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The precursor to Black History Month was established in 1926 in the United States, when historian Carter G. Woodson and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History announced the second week of February to be "Negro History Week." That week was chosen because it coincided with the birthday of Abraham Lincoln on February 12th and of Frederick Douglass on February 14th, dates Black communities had celebrated together since the late 19th century,

From the event's initial phase, primary emphasis was placed on encouraging the coordinated teaching of the history of American blacks in the nation's public schools. At the time of Negro History Week's launch, Woodson contended that the teaching of black history was essential to ensure the physical and intellectual survival of the race within broader society:

"If a race has no history, it has no worthwhile tradition, it becomes a negligible factor in the thought of the world, and it stands in danger of being exterminated."

By 1929 *The Journal of Negro History* was able to note that with only two exceptions, officials with the State Departments of Educations of "every state with considerable Negro population" had made the event known to that state's teachers and distributed official literature associated with the event."

After a lukewarm start, Negro History Week ultimately prompted the creation of black history clubs, an increase in interest among teachers, and a segment of mainstream dominant culture. Negro History Week grew in popularity throughout the following decades, with mayors across the United States endorsing it as a holiday.

The expansion of Black History Week to Black History Month was first proposed by the leaders of the Black United Students at Kent State University in February 1969. The first celebration of the Black History Month took place at Kent State one year later, in February 1970.

In 1976 as part of the United States Bicentennial, the informal expansion of Negro History Week to Black History Month was officially recognized by the U.S. government. President Gerald Ford spoke in regards to this, urging Americans to "seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected

accomplishments of black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history.”

And so it is fitting and proper that we, too, in Idaho should commemorate and recognize the accomplishments of African American in this, Black History Month. Though blacks in Idaho number less than 1% of the population, we have proudly proclaimed Idaho our home and continue to work diligently in service to its growth and development. Some of us for many generations.

Since the arrival of York, manservant of Captain William Clark in 1805 to present day, Blacks continue to cherish Idaho as our home:

- From Ned and Suzanne Legroan of Milo who came to Idaho with the Mormon Migration
- To miner George Washington Blackman of Hailey in 1879
- From former slave Elvina Moulton who crossed the plains in 1867 and “got tired” and stopped in Boise and on February 24, 1878, became the only Black charter member of the Boise Presbyterian Church
- From Jennie Hughes who was the first Black known to graduate from the University of Idaho in 1908 with a degree in Botany
- To Reginal Reeves, graduate of the University of Idaho Law school in 1952
- From Dr. Alexander J. Foster, a podiatrist who practiced in Nampa, Twin Falls, and Idaho Falls
- To Tracy Thompson, Bronco Rider from Pocatello, father of Human Rights Activists Idaho Purce and grandfather of Thomas Les Purce, the first Black elected official in Idaho History who served as first a city councilman and then mayor of Pocatello and later served as Director of Idaho's departments of Administration and Health and Welfare under Governor John Evans.
- From the establishment of the Idaho Black History Museum in 1999– the first in the northwest - to the present, Feb 1, 2016, blacks have

been part of the landscape, culture, vitality and economic development of Idaho.

Idaho's black citizens have persevered to contribute to that rich mosaic that is uniquely Idaho. You will find proud Black Idahoans across the state, working, sharing, educating, worshipping, building. Good Senators, I ask your support to commemorate and recognize the contributions of Idaho's Black Citizens by recognizing February 2016 as Black History Month in Idaho.