

# CITY OF NEW BEDFORD

## IN CITY COUNCIL

January 18, 2018

### RESOLUTION IN HONOR AND CELEBRATION OF BLACK HISTORY MONTH - FEBRUARY 2018

**WHEREAS**, Dr. Carter G. Woodson, a high school teacher, discovered that schools did not teach the history of Black Americans; and in 1915, he set out to change that by establishing the Association for the Study of African-American Life and History (ASALH) and in 1926, he established "Negro History Week" to be held during the second week of February, this date was chosen because it marked the birthdays of famed abolitionists Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass; and

**WHEREAS**, The Celebration of Black History Week was then expanded to encompass the month of February 1976, the Country's Bicentennial year, but not without some controversy and debate regarding designating a month to the history of one race rather than overall history; therefore, the importance of providing a Theme to show that the intention was never to dictate or limit the exploration of the Black experience, but to bring to the public's attention important developments that merit emphasis; and

**WHEREAS**, The ongoing mission of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, now holding its 103rd Annual ASALH Convention, is to promote, research, preserve, interpret and disseminate information about Black life, history and culture and to be the premier Black Heritage learned society with a strong network of national and international branches whose diverse and inclusive membership will continue the Woodson Legacy, and one of the most successful means to achieve this goal has been, and still is, BLACK HISTORY MONTH and its powerful Themes; and

**WHEREAS**, The **THEME** for 2018 is "African Americans in Times of War", honoring those brave men and women who served their countries in the Armed Forces, especially those who made the ultimate sacrifice while defending the American ideals of freedom and democracy, during World War II, more than two and a half million black men registered for the draft and one million served as draftees or volunteers in every branch of the armed forces, a decade before the first glimmers of the civil rights movement, most black men were assigned to segregated combat groups, more than twelve thousand black men who served in the segregated 92<sup>nd</sup> Division received Citations or were decorated for "extraordinary heroism" on the battlefield, more famously the Tuskegee Airmen became legendary for their heroic feats and as a group received a Distinguished Unit Citation, several silver stars, 150 distinguished flying crosses, 14 bronze stars and 744 air metals by war's end, recognition of the African-American contribution to the war effort would eventually lay the groundwork for the civil rights protests of the 1950s and the 1960s; and

**WHEREAS**, "THE CRISIS IN BLACK EDUCATION" focusing on the crucial role of education in the history of African Americans, ASALH's founder Carter G. Woodson once wrote that "if you teach the Negro that he has accomplished as much good as any other race he will aspire to equality and justice without regard to race," Woodson understood well the implications associated with the denial of access to knowledge, and he called attention to the crisis that resulted from persistently imposed racial barriers to equal education, the crisis in black education first began in the days of slavery when it was unlawful for slaves to learn to read and write, in pre-Civil War northern cities, whether by laws, policies, or practices, racially separated schools remained the norm in America from the late nineteenth century well into our own time, the crisis in black education has grown significantly in urban neighborhoods where public schools lack resources, endure overcrowding, exhibit a racial achievement gap, and confront policies that fail to deliver substantive opportunities, the touted benefits of education remain elusive to many blacks of all ages, tragically, some poorly performing schools serve as pipelines to prison for youths, yet, African American history is rich in centuries-old efforts of resistance to this crisis: the slaves' surreptitious endeavors to learn; the rise of black colleges and universities after the Civil War; unrelenting battles in the courts; the black history movement; the freedom schools of the 1960s; and local community-based academic and mentorship programs that addressed the crisis in black education should be considered one of the most important goals in America's present and future; and

**WHEREAS**, We cannot allow Black History Month to pass without recognizing our many local people of color who have accomplished great things against great odds, such as Frederick Douglass, who began his new, free life in our great City; Medal of Honor recipient Sgt. William Carney, who led his Civil War Regiment to victory; Westport's Paul Cuffe, son of an African slave and Wampanoag Indian, born in Cuttyhunk, who, in the years after the American Revolution built an American shipbuilding fortune on the Westport River and founded the first elementary school in Westport, MA; New Bedford Whaling Era's Lewis Temple, inventor of the toggle harpoon; abolitionist and confectioner Polly Johnson; escaped slave Henry "Box" Brown; Edward M. Brooke, III, of Massachusetts, who was the first African-American Attorney General of any State, first African-American United States Senator and a Presidential Medal of Freedom Winner; Deval Patrick, who was the first African-American Governor of Massachusetts; former Illinois Senator Barack Obama, who became the first African-American elected to the Office of President of the United States; as well as many, many other individuals whose accomplishments have not yet been fully recognized; and

**WHEREAS**, Black History Month continues to pay tribute to the African-American history makers of the past and present, and the sacrifices made to ensure equality among all men and women of this great Nation, and serves as an occasion to examine the collective creativity, cultural and political experience of the masses of Africans and people of African descent, through lectures, exhibitions, banquets and cultural activities held throughout the United States in schools, communities, Churches and political arenas:

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the New Bedford City Council takes note and celebrates the **MONTH OF FEBRUARY 2018, as BLACK HISTORY MONTH**, urges Citizens to honor and remember the Black Heroes of the past and present, and encourages everyone to take part in activities held Citywide in recognition of our community's rich heritage of diversity; and **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, That this Resolution be posted outside of the City Council Chamber for the entire month of February 2018, in recognition of **BLACK HISTORY MONTH**.