

City of East Lansing, Michigan

RESOLUTION CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY MONTH

February 7, 2023

WHEREAS, Africans were first brought involuntarily to the shores of the American Colonies as early as the 17th century; and,

WHEREAS, Black Americans suffered enslavement and subsequently faced the horrors of lynching, violent mobs, economic enslavement, forced poverty, Jim Crow, domestic terror, segregation, mass incarceration and denial of the basic and fundamental rights of citizenship; and,

WHEREAS, in 2023, the vestiges of those injustices and inequalities remain evident in the society; and,

WHEREAS, in the face of these atrocities, Black Americans have distinguished themselves with a commitment to the noble ideals on which the United States was founded and have fought courageously for the rights and freedom of Black Americans and others; and,

WHEREAS, Black History Month, a federally recognized, nationwide celebration that calls on all Americans to reflect on the significant roles that Black Americans have played in shaping US history and the American experience; and,

WHEREAS, Carter G. Woodson, son of former slaves, spent his childhood working in coal mines and quarries. He received his education during the four-month term that was customary for Black schools at the time; and,

WHEREAS, at age 19, having taught himself English fundamentals and arithmetic, Woodson entered high school, where he completed a four-year curriculum in two years. He went on to earn his master's degree in history from the University of Chicago and later earned a doctorate from Harvard; and,

WHEREAS, Dr. Woodson was concerned that history textbooks generally ignored America's Black population and often presented distorted or false narratives about their contributions and experiences. He wrote Black Americans into the nation's history. Unfortunately, an accurate and expansive history of Black Americans is still not told in far too many school districts across the country, and forces are working to ban these teachings in this current day; and,

WHEREAS, he established the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History and founded the group's publication, the Journal of Negro History; and,

WHEREAS, in 1926, Woodson developed Negro History Week. He believed "the achievements of the Negro properly set forth will crown him as a factor in early human progress and a maker of modern civilization;" and,

WHEREAS, Dr. Carter G. Woodson also stated, "We have a wonderful history behind us. If you are unable to demonstrate to the world that you have this record, the world will say to you, you are not worthy to enjoy the blessings of democracy or anything else;" and,

WHEREAS, the second week in February was chosen as it marks the birthdays of two men who greatly influenced the Black American experience in this country:

Frederick Douglass, who escaped slavery and became an abolitionist and civil rights leader. Though his birthdate isn't known, he celebrated it on February 14.

Abraham Lincoln, who signed the Emancipation Proclamation, which abolished slavery in America's confederate states. He was born on February 12; and,

WHEREAS, for his work, Dr. Carter G. Woodson has been called the Father of Black History; and,

WHEREAS, in 1976, President Gerald Ford officially recognized 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;" and,

WHEREAS, Black Americans worked against racism to achieve success and to make significant contributions to the economic, educational, political, artistic, athletic, literary, scientific, and technological advancement often never receiving the recognition those individuals deserved, and yet paved the way for future generations to succeed; and,

WHEREAS, on November 4, 2008, the people of the United States elected Barack Obama, an African American man, as President of the United States; and,

WHEREAS, on August 1, 2020, the East Lansing City Council appointed the first Black man to serve on City Council in its history and the first Black woman to serve since the 1970s; and,

WHEREAS, on November 24, 2020, the East Lansing City Council declared racism a public health crisis; and,

WHEREAS, on September 23, 2021, the City of East Lansing dedicated the first state historic marker to Robert L. Green, a Black man who fought housing discrimination, and in 1964 was the first Black person to purchase a home outright in the City of East Lansing; and,

WHEREAS, on October 21, 2021, East Lansing passed Ordinance No. 1508 banning hair-based discrimination in the City of East Lansing; and,

WHEREAS, on November 2, 2021, the people of East Lansing elected Dana Watson, the first Black woman, and Ron Bacon to serve on East Lansing City Council; and,

WHEREAS, on November 9, 2021, the East Lansing City Council, by unanimous vote, appointed Ron Bacon to serve as the City's first Black Mayor who remarked "*The historical significance of my election as the first black man to serve in this capacity is not lost on me. I stand on the shoulders of many inspiring community and civil rights leaders who came before me, and I will do my best to make them and this community proud;*" and,

WHEREAS, the City of East Lansing acknowledges that all people are the recipients of the wealth of history and culture contributed by Black Americans; and,

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the City of East Lansing acknowledges the significance of Black History Month as an important opportunity to commemorate the tremendous contributions of Black Americans to the history of East Lansing and the United States and recognizes the importance of Black History Month as an opportunity to reflect on the complex history of the nation.

Ron Bacon, Mayor

Jennifer Shuster, City Clerk