

**NYCHA CHAIRMAN JOHN B. RHEA  
NYCHA'S 2011 BLACK HISTORY MONTH PROGRAM  
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2011 – 5:00 – 7:00 PM  
SURROGATE'S COURT, 31 CHAMBERS STREET, NEW YORK CITY**

Good evening, NYCHA. To our colleagues, friends, honored guests and tonight's keynote speaker, Ms. Cheryl Wills—welcome to NYCHA's 14<sup>th</sup> annual celebration of the legacy, triumphs, and continuing commitment of African Americans to our nation and to the world.

What began as a day, then became a week and now is a month-long commemoration of black American achievement is an opportunity not only to remember how far we have come, but it should also serve as an encouragement for the journey ahead. As Ms. Wills' engaging family memoir demonstrates—each of us have stories of perseverance, stories of victory, and stories of hope in our own lives and in the lives of those we have touched. As we celebrate another Black History Month, let us commit to honoring those stories each and every day.

Much like Women's History, which we will observe next month; Chinese Lunar New Year, which we celebrated recently; Jewish

Heritage Month or Hispanic History Month, tonight should serve as another occasion to bring us together; as another opportunity to remember that the success of our communities depends upon us all: working together, sharing our talents and, ultimately, honoring the best in each other by recognizing how much we share.

Today, we proclaim that Black History Month is for all people and all races.

A person many of us would traditionally honor this time of year is Dr. Maya Angelou. Dr. Angelou was among those President Obama awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom just last week; and one subject she often talks about is 'What she knows for sure.' Well, one thing I know for sure is that the cornerstone of progress is partnership. Only through working together can we ever truly know the full range of our challenges. No one person and no single group have a monopoly on good ideas, so you first have to have everyone at the table, sharing and contributing. Only then

can we develop inclusive, community-centered strategies for the future.

Partnership—each one helping one, and each one teaching one for the greater good—has been at the heart of the African American experience since the days when America was a collection of colonies not yet united in national pride or ambition. That lesson has been passed down, generation to generation. It appears in the stories of our parents and our grandparents, our teachers and our friends. It appears in Ms. Wills’ memoir and it punctuates the pride-filled celebrations that take place all over New York City and all across the United States each February.

Tonight, we honor that tradition. We recognize that it is a tradition and a story worth remembering, worth sharing and worth emulating today and every day.

Dr. Carter G. Woodson, the author, professor and pioneer who led the effort to create what was then known as “Negro History Week” in 1926, was only the second African American to earn a Ph.D., which he earned at Harvard University after his friend and

NAACP colleague Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois. Dr. Woodson taught history at Howard University and he was known for telling his students, “I am ready to act, if I can find brave men to help me.” That’s how I feel. But unlike Dr. Woodson, I already know there are brave women and men at NYCHA and throughout New York City who are ready to come together to ensure that the public housing communities of tomorrow will be stronger, more sustainable and more secure, and that New York City will continue to lead the nation as stewards of this sacred public trust. So, I am ready to act, and I truly look forward to working with each of you.

Thank you very much.