society of Friends, the Quakers) concluded in 1924, questions were raised whether the Committee should continue to exist at all. In September of that year, a group of concerned Friends met to consider the future direction of AFSC. It was decided that AFSC still had an important service mission to carry out and therefore, should continue to function.

The important matters requiring attention, so far as this group of Friends was concerned, were reconciliation work in Europe, home service activities and better interracial relationships in the United States.

As an outcome of these discussions, an Interracial Section was formed in the AFSC in 1925. A young African-American woman, Crystal Bird, was offered a staff position in the section beginning in September 1927. She accepted it in order to pursue her chief interest, which in her own words was “having people of other racial groups understand the *humanness* of the Negro wherever he is found.”

By the time she appeared at AFSC headquarters, she used the following anecdote to more fully describe her plans: “I went to the Conference at Swarthmore, but as I reached there a little late, I sat behind a curtain waiting my turn to talk, realizing the whole white audience was on the other side of the curtain. When it was time for me to meet the group, I stepped out and lifted the curtain that had separated that group from me, and as I did so I knew in reality that what I am to do this year is to lift the curtain that separates the white people and the colored people, to lift the curtain of misunderstanding that is so dividing us.”

AFSC helped her in this task by arranging speaking engagements before various (typically white) groups in Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Washington, Baltimore, and Indiana. Between September 1927 and September 1928, she made 210 appearances before more than 40,000 people. The schedule left her totally exhausted.

After Crystal Bird completed her work, the Interracial Section sent a letter entitled “An Experiment in Interracial Education” to Friends groups throughout the country. The following excerpt from the letter describes her service: “In the fall of 1927 Crystal Bird was introduced to Philadelphia audiences through the public and private schools, colleges, church groups, social agencies, and community meetings. The subject material of her talks was not of the propaganda type and controversial elements were not stressed. She presented the contributions of the Negro to American life and often included an analysis of the nature of prejudice. Underneath all that she said was the attempt to interpret the Negro, to make vivid the fact that he was human with the same aspirations, the same longings, the same failings of which the white person is possessed. Her talks drew aside the veil which we so constantly throw around the Negro and he stood before us appealing, convincingly demanding both our sympathy and our respect.”

In an excerpt from her own summary of her year of service, Crystal Bird added: “The types of questions asked give clear evidence that white

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students, both high school and college, think of the American Negro as being not quite human, think of him as being more or less of an alien, associating him with an African rather than American background, and that whatever advantages and privileges he enjoys are due solely to the magnanimity of white people. They do not seem to realize that these advantages and privileges are due him as a native-born American citizen and as a normal human being – at least as normal as the attitude of the white world permits him to be.”

After her year with AFSC, Crystal Bird married sociologist Arthur Huff Fauset, and worked on the Joint Committee on Race Relations of the Arch and Race Streets Yearly Meetings where she helped establish the famous Swarthmore College Institute of Race Relations. She also founded the Colored Women’s Activities Club for the Democratic National Committee and, in 1938, became the first African-American woman to be elected as a state legislator, representing Philadelphia’s 13th District, which was more than 66 percent white. Crystal Bird Fauset became Assistant Director for the Works Progress Administration in Pennsylvania and advised both Eleanor Roosevelt and New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia in her capacity as race relations advisor in the Office of Civilian Defense.

Her outstanding accomplishments earned her a Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission Marker, which stands outside of her home at 5402 Vine Street in Philadelphia, and reads: “The first Black woman elected to a state legislature in the U.S., Fauset, who lived here, won her seat in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, 1938. She later served as a Civil Defense race relations advisor under Franklin D. Roosevelt.”

Crystal Bird Fauset died in 1965.

### African-American Women in Politics

**1775:** Phillis Wheatley is invited to meet with General George Washington after penning a poem in his honor. She may have influenced Washington’s decision to allow blacks to join the Continental Army and later contributed to his discomfort as a slaveholder.

**1787:** The Constitution counts each male slave as three-fifths of a man when determining representation.

**1832:** Maria W. Stewart becomes the first American-born black woman to speak publicly on political issues before an audience of men and women in Boston. She wrote political pamphlets and speeches, often encouraging women to accept public activism.

**1870:** The Fifteenth Amendment grants voting rights to all men. Women of any color were still disenfranchised.

**1920:** The Nineteenth Amendment gives women the right to vote. But many black women never got to exercise that right because of Jim Crow laws in the South.

**1936:** Mary McLeod Bethune becomes the first black woman to head a federal office as director of the Negro Division of the National Youth Administration under Franklin D. Roosevelt. She said that one of her “sacred duties” in years of advising and government service was to “interpret the dreams and the hopes and the problems of my long-suffering people.”

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## NOTES FROM THE AMERICAN LIBRARY

### A select bibliography on African-American Leaders

<http://www.inmotionaame.org/home.cfm>

In Motion – The African-American Migration Experience

<http://anacostia.si.edu/Resources.htm>

The Anacostia Community Museum – African American Resources

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/aaworld/>

African American World

<http://www.tulane.edu/~amistad/>

Amistad Research Center

<http://www.asalh.org/>

Association for the Study of African American Life and History

<http://www.factmonster.com/spot/bhm1.html>

Black History Month

<http://www.crmvet.org/>

Civil Rights Movement Veterans

<http://www.infoplease.com/spot/bhmfirsts.html>

Famous Firsts by African Americans

[http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets\\_african\\_american.html](http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets_african_american.html)

Famous Poets and Poems.com – African American Poets

[http://usinfo.state.gov/scv/history\\_geography\\_and\\_population/population\\_and\\_diversity/african\\_americans.html](http://usinfo.state.gov/scv/history_geography_and_population/population_and_diversity/african_americans.html)

Gateway to African American History

<http://www.civilrights museum.org/>

National Civil Rights Museum

<http://www.nps.gov/malu/>

U.S. Department of the Interior – National Park Service – Martin Luther King, Jr.

<http://www.factmonster.com/spot/afroambios.html>

Notable African Americans

<http://www.bunchecenter.ucla.edu/>

Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA

<http://e-portals.org/Parks/>

The Rosa Parks Portal

<http://www.splcenter.org/index.jsp>

Southern Poverty Law Center

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/voices/>

The Library of Congress – Voices from the Days of Slavery

[http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~du\\_bois/](http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~du_bois/)

W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for African and African-American Research

Note: Internet sites included in this listing, other than those of the U.S. Government, should not be construed as an endorsement of the views contained therein.

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## MUMBAI MONDAYS

A Discussion on  
African-American Literature  
led by Amanda Zafian

Monday, February 25  
American Center Auditorium

6:00 p.m.

African-American literature offers a unique perspective on American culture and history. To correspond with Black History Month, February's Mumbai Mondays will provide an overview of African-American literature from spirituals of the slavery era, through the modernist experiments of the Harlem Renaissance, to the literature of social protest and beyond.

This talk will provide not only a brief overview of the history of African-American literature but will also explore why it is valuable to examine African-American letters as a body of work in itself. As literature from a minority group, African-American writing stands both "inside" and "outside" mainstream American society. Many critics argue that, as such, it offers a prescient vantage point to view the United States – or in the words of Toni Morrison, it serves as a "rip in the tent" through which we can better see what is actually going on inside the entire American experience.

**Amanda Zafian** joined the State Department in January 2006 and is currently serving on her first tour in Mumbai. Prior to this position, Amanda spent five years working in a legal office of the New York City government. She additionally worked as a freelance journalist and communications consultant for nonprofits in New York. Amanda studied International Relations at Brown University and later did graduate work in public policy, English, and journalism at Columbia University and Queens College. She is originally from New York City.

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**1938:** Crystal Bird Fauset is the first African-American woman to be elected to a state house of representatives, marking the first election of a black woman to a major public office. Fauset, who believed that political action was necessary to bring about economic change, was asked by the Philadelphia Democratic Party to run for the Pennsylvania office.

**1952:** With the Progressive Party nomination, Charlotta Spears Bass becomes the first black woman to run for vice president of the United States. She ran unsuccessfully against Richard Nixon. Her campaign slogan was "Win or lose, we win by raising the issues."

**1965:** Voting Rights Act passes, nullifying the tactics used in the South to keep blacks disenfranchised.

**1968:** Shirley Chisholm is the first African-American woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. She characterized her legislative legacy as "unbought and unbossed" and she adopted the same take-no-stuff approach to her presidential campaign in 1972. She was the first African-American to seek the presidential nomination.

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The American Center acknowledges the following web sites in compiling this essay:

<http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=Mary+McLeod+bethune>

[http://www.afsc.org/about/hist/2003/crystal\\_bird\\_fauset.htm](http://www.afsc.org/about/hist/2003/crystal_bird_fauset.htm)

[http://www.soulsearch.net/Cherry/doc\\_page31.html](http://www.soulsearch.net/Cherry/doc_page31.html)

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## FILMS THIS MONTH

Friday, February 15

**Once Upon a Time ... When We Were Colored**  
(1996, color, 113 mins)

Wednesday, February 27

**The Preacher's Wife** (1996, color, 123 mins)

American Center Auditorium

3:30 and 6:30 p.m.



Marvelous drama chronicling the African-American experience in the deep South throughout the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. The film focuses on a young man who is born in a Mississippi cotton field, is shown the horror of prejudice from his grandfather and taught about literature from an understanding, liberal woman. With Al Freeman, Jr., and Phylicia Rashad. Tim Reid directs.

Vibrant fantasy/comedy, based on 1947's "The Bishop's Wife," features Denzel Washington as an angel sent to Earth to help Whitney Houston and her minister husband save their failing New York neighborhood church. But will the romantic feelings that Houston and Washington begin to have for each other endanger his mission? Director Penny Marshall's warm and winning film also stars Courtney Vance and Gregory Hines.



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**1973:** Lelia Smith Foley is the first black woman mayor in the continental United States. The former welfare recipient campaigned door-to-door in Taft, Oklahoma, pledging to clean up the city and attract business.

**1977:** The first black woman presidential cabinet member, Patricia Roberts Harris, is appointed Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development by Jimmy Carter. During her Senate confirmation hearing, she was asked if she would be sympathetic to the problems of the poor. She responded: "I didn't start out as a member of a prestigious law firm, but as a woman who needed a scholarship. If you think that I have forgotten that, you are wrong."

**1988:** Lenora Fulani is the first black woman to appear on the presidential ballot in all 50 states when she runs as a member of the New Alliance Party. Fulani, who later joined the Reform Party, endorses Pat Buchanan for president in 2000, becoming his campaign cochair.

**1992:** Carol Moseley-Braun is the first black woman to be elected to the U.S. Senate, in the wake of the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings, and the second black to gain a Senate seat since Reconstruction.

**Admission to all American Center programs, restricted to persons over 16, will be on a first-come, first-served basis. Please bring the envelope containing this issue of the bulletin for admission (maximum two persons). The auditorium doors will open 30 minutes before the start of the program.**

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