

DENVER CITY COUNCIL



Proclamation

Proclamation No. 26-0100
Honoring the work of Blair Caldwell African American Research Library, Stiles African American Heritage Center, Black American West Museum & Heritage Center and Central Baptist Church in celebration of Black History Month

WHEREAS, Denver's first Black mayor and his wife, Mayor Wellington Webb and the Honorable Wilma Webb, shared a vision for a research library and museum to preserve and showcase the many incredible contributions of African Americans in Colorado and in the West; and

WHEREAS, with community support and investment and with the help of pioneering Black librarians Gwendolyn Crenshaw and Charleszine "Terry" Nelson, they worked to obtain historical materials about the accomplishments of African Americans in the west. In 2000, the Denver Public Library engaged consultants and a community advisory committee to help plan the research library and in April 2003, the Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library opened to the public; and

WHEREAS, named after Omar Blair, a Tuskegee Airman and the first African American to serve as president of the Denver Public School Board, and Elvin Caldwell, the first African American elected to the Denver City Council, Blair-Caldwell's mission of serving as an educational and cultural resource for the people of Denver and the world, focusing on the history, literature, art, music, religion and politics of African Americans throughout the Rocky Mountain west is unique and important to the education and preservation of Black History and culture; and

WHEREAS, Blair-Caldwell is poised to continue serving as a cultural and community hub, where Black representation and celebration is at the center of all three floors: the branch library, the archives, research library, and the Western Legacies Museum; and

WHEREAS, the Central Baptist Church is the second oldest African American church in Denver, Colorado. Organized in the fall of 1891 with 30 members by the first Pastor, Reverend W.P.T. Jones, M.D., Central Baptist Church has always been known throughout the United States of America as a church with outstanding Bible-based preaching and exceptional choirs and faithful members; and

WHEREAS, a frame structure situated at 20th and Arapahoe was known to the residents of Denver as the only colored church in the city, leading up to 1891; and

WHEREAS, this church was originally known as Zion Baptist. The Reverend W.P.T. Jones, a minister and medical doctor, who had come from St. Louis, Missouri asked and received permission of Reverend John E. Ford and the official board of Zion Baptist to organize a new church. Aggressiveness and spirituality characterized these founding members, and their characteristics have clung to the membership throughout the years; and

WHEREAS, the corner of 24th and California Street has served as a lighthouse for the past 133 years; and

WHEREAS, Grace Stiles retired from teaching in Denver Public Schools in 1991. In 1994, Grace still felt the need to educate people on the contributions of African Americans and founded African American History on Wheels, loading her car with educational materials and taking her knowledge to various schools, businesses, churches and nursing homes; and

WHEREAS, in 1995, Grace purchased two abandoned houses in the Five Points area located at 2607 Glenarm Place and 517 26th Street and with the help of countless volunteers and her personal savings; and

WHEREAS, in 1998, Grace founded the Stiles African American Heritage Center. Since then, the Stiles African American Heritage Center has been a cultural pillar of the historical Black neighborhood. Grace built her center to celebrate the achievements of Black Americans from inventors to entrepreneurs while paying homage to our African Ancestors; and



WHEREAS, today the Center serves as a gathering place for community cultural events and meetings, including the Kwanzaa Committee of Denver and the Colorado Native Plant Society; and

WHEREAS, Grace Stiles passed away on January 26, 2025, and her family, an advisory board, and many dedicated volunteers are honoring her legacy by keeping the Center open on Saturdays from 2 to 4 p.m.; and

WHEREAS, Paul Wilbur Stewart, born in 1925 in Clinton, Iowa to one of only a few African American families in the county, honorably served in the United States Navy during World War II and later pursued a career as a barber after earning a certificate from Moler Barber College in 1947; and

WHEREAS, during a visit to Denver in the early 1960s, Stewart became aware of the largely omitted history of Black cowboys through his cousin, Earl Mann, Colorado’s first African American legislator, an experience that inspired Stewart to preserve and elevate these overlooked narratives; and

WHEREAS, Stewart’s lifelong dedication to documenting African American contributions to the Western frontier led to the founding of the Black American West Museum & Heritage Center, which grew from his personal collection honoring Black pioneers and everyday settlers of the West; and

WHEREAS, the Black American West Museum & Heritage Center continues Stewart’s legacy by honoring Dearfield, Colorado, an early twentieth century African American agricultural settlement and enduring symbol of Black self-determination, resilience, and perseverance, while also recognizing the vital contributions of Dr. Justina Ford and African American cowboys, miners, soldiers, ranchers, homesteaders, educators, lawmen, entrepreneurs, and others who helped shape the development of the American West.

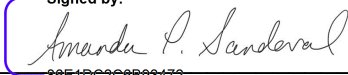
NOW THEREFORE, BE IT PROCLAIMED BY THE DENVER CITY COUNCIL:

Section 1. That the Denver City Council honors the Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, the Stiles African American Heritage Center, the Black American West Museum & Heritage Center, and Central Baptist Church during Black History Month for their vital roles in preserving, educating, and uplifting African American history, culture, faith, and legacy, and for their enduring contributions that strengthen community, advance equity, and ensure that the stories of Black Denver and the American West are honored for generations to come.

Section 2. 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 that copies be transmitted to Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, Black American West Museum & Heritage Center, Stiles African American Heritage Center and Central Baptist Church.

PASSED BY THE COUNCIL February 2, 2026

Signed by:


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PRESIDENT

