

* Today in Black History - February 19 *

1919 - The first Pan-African Congress, organized by W.E.B. Dubois, opens in Paris, France. Fifty-seven delegates from 16 countries and colonies will meet for three days and declare "The natives of Africa must be allowed to participate in the government as fast as their development permits." Blasé Diagne of Senegal is elected president and Dubois is named secretary. The Pan-African movement is started by these African American, African and Caribbean intellectuals, stressing the unity of Black people, whether living in Africa or in the various parts of the world to which Africans had been brought as slaves. African independence and nationalism were its goals. These representatives from the Americas, Europe, and Africa gather to discuss the situation of Africans living under colonialism. Also taking place in Paris at that time are the negotiations for the post-WWI Treaty of Versailles. Since the fate of the European powers' African colonies is being discussed in these negotiations, Du Bois hopes to influence the decisions that will come out of the peace conference.

1940 - William "Smokey" Robinson is born in Detroit, Michigan. As part of the Motown group "The Miracles" and in his solo career, Robinson will be an enduring Rhythm and Blues and pop performer. He will also become a Vice-President of Motown Records.

1959 - Gabon adopts its constitution.

1987 - A racially motivated civil disturbance erupts in Tampa, Florida, after a young African American man dies from injuries resulting from a police chokehold.

1992 - John Singleton is nominated for two Academy Awards for best director and best screenplay for his first film, "Boyz n the Hood." Singleton is the first African-American director ever to be nominated for the Academy Award.

1995 - A day after being named the new chairwoman of the NAACP, Myrlie Evers-Williams outlines her plans for revitalizing the civil rights organization, saying she intended to take the group back to its roots.

1999 - President Bill Clinton posthumously pardons Henry O. Flipper. Flipper was the first African American to graduate from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Flipper was acquitted on charges of embezzlement of commissary funds, but was found guilty of "conduct unbecoming an officer" for lying to investigators. He received a dishonorable discharge in 1882. He had been a victim of racism from the time he went to West Point to the time he was railroaded out of the military. Mr. Flipper joined the ancestors in 1940 at the age of 84.

2002 - Vonetta Flowers becomes the first Black athlete from any country to win a gold medal in the Olympic Winter Games. She and her partner won the women's two-person bobsled event at the Salt Lake City games. They finished their two runs in 1 minute 37.76 seconds.