



BLACK HISTORY MONTH




Black history month is a month when blackness takes centre stage, the spotlight is on and for 31 days we have the attention of the UK. Every day is a good day to be Black and Proud, proud of black culture, heritage, innovations, style, contributions, art, melanin and Afro. October is a particularly special month for highlighting all these things.

The celebration originated from the United States by historian Carter G Woodson, who founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in 1915 to raise awareness of Black History. In 1926 Woodson founded the Negro history week, which evolved into the Black History Month in the era of the civil rights movements. In 1969 a special projects officer at the Greater London Council named Akyaaba Addai Sebo established the UK Black history month after visiting the United States.

Black History Month was intentionally slated for October so black children going to school would start the new year with a sense of pride. While black history is largely watered down or erased from the global narrative Black History Month is an opportunity to have these discussions, write these articles and remind the world that we exist.

Today, Black history month is both a remembrance month and a celebratory month. For me, black history month is a time of reflection to appreciate our collective history (which extends beyond the trauma of slavery) and a time to be proud of where we come from. The journey has been far from smooth, we are not where we used to be, and we have not yet arrived at our destination.



As a non-black person, you might read this and wonder what Black History Month has to do with you, or may be intrigued to explore how you can do more. Allyship looks like many things:

(1) Seeing colour! Being colourblind does everyone a real disservice. It erases the fundamentals of what is in front of you and ignores the beauty of nuance.

(2) Educating yourself and your colleagues by exploring resources available on race. There are tours, food festivals, educational seminars, & workshops which run all year round, don't just wait until October comes around to learn.

(3) Recognising your bias - we all have it in us, but make a conscious effort to leave it at the door. When interviewing, do you silently judge a candidate with a particular accent as less qualified?

(4) Reviewing the status quo (e.g., policies) in your organisation. For example, what does 'professional' look like to you? Does that include dreadlocks, braids, cornrows, afros? Or are these hairstyles only acceptable for non-client facing roles.

(5) Creating an environment where people feel comfortable to talk about race. Don't shy away from the conversation. Engage in a polite and inquisitive way.

(6) Championing and celebrating black colleagues. Speak up for colleagues when they are not in the room, share their ideas, and promote and pay them fairly.

As the chair of the Diversity and Inclusion Council at Plenitude, I recognise that some of these points might be quite daunting, but by having these dialogues and making these changes, we are shifting the narrative away from simply recognising and appreciating black contributors in October, towards creating a new normal; 365 days of the year.



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