



Dreams realized

Websites chronicle black history in words and images

February is Black History Month. Also known as African-American History Month, it dates back to February 1926 when the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH) celebrated the first Negro History Week. The time was chosen because both Abraham Lincoln's and Frederick Douglas' birthdays fell during that week.

The purpose of the celebration was to raise awareness of the contributions of African-Americans to civilization. Lincoln and Douglas were honored because of their significant contributions to the advancement of African-Americans. Lincoln, of course, ended slavery in America with the Emancipation Proclamation and the successful waging of the Civil War. Douglas was an escaped slave who went on to become a leader in the abolitionist movement — including advising President Lincoln during the Civil War. He was also a writer, a newspaper publisher and the first black citizen to become a high-ranking U.S. Government official as U.S. Minister and Consul to Haiti.



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InSites

Continuing mission

In 1976, America's bicentennial year, the celebration was expanded to a month under President Gerald Ford. The ASNLH had by now become the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH). This organization still operates today with a mission to promote, research, preserve, interpret and disseminate information about black life, history and culture.

Its website, **ASALH.org**, features black women in American culture and history for this year's celebration. For a historical society that's been around for almost 100 years, the website is pretty thin on black history. The link from the main feature on the page, African-American journalist and civil rights activist Ida B. Wells, takes you to the Wikipedia page on her. The site is a poorly designed collection of links to interior pages without a lot of substance to them.

Close but no cigar

I reviewed four other websites that focused on Black History and found a mixed bag of features and content.

BlackHistory.com sounded like it would be the perfect, all-encompassing site for the subject. It's a blog-style site that is self-described as an encyclopedia and social network dedicated to black history and culture. The content runs the gamut from

sourced articles on black history and biographies of prominent African-Americans to member-posted photos and videos of a more personal nature. It's a crowded site that's tough to wade through if you're just trying to learn about black history.

AfricanAmericanHistoryMonth.gov

is a collaboration between several U.S. Government organizations including the Library of Congress, National Archives and Records Administration and the Smithsonian Institution. The site is a well-organized collection of links to black history content on the sites of the member organizations. There's a wealth of information accessible from the site, but it's presented in a dry, academic manner.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's site at **NAACP.org** has lots of resources related to African-Americans, including historical information. The History tab at the top of the home page takes you to a very well done interactive timeline. It's divided into three sections: The Timeline, which describes important historical events around the country with words and pictures; The People, which is an alphabetical list of short biographies of prominent African-Americans; and The Branches, which is a map locating and giving short histories of NAACP branches around the country.

All the right stuff

A website that does a nice job of combining substantive black history content with an engaging presentation is **Biography.com**. The home page features a large slide show of prominent African-Americans from civil rights, politics, sports and entertainment. A drop-down menu under the People tab at the top of the page takes you to a section devoted to Black History. There are photos, videos and, of course, biographies of key figures from all walks of life. There's also an interactive time line loaded with information and images going back to the first African slaves brought to America in 1619. The site is well designed with strong images and slick navigation.

If you want to learn more about African-American history, which turns out to be inseparable from American history, check out some of these sites.

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