LEARNING MADE EASY

Black American History

for dummies®

A Wiley Brand

The long road to freedom

The Civil Rights Movement and beyond

Black culture in America

Ronda Racha Penrice

Black American History

by Ronda Racha Penrice

for dummies®
A Wiley Brand

Black American History For Dummies®

Published by: **John Wiley & Sons, Inc.,** 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774, www.wiley.com

Copyright © 2021 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey

Published simultaneously in Canada

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning or otherwise, except as permitted under Sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without the prior written permission of the Publisher. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, (201) 748-6011, fax (201) 748-6008, or online at http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions.

Trademarks: Wiley, For Dummies, the Dummies Man logo, Dummies.com, Making Everything Easier, and related trade dress are trademarks or registered trademarks of John Wiley & Sons, Inc., and may not be used without written permission. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

LIMIT OF LIABILITY/DISCLAIMER OF WARRANTY: WHILE THE PUBLISHER AND AUTHOR HAVE USED THEIR BEST EFFORTS IN PREPARING THIS BOOK, THEY MAKE NO REPRESENTATIONS OR WARRANTIES WITH RESPECT TO THE ACCURACY OR COMPLETENESS OF THE CONTENTS OF THIS BOOK AND SPECIFICALLY DISCLAIM ANY IMPLIED WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE. NO WARRANTY MAY BE CREATED OR EXTENDED BY SALES REPRESENTATIVES OR WRITTEN SALES MATERIALS. THE ADVICE AND STRATEGIES CONTAINED HEREIN MAY NOT BE SUITABLE FOR YOUR SITUATION. YOU SHOULD CONSULT WITH A PROFESSIONAL WHERE APPROPRIATE. NEITHER THE PUBLISHER NOR THE AUTHOR SHALL BE LIABLE FOR DAMAGES ARISING HEREFROM.

For general information on our other products and services, please contact our Customer Care Department within the U.S. at 877-762-2974, outside the U.S. at 317-572-3993, or fax 317-572-4002. For technical support, please visit https://hub.wiley.com/community/support/dummies.

Wiley publishes in a variety of print and electronic formats and by print-on-demand. Some material included with standard print versions of this book may not be included in e-books or in print-on-demand. If this book refers to media such as a CD or DVD that is not included in the version you purchased, you may download this material at http://booksupport.wiley.com. For more information about Wiley products, visit www.wiley.com.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021935715

ISBN: 978-1-119-78085-4

ISBN: 978-1-119-78086-1 (ebk); ISBN: 978-1-119-78087-8 (ebk)

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents at a Glance

Introduction 1

Part 1: Coming to America 7

CHAPTER 1: The Soul of America 9

CHAPTER 2: From Empires to Bondage: Bringing Africans to the Americas. 33

CHAPTER 3: The Founding of Black America 49

Part 2: Long Road to Freedom 63

CHAPTER 4: American Slavery, American Freedom 65

CHAPTER 5: Bringing Down the House: Marching toward Civil War and Freedom 85

CHAPTER 6: Up from Slavery: Civil War and Reconstruction 109

Part 3: Pillars of Change: The Civil Rights Movement 135

CHAPTER 7: Living Jim Crow 137

CHAPTER 8: I, Too, Sing America: The Civil Rights Movement, 1954–1963 163

CHAPTER 9: Turning Up the Heat (1963–1968) 187

CHAPTER 10: Where Do We Go from Here? Post–Civil Rights 207

CHAPTER 11: The New Civil Rights — Obama, Black Lives Matter, and Beyond 233

Part 4: Cultural Foundations 259

CHAPTER 12: Somebody Say "Amen": The Black Church 261

CHAPTER 13: More Than Reading and Writing: Education 285

CHAPTER 14: Writing Down the Bones: Black Literature 307

CHAPTER 15: The Great Black Way: Theater and Dance 331

Part 5: A Touch of Genius: Music, Film, TV, and Sports 357

CHAPTER 16: Give Me a Beat: Black Music 359

CHAPTER 17: Black Hollywood: Film and Comedy 393

CHAPTER 18: Black Hollywood: TV 427

CHAPTER 19: Winning Ain't Easy: Race and Sports 449

Part 6: The Part of Tens 479

CHAPTER 20: Ten Black American Firsts 481

CHAPTER 21: Ten Black Literary Classics. 487

CHAPTER 22: Ten (Plus One) Influential Black American Visual Artists 493

Index 501

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION 1
About This Book. 2
Foolish Assumptions 3
Icons Used in This Book 4
Where to Go from Here 5

PART 1: COMING TO AMERICA 7

CHAPTER 1: **The Soul of America** 9
A Peek at the Past 10
Life before slavery 11
Life before emancipation 11
Life before civil rights 12
Being Black in America Today 14
Contributions to history and culture 15
Challenges 19
Black Pride Goes Mainstream 22
Celebrating Black heritage 23
Black cultural tourism booms 24
Reconciling the Past to Create the Future 26
Slavery as an American (not Southern) institution 28
Flagging the issue 28
A question of reparations. 30

CHAPTER 2: **From Empires to Bondage: Bringing Africans to the Americas** 33
Touring African Empires 34
Ghana Empire 35
Mali 35
Songhai 36
Interaction with the rest of the world. 37
Origins of the Transatlantic Slave Trade 38
Slavery on the African continent 38
Launching the European slave trade 39
Enslaving Africans in Latin America and the Caribbean 41
Sanctioning and opposing slavery 42
Dealing with life enslaved. 44
Seeking freedom 45

CHAPTER 3: **The Founding of Black America** 49
From Servitude to Slavery 49
Inching toward slavery 50
Why Africans? 51
The Triangular Trade 51
The Middle Passage 52
The capture 52
The voyage 54
Safe arrival 55
Black Americans and the Revolution 57
A bit of background 58
Fighting for freedom 58
Hope and disappointment 60
The Free African Society and the Birth of Black America 61

PART 2: LONG ROAD TO FREEDOM 63

CHAPTER 4: **American Slavery, American Freedom** 65
American Bondage 66
Northern slavery 66
Enslaved life in the South 69
Before I'd Be a Slave: Fighting the System 73
The Slave Codes 74
Rebellions 75
Running away 79
"Free" Black People 81
Different paths to freedom 82
Perhaps free, but not equal 82

CHAPTER 5: **Bringing Down the House: Marching toward Civil War and Freedom** 85
Picking Fights 86
Arguing against slavery 87
Arguing for slavery 88
Leading the Antislavery Assault: Key Abolitionists 89
Anthony Benezet 89
David Walker 90
William Lloyd Garrison 90
Frederick Douglass 91
Fighting with Words 92
Slave narratives 92
Origins of the Black press 93
Colonization (or Emigration) Movement 94
Early resettlement efforts 95
Cuffe: Man on a mission 95
Questioning motives 96

The Effects of Proslavery Politics . . . 96
The Fugitive Slave Clause . . . 96
Stronger fugitive slave measures: Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 . . . 97
Battling over the slave status of new land . . . 97
The Missouri Compromise . . . 98
The Underground Railroad . . . 98
Operation Freedom . . . 99
Key people along the line . . . 99
Message in the music . . . 103
The Breaking Point . . . 103
Straining North-South relations . . . 104
The Compromise of 1850 . . . 104
The Kansas-Nebraska Act . . . 105
Slavery continues . . . 105
Dred Scott: A strike against freedom . . . 106
Defining events at Harpers Ferry . . . 106
Facing the Moment of Truth . . . 107

CHAPTER 6: **Up from Slavery: Civil War and Reconstruction** . . . 109
The Question: To End Slavery or Not? . . . 110
Teetering on a tightrope . . . 110
The first Confiscation Act, 1861 . . . 111
Black People in the Early Days of the Civil War . . . 111
Serving the Union . . . 112
Surviving in the South . . . 112
Moving toward the Emancipation Proclamation . . . 113
Shutting down the illegal slave trade . . . 113
Passing the Second Confiscation Act . . . 114
Courting England's support . . . 114
Free at Last (Well, Sort of): The Emancipation Proclamation . . . 114
What the Proclamation did . . . 115
Reaction to the order . . . 115
Finally in the Fight . . . 116
As Union soldiers . . . 116
As Confederate soldiers . . . 118
The War's End and the Thirteenth Amendment . . . 119
(Re)constructing Democracy . . . 121
Undermining Lincoln's plan . . . 121
Taking back the power: Reconstruction Act of 1867 . . . 123
A Mixed Bag of Hope and Despair . . . 123
The Freedmen's Bureau . . . 123
Where's my 40 acres and a mule? . . . 124
Back to the land . . . 127
Finding a new way . . . 128
Banking on wealth . . . 128
Taking office . . . 129

The Fifteenth Amendment 130
A Turn for the Worse: The End of Reconstruction 131
The Redeemers 131
The Mississippi Plan 132
Civil Rights Act of 1875 132
Pulling the plug 132

PART 3: PILLARS OF CHANGE: THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT 135

CHAPTER 7: **Living Jim Crow** 137
Post-Reconstruction Blues 137
The Exoduster Movement 138
Black Town, U.S.A. 139
Lynchings and riots/massacres 140
Instituting Jim Crow: Plessy v. Ferguson 146
Court cases before Plessy 146
The actual case: Plessy v. Ferguson 147
Strategies for Achieving Equality 147
Booker T. Washington: The Accommodationist 148
W.E.B. Du Bois: The Integrationist 148
Organizing for Freedom 150
National Afro-American Council 150
The National Negro Business League 150
The Niagara Movement 152
The NAACP 153
The National Urban League 154
Keep on Moving: The Great Migration 154
Leaving the South 154
Life up North 156
Marcus Garvey: Man with a Plan 156
Advocating racial pride 157
Going "Back to Africa" 157
Powerful enemies 158
Can't Catch a Break: The Depression Years and FDR 158
FDR: Friend or foe? 159
Striking a new deal 159
Can't Fool Us Twice: Black Americans and WWII 161

CHAPTER 8: **I, Too, Sing America: The Civil Rights Movement, 1954–1963** 163
The Tide Turns: Brown v. Board of Education (1954) 163
The 1954 ruling and the reaction 164
Desegregating Central High School 167
Massive resistance follows in Virginia 169

Putting a Face to Racial Violence: Emmett Till 169
Emmett Till's murder 170
The outrage of the nation 170
A New Twist in Leadership: Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. 171
Adopting the philosophy of nonviolence 172
Founding the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) 173
Sit-ins, Boycotts, and Marches: The King Era of the Civil Rights Movement Begins 173
The Montgomery Bus Boycott and Rosa Parks 174
Sitting in for justice 177
Founding SNCC 179
Riding for freedom 179
The Albany Movement: A chink in the armor 180
Integrating Ole Miss and Increasing Federal Involvement 181
1963: A Bloody Year 182
Not-so-sweet home Alabama: Birmingham 182
Murder in Mississippi: Medgar Evers 184
March of All Marches: The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (1963) 185

CHAPTER 9: **Turning Up the Heat (1963–1968)** 187
Suffering Two Tragic Blows 187
Four innocent victims 188
JFK dies 189
The Civil Rights Act of 1964 189
Targeting Mississippi for Voter Registration: Freedom Summer 190
Getting ready 190
Getting out the Black vote 191
Mississippi burning 192
The success of Freedom Summer 192
Oh Lord Selma: Back in Alabama 193
Getting arrested again 194
Marching from Selma to Montgomery 194
The Voting Rights Act of 1965 195
Black Power Rising 196
The Nation of Islam 196
Malcolm X 197
The Black Panther Party 199
The transformation of SNCC 200
Race Relations in the North 201
Rioting in Watts 201
The Chicago Freedom Movement 202
The Poor People's March 203

Death of a King 203
The night of his death and the mourning after 204
Continuing his work 204

CHAPTER 10: **Where Do We Go from Here? Post–Civil Rights** 207
The Panthers Stumble 208
Huey Newton: A symbol of Black Power 208
The BPP encounters challenges 208
Changing focus: Embracing nonviolence and women's leadership 213
Fighting Vietnam 214
An unfair fight 214
Reacting to the war 215
Coming home 215
Black Women Taking a Stand 217
A Race to Political Office 219
Getting a foot in the door in the 1960s 220
Making political strides in the 1970s 220
Eyeing a bigger prize in the 1980s 221
Still thriving in the 1990s and early 2000s 222
Money, Money, Money 222
Looking at homeownership 222
Facing barriers in business 223
Successful Black-owned businesses 224
Unforeseen Enemies 226
Crack cocaine 226
HIV/AIDS 228
The Racial Divide 229
L.A. riots 230
The O.J. Simpson verdict 230
A modern-day lynching 231
Hurricane Katrina 232

CHAPTER 11: **The New Civil Rights — Obama, Black Lives Matter, and Beyond** 233
Gaining the Presidency 234
Obama's 2008 campaign 234
The Age of Obama, 2008–2016 235
Black community gains 236
Black Lives Matter Emerges 238
I am Trayvon 239
Ferguson explodes: Michael Brown and the impact of Eric Garner's death 242
Police killings continue: Tamir Rice and Laquan McDonald 243
Baltimore Rising: Freddie Gray 243

The Charleston Church Massacre 244
Say her name: Sandra Bland 244
Colin Kaepernick Kneels and Donald Trump Reacts 245
Trump responds 246
Kaepernick opts out of his contract 247
Change Gone Come: Trump, COVID-19, and George Floyd 247
Trump's attacks continue 248
Stacey Abrams runs for governor in Georgia 249
COVID-19 exposes racial disparities 249
"Stop killing us": George Floyd and Breonna Taylor 251
The 2020 Election 253
Voting in the era of COVID-19 253
Trump and the U.S. Capitol riot 256

PART 4: CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS 259

CHAPTER 12: Somebody Say "Amen": The Black Church 261
Converting to Christianity 262
Early objections, early conversions 262
The Great Awakenings: Called to convert 263
Christianity, Black American style 264
Building and Sustaining the Black Church 266
Black churches in the North 267
The Black church in the antebellum South 268
Post–Civil War and Reconstruction 270
Worship in the early 20th century 271
The modern era: Megachurches 273
The changing role of women 274
Politics and the Church 275
Getting more political 276
Minister-politicians: Pulling double duty 276
Fighting for civil rights: Minister-activists 277
Continuing the struggle 278
Worshiping Outside the Black Christian Mainstream 279
Muslims and the Nation of Islam 279
Black Catholics 281
Jehovah's Witnesses 282
Seventh-day Adventists 283
Black demagogues 283

CHAPTER 13: More Than Reading and Writing: Education 285
A Brief History of Early Black American Education 286
Revolting education 286
Reconstructing: Education post–Civil War 289

20th-Century Educational Milestones 290
Mixing it up with the Brown case 290
Turning back the clock? 292
Vouchers and school choice 292
Leaving no child behind? Maybe 293
Atlanta Public Schools cheating scandal 294
Obama and Trump on education 294
Higher Learning 295
Launching higher ed for the Black masses 296
The Morrill Acts: Making it stick 298
Determining the goal of higher education 299
Desegregating higher education 303
School Daze: The Black Greek system 304

CHAPTER 14: **Writing Down the Bones: Black Literature** 307
Troubled Beginnings 308
Early poets 308
Slave narratives 310
A novel journey 311
Writers' Party: The Harlem Renaissance 314
Why Harlem? 315
Key Renaissance artists and themes 316
Post–World War II, Civil Rights–era Literature 319
Richard Wright 320
Ralph Ellison 320
James Baldwin 321
Frank Yerby 321
The Breakthrough: The Black Arts Movement 322
The beginning of the movement 322
Welcoming new voices 322
The Black Arts Movement legacy 323
Anthologies from the Black Arts Movement 323
Black Women's Words 324
Alice Walker 324
Toni Morrison 325
Black Books from the 1990s On 327

CHAPTER 15: **The Great Black Way: Theater and Dance** 331
Making an Early Statement 332
Minstrelsy: Performing in Blackface 333
White minstrels 333
Black minstrels 334

Moving toward Broadway: Black Musical Theater 335
More than minstrels 336
Williams and Walker on Broadway 336
The rumblings of serious Black theater 337
Shuffling ahead 340
Black Theater Comes of Age 342
The Federal Theater Project and Black drama 342
The American Negro Theater (ANT) 343
A place to call home 344
Black musicals, 1940s and beyond 345
Two Visionaries 346
August Wilson 346
George C. Wolfe 347
Black Theater in the 21st Century 348
Kenny Leon 348
Suzan-Lori Parks, Lynn Nottage, Tarell Alvin McCraney, and beyond 349
Black Dance in America 351
Early dances 351
Tap dance 352
Breakdancing 353
Classical dance forms 354

PART 5: A TOUCH OF GENIUS: MUSIC, FILM, TV, AND SPORTS 357

CHAPTER 16: **Give Me a Beat: Black Music** 359
African Roots 359
Black Music Fundamentals 360
Feeling the Spirit: The Spirituals 361
Ragtime 362
Singing the Blues 363
Blues basics 363
Blues genres 364
Famous blues musicians 365
Let the Good Times Roll: Jazz 367
The evolution of jazz styles 367
Jazz singers 371
Great jazz instrumentalists 372
Keeping the tradition alive 374
Spreading the Gospel 375
Kirk Franklin and the new gospel sound 377
Mainstreaming Black Music 378
R&B 378
Rocking and rolling 379

Motown 381
Giving America soul 383
Post-soul Black music 384
Getting funky and popping off 384
The hip-hop age of R&B 385
Taking the Rap 388
Hip hop matures 388
The West Coast opens up rap 389
Women take the mic 390
Trap music emerges 391
Lyrical emcees return 392

CHAPTER 17: **Black Hollywood: Film and Comedy** 393
Making Movies Black 394
Race movies: Introducing all-Black casts 395
Early Black roles in major studio films 398
1940s–1960s: Exploring new themes 401
1960s–1970s: Blaxploitation films 402
Spike Lee and a Black film renaissance 403
Hood films 404
Stepping out of the hood genre 405
The Rise of Black Directors 406
Spike Lee: Getting personal 406
1990s and early 2000s: The music video launch 407
The 2010s: Drama, horror, heroes, and more 408
2020: A stream of Black women directors 411
Black Film Stars: From Song to Celluloid 412
Singers-turned-actors 413
Rappers-turned-actors/producers 413
Kings and Queens of Comedy 415
Richard Pryor 415
Eddie Murphy 415
Male comedians who followed Pryor and Murphy 416
Whoopi Goldberg 419
Other comediennes 419
Enter Stage Left: Serious Actors 421
Sidney Poitier 421
Cicely Tyson 422
Denzel Washington 422
Morgan Freeman 423
Wesley Snipes 423
Samuel L. Jackson 424
Halle Berry 424
Viola Davis 425
And the Award Goes to? 426

CHAPTER 18: **Black Hollywood: TV** 427
Early Black TV Comedies. 428
Opening the doors wider 428
Getting an edge 429
Kid comedies 429
Cue the Huxtables and A Different World 430
Targeting the Black Hip-Hop Audience. 432
Cable TV Opens the Door to More 432
Black Women Comedians Contribute on TV 434
No More Drama with Dramas 435
The Rhimes effect 435
Made-for-TV movies 436
Black actors in cable TV series. 437
Network dramas 440
Highlighting Black LGBTQ stories 440
Black women TV executives. 442
The Next Level: Building Black Television and Film Empires. 443
The billion-dollar BET 443
The big "O" 444
Tyler Perry builds his own table 445

CHAPTER 19: **Winning Ain't Easy: Race and Sports** 449
Baseball. 449
The Negro Leagues 450
Jackie Robinson: Integrating baseball. 454
The modern era. 455
Basketball 456
College ball 457
Pro ball 458
Women's basketball 462
Boxing 464
Football 467
Pro football. 467
College football 469
Track and Field. 470
Tennis 474
Arthur Ashe 474
Venus and Serena Williams 475
Golf 475
Other Sports. 476

PART 6: THE PART OF TENS 479

CHAPTER 20: **Ten Black American Firsts** 481

Medicine (1837) 481
Law (1845) 482
Kentucky Derby (1875) 482
Congressional Medal of Honor (1900) 483
Rhodes Scholar (1907) 483
Exploration (1909) 483
Television (1939) 484
Nobel Peace Prize (1950) 484
Pulitzer Prize (1950) 484
Fashion (1988) 485

CHAPTER 21: **Ten Black Literary Classics** 487

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave Written by Himself (1845) 488
Up from Slavery: An Autobiography by Booker T. Washington (1901) 488
The Souls of Black Folk by W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) 489
The Mis-Education of the Negro by Carter G. Woodson (1933) 489
Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston (1937) 490
Native Son by Richard Wright (1940) 490
Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison (1952) 491
The Autobiography of Malcolm X (As Told to Alex Haley) by Alex Haley and Malcolm X (1965) 491
The Color Purple by Alice Walker (1982) 492
Beloved by Toni Morrison (1987) 492

CHAPTER 22: **Ten (Plus One) Influential Black American Visual Artists** 493

Joshua Johnson (c. 1763–1832) 494
Edmonia Lewis (c. 1844–1907) 494
Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859–1937) 495
Aaron Douglas (1899–1979) 495
Horace Pippin (1888–1946) 496
Loïs Mailou Jones (1905–1998) 497
Jacob Lawrence (1917–2000) 498
Romare Bearden (1911–1988) 498
John Biggers (1924–2001) 499
Samella Lewis, Ph.D. (1924–) 499
Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960–1988) 500

INDEX 501

Introduction

Black history as American history is a truth that has become increasingly more accepted since *African American History For Dummies* appeared more than a decade ago. The mainstream amplification of the 1921 Tulsa Massacre in such shows as *Watchmen* and *Lovecraft Country*, both from HBO, along with triumphant hidden history like mathematician Katherine Johnson's role in putting a man on the moon as shown in the Oscar-nominated *Hidden Figures*, have highlighted how little the average American, Black, white, Latino, Asian, indigenous, and more, actually knows about Black American history aside from the obvious Black History Month mainstays. For many, the police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Laquan McDonald, Michael Brown, and more point to the devastating role this nation's history of racial discrimination plays in modern policing. All these events drive home the pressing need for a more inclusionary American history curriculum.

Carter G. Woodson, the man who created Negro History Week, which evolved into Black History Month, actually envisioned a time when general American history would incorporate Black American history. He believed that this important aspect of the nation's collective history was for all to know. It's a core belief that modern Black history experts cosign.

"Black history is American history, and American history is Black history. You can't have one without the other," Dr. Dwight McBride, an African American studies expert who became president of The New School in New York City in 2020, has said. "And if you're going to tell a story of America, and leave out Black people, it's going to be a very incomplete, not to mention unsatisfying and dishonest, story."

Black American history is so much more than a handful of extraordinary individuals or cruel institutions like slavery and Jim Crow, or the ongoing battle for civil and human rights steeped in the Black Lives Matter movement. A lot of it is painful, but it's also inspiring and triumphant. History can give people the courage and strength to become better, to do better. "You can never know where you are going unless you know where you have been," said civil rights trailblazer Amelia Boynton Robinson, who almost lost her life on the Edmund Pettus Bridge during Bloody Sunday in 1965.

Sadly, it has taken the Civil War, the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, and a lot of struggle in between — and after — to even begin securing Black Americans the basic right of citizenship that many white Americans take for granted. *Black American History For Dummies* isn't a big sermon on this struggle; instead, it's a straightforward, interesting, and honest overview of Black American history from Africa through the transatlantic slave trade, slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s up to today. I hope this history sheds light on both the significance of Barack Obama's election as president and why the Black Lives Matter movement exists. Along the way, this history has birthed a culture that includes the Black church and education, as well as music, literature, film, television, and sports.

About This Book

Making this book as thorough (within the page constraints) and as engaging as possible has been a top priority for me. So consider *Black American History For Dummies* an introduction to a vast and vastly interesting subject. I hope it inspires you to seek out more information (in addition to books, I suggest quite a few documentaries and other movies that bring history to life). At the very least, look at the contributions of Black Americans with new eyes.

Of course, in deciding what to include, I tried to be as objective as possible. I sifted through many history books and online sources, and checked and double-checked numerous dates and facts so that you could trust the information contained in this book. Because that information is often ugly, there is objectionable language in quotes, songs, movie titles, and the overall history itself. So do know that keeping the context of the times in mind is required.

I have a personal connection to the book. My grandfather, a Mississippian from birth to death, came from a family of sharecroppers. My great aunt sang blues songs at family gatherings and told the best stories, some of which I later found in a book of "Negro" folklore. My grandmother never tired of sharing family stories with me, even a tragic one about the unsolved murder of her brother who migrated to Chicago in the 1930s. Of course, my whole family has plenty of stories about the civil rights movement, and, yes, I wish I had first learned about the Ku Klux Klan in books or on TV.

I've lived a little bit of Black American history myself, too. I was a middle school student when Harold Washington became Chicago's first Black mayor, and, wouldn't you know, David Dinkins became the first Black mayor of New York City when I moved there for college? Did I know that LL Cool J would become a global rap pioneer or a successful actor when I bumped into him at NYC clubs? Certainly

not, but in Los Angeles, I did know that meeting Fayard Nicholas of the legendary Nicholas Brothers dance duo was a huge privilege. I also cherished seeing Halle Berry, Will Smith, and Denzel Washington at the Academy Awards luncheon the year Berry and Washington won their Oscars. Braving the cold for Barack Obama's historic 2009 inauguration as the nation's first Black president was simply amazing. Still, one of my biggest thrills in life was meeting Muhammad Ali in Chicago when I was young.

Black American History For Dummies is the actual history behind these personal experiences and hopefully explains why these events mean so much. In my effort to reveal the interesting side of history (believe me, there is one!), I hope you'll also embrace this history and share it. The ultimate goal of this book for me is to make Black American history accessible without sacrificing, well, the history.

This book is chock-full of interesting information and stories to help give you a more complete picture of Black American history. Specifically, you can find details about the following:

- The role the deaths of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown played in sparking the Black Lives Matter movement
- How Black TV and film exploded in the 2010s
- The resurgence of political activism among Black athletes
- How Black literature has further expanded
- The changes afoot in the Black church

Foolish Assumptions

In writing (and revising) *Black American History For Dummies*, I had to make some assumptions about you, the reader. On top of my main assumption — that Black American history is important for everyone, not just Black Americans — here are a few others:

- You suspect that Black American contributions to American history run deeper than you learned in required history classes but don't know how to prove it.
- At one point, you tried to read about Black American history, but just couldn't find enough of what you needed to know in one spot and don't like the idea of having to dust off your high school or college research skills or cultivate them.

- You picked up bits and pieces of Black American history here and there but want an accessible reference where you can go to find out more.
- You're naturally inquisitive and open to finding out more about Black Americans and their struggles and triumphs, as well as their contributions to the nation overall.

Icons Used in This Book

The little pictures you see attached to paragraphs throughout the book are another of the standard, helpful *For Dummies* features. They flag information that's special and important for one reason or another. *Black American History For Dummies* uses the following icons:

HISTORICAL ROOTS

This icon accompanies information that explains where something — an organization, an event, and so on — originates. Perhaps you didn't know, for example, that other civil rights activists used sit-ins before they became popular in the 1960s.

BLACK AMERICAN FACES

This icon of a magnifying glass focuses on the details of Black Americans, especially those not typically spotlighted, who did some outstanding things that warrant further explanation.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Words say a lot. Surely, someone who made the brave decision to flee can better tell you how scary running away really was or what freedom truly means than I can. Besides, many of the quotations and excerpts that carry this icon are just outright inspiring.

TECHNICAL STUFF

Although I find everything in this book enlightening, I admit that it isn't all necessary in order to understand the topic. This icon points out what you may want to read but don't have to. It also highlights some interesting facts you might not know, like the fact that Mississippi didn't ratify the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery until 1995.

REMEMBER

This icon points to facts or ideas that you should, well. . . remember. Essentially, it's important stuff that's had a major impact on Black American and American history and therefore shouldn't be overlooked.

Where to Go from Here

Now's the time to dive into this book in the way that best suits you: I can't tell you which chapter to choose or part to read. Flip to the Table of Contents or index and find a topic that interests you. Skip around. Fast forward ahead or travel back in time. Within each chapter, sidestep sidebars or read only the text with Remember icons. Or if you like, read *Black American History For Dummies* from cover to cover. If you want a good overview of the book, start with Chapter 1 and find a topic that interests you. Part 2 delves deeper into slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. Or if you want to read more about how Black Americans have contributed to culture and sports, start with Part 5. For a handy reference guide, head to `www.dummies.com` and search for the "Black American History For Dummies Cheat Sheet." It's completely up to you.

1 Coming to America

IN THIS PART . . .

Get an overview of Black American history and culture, touching on the legacy of Carter G. Woodson who pioneered the field, identifying the past and present challenges stemming from anti-Blackness, exploring how Black Americans embrace the past personally and institutionally, as well as uncovering the push behind reparations.

Discover how Africans found themselves in the New World and the horrors they endured as commodities who largely built the American colonies effectively making England a world power in the process.

Understand how despite the disappointment of the American Revolution that promised freedom to all but denied it to the enslaved, they managed to become a nation within a nation, continuing the fight for freedom from enslavement that lasted roughly another 100 years.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Capturing the Black American experience throughout history
- Examining advances and challenges for Black Americans
- Exposing all Americans to Black American history
- Remaining conscious of unresolved issues

Chapter 1

The Soul of America

The word "Sankofa" from the Akan people in present-day Ghana and the Ivory Coast roughly translates to "knowing the past to know your future." The collective recognition of Black American history has come in stages and is frankly still evolving. In the mid-1970s, Americans felt that connection to a certain degree when Alex Haley's book *Roots* (1976) and the television miniseries sparked a nationwide fervor among Black Americans and others to learn more about Black Americans and their connection to Africa.

That passion was certainly reignited in the 2000s and 2010s as interest in DNA testing through companies like the Black-owned African Ancestry, allowing Black people, in particular, to see from which part of the African continent they may hail, exploded. So did interest in genealogy research, especially through online genealogy sites. Black scholar Henry Louis Gates proved this with the success of his 2006 PBS docuseries *African American Lives,* where he used DNA testing as well as historical and genealogical research to connect the American and African lineages of such participants as Oprah Winfrey, Chris Tucker, and Whoopi Goldberg. In 2008, he followed it with *Finding Your Roots* and later began incorporating white Americans, too.

Although the nation as a whole appeared to have a thirst for their roots, this quest seemed to once again take on special significance for Black Americans, who, through more than two centuries of slavery, had been routinely robbed of a direct, continuous connection to their African heritage. But what has that quest for

identity, belonging meant, especially in a country where it has been generally denied and suppressed? How does ignorance of Black American history contribute to the police killings of Black Americans like George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Eric Garner, Michael Brown and Tamir Rice? Or to the Capitol Riot at the top of 2021? Why is Black Lives Matter even necessary in the 21st century and why are folks like Stacey Abrams fighting voter suppression?

Not knowing the contributions of Black Americans to overall American history isn't just a disservice to Black Americans. "I want American history taught," celebrated writer James Baldwin once demanded. "Unless I'm in the book, you're not in it either." This chapter presents a general overview of Black American history, underscoring its importance to Black Americans and *all* Americans.

A Peek at the Past

Perhaps no one individual did as much for the study and popularization of Black American history as Carter G. Woodson, the man responsible for Black History Month. Born in 1875 in Virginia to parents who were formerly enslaved, Woodson received his B.A. at Kentucky's Berea College, his M.A. at the University of Chicago, and his Ph.D. at Harvard.

Woodson, who taught and led public schools even after receiving his graduate degrees, spearheaded the 1915 founding of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH), presently the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), which began publishing what is now the *Journal of African American History*. After overseeing the organization for more than 30 years, Woodson passed away in 1950 at the age of 74, but the organization still stands and is more than 100 years old.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Woodson believed that preserving Black American history was essential to Black American survival. "If a race has no history, if it has no worthwhile tradition," Woodson reasoned. "It becomes a negligible factor in the thought of the world, and it stands in danger of being exterminated." He also felt that omitting Black American contributions from general American history sanctioned and perpetuated racism. "The philosophy and ethics resulting from our educational system have justified slavery, peonage, segregation, and lynching," he noted. Looking at matters from this perspective, it's little wonder that Black Americans have been vilified.

The only way to move forward is to recognize this reality. And that can only be done by acknowledging the history. The following sections examine some moments in Black history.

Life before slavery

"What is Africa to me?" Countee Cullen asks in his 1930 poem "Heritage." It is a question that should resonate with more than just Black Americans. European interaction with the African continent profoundly changed the world — Black, white, and otherwise — and nowhere else is that fact more evident than in the United States.

With the exception of South Carolina, Africans were largely the racial minority in early America, partially because white colonists adamantly restricted their numbers. Even in small numbers, though, Africans had an enormous impact on American history. The truth is that America has a dual history rooted in both Europe and Africa. Despite what you see in many textbooks, Black American history didn't begin with slavery; like other Americans, Black Americans have a beginning that predates the Americas.

Kidnapped Africans transported to the Americas through the slave trade generally hailed from Western and Central Africa, an area that includes present-day Ghana, Nigeria, the Ivory Coast (also known as Côte d'Ivoire), Mali, Senegal, Angola, and the Congo. Of Africa's many empires, Ghana, Mali, and Songhay are the most important to Black American history. Some unique features of these empires included religious tolerance, attempts at representative government, and somewhat egalitarian attitudes concerning the contributions of women. Chapter 2 provides more information about these empires.

Although Egypt attracted European attention centuries before the slave trade began, tales of Africa's enormous riches reignited European interest in the continent. Portugal, which beat other European countries to Africa, didn't go there to become enslavers but rather to gain material wealth. And although the Portuguese captured Africans during those early trips, they weren't doomed to a lifetime of enslavement. Columbus's "discovery" of the New World and Spain's claim on the land changed that. When Spain instituted slavery to capitalize on cash crops like sugar, Portugal served as the primary supplier of Africans kidnapped from their homes. As Chapter 3 explains, England entered the slave trade relatively late but excelled quickly.

Life before emancipation

The first Africans to arrive in Virginia to Point Comfort and, later, Jamestown in 1619 were brought in on slave ships. Historians of the past argued that these people weren't enslaved; however, when John Punch (believed to be an ancestor of Barack Obama on his mother's side and Nobel Prize winner Ralph Bunche) ran away from Virginia to Maryland with two indentured servants who were white in 1640, only he received a punishment of lifetime enslavement when captured. Still

the evidence shows that Africans, by and large, never resigned themselves to being enslaved and kept trying for their freedom, either through running away, challenging their status in court, or trying to appeal to the moral consciences of colonists.

Enslaved life was harsh, with human beings reduced to nothing more than property. Laws ensured that those enslaved had no control over their lives. Slaveholders had the legal right to dictate their every move and mistreat them with no recourse. Consequently, slaveholders separated families without a second thought, and rapes and unwanted pregnancies were far from unusual occurrences for enslaved girls and women.

Still, free Blacks and their enslaved brethren never abandoned their hope for freedom. Whether they ran away, rallied sympathetic white people toward emancipation or helped carry others to freedom using the Underground Railroad, they did whatever they could to force the new nation to live up to its promise of freedom and equality. Less than a century into the new nation's existence, the inevitable happened with the onset of the Civil War.

Life before civil rights

Long before Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery, Black Americans firmly set their minds on attaining freedom. When Lincoln wavered about ending slavery during the Civil War, Black Americans like Frederick Douglass continued lobbying for freedom.

Reconstruction (the period of recovery, particularly in the South, following the Civil War) revealed that most white Americans had never seriously entertained the idea of Black American freedom. Even some white abolitionists who believed that Black people shouldn't be enslaved didn't necessarily believe that they should enjoy the same rights and freedoms as other white people. White Congressman Thaddeus Stevens was the grand exception. He and others battled to right the wrongs of the past tied to slavery through various actions like proposing an amendment to the 1866 Freedmen's Bureau Bill for 40 acre lots for freedmen or supporting bills like the Civil Rights Act of 1866 declaring all men born in the country free with the aid of newly inaugurated Black American congressmen. White Southerners, evidenced by their subsequent push for poll taxes, grandfather clauses, and new state constitutions often excluding Black people, refused to change the status quo, and the North largely sat back and watched.

When Reconstruction ended, Black Americans continued the fight for racial equality as white mob violence compromised their freedom and Jim Crow ruled their lives determining where they could live, eat and socialize. In the 20th century,