

DENVER CITY COUNCIL



Proclamation

Proclamation No. 25-0246
Uplifting Black History Month and the Unwavering Fight for Freedom and Justice

WHEREAS, The United States was built on the backs of those stolen from their lands, forcibly enslaved, and subjected to unimaginable brutality, their labor, and sacrifices shaping the foundations of this nation, yet their contributions have too often been minimized or erased from the narrative of American greatness; and

WHEREAS, Black History Month has its origins in the celebration of Negro History Week, first observed in 1926 to honor the birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln. It was advanced by the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History—founded in 1915 by historian Carter G. Woodson and minister Jesse E. Moorland—to acknowledge the enduring contributions of Black individuals to American history in a time when the country was actively attempting to erase their contributions; and

WHEREAS, over time the observance of Negro History Week evolved into Black History Month—initially celebrated as a week-long event by mayors across the nation that honored the enduring legacy of Black history, and later expanded in the late 1960s amid the rising momentum of the civil rights movement and increasing awareness of Black identity into a full month-long observance officially designated by President Ford in 1976 and embraced by every subsequent administration—while recognizing that true Black history is not confined to a single month but is a daily legacy woven into the fabric of this nation and integral to understanding its present and future; and

WHEREAS, Black Americans have made unparalleled contributions to every field, from pioneering advancements in science and medicine by figures such as George Washington Carver and Dr. Mae Jemison, to shaping music, literature, and art through the works of artists like Langston Hughes, Nina Simone, and John Coltrane, who have defined cultural movements and inspired the world; and

WHEREAS, Black American leaders, from Harriet Tubman to Frederick Douglass, from Malcolm X to Angela Davis, have relentlessly fought for freedom, justice, and equality, laying the groundwork for future generations to continue the battle for civil rights and human dignity; and

WHEREAS, Black History Month serves as a reminder of the ongoing struggle for racial justice and equality, a call to action against the erasure of the history, culture, and contributions of Black Americans, and a steadfast demand for a world where all people, regardless of race, have the freedom, opportunity, and respect they deserve; and

WHEREAS, at the federal level, there is a disturbing movement to erase the acknowledgment of Black history as a month worthy of recognition, further seeking to undermine the collective understanding of our nation's legacy, struggles, and progress toward justice; and

WHEREAS, uplifting Black History Month is not only about celebrating the past but about creating a future that acknowledges the pain and triumphs of Black Americans, one that recognizes that the fight for justice is far from over, and must continue in the face of continued efforts to dismantle DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) systems in our schools, workplaces, and communities; and

WHEREAS, the history of Black people in Denver, Colorado, stands as a testament to resilience, ingenuity, and civic leadership, as they have, from the city's earliest days to its modern era, overcome systemic adversity and discrimination to build vibrant, economically robust, and culturally rich communities that have laid the foundation for Denver's diverse identity; and

WHEREAS, this enduring legacy is exemplified by pioneering figures whose remarkable contributions have profoundly shaped the community—Barney L. Ford, whose entrepreneurial spirit and civil rights advocacy earned him the title “Black Baron of Colorado”; Justina Ford, Colorado's first licensed Black woman doctor, who surmounted racial and gender barriers to deliver thousands of babies and provide critical healthcare to marginalized populations; Ruth Denny, a dedicated educator and civil rights activist who championed equitable policies in education and employment; and Elvin R. Caldwell, Sr., the first Black person elected to Denver's City Council, whose leadership in economic justice, housing reform, and desegregation has left an indelible mark on the city—each of whom continues to inspire future generations through their steadfast commitment to progress and justice; and

WHEREAS, The City and County of Denver recognizes the enduring legacy of systemic racism, discrimination, and marginalization and the exploitation of Black culture and labor, as well as the harmful influence of the Ku Klux Klan in shaping discriminatory policies that continue to affect the city today; and

WHEREAS, the City and County of Denver proudly honors the vibrant history and resilience of its Black communities, exemplified by historic neighborhoods like Five Points (often called the “Harlem of the West”) where, in the face of segregation and redlining, Black residents forged self-sustaining communities of businesses, churches, and cultural institutions, and where institutions like the Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library preserve this enduring legacy; and

WHEREAS, the City of Denver, as a progressive and diverse community, stands in resistance to any efforts to erase Black history, and is committed to amplifying the voices, achievements, and contributions of Black Americans, today and every day, while fostering an environment that supports unity, justice, and the ongoing fight for racial equity.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT PROCLAIMED BY THE DENVER CITY COUNCIL:

Section 1. That the Denver City Council formally recognizes February 2025 as Black History Month in the City and County of Denver, and calls upon all residents to honor Black history, not just during this month, but every day, as a fundamental part of American history and identity. We encourage all to stand in solidarity with the fight for racial justice, to resist the erasure of Black history, and to support initiatives that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion for all.

Section 2. That the Denver City Council encourages all Denver residents to engage with and celebrate Black History by visiting institutions such as the Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, exploring the historic Five Points neighborhood, as well as supporting local Black-owned businesses and cultural events. In doing so, our community reaffirms its commitment to preserving and promoting the invaluable heritage of Black Denverites and ensuring that their stories of struggle, triumph, and innovation are passed onto future generations.

Section 3. That the Clerk and Recorder of the City and County of Denver shall affix the seal of the City and County of Denver to this proclamation and transmit a copy to Auon'tai Anderson and the Black Santa Project, Black American West Museum and Heritage Center, Black Business Initiative, Black Cannabis Equity Initiative, Black Economic Opportunities Council, Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, Blazing Chicken Shack II, Brother Jeff and the Brother Jeff Cultural Center, Center for African American Health, Collaborative Healing Initiative within Communities, Colorado Black Arts Festival, Colorado Black Chamber of Commerce, Colorado Black Round Table, Colorado Black Women for Political Action, Colorado Center for Change, Curls on the Block, Denver African American Commission, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Colorado Holiday Commission, Dr. Plashan McCune and the African American Young Ladies Summit, Ducks in a Row Human Services, Elbra Wedgeworth, Families Against Violent Acts, Families Forward Resource Center, Fathima Dickerson and the Welton St. Cafe, Five Points Business Improvement District, Five Points Music Festival, Frontline Farming, Girls Inc. of Metro Denver, GirlTrek, Greater Denver CARES, Greater Ministerial Alliance, HOPE Center, Juneteenth Music Festival, Justice for Black Coloradoans, Kevin Marchman, Roger Cobb and the Northeast Park Hill Coalition, K-Solutions, LaMone Noles and the East Denver Residents Council, Legacy Foundation for Family and Community Development, Make a Chess Move, MiDian Luckett and the Epitome of Black Excellence and Partnership, Millete Birhanemaskel and the Whittier Cafe, Ms. Ann White and Montbello 2020, NAACP Denver, National Organization of African Americans in Housing Prime, Neighborhood Uplift, Park Hill Pirates Youth Sports Organization, Pastor Vernon Jones Jr. and Faithbridge, Project VOYCE, Rise 5280, Rocky Mountain NAACP, Simone D. Ross, Soul 2 Soul Sisters, Street Fraternity, Struggle of Love, The Center for Trauma and Resilience, Urban League, Urban Leadership Foundation of Colorado, Youthseen.

PASSED BY THE COUNCIL February 24, 2025

Amursh P. Sandborn

PRESIDENT