

Black History Month 2007

History

- February is Black History Month, a month dedicated to the acknowledgement of the contributions of African Americans to our nation's rich past. An idea for the recognition of historical black Americans was first proposed in 1926, when historian Dr. Carter G. Woodson launched "Negro History Week" in February. Dr. Woodson, the Harvard educated founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (now the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History), chose the second week in February to commemorate the births of Abraham Lincoln and Fredrick Douglass. The week evolved into "Black History Month" in 1976.
- Several important dates in African American history occur in February including: February 23, 1868, the birth of writer and sociologist, W.E.B. DuBois February 23, 1870, the 15th Amendment was adopted, giving blacks the right to vote February 23, 1870, the first black Senator (MS) Hiram R. Revels took the oath of office February 12, 1909, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is founded to address social injustice against racial minorities in the United States

Population Profile

- The number of African Americans in the United States in 2005 was estimated to be 39.7 million individuals, or about 13.4 percent of the U.S. population, according to the United States Census Bureau. This number includes individuals who are black or black in combination with one or more other races. While historically blacks have been the largest minority group, the number of people who are ethnically Hispanic has grown to exceed the number of those who are racially black.
- The population of blacks, alone or in combination with one or more races, increased at least 30 percent between 1990 and 2005. In comparison, the overall U.S. population increased by 20 percent over the same time period. However, the black population grew more slowly than other racial/ethnic groups; the Hispanic and the Asian and Pacific Islander populations had growth rates more than four times the overall U.S. rate.
- Over one-half (55%) of African Americans live in the South, while 18 percent live in each of the Midwest and Northeast regions. The remaining nine percent live in the West. In 2004, the largest black populations were in New York, with 3.5 million, and Florida, California, Texas, and Georgia, each with more than two million. Nearly 57 percent of residents in the District of Columbia were black, while about one-third of the population in Mississippi (37%) and Louisiana (33%) was black. Less than one percent of residents in Idaho, Maine, Montana, North Dakota, New Hampshire, Utah, Vermont and Wyoming were black.
- The percentage of African Americans living in a metropolitan area inside of the central city is 51.5 percent, far greater than the 21.1 percent of urban dwelling, non-Hispanic whites.

African Americans and the Census

- African Americans have been enumerated in every U.S. Census since 1790, when they were just under one-fourth of the U.S. population, or 797,000 individuals. Not until 1960 were respondents mailed their own forms, allowing them to determine race for themselves.
- The term "African American" was added for the first time in Census 2000, alongside "black," which was introduced in 1970. (Previously "Negro" had been used.) The term also includes individuals who write in entries such as Afro-American, Nigerian or Haitian. Census 2000 was the first Census to allow respondents to fill in more than one race. About 1.8 million individuals reported themselves to be black in combination with another race, accounting for just under five percent of the black population in 2005.

Health and Fertility

- African Americans are younger than the general population: almost one third (32.5%) is under age 18, whereas only 25.4 percent of the general population was under age 18. Over the last decade, the fertility rate for black Americans has fallen, from over 2.5 in 1990 to 2.0 in 2004. On the other hand, 64 percent of all unmarried American women who gave birth in the past 12 months were African American.
- African Americans have higher HIV/AIDS infection rates than other racial and ethnic groups. Between 2001 and 2004, African Americans accounted for 50 percent of HIV/AIDS cases nationwide (African Americans represent only 12 percent of the US population). The UNAIDS 2006 report found that 49 percent of African American men with HIV/AIDS were infected through unprotected homosexual sex and 78 percent of African American women contracted the disease through unprotected heterosexual sex.

Family and Household Structure

- In 2005, there were 8.9 million African American families. Only 44 percent of black households were married-couple households, compared with 82 percent of non-Hispanic whites. Twenty percent of African American married couples lived in households of five or more people, compared with twelve percent for non-Hispanic whites. Alternatively 33 percent of married-couple black families consisted of only two members, while the number for non-Hispanic whites in married-couple families was 47 percent.
- Only 45.5 percent of black men and 37.4 percent of black women aged 18 and over were married in 2005 (compared to 55.6 percent and 58.7 percent for non-Hispanic white men and women, respectively).
- Comparatively, 42 percent of black men 18 and over have never been married, and 39.5 percent of black women. For non-Hispanic white men and women the percentages are 28 percent and 21.3 percent respectively.
- Blacks and non-Hispanic whites were much more likely than other minorities to live alone. In 2005, approximately 28 percent of blacks and 27 percent of non-Hispanic whites lived alone, compared with 16 percent of other minorities.

Labor Force and Employment

- 17.0 million African Americans were in the labor force in 2005, representing about 11.4 percent of the civil labor force. African American women had the highest labor force participation rate for women of any racial group: 64.9 percent versus 59.1 of the total population.
- In 2005, 26 percent of blacks age 16 and older worked in managerial or professional specialty occupations
- The most common occupation group for African Americans was sales and office occupations (26.6 percent of the workforce). The second largest industry of employment was management and professional occupations at 24.6 percent of the black workforce, while 24 percent worked in service occupations and 16.4 percent as operators, fabricators and laborers.
- Unemployment remains consistently higher for African Americans than for other ethnic groups with the same educational attainment. In 2005, 14.4 percent of African Americans with less than a high school degree were unemployed, compared to 6.3 percent of non-Hispanic whites and 6 percent of Hispanics with similar education attainment.
- The unemployment rate for Africans Americans with a Bachelor's degree or higher (3.5%) was more similar to whites (2%) and Hispanics (3%) of similar education background.

Income and Education

- In 2005, the annual median income for African Americans households was \$30,858. The poverty rate for African Americans in 2005 was 24.9 percent, down 6.4 percent from 1985.
- The percentage of African Americans aged 25 and over with at least a high school diploma in 2005 (80%) increased 7 percentage points since 1994 and was more than double the percentage (34%) in 1970. The progress made in recent years is clearly reflected by the fact that in 2004, 88 percent of blacks aged 25-29 had earned a high school diploma, compared to 94 percent of non-Hispanic whites in the same age group who had at least a high school diploma. In addition to these figures, the percentage in 2005 with at least a bachelor's degree (17%) was more than threefold the percentage in 1970 (5%).

This Fact Sheet was updated in January 2007 by the Population Resource Center. It is based on information from a number of sources, including the U.S. Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. For more information contact the Population Resource Center at (202) 467-5030, 1725 K Street NW, Suite 1102, Washington, DC 20006.