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Alexandria
 COMMUNITY MEDIA

100 years of celebrating Black History Month

BY ARTURA JACKSON

The nation commemorates the 100th anniversary of Black History Month this month, a milestone rooted in the vision of historian Carter G. Woodson.

In 1926, Woodson established Negro History Week in response to the near erasure of African American history from classrooms and public life. He believed the nation could not understand itself honestly without acknowledging the full humanity, contributions and struggles of Black Americans. What began as a week of study expanded through the efforts of educators, churches and civic leaders, and in 1976 became Black History Month.

A century later, Woodson's call to truth and accountability remains urgent.

The City of Alexandria offers a powerful lens through which to reflect on this centennial. Alexandria's African American history is deeply local and nationally significant. In the early 19th century, the city was a major hub of the domestic slave trade. Sites

such as the Freedom House Museum bear witness to the thousands of men, women and children who were forcibly removed from their homes and sent to the Deep South. This history shaped families and communities across Virginia and the nation.

Alexandria is also a place of resistance and organized protest. In 1939, attorney Samuel Wilbert Tucker led a sit-in at the then whites-only Alexandria library, one of the earliest documented library sit-ins in the country. The protest resulted in arrests, but it also forced the city to confront segregation in public spaces and helped lay the groundwork for future civil rights actions. The sit-in stands as a reminder that young people and local communities have long been at the forefront of change. Alexandria's initial response to the sit-in was to open segregated Robert Robinson Library in 1940. Today, the Robinson Library forms part of the Alexandria Black History Museum on Wythe Street.

The city's legacy of Black



The city built the segregated Robert Robinson Library in 1940, in response to a sit-in advocating for Black Americans to be able to use the whites-only Alexandria library.

PHOTO/ALEXANDRIA
 BLACK HISTORY MUSEUM

excellence is also reflected in figures such as Earl Lloyd, born and raised in Alexandria. In 1950, Lloyd became the first African American to play in an NBA game, breaking barriers in professional sports and expanding possibilities for generations to come.

Alexandria is further remembered through the true story behind "Remember the Titans," which chronicles the integration of T.C. Williams High School, today's Alexandria City High School, in the early 1970s. The story highlights the tensions and determination of a community as it navigated desegregation and change.

As Alexandria marks 100 years of Black History Month, the city reminds us that Black history is not distant or abstract. Black history lives in acts of resistance, in barrier-breaking achievements and in community stories that continue to shape the present.

The centennial invites us to learn deeply, remember honestly and carry these histories forward with care and responsibility.

The writer is the Assistant Director for the Division of African American History in the Office of Historic Alexandria. Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.