History

Carter G. Woodson, founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, first proposed a Negro History Week in 1925, seeking to increase awareness of African American contributions throughout American history. Woodson chose the week in February between Abraham Lincoln’s and Frederick Douglass’ birthdays as the time of celebration. Fifty years after the first such week, President Gerald Ford took the opportunity of the United States bicentennial in 1976 to officially proclaim the month of February as Black History Month, calling on all Americans to “seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history.” Every president since has continued to proclaim February as Black History Month or, more recently, National African American History Month.

Johns Hopkins’ Legacy

The very first patient ever admitted to The Johns Hopkins Hospital in the summer of 1879 was an African American bricklayer named John Bruff, who was treated and spent two months in recovery there. Thus, from the very beginning, the hospital upheld the beliefs of its founder, Mr. Johns Hopkins, who wrote that the institution must always strive to care for the “sick of this city and its environs, without regard to sex, age, or color.”

African Americans Locally and Nationally

African Americans make up approximately one-third of the patients and employees at the various Johns Hopkins hospitals—roughly on par with the percentages in Maryland as a whole.

Johns Hopkins patients*
31%

Johns Hopkins employees*
29%

African Americans in Baltimore+
63%

African Americans in Washington, D.C.+
48%

African Americans in Maryland+
31%

African Americans in the United States+
13%

+ (2016, estimated)
* (Collectively, at the six Johns Hopkins hospitals, Fiscal Year 2017)
Prominent African Americans in Johns Hopkins History

**Vivien T. Thomas**
One of the most innovative surgical pioneers of his generation despite being financially unable to complete college, Thomas began work in the lab of Alfred Blalock, where the two built one of the most fruitful partnerships in modern medicine. Thomas was initially hired as a research technician, doing post-doctorate level research, though his job was listed as “janitor.” Despite the limitations imposed by racial prejudice of the time, Thomas was instrumental in many of the most important surgical advances of the 1930s and 40s, including revolutionizing theories of shock and innovating successful open-heart surgery procedures, including the first successful blue baby operation. Thomas worked at Johns Hopkins for 35 years, eventually becoming the supervisor of the surgical research laboratories and mentoring such luminaries as Levi Watkins. In 1976, The Johns Hopkins University bestowed an honorary doctorate upon Thomas for his tremendous contributions.

**Roland Thomas Smoot**
A gifted doctor and the first black chief of medicine at Provident Hospital, Smoot was the first black physician to be granted admitting privileges at The Johns Hopkins Hospital. Joining the faculty in 1963, at a time when area restaurants were still closed to African Americans, Smoot persevered and went on to personally mentor approximately 500 minority students. In 1978, Smoot became assistant dean of student affairs, and in 1983, was elected the first black president of Medical and Chirurgical Faculty of the State of Maryland.

**Levi Watkins**
Watkins was the first black chief resident in cardiac surgery at The Johns Hopkins Hospital. A medical pioneer, he was the first surgeon to implant an automatic defibrillator in a human subject – a procedure that has been credited with saving tens of thousands of lives. A close friend and mentee of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Ralph David Abernathy, Watkins was also a doctor to many prominent figures in the civil rights movement, including Abernathy, Coretta Scott King and Rosa Parks. In his time at Johns Hopkins from 1970 until his death in 2015, Watkins was a constant innovator, helping develop the hospital’s cardiac arrhythmia service and starting the nation’s first postgraduate association. A mentor to countless students, Watkins is responsible for increasing minority representation in the school of medicine by 400 percent during the four years he served on the school’s admissions committee.

**Claudia Thomas**
A 1975 graduate from the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, Thomas became the first black female orthopaedic surgeon in the United States. While still an undergraduate at Vassar College, she was instrumental in a 1969 civil resistance effort that led to the formation of that school’s Africana Studies department.

**Fannie Gaston-Johansson**
The first black female full professor in Johns Hopkins University history, Gaston-Johansson was an accomplished researcher of racial disparities in breast cancer outcomes, as well as an innovator in pain management, developing the internationally used Painometer pain assessment tool. In 2007, Gaston-Johansson became the inaugural chair of the school of nursing’s Department of Acute and Chronic Care, in addition to holding a position at Sweden’s University of Gothenburg, where she served as dean and was the founder of the university’s doctoral program in nursing. In 2005, she became the first nurse ever elected to Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, and in 2015 she was granted Living Legend status by the American Academy of Nursing.
Health Disparities
African Americans compared to Non-Hispanic Whites

**BREAST CANCER**
40% more likely to die from breast cancer

**ASTHMA**
2.1x more likely to die from asthma

**MATERNAL MORTALITY**
2.5x more likely to die during pregnancy

**INFANT MORTALITY**
2.2x more likely to die within first year of life

**OBESITY**
40% more likely to be obese

**DIABETES**
60% more likely to be diabetic

**2x** more likely to undergo leg, foot or toe amputation

**DEPRESSION**
20%
less likely to receive treatment for depression

**STROKE**
40%
more likely to die from stroke

**HEART DISEASE**
30%
more likely to die of heart disease

**STOMACH CANCER**
2x more likely to die of stomach cancer

**PROSTATE CANCER**
2x more likely to die from prostate cancer

**CERVICAL CANCER**
2x more likely to die from cervical cancer

**HIV**
8x more likely to die from HIV

**DIABETES**
60% more likely to be diabetic

Resources

**African American History Month**
[africanamericanhistorymonth.gov](http://africanamericanhistorymonth.gov)

**National Park Service: African American Heritage**
[www.nps.gov/aahistory](http://www.nps.gov/aahistory)

**EDSITEment’s Guide to Black History Month Teaching Resources**
[edsitement.neh.gov/feature/editems-2-black-history-month-teaching-resources](http://edsitement.neh.gov/feature/editems-2-black-history-month-teaching-resources)

**Johns Hopkins Resources**

**Johns Hopkins University Black Faculty and Staff Association**
[bfsa.jhu.edu/](http://bfsa.jhu.edu/)

**Black Graduate Student Association (BGSA)**

**The Student National Medical Association (SNMA)/JHU Chapter**
[www.hopkinsmedicine.org/som/students/diversity/snma](http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/som/students/diversity/snma)

**African Public Health Network**

**Johns Hopkins University Black Student Union**
[www.facebook.com/jhubsu](http://www.facebook.com/jhubsu)

**The Indispensable Role of Blacks Project**
[bfsa.jhu.edu/exhibits/exhibit-list](http://bfsa.jhu.edu/exhibits/exhibit-list)

Source: FamiliesUSA ([familiesusa.org/product/african-american-health-disparities-compared-to-non-hispanic-whites](http://familiesusa.org/product/african-american-health-disparities-compared-to-non-hispanic-whites))
Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)

The term historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) refers to institutions of higher education in the United States founded prior to 1964 for African American students. In Title III of the Higher Education Act of 1965, Congress officially defined an HBCU as “a school of higher learning that was accredited and established before 1964, and whose principal mission was the education of African Americans.”

The first HBCUs were founded in Pennsylvania and Ohio before the American Civil War (1861–65) with the purpose of providing black youths — who were largely prevented, due to racial discrimination, from attending established colleges and universities — with a basic education and training to become teachers or tradesmen.

Today, HBCUs produce 24% of African American STEM graduates and confer almost 35% of all bachelor’s degrees earned by African American graduates in astronomy, biology, chemistry, math and physics. According to a report from the National Science Foundation, eight of the top 10 institutions producing African American undergraduates who went on to earn science and engineering doctorates were HBCUs.

Learn more about HBCUs: thehundred-seven.org/hbculist.html

Sources
1. Black Greeks: A Legacy in Peril?
diverseeducation.com/article/10154/
2. The Importance Of Black Greek-Letter Organizations
www.theodysseyonline.com/the-importance-of-black-greek-letter-organizations
3. Historically black colleges and universities
www.britannica.com/topic/historically-black-colleges-and-universities
4. The history of HBCUs in America
www.americanradioworks.org/segments/hbcu-history/

The Divine Nine: The History of Black Greek Organizations

The five black fraternities and four black sororities that comprise the “Divine Nine” were established in the early 20th century as a response to white Greek-letter organizations that denied black students entry. Amid racial oppression and segregation, these organizations assumed the charge of activism, scholarship, social uplift and service. Today, they play a significant role in the lives of young African Americans in higher education. Greek life influences campus life, social life, surrounding communities, networking and friendships.

Learn more about the Divine Nine: blackgreek.com/divinenine

National Black History Month

#HopkinsBetterTogether