

Administrator Michele M. Leonhart
National African American History Month
DEA Auditorium
Arlington, Virginia
February 28, 2012, 11:00 am

Good morning! Thank you for joining me as we celebrate the achievements of African-Americans, especially African-American women, as we close out this year's National African American History Month, with the theme, "Black Women in American Culture and History."

I'd like to take a moment to thank our wonderful Master of Ceremonies Nicole Payne for her kind introduction. And I'd also like to recognize the hard work of Oliver Allen, the leader of our EEO program; Netosha Washington, the manager who coordinated today's program; and everyone on their team who made today's program come together. They do a fantastic job.

And as always, the DEA choir used their beautiful voices to lead us in the national anthem, and again, it's a pleasure to have Washington Field Division Special Agent Greg Scott here to do the invocation. A special thanks to the young members of the Air Force Junior ROTC from Maryland who serve as the color guard today.

Since last year's celebration, there have been many great triumphs that recognized the role of African-Americans in the history of our nation.

Of course President Obama has continued his term as our nation's first black president, and standing beside him along the entire journey has been our outstanding Attorney General, and boss, Eric Holder.

They have led the way to make sure that our nation's civil rights agenda is front and center, enforcing our laws against discrimination and bringing justice to the work place and in public spaces throughout our nation. And they were there as we recognized leaders in the struggle for civil rights, most notably as we came together last fall to dedicate a magnificent monument celebrating the life and achievements of Martin Luther King.

Last week just yards away from the nation's memorial to Reverend King, near the Washington Monument, you may have seen a huge tent. That is where a groundbreaking took place, the commencement of a project that has taken too long to come to pass, but which will have an impact on our capitol city and our nation that will far outlast our lifetimes.

The Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture will soon tell the story of African Americans to countless future generations of all cultures, creeds, and races. Indeed its mandate is to "tell the complete story of the black experience in America," a story all Americans have been shaped by and need to know.

Many of those accomplishments were by African-American women who have traditionally been woefully underrepresented in our history books, but whose lives have been extraordinary and whose stories deserved to be told.

From Phillis Wheatly, the first published African American poet born before our nation was, to the likes of Etta James, who we lost last month; to others who continue to inspire us with their words such as Maya Angelou and Toni Morrison. Each of them, in ways both big and small, have changed our nation and touched our lives indelibly and forever. One of our own has also touched our lives – Diversion Investigator Alice Faye Hall-Walton, who died 11 years ago this week and who is on our Memorial Wall. She and her dedication and hard work will never be forgotten.

This year, National African-American History Month celebrates their achievements and that of so many others as part of the important role that women of color have had, from the untold millions who have been the bedrock of countless American homes throughout history, to First Lady Michelle Obama who today makes the White House a home for her family.

And we are proud to have with us this morning perhaps the *second* most recognized woman in Washington, and one of the most accomplished African-American broadcasters anywhere, Maureen Bunyan. I know all of us look forward to hearing your story after seeing you on television.

As the President said in his proclamation recognizing Black History Month, the progress we have made has not come easily, and our work is far from complete. We must insist on equal access to quality educational opportunities for our children; justice in our courts; and the right to work and to be promoted in every occupation based on the quality of our character and the capabilities we possess, not on or race or our gender.

Here at DEA:

- Nearly 900 of our employees are African-American women;
- More than 10 percent of our top leaders are African-American;
- Nearly 20 percent of our Diversion Investigators are African-Americans, and 73 out of 101 of them are African American women;
- In fact, today women make up a larger proportion of core series non-1811 professionals at DEA than men; and,
- Among our Special Agents, nearly 500 are women.

It is my promise that at DEA, we will continue down this path of greater opportunity and provide an increasingly level playing field. It makes us stronger and more capable in our work of enforcing the nation's drug laws. This is a noble and righteous cause that brings justice to places and people who need it most and the chance for a brighter future for those who might otherwise have it all taken away from them by drugs.

Thank you for the contribution you make every day to our important mission, and for joining me here today.

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