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LEARNING | CHARITY | COMMUNITY

Black History Month 2025

What is Black History Month?

Black History Month is an annual observance that recognises and celebrates the history, achievements, and contributions of Black people around the world. It provides an opportunity to reflect on the struggles and triumphs that have shaped the lives of Black communities throughout history, from the fight against slavery and discrimination to the ongoing pursuit of equality and justice. The month serves as a reminder of the resilience, creativity, and influence of Black individuals across all areas of life, including science, politics, art, literature, and social change.

Beyond simply looking back at the past, Black History Month encourages learning, understanding, and appreciation of the diverse experiences and perspectives that form part of our shared human story. It promotes awareness of the importance of inclusion and representation, inspiring people to continue working toward fairness and respect for all.

How did Black History Month start?

The event was the brainchild of Carter G Woodson, known as the father of black history.

Born in Virginia in 1875 to parents who were former slaves, he had limited access to education and job opportunities, but he was able to study at one of the few high schools for black students after saving money earned by working as a coal miner. Woodson went on to gain various qualifications, including a PhD in history from Harvard University, and became a professor at Howard University.

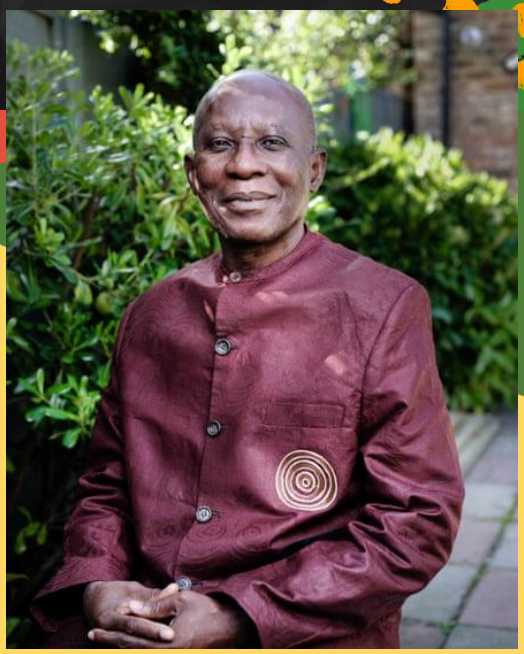
Throughout his life, he worked tirelessly to promote black history in schools.

In 1926 he launched the first Black History Week, set in February to coincide with the births of former President Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. Both men played a significant role in helping to end slavery.

The event was expanded in 1970, and since 1976 every US president has officially designated February as Black History Month.

A separate holiday - "Juneteenth", held on 19th June - commemorates the end of slavery in the US.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH



How did Black History Month start in the UK?

The first Black History Month in the UK took place in 1987, the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in the Caribbean and was arranged by Akyaaba Addai-Sebo.

Born and raised in Ghana, Addai-Sebo was part of Kwame Nkrumah's Young Pioneers Movement. In January 1984, he moved to England, seeking refuge from political persecution.

Within a year of his arrival, he was taking on the roles of Special Projects Coordinator at the Greater London Council, Chair of the African Refugees Housing Action Group, and later Operations Manager of the Notting Hill Carnival.

Like Woodson before him, he wanted to challenge racism and make sure that the contributions and achievements of Black people in the UK were celebrated and that we learned about Black history in school.

Every October, we honour Black History. It continues to serve as a reminder of the ongoing struggle for racial equality and social justice, as well as a time to celebrate Black people's positive contributions to society and the world.

October was chosen partly because it's traditionally a time when African leaders gather to talk about important issues, and partly because it falls at the start of the school year.

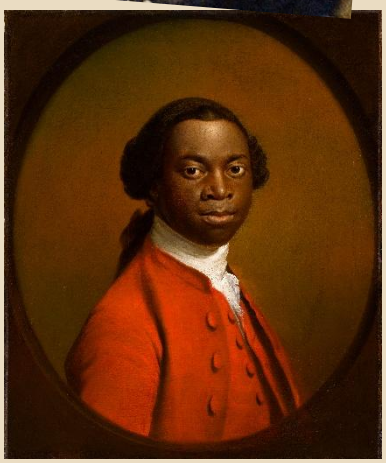
Black History Month 2025 - Standing Firm in Power and Pride

The theme for Black History Month UK 2025 is “Standing Firm in Power and Pride,” a powerful tribute to the resilience, strength, and unwavering commitment to progress that defines the Black community across the globe. This year, the theme highlights the profound contributions made by Black people be they leaders, activists, or pioneers who have shaped history, while also looking towards a future of continued empowerment, unity, and growth.

The theme focuses on two core values: power and pride.

Power

Power represents the influence, leadership, and capacity to effect positive change. It acknowledges the visionaries who have led political, civil rights, and social movements, as well as those who have broken barriers in business, education, and the arts. Their legacies remind us that true power is not about titles but about the collective strength, courage, and unity used to forge a more equitable future for all.



Pride

Pride reflects cultural identity, heritage, and the celebration of Black excellence. From the art and music to the stories passed through generations, pride is the heartbeat of Black communities worldwide. It’s about knowing where we come from, embracing our history, and walking boldly into the future without compromise or apology. Pride is a declaration of the beauty, the resilience, and the unmatched contributions of Black culture to the world.

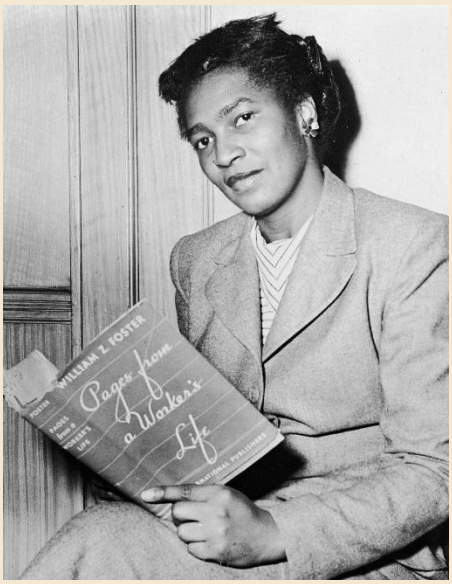
Power

Power in Protest

Across Britain's modern history, Black activists have spoken out, stood firm, and demanded change. They organised boycotts, led campaigns, built networks, and challenged systems that denied justice. Their courage shifted opinion, reshaped laws, and inspired new generations to act. The six people remembered here are part of a longer tradition – one that shows protest is not only resistance, but power to remake the nation.

Altheia Jones-LeCointe

Scientist and leader in the British Black Panthers whose organising and intellect built community programmes, defended Black Britons, and inspired a generation with the language of resistance.



Claudia Jones

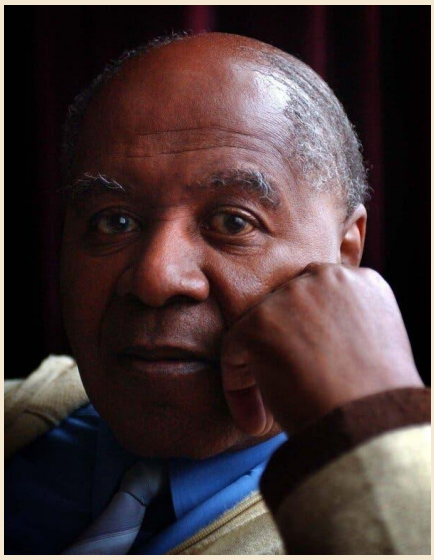
Journalist, organiser, and visionary who founded the West Indian Gazette and launched Britain's first Caribbean Carnival, blending culture with protest to empower communities.

Mavis Best

Grassroots leader who spearheaded the Scrap the Sus campaign, uniting communities to end racist stop-and-search laws and proving ordinary people could force national change.

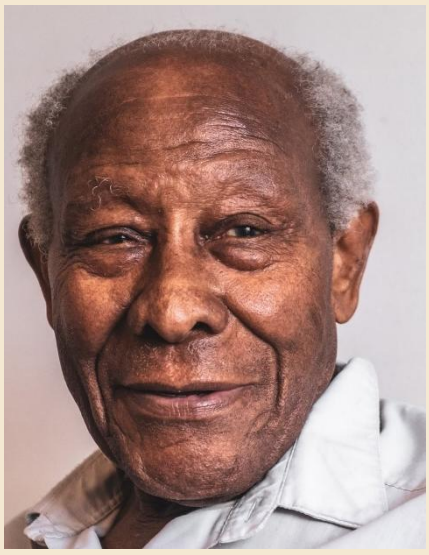
Olive Morris

Radical organiser and member of the British Black Panther Movement who fought tirelessly for housing rights, women's liberation, and racial equality.



Paul Stephenson

Leader of the 1963 Bristol Bus Boycott, a landmark protest that challenged colour bars and helped pave the way for race relations legislation.



Roy Hackett

Civil rights leader whose direct action in Bristol transformed the city's transport policy and became a catalyst for national change.

From marches and boycotts to courtrooms and communities, these individuals stood firm against injustice. Their courage and activism helped break down barriers and ignite change in British society.

We honour the legacy of those who spoke out – even when it came at great personal cost – and whose protest paved the way for the rights we defend today.

Pride

Black Excellence in the Arts

Through poetry, storytelling, music, publishing, and performance, these figures reshaped the cultural landscape. Their voices gave rhythm to resistance, joy to communities, and pride to a nation.
We honour those who used creativity as a tool for change – speaking truth, preserving memory, and inspiring new generations to find power in expression.

Benjamin Zephaniah

Benjamin Zephaniah was a celebrated British poet, writer, musician, and activist whose work gave voice to the experiences, struggles, and triumphs of Black communities in Britain and beyond.

Born in Birmingham to Jamaican parents, Zephaniah grew up in a working-class neighbourhood where he developed a deep connection to language, rhythm, and storytelling.

Although he left school at 13 and faced challenges with literacy, he transformed those early experiences into a lifelong passion for words, justice, and equality.

Zephaniah became a leading figure in the performance poetry movement of the 1980s, known for his electrifying delivery and his fusion of poetry, reggae, and social commentary. His work often tackled themes of racism, inequality, identity, and hope, and he used his art as a tool for activism and empowerment. Beyond poetry, he wrote acclaimed novels for young people, including *Refugee Boy*, *Face*, and *Gangsta Rap*, which gave authentic voices to young readers navigating complex social realities.

Throughout his career, Zephaniah refused to separate art from activism. He was a passionate advocate for human rights, animal rights, and anti-racism, and he famously turned down an Order of the British Empire (OBE) in protest against the legacy of colonialism. His honesty, creativity, and commitment to justice inspired generations of readers, performers, and activists.

Benjamin Zephaniah's legacy continues to shine through his poetry, his music, and his powerful message of equality, compassion, and resistance – reminding us that words have the power to change the world.

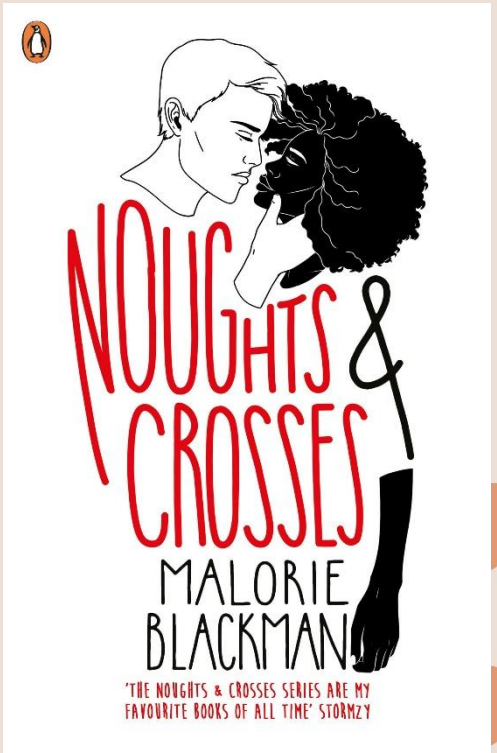
Malorie Blackman

Malorie Blackman is an acclaimed British author and trailblazer whose storytelling has reshaped the landscape of children's and young adult literature in Britain and beyond.

Born in London to Barbadian parents, Blackman grew up with a love of reading but saw few stories that reflected her own experiences or the realities of Black British life. Determined to change that, she began writing stories that spoke directly to young people, stories that were bold, honest, and unafraid to tackle complex themes of identity, injustice, and hope.

After working as a systems programmer, Blackman turned to writing full-time and went on to publish more than 60 books across genres, from picture books and short stories to ground-breaking novels. Her *Noughts & Crosses* series, a powerful exploration of race, love, and power set in an alternate world of racial inversion, became a modern classic, widely studied in schools and adapted for television and theatre. Through her vivid imagination and emotional depth, she gave readers, especially young Black readers, a mirror in which to see themselves and a window through which others could understand their struggles.

In 2013, Blackman made history as the first Black Children's Laureate, using her platform to champion diversity in publishing and equal access to literature for all young people. Her work has inspired generations of readers and writers to question the world around them and to believe in the transformative power of stories.



Malorie Blackman's voice continues to resonate as one of courage, empathy, and innovation – a reminder that imagination can be both an act of resistance and a force for change

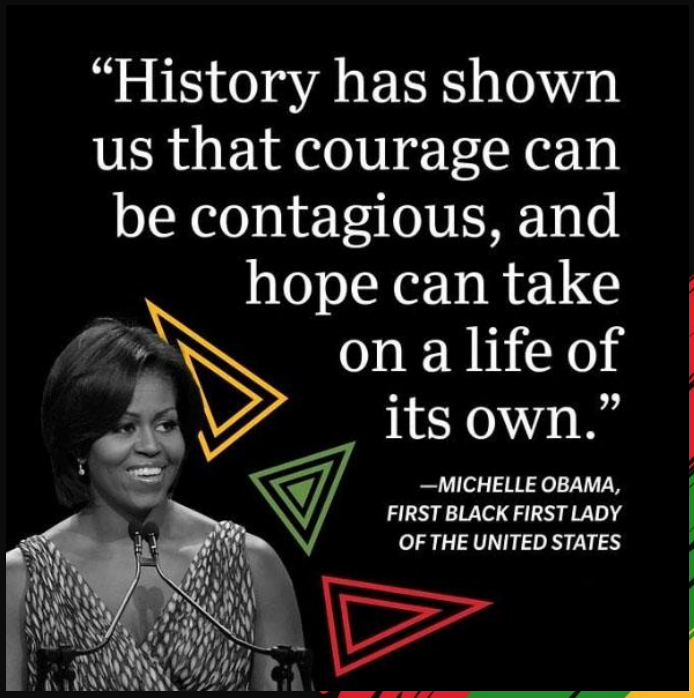
Why is Black History Month important?

Black History Month is a time to recognise, celebrate, and reflect on the rich histories, achievements, and contributions of Black people, stories that have too often been overlooked or forgotten.

It provides an opportunity to honour the creativity, resilience, and brilliance of Black individuals and communities across generations, while also acknowledging the struggles and injustices they have faced.

More than a celebration, it's a time for learning and reflection, a chance to explore the legacies of those who paved the way, to confront the realities of racism and inequality, and to inspire future generations to continue the work of change.

Black History Month reminds us that Black history is not separate from wider history; it is an essential part of our shared story, shaping the culture, identity, and progress of society as a whole.

As we begin Black History Month 2025, we embrace this year's theme – "Standing Firm in Power and Pride", as a call to celebrate strength, resilience, and unity within our communities. This month invites us to honour the legacies of those who came before us, whose courage and determination paved the way for progress and possibility. It reminds us that Black history is not only a story of struggle, but one of triumph, creativity, and unbreakable spirit. To stand firm is to recognise our worth, to take pride in our identity, and to use our collective power to inspire change.

As we move through this month of reflection and celebration, let us carry that sense of pride and purpose forward, lifting one another, sharing our stories, and continuing to shape a future grounded in equality, dignity, and hope.