

* Today in Black History -February 12 *

1793 - Congress makes it a crime to hide or protect a runaway slave by passing the first fugitive slave law.

1865 - Henry Highland Garnet, preacher and abolitionist, becomes the first African American to preach in the rotunda of the Capitol to the House of Representatives. It is on the occasion of a Lincoln birthday memorial.

1896 - Isaac Burns Murphy, considered the greatest American jockey of all time, joins the ancestors. He was the first jockey to win the Kentucky Derby two years in a row and became the first jockey to win the Kentucky Derby three times. In 1955, Isaac Murphy was the first jockey voted into the Jockey Hall of Fame at the National Museum of Racing, in Saratoga Springs, New York.

1900 - For a Lincoln birthday celebration, James Weldon Johnson writes the lyrics for "Lift Every Voice and Sing." With music by his brother, J. Rosamond, the song is first sung by 500 children in Jacksonville, Florida. It will become known as the "Negro National Anthem."

1909 - When six African Americans were killed and 200 others driven out of town in race riots in Springfield, Illinois in the summer of 1908, many Americans were shocked, because they associated such violence only with racism in the south. Springfield was not only a northern city, but the home of Abraham Lincoln. Three people, Mary Ovington, William E. Walling, and Dr. Henry Moskowitz, alarmed at the deterioration of race relations, decided to open a campaign to oppose the pervasive discrimination against racial minorities. They issue a call for a national conference on "the Negro question", and for its symbolic value, they will choose the centennial of the birth of Abraham Lincoln, February 12, 1909, as the date for the conference. Held in New York City, it will draw an interracial group of 60 distinguished citizens, who will formulate plans for a permanent organization devoted to fighting all forms of racial discrimination. That organization will be the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The NAACP will be the oldest and largest civil rights organization in the U. S. With more than 2,200 branches across the country, it will be in the forefront of the struggle for voting rights, and an end to discrimination in housing, employment, and education.

1934 - William Felton "Bill" Russell is born in Monroe, Louisiana. He will become a star basketball player and high jumper at the University of San Francisco. After college, he will win a gold medal in the 1956 Olympics, as a member of the United States basketball team. He will then play professional basketball for the Boston Celtics for thirteen seasons, winning eight straight NBA titles and eleven championships. At the end of the 1965-66 season, he will become the coach of the Boston Celtics.

1983 - Eubie Blake joins the ancestors at the age of 100 in Brooklyn, New York. Blake was one of the last ragtime pianists and composers whose most famous songs included "I'm Just Wild About Harry." With Noble Sissle, Blake was the composer of the first all-African American Broadway musical, "Shuffle Along," which opened on Broadway in 1921.