

PROCLAMATION

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

FEBRUARY 2026

WHEREAS, the story of Black History Month began in 1915, half a century after the Thirteenth Amendment abolished chattel slavery in the United States, when Harvard-trained historian Dr. Carter G. Woodson, known as the “Father of Black History,” and the prominent minister Jesse E. Moorland founded the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), an organization dedicated to researching, preserving, and promoting the achievements of Black Americans; and

WHEREAS, in 1926, Dr. Woodson launched the first Negro History Week, held during the second week of February to honor the birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln, marking the beginning of a national effort to ensure Black history would no longer be excluded from America’s historical narrative; and

WHEREAS, what began as a week of recognition grew into a movement of education, celebration, and truth-telling, and in 1976, fifty years later, Negro History Week officially expanded into what we now know as Black History Month, recognized nationwide as an essential time to reflect upon, honor, and uplift the enduring contributions of African Americans to the United States and the global Black diaspora; and

WHEREAS, Black history is U.S. history, and essential to understanding the complexities of our nation’s past and present. It is a story of resistance, brilliance, creativity, perseverance, and the continued pursuit of liberation and justice, lessons that continue to inspire all marginalized communities striving toward equity and inclusion; and

WHEREAS, the ASALH continues its mission to promote, research, preserve, interpret, and disseminate information about Black life, history, and culture to the global community, and the year 2026 marks the 100-year commemoration of this national tradition of honoring Black history, from its origins to its continued relevance today; and

WHEREAS, the Village of Oak Park is proud to celebrate this milestone year with a series of community-centered events that highlight the evolution of Black American history, culture, and excellence across generations; and

WHEREAS, the Village will kick off its Black History Month commemorations with an art reception, A William A. Keyes Experience, on January 30, 2026, honoring artistic legacy and cultural storytelling within our community; and

WHEREAS, the Village of Oak Park will commemorate Black History Month with a special performance by Kuumba Kids during the Village Board Meeting on February 10, 2026, celebrating African American culture through music, dance, and storytelling; and

WHEREAS, in 2006, Oak Park parent Donna Callender founded Harambee—Swahili for “let’s pull together”—in partnership with Longfellow School’s Parents of African American Children (PAAC), creating a space for children to celebrate Black excellence, cultural pride, community engagement, and educational enrichment. The 20th Anniversary Harambee event will take place on Saturday, February 28, 2026, from 12:00 PM to 5:00 PM, featuring Kuumba Kids. We recognize and celebrate the 20-year legacy of Harambee and its ongoing impact on Oak Park families and the broader community; and

WHEREAS, the Village of Oak Park will host its 4th Annual Black History Month Celebration on February 28, 2026, at the Nineteenth Century Charitable Association beginning at 11:00 A.M., featuring keynote speaker Maggie Anderson, acclaimed author and nationally recognized voice, along with musical and dance ensembles that guide attendees through the evolution of Black American life and contributions across the decades; and

WHEREAS, this year's celebration will also honor Oak Park's own centenarian Essie Pough, who turns 100 years old in February, recognizing a life that embodies history, resilience, and the continued legacy of Black community presence and strength; and

WHEREAS, the Village of Oak Park proudly recognizes Lynn Allen for her decades of outstanding service to students, including her leadership in curating the Multicultural Center and organizing the annual Multicultural Fest; and

WHEREAS, through her vision, the Multicultural Center has provided invaluable educational materials and programming to teachers and students from all ten Oak Park District 97 schools, local private schools, neighboring districts, colleges, libraries, museums, churches, and businesses—ensuring that resources for cultural learning reach far beyond our borders. Described as “a bridge that connects cultures and brings people together,” the Multicultural Center, under Lynn Allen's guidance, has enriched our community through its enduring legacy of multicultural celebration and left a lasting impact on generations; and

WHEREAS, Oak Park is honored by the enduring contributions of Black residents, past and present, whose leadership, labor, creativity, and advocacy have enriched our village in countless ways, and whose history remains central to the story of Oak Park and the nation.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Vicki Scaman, President of the Village of Oak Park and Board of Trustees, do hereby proclaim the month of February 2026 to be Black History Month in the Village of Oak Park, and urge all community members to reflect upon, learn from, and participate in events arranged for this commemoration, and to work fearlessly toward a village that embodies anti-racist systems, inclusive belonging, and equity throughout the year and for generations to come.

DATED this 10th day of February 2026.

Vicki Scaman

Village President

ATTEST

Christina M. Waters

Village Clerk