

* [Today in Black History - February 23](#) *

1763 - A major slave rebellion occurs in the Dutch South American colony of Berbice (part of present-day Guyana). Slaves, led by Cuffy, Atta, Accara, and others, fire a rebellion at Plantation Magalenenburg because of the harsh and inhumane treatment of the slave population. Cuffy, proclaims himself Governor of Berbice and orders the Dutch Governor, Hoogenheim, to leave with the white inhabitants. The slaves will control the territory for months. Major resistance will continue beyond [October, 4th](#). There will be a split at the leadership level of the rebellion. The final collapse of the revolution will occur just before the trial of the last resisters on [March 16, 1764](#).

1868 - William Edward Burghardt (W.E.B.) Du Bois is born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. He will become one of the greatest men of letters of his time, serving as an editor, teacher, political theorist, and novelist. His accomplishments will include founding and editing the NAACP "Crisis Magazine," writing the influential "Souls of Black Folk," being one of the founding fathers of the NAACP, and the first African American to become a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. He will join the ancestors on [August 27, 1963](#) in Accra, Ghana.

1942 - Don Luther Lee is born in Little Rock, Arkansas. He will become a major African American literary critic, author of nonfiction and poetry, and founder of the influential Third World Press known as Haki Madhubuti. The Chicago State University professor, poet, and publisher will score a hit for his Third World Press with his own "Groundwork: Selected and New Poems 1966-1996." "Groundwork" and the second volume of Gwendolyn Brooks' autobiography-along with continuing sales of Madhubuti's 1995 "Million Man March/Day of Absence", will increase the number of successful titles at Third World Press to 25 by 1997.

1964 - Roberto Martin Antonio "Bobby" Bonilla is born in New York City. He will become a major league baseball player in 1981 and will play for the Pittsburgh Pirates, Chicago White Sox, New York Mets, and the Baltimore Orioles, before ending up with the Florida Marlins in 1996.

1968 - Wilt Chamberlain becomes the first NBA player to score 25,000 points.

1970 - Guyana becomes a republic. The Republic of Guyana changes its name to the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. [February 23](#) is chosen to celebrate the start of the Berbice Slave Revolt of 1763, which was led by Cuffy, a slave who became a national hero. One of the first actions of the new republic will be to nationalize foreign-owned companies.

1977 - "Roots," an adaptation of Alex Haley's best-selling novel, is viewed by more Americans than any other program since the invention of television. Approximately 130 million people watched at least part of the series. The final episode was watched by a reported 80 million viewers. Alex Haley spent twelve years researching and writing the book. While the show attracted many African American viewers, ratings companies reported that millions of whites as well as African Americans watched the show.

1979 - Colonel Frank E. Peterson, Jr. becomes the first African American promoted to the rank of general in the Marine Corps. He also was the first African American pilot to win Marine Corps wings. He will retire in 1988 as commanding general of the Marine Development Education Command in Quantico, Virginia.

1990 - Comer J. Cottrell, President of Pro-Line Corporation, pays \$1.5 million for the Bishop College campus, traditionally an African American college, in a bankruptcy auction. Cottrell's actions result in the relocation of Paul Quinn College in Waco, another African American campus, to the Dallas site.

1999 - Hughie Lee-Smith, a painter and former teacher at the Art Students League in New York, joins the ancestors after succumbing to cancer at the age of 83 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Lee-Smith was known for his paintings that frequently included symbolic figurative scenes. His works often included settings suggestive of theater stages or bleak urban or seaside landscapes. In 1953, he won a prize for his work from the Detroit Institute of Arts. While serving in the Navy he did a mural titled, "History of the Negro in the U.S. Navy." He taught at the Art Students League for 15 years, beginning in 1958. In 1963, he became the second African American member elected to the National Academy of Design in New York City. He became a full member four years later. His paintings are in many public collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Detroit Institute of Arts, the National Gallery of Art in Washington and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York City.

1999 - A jury in Jasper, Texas convicts white supremacist John William King of murder in the gruesome dragging death of an African American man, James Byrd Jr. King will be sentenced to death two days later.