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Senate

Statement of Senator Dianne Feinstein

“Celebrating Black History Month”

MRS FEINSTEIN: Mr. President, I rise today to commemorate Black History month.

This month celebrates the accomplishments of African Americans, honors the tremendous sacrifices they have made to promote the strength of our great nation, and recognizes their enormous contributions to our diverse American culture.

Black History Month is a time to reflect on the accomplishments and heroes of the past, as well as a time to salute the leaders of today.

The first Negro History Week took place in 1926 and was coordinated by Dr. Carter G. Woodson, the son of former slaves, the second African American ever to earn a PhD from Harvard University, and founder of the *Journal of Negro History*. Dr. Woodson's goal was to raise awareness of and funding for the study of black culture and history in America.

The second week of February was chosen for Negro History Week to honor the birthdays of President Abraham Lincoln, who promulgated the Emancipation Proclamation, and Frederick Douglas, one of the most prominent black abolitionists.

In 1972 Negro History Week was changed to Black History Week to reflect the changing social attitudes towards race in America, and in 1976 February officially became Black History Month.

The theme of this year's Black History Month is “The Niagara Movement: Black Protest Reborn, 1905-2005.”

The Niagara Movement was the forerunner to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. It was founded in 1905 by a group of black intellectuals, led by W.E.B. DuBois, John Hope, and William Monroe Trotter, who called for full civil liberties, an end to racial discrimination, and recognition of human brotherhood.

In my home State of California, you will find many African American leaders who have contributed to the legacy set forth by the Niagara Movement. They are true humanitarians and epitomize the ideals of the civil rights movement.

I would first like to recognize Roy Willis, a resident of my hometown of San Francisco, for his 35 years of history-making contributions to California and over 45 years of service to our nation as a civil rights pioneer.

In 1958, Roy Willis ended racial segregation at the University of Virginia by becoming its first African American student.

In 1967, he went on to Harvard Business School to earn his MBA. While at Harvard he organized and co-founded the Harvard Business School African American Student Union over strenuous objection from the school's administration. Despite their objections, the AASU was able to convince the administration that it

needed to do much more to recruit African American students.

Thanks to the pioneering efforts of Mr. Willis, the Harvard Business School AASU has helped to graduate thousands of African American MBAs over the past 36 years. It has produced many of today's brightest leaders, and continues to create the leaders of tomorrow.

Roy moved to northern California after earning his MBA in 1969. In the early 1970s he became one of the founding members of BAPAC, the Black American Political Association of California, which has become one of California's largest and most effective organizations in the areas of voter registration, homeownership and economic development.

He has enjoyed a successful career in real estate development, and dedicates himself to creating projects that enhance the community.

The next great Californian I would like to recognize is Bishop Hamel Hartford Brookins, better known as Bishop H. H. Brookins.

He is truly a living legend. Bishop Brookins ascended to positions of international leadership as a champion of black political and economic empowerment, Third World liberation, business enterprise development, and church growth.

After graduating from the University of Kansas, Bishop Brookins was thrust into the civil rights arena in 1954 in the wake of hostile reactions by

Wichita citizens to the historical Supreme Court decision, *Brown vs. the Board of Education*. Bishop Brookins organized and was elected President of a 200 member interracial ministerial alliance which was committed to the peaceful effective implementation of the desegregation decision. From Kansas, Bishop Brookins was appointed to the prestigious First AME Church of Los Angeles where he was a major force in quelling the Watts riots of 1965.

At the 1972 General Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, he was elected 91st Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. His assignments as Bishop have taken him across the country and around the world.

One of his biggest accomplishments has been establishing the first modern day economic development program in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Under his inspired leadership, church members have invested more than \$1,000,000 in "The People's Trust Fund," which provides loans to black entrepreneurs who have been denied bank loans, enables churches to obtain loans at reduced rates, provides scholarships to black theology students, and assists the elderly and indigent with emergency funds.

Outside the church, Bishop Brookins demonstrates his zealous concern for meaningful social action through his Chairmanship of the Board of Directors of the South Los Angeles Development Corporation, a six million dollar state funded job training program which has successfully placed more than 4,000 black teenagers in jobs in the electronics and word processing fields. In addition, he is one of the founding members of Operation PUSH and has served as a national board member of TransAfrica, an organization that lobbies on behalf of African and Third World countries.

Bishop Brookins is a local hero in Los Angeles. Because of his passion for social justice and racial equality, African Americans in the City of Los Angeles have moved forward in the

areas of housing, public education, health, and unemployment.

The story of struggles and triumphs of African Americans cannot be told without including the pastor of the First African Methodist Episcopal Church of Los Angeles, the Rev. Cecil L. "Chip" Murray.

In 1977 Dr. Murray was assigned to First AME Church, the oldest black church in Los Angeles. His new church family had 300 active members when he arrived, but under his leadership the congregation has multiplied to over 17,000 members.

Reverend Murray has helped First AME Church to develop a program called "Beyond the Walls," which consists of close to 40 task forces that help deal with issues affecting the congregation and community as a whole. Each member joins a task force to help take the effort to every corner of the community.

Dr. Murray has exhorted his congregation to go beyond Bible studies and reach out to build 2,000 units of low-income housing, provide thousands of jobs, expand neighborhood food programs and educate young people through college scholarships and its own elementary schools.

Though Reverend Murray retired last year ending his illustrious 27-year tenure as leader of First AME Church, he has left an indelible mark on the community.

Each of these leaders has made a profound impact which reaches far beyond their local communities. They are just a few of the many who have given their blood, sweat, and tears to make America a better place for themselves and for their children.

They have had many successes, but the struggle is not over. We can always do better, and these heroes fight every day to continue the legacy of the civil rights movement and to make America a more perfect union.

Mr. President, I am pleased to take the time today during Black History Month to honor these individuals and

the many tremendous contributions that African Americans make every day to our society.