



# Celebrating black history in the UK

The annual event is marking its 30th birthday.

Black History Month UK has taken place every year in October for the last 30 years. It celebrates the achievements and contributions of black people from all over the country, in all sorts of fields, ranging from art and music to science and literature. To mark Black History Month (BHM), Prime Minister Theresa May said, "Today, in every walk of life... there are African and African Caribbean men and women whose achievements are not just making our country a better place, but inspiring others to follow in their footsteps to even greater success."

## Why do people celebrate it?

Throughout history, black people have been treated badly simply because of the colour of their skin. This is known as racism. In the past, incredible successes were sometimes dismissed or even ignored if they were achieved by black people. Now, there are special laws that forbid discrimination and racism, and people celebrate BHM partly as a

way of drawing attention to the experiences of black people. Black History Month aims to shine a light on their history and accomplishments. As well as the contributions of people of African and Caribbean heritage, BHM also celebrates the contributions of people of Asian heritage.

## What do others say?

Some people don't agree with Black History Month. They say that black history should be taught every day in schools, and there shouldn't be just one month of the year devoted to it. For this reason, lots of black people in the past have refused to mark it. Lord Victor Adebowale, head of the social-care charity Turning Point, believes that black history should be taught as part of the history curriculum. "Why don't we give ourselves the chance to remember what we forget – and others have forgotten – and remember that history isn't history unless we are in it," he said.

## What was the slave trade?



An illustration of slaves working on a plantation.

BHM aims to raise awareness of how black people were treated in the past. It is hard to believe now, but people used to buy and sell black people as slaves. The slave trade between Africa, the US and Britain was a horrific business that was established in the 17th century. Ships left British ports carrying goods, such as cloth and guns, and headed to west Africa. The goods were exchanged for

men, women and children who had been kidnapped. They were packed onto ships and sent to the Caribbean or to North and South America, where they were forced to work, growing crops like sugarcane and coffee. They were not paid for their labour and were treated very badly. The coffee and sugar they grew was sent to Britain to be sold. The slave trade was banned in the UK after 1807.

## SIX GREAT BLACK BRITONS

**DIANE ABBOTT**  
Diane Abbott was born in London in 1953. After graduating from Cambridge University, Abbott worked for the UK Government. She made history in 1987 by becoming the first ever black woman to be elected to Parliament. She has served as a Labour Member of Parliament for Hackney North and Stoke Newington in London for 30 years. As well as a distinguished political career, Abbott also started the London Schools and the Black Child programme, which help black children receive a good education.

## CHRIS OFILI

Chris Ofili was born in Manchester in 1968 and is best known for his incredible collages. He creates them using all sorts of materials including glitter and elephant dung. In 1998, Ofili became the first black winner of the Turner Prize – one of the most respected awards in art. Since, then, his art has fetched millions of pounds at auction and his collages have been displayed in galleries all over the world.



**GREATEST BLACK BRITON**  
In 2004, Mary Seacole – a nurse in the 19th century – was voted the greatest black Briton of all time.

**LENNOX LEWIS**  
Lennox Lewis is considered one of the UK's most successful boxers. As a child, Lewis said he was never interested in boxing. When he was young, he dreamt of becoming a fireman. It wasn't until he and his mother moved to Canada that his career really took off. In 1988, he boxed for Team Canada in the Seoul Olympics. He first became World Boxing Council (WBC) Heavyweight champion in 1993 and undisputed champion (a champion in each boxing category) in 1999.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Black History Month began as a week-long event in 1926 in the US.

**TOP AUTHOR**  
In 2013, the author Malorie Blackman became the first black person to become the Children's Laureate.

**BENJAMIN ZEPHANIAH**  
Born in 1958 in Birmingham, Benjamin Zephaniah had trouble with reading and writing at school because of a learning difficulty known as dyslexia. Despite this, Zephaniah grew up to be a world-famous author and poet. His work is influenced by the music and poetry of Jamaica, where his mother was born.

## SHARON WHITE

Sharon White is the chief executive of the Office of Communications, otherwise known as Ofcom. Ofcom regulates TV, radio and on-demand services, and makes sure that no one is getting tricked by TV companies. White is the first woman – and the first black person – to hold the top job at Ofcom. Before Ofcom, White worked in various government departments.



## MAGGIE ADERIN-POCOCK

Born in 1968, Maggie Aderin-Pocock was aged three when she was inspired to study space after watching the children's TV show, *The Clangers*. She went on to study physics and mechanical engineering at Imperial College London, before becoming a presenter for the TV show *Sky at Night*. Not only is she a leading scientist, Aderin-Pocock has made it her mission to encourage 100,000 schoolchildren around the UK to study science.

