

# African American History Month

## Origin of African American History Month:

The original incarnation of African American History month began as a week of celebrating Black history during February of 1926 with a week that overlapped the birthdays of both Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. This was embraced by schools, history clubs, and many others. It grew and expanded until it was announced as a month-long celebration in 1976, coinciding with the nation's bicentennial. Since then, every president has given African American History Month Proclamations. Celebrated in February of each year, this is an important time for all Americans to recognize the tremendous contributions made by Black Americans.<sup>1</sup>

## *A few examples of African Americans in STEM fields:*



Dr. Ruth Ella Moore

Dr. Moore was a bacteriologist who completed her dissertation on tuberculosis at Ohio State University. In 1933, she became the first Black woman to earn a Ph.D. in a STEM field. Her research focused on tuberculosis, blood types, tooth decay, and microorganisms of the digestive system. She became the head of the bacteriology department at Howard University. Her work on antibiotics and microorganisms was an important contribution to public health.<sup>2</sup>



Dr. Ronald McNair

Dr. McNair was a Mission Specialist onboard the Challenger space shuttle, and was the second African American in space in 1984, and logged a total of 191 hours in space. He was a valedictorian of his high school class, and received a B.S. in Physics, and then a Ph.D. in physics from MIT. He researched quantum theory, and laser technology. His work with optical physics for satellite-to-satellite communications led to his pursuing astronaut training.<sup>3</sup>



Dr. Patricia E. Bath

Dr. Bath earned her medical degree from Howard University in 1968, and went on to become the first resident in ophthalmology in 1970. She did pioneering work in the epidemiology of blindness in the Black community, and drove changes in public health. In 1974, she became the first woman member of the UCLA Ophthalmology department. Her research led to inventing a new device and method of removing cataracts – the laserphaco probe. Her device is now used worldwide.<sup>4</sup>



Dr. Gary H. Gibbons

Dr. Gibbons obtained a B.A. in Biology from Princeton in 1978, and went on to earn his M.D. from Harvard in 1984. He became a professor of medicine in cardiology at Stanford and studied the renin-angiotensin system. He moved to Harvard to study the factors regulating blood pressure. He then moved on to become the director of the Cardiovascular Research Institute at Morehouse where he focused on the incidence of cardiovascular disease in African Americans. He is currently the director of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) at the NIH.<sup>5</sup>



Dr. Marie Maynard Daly

Dr. Daly grew up with a love for science and was inspired by the book "The Microbe Hunters." She earned her bachelor and masters degrees in chemistry, completing the second in just one year. In 1947, at Columbia University, she became the first African-American woman to earn a PhD in chemistry. Her doctoral work was focused on studying pancreatic amylase. She went on to become a professor in the Albert Einstein college of Medicine. Much of her research was dedicated to understanding the relationship between cholesterol, atherosclerosis, and high blood pressure. She also made contributions to our understanding of histones.<sup>6</sup>



Dr. Charles R. Drew

Dr. Drew obtained his medical and surgical degrees at McGill University in 1933. During his residency, he began to focus on blood transfusions while also joining the faculty at Howard University. He then pursued his doctorate at Columbia in medical sciences, being awarded a PhD in 1940. His research was "Banked Blood: A Study in Blood Preservation." His work further developed into blood and plasma extraction, storage, and packaging to help the war effort in Britain. His work led to a pilot blood-bank program for the Red Cross, this included many innovations, including bloodmobiles. Following that, he worked to set-up a surgical program for African-Americans at Howard.<sup>7</sup>

References:  
1: <https://africanamericanhistorymonth.gov/about/>  
2: <https://mbb.vale.edu/news/celebrating-black-history-month-ruth-ella-moore>  
3: <https://www.challenger.org/2021/02/22/black-history-month-celebrating-african-american-stem-pioneers/>  
4: [https://cfmedicine.nlm.nih.gov/physicians/biography\\_26.html](https://cfmedicine.nlm.nih.gov/physicians/biography_26.html)  
5: <https://digital.sciencehistory.org/works/2wvrt0>  
6: <https://www.sciencehistory.org/historical-profile/marie-maynard-daly>  
7: <https://www.sciencehistory.org/historical-profile/charles-richard-drew>