



RHUMB LINES

Straight Lines to Navigate By



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African American / Black History Month

"Black history is, and always has been, a vital part of American society. Learning and understanding cultural differences are important aspects in the concept of teamwork and, essentially, in America. It is that American spirit of inclusion and diversity that has made today's Navy wonderful and this great Nation strong and rich with culture."

– Vice Adm. Adam M. Robinson, Jr., Surgeon General of the Navy and Chief of the Navy's Bureau of Medicine and Surgery

Each year, the Navy joins the nation in the observance of [African American/Black History Month](#). Established as Negro History Week in 1926 by [Dr. Carter G. Woodson](#), it was later expanded by President Gerald R. Ford in 1976, when he [proclaimed](#) February as Black History Month. Today, Black History Month pays tribute to the generations of African Americans who struggled against adversity to achieve equality. The Black History Month national theme for 2011 is "African Americans and the Civil War," and it honors the contributions of more than [186,000 African Americans](#) who served in the Union Army and Navy.

Recognizing Our Diversity

Our Navy is strengthened by the diversity of our people. African Americans have served bravely in the Navy through every war and conflict since the American Revolution. Today, nearly 89,000 African American Sailors and civilians serve in the Navy's Total Force. Some notable examples throughout history include:

- Forty-four African American Sailors served under David Glasgow Farragut on the USS Hartford at the [Battle of Mobile Bay](#) in 1864, including [Landsman John Lawson](#), who was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions during the battle.
- [Ensign Oscar Holmes](#), the Navy's first African American aviator, and [Ensign Jesse LeRoy Brown](#), the Navy's first African American aviator to fly in combat.
- [Rear Adm. Michelle Howard](#), the first African American woman to command a combatant ship, commanded Expeditionary Strike Group Two and [Combined Task Force 151](#), a multinational task force established to conduct counterpiracy operations in the Gulf of Aden.
- Operation Specialist 1st Class Samira McBride and Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Shalanda Brewer, two of the four [2009 Sailors of the Year](#).
- [Rear Adm. Bruce Grooms](#) and [Mr. Victor Gavin, SES](#), recipients of the 2011 Professional Achievement and Career Achievement categories respectively of the [Black Engineer of the Year Awards \(BEYA\)](#).

Engaging in Diversity Outreach – Highlighting Achievements

Each year, the Navy's sustained outreach efforts reach a variety of diverse populations. Events highlighting the achievements of African Americans this year include:

- [BEYA](#), Washington, D.C., Feb. 17-18
- [National Society of Black Engineers \(NSBE\)](#) Convention, St. Louis, Mo., Mar. 23-27
- [National Naval Officers Association \(NNOA\)](#) National Conference, San Diego, Aug. 1-5
- [Blacks in Government](#) National Conference, Boston, Aug. 22-26
- [National Women of Color \(NWOOC\)](#) in Technology Conference, Dallas, Nov. 3-5

Key Messages

- To be an effective fighting force, credible to the nation it serves, the Navy must reflect diversity at all levels, including top leadership.
- The Navy employs top-performing Sailors and civilians whose diverse backgrounds, experiences and skills are necessary to meet today's challenges.
- The Navy supports the [National Naval Officers Association \(NNOA\)](#), an affinity group that fosters the recruiting, retention, and development of minority officers in the sea services.

Facts & Figures

- Nearly 89,000 African Americans serve in the Navy Total Force, including 19 active and reserve flag officers, 105 command master chiefs, and 16 members of the Senior Executive Service.
- More than 18,000 African American Sailors, including more than a dozen women, served nearly all of the 700 Union vessels during the Civil War.
- For more on African Americans in the Navy, visit <http://www.history.navy.mil/special%20Highlights/AfricanAmerican/african-hist.htm>.