

# Understanding and Celebrating Black History Month



Observed in February, Black history month is an annual celebration of the contributions and achievements made by African Americans throughout our history.

[Carter G. Woodson](#)—a notable educator and historian— encouraged recognition of the study of African American history in schools and organizations. He believed it was necessary for young African Americans to learn about and be proud of their heritage. In February 1926, Woodson established “Negro History Week” during the second week of February to coincide with the birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln. This week was celebrated by black communities throughout the following decades across the United States.

The first-ever month-long celebration of Black History was introduced by Black educators at Kent State University in 1970. Six years later, [Black History month](#) was formally recognized by President Gerald Ford in 1976 and became a nationwide celebration. Ford called upon Americans to “seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of Black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history.” Along with the United States, Canada and The United Kingdom devote a month to celebrate black history.

To commemorate black history month, people take time to reflect on the contributions and achievements of prominent figures such as Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Harriet Tubman, Muhammad Ali, Ruby Bridges, Robert F Smith, General Frank Petersen, the Six Triple Eight, and countless others who have made a substantial impact in history. While revisiting and studying black history during this month is great and important, what can we do to celebrate black excellence all year-round?

## **Tokenism vs Genuine Appreciation**

Black excellence is a celebration of success in the black community. If diversity and inclusion practices are done correctly and are all-encompassing, we shouldn't wait to celebrate black voices once a year. Though February focuses on honoring black history, it should be an extension of celebrating individual black excellence throughout the year.

As [stated](#) by the Association for the Study of African American Life and History—"Black History Month is not a token. It is a special tribute—a time of acknowledgment, of reflection, and inspiration—that comes to life in real and ongoing activities throughout the year."

If organizations are confident they are investing time and effort in implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion in an [authentic](#) manner, there isn't a need for concern about their celebration of black history month being performative. Being genuine and continuously engaging in creating a culture of belonging more than a performance. It is key to making people feel seen and heard.

## **Celebrating Black History in the**

# Workplace

A few ways to support our colleagues are by recognizing their work and contributions month to month, being aware of biases toward them, amplifying their voices and experiences, and acknowledging all that African Americans have done for our community and our country.

To celebrate Black excellence in the workplace in continuity—organizations can support Black-owned businesses, offer volunteer services to organizations in Black communities, and acknowledge black creators. In addition to that, it's always good to take the time to educate ourselves and [listen and learn](#) from those who know more.