



ORGANIZING PARTNERS



Press Release
For Immediate Release

Accounting Profession Commemorates Centennial of First Black CPA

This year-long effort aims to honor, celebrate, and build upon the progress Black CPAs have made in shaping the accounting profession.

CHICAGO, Feb. 1, 2021 – In 1921, 25 years after the first certified public accountant (CPA) certificate was granted in the U.S., John W. Cromwell, Jr. became the first Black CPA. He opened a door through which thousands of Black accountants would eventually pass.

With 2021 marking the 100th anniversary of Cromwell’s landmark achievement, the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA), Diverse Organization of Firms Inc., Illinois CPA Society, National Association of Black Accountants Inc., and National Society of Black CPAs Inc. have come together to announce a year-long national awareness campaign that recognizes Black CPAs in the U.S. and that pushes for greater progress to be made in achieving diversity, inclusion, and equity in the CPA profession. Following Cromwell, it took a staggering 45 years for the first 100 Black accountants to be licensed as CPAs. Black CPAs account for less than 1 percent of all CPAs in the U.S., according to estimates by the National Association of Black Accountants Inc.

“As we work to continue building a more diverse and inclusive profession, it’s important that we recognize the efforts of those who broke down barriers,” says Crystal Cooke, the AICPA’s director of diversity and inclusion. “By earning his CPA license, John Cromwell helped paved the way for future generations of Black CPAs and fueled the profession’s journey toward greater diversity and inclusion.”

The 2021 Black CPA Centennial campaign will “honor, celebrate, and build” upon the rich history and progress Black CPAs have made in the profession. Activities include a series of articles and videos that bring to life and preserve the inspiring stories of success against the odds of some of the most prominent and trailblazing Black accountants—like Mary T. Washington Wylie, who became the first Black female CPA in 1943 and played a pivotal role in the advancement of Black CPAs in Illinois and throughout the nation.

Each of the partner organizations and other stakeholders are united in advancing the following shared goals:

- **Honoring the past:** Educate accounting and finance professionals as well as the public about the barriers the first Black CPAs overcame by sharing their stories.
- **Celebrating the progress:** Recognize Black CPAs for influencing the profession, engendering trust, and breaking barriers.
- **Building the future:** Highlight Black CPAs who are blazing trails and creating legacies by becoming the first achievers in significant areas in the profession and society. Also, support Black student enrollment in accounting

programs; provide opportunities to prepare them to enter the CPA profession; and encourage the recruiting and retention of more Blacks CPAs in firms and organizations of all sizes.

“We’re honored to bring forward this important national centennial commemoration that will undoubtedly help drive momentum, encouragement, and support for more Black people to enter the accounting and finance profession and become CPAs,” says Todd Shapiro, president and CEO of the Illinois CPA Society. “As CPAs serve as protectors of the public’s interest and strategic business advisors, it’s in all our best interest to help pave the way for more Black people and other underrepresented minorities to shape the CPA profession into one that matches the diversity of the people it serves.”

Due to the ongoing pandemic, celebratory activities will occur virtually for as long as necessary, and planning is underway for a special culminating symposium and celebratory event in Chicago this November. The website www.BlackCPACentennial.cpa offers resources and information related to the Black CPA Centennial commemoration, including ways for individuals and organizations (state CPA societies, universities, accounting firms, etc.) to participate.

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Image from National Association of State Boards of Accountancy:

