



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

100 East Erie Street
Chicago, IL 60611

Legislation Text

File #: 20-0165, **Version:** 1

RESOLUTION FOR BOARD MEETING OF FEBRUARY 20, 2020

RESOLUTION sponsored by the Board of Commissioners recognizing February as Black History Month and honoring the Montford Point Marines

WHEREAS, the concept of creating Black History Month can be traced back to 1915, when Dr. Carter G. Woodson traveled to Illinois to participate in the 50th anniversary of the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution ending slavery. Dr. Woodson was among many that participated as an exhibitor during the three-week celebration. Witnessing the interest, curiosity, and demand for knowledge, Dr. Woodson decided to form an organization whose undertaking would be to encourage the study of Black history and life. Thus, on September 9, 1915, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH) was formed; and

WHEREAS, the first official celebration was held in February 1926 and was known as Negro History Week. The second week of February was chosen, as this week encompassed the birthdays of two notable figures in Black history: Abraham Lincoln, who signed the Emancipation Proclamation, and Frederick Douglass, who was an escaped slave and devoted abolitionist; and

WHEREAS, in the 1920's, the ASNLH began creating an annual theme for Negro History Week and in 1937 the Negro History Bulletin was established to promote the annual theme and create a venue for circulating information about Negro History Week on a larger scale; and

WHEREAS, in the 1960's, with the increasing momentum of the Civil Rights Movement, the popularity of Negro History Week exploded. In many places, including college campuses, instead of celebrating Negro History Week, many students were celebrating Black History Month; and

WHEREAS, President Gerald R. Ford became the first president to recognize Black History Week in 1975. He issued a "Message on the Observance of Black History Week" and encouraged Americans to "recognize the important contribution made to our nation's life and culture by black citizens"; and

WHEREAS, in 1976, Black History Week was officially converted into Black History Month. In commemoration of this celebration, President Ford issued the first "Message on the Observance of Black History Month"; and

WHEREAS, in 1986, Congress passed Public Law 99-244, designating February 1986 as "National Black (Afro-American) History Month". There have also been a multitude of Presidential Proclamations issued in recognition of Black History Month. Since 1996, a Presidential Proclamation has been issued each year; and

WHEREAS, the transformation from a weeklong observance to a month was a major accomplishment for the ASNLH (now Association for the Study of African American Life and History). The move to a month-long celebration captured Dr. Woodson's long held belief that Black history should not just be acknowledged one week out of the year, but instead deserved much broader celebration and recognition; and

WHEREAS, the District salutes the infinite, dynamic, and illustrious history of African Americans and affirms that the world in which we live would not exist if not for the plenteous contributions that African Americans have made throughout history and continue to make today; and

WHEREAS, the theme of this year's celebration is "African Americans and the Vote". This theme was selected to honor the sesquicentennial anniversary of the Fifteenth Amendment (1870) granting African American men the right to vote and the centennial anniversary of the Nineteenth Amendment (1920) granting women the right to vote; and

WHEREAS, the District is honored to recognize the Montford Point Marines; and

WHEREAS, in 1941, the United States military prohibited the enlistment of Black men. While there had been various times in the history of the United States where the government had encouraged Black men to participate in the military (i.e. the American Revolution and the Civil War), there was a general ban that existed; and

WHEREAS, Civil Rights leader A. Philip Randolph was determined to end this exclusion. With President Franklin D. Roosevelt clearly resisting the demand to permit Black men to join the military, A. Philip Randolph planned a march to occur in Washington, D.C. to advocate for the right of Black men to enlist; and

WHEREAS, on the heels of the United States entering World War II, one week before the march and under pressure from Civil Rights leaders, war strategists, and his wife, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802 (Order) on June 25, 1941. While this Order prohibited racial discrimination in the "defense program", it did not prevent Black men from being stationed in segregated units; and

WHEREAS, on June 1, 1942, the Marine Corps began recruiting Black men. There was an initial 900-men quota which was established and quickly fulfilled. The newly enlisted men were sent to Montford Point, North Carolina. Despite the fact that there was a newly built \$14 million Marine training facility nearby, Black soldiers were strictly prohibited from using this facility. Instead, the recruits were mandated to build their own training facilities; and

WHEREAS, while training at Montford Point, the recruits faced brutal and intimidating discrimination, but yet they persisted. Often was the tale heard of a uniformed recruit being arrested for impersonating a Marine due to the prevalent thought at the time that Black men could not be soldiers. And while Black men were given the same rigorous training as other soldiers, they were prohibited from being promoted to officers, as they were forbidden from giving orders to White men; and

WHEREAS, Montford Point was decommissioned on September 9, 1949. Between 1942 and 1949 approximately 20,000 Black soldiers were trained there. These soldiers became known as the Montford Point Marines; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that we, the Board of Commissioners of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago, on behalf of ourselves and staff, do hereby recognize the month of February as Black History Month and honor the courage, dignity, valor, resilience, and determination of the Montford Point Marines; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this Resolution be spread upon the permanent Record of Proceedings of the Board of Commissioners of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago and that a copy of same, suitably engrossed, be presented to the Montford Point Marines.

Dated: February 20, 2020