

What *is* Black History Month?

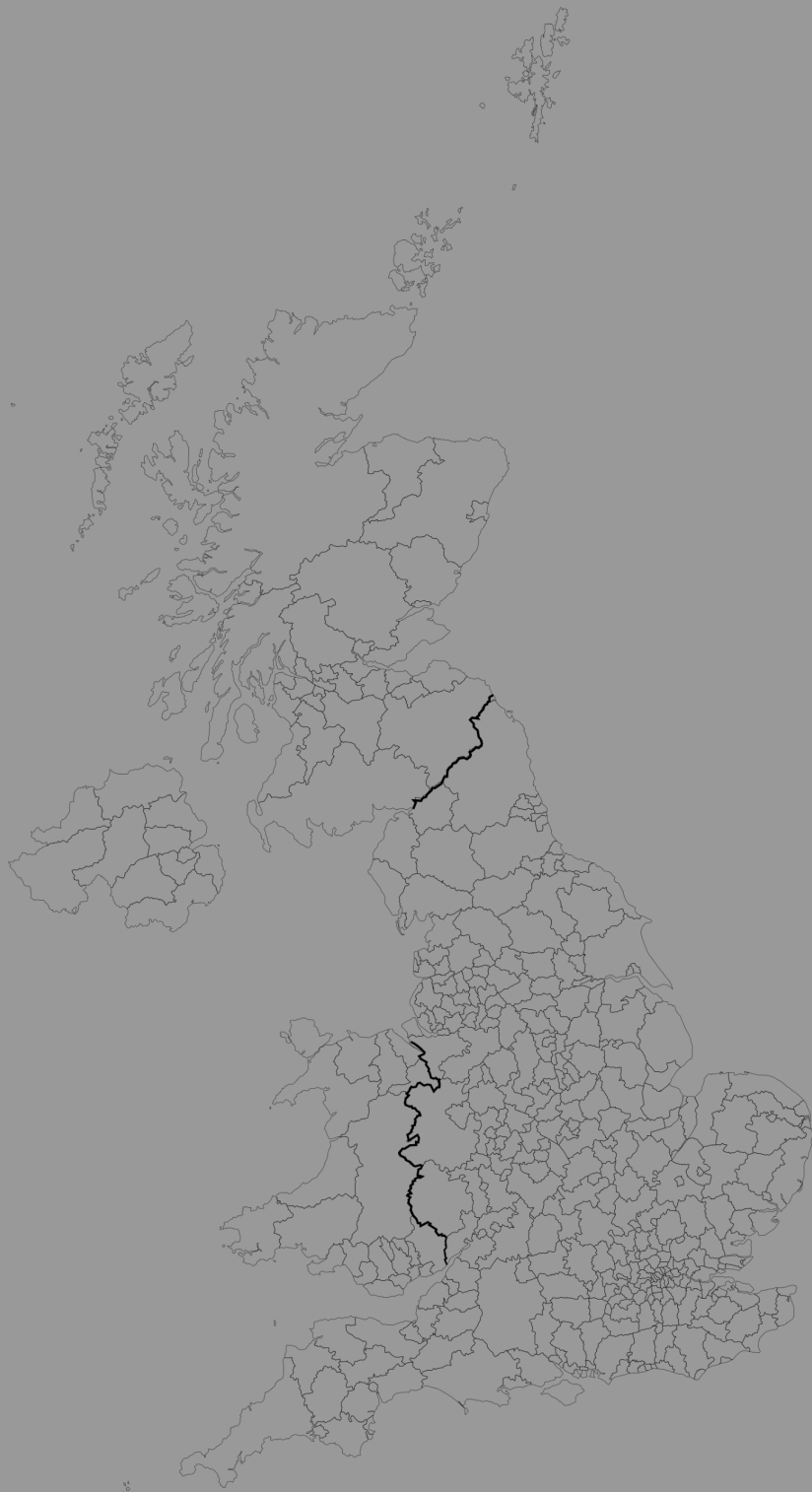
By Mya Chemonges-Murzynowska

What is Black History Month exactly?

Black History Month is an annual celebration which recognises important events, achievements, and work by black people. In North America, it takes place in February, while in the UK, Ireland and Holland, it takes place in October.

Black History Month has been marked in the UK since 1987, and takes place every October. It's important because it's an opportunity for everyone to reflect on the past and think about how to improve things for the future.

Black History Month helps us remember that studying history isn't just because it's interesting – ***it's because it's the only way to change the future!*** By looking at the past through a different perspective, we can make fresh opinions about how Britain became what it is today. We can use this knowledge to try and avoid the same mistakes of the past, and hopefully make a fairer future for everyone.



The islands we now call Britain were part of the Roman Empire – a huge, multicultural Empire. There were Romans from Africa, from the Mediterranean, and from as far East as Persia (modern day Iran). People moved around freely in the Empire, and many black and brown people set up shop in modern day Britain. They were soldiers, business people, scholars.

It's claimed that Britain's had two black Queens. One is Queen Phillipa of Hainault (1310 – 1369), and the other is Sophie Charlotte (1744 – 1818). Both are claimed to have had African ancestry, and so were mixed race. There is clear evidence that Sophie Charlotte in particular had North African heritage via her Spanish ancestors.



As part of the Empire, many black and brown soldiers from places like the West Indies, India, South Africa and other places fought for Britain in both World Wars. They made a huge contribution to the war effort – 3 million soldiers came from the Commonwealth in WW1, and over 10 million in WW2! It's hard to guess how the wars might have gone without their help – but what's for sure is that history would have been very different.

The British Empire slowly falling apart after World War 2 didn't mean the end of black history in the UK. Far from it! *Half a million* workers from Jamaica, Trinidad, Tobago and other islands were ***asked*** to come to Britain to fill job shortages. This group were known as the ***Windrush generation***, and they played a huge role rebuilding Britain after the war. Great British institutions like the NHS really *relied* on the Windrush generation – and often they weren't treated well in Britain.

Migration to the UK also changed British culture for the better too – it led to the Notting Hill carnival, a more diverse culture in the UK, and all the other great things that come with a more inclusive society.

Martin Luther King



Martin Luther King was a leader during the Civil Rights Movement which began in the 1950s. His peaceful campaigns changed the lives of millions of black people who were treated as second-class citizens in the United States of America. In 1963, he delivered his famous 'I Have A Dream' speech in Washington, which outlined his hopes of people living together peacefully. He was assassinated in 1968, but his tireless work for a better world continues to inspire people decades later.

Nelson Mandela



Nelson Mandela was a civil rights hero and fought for racial equality in South Africa. He spent 27 years in prison and just four years after he was released, he was elected as the first black president of South Africa. Even in the remaining years of his life, he used his time fighting discrimination and working for a better world.

Khoudia



Growing up in Senegal, Khoudia was bullied because of her dark skin tone but quickly became a model after moving to Paris. In 2016, she was featured in 'The Colored Girl Project', a photo series celebrating women of colour. Her involvement saw her Instagram followers rocket from a few hundred to 350,000 in a matter of days.

Barack Obama



Barack Obama was the first African-American President of the United States of America, and served two terms in office from 2009 to 2017. During that time, he achieved many things, including signing the ***Affordable Care Act*** which provided health insured to millions of uninsured Americans. He was an ***LGBT ally***, and helped fight for ***marriage equality***, and started the ***My Brother's Keeper***, which was launched to assist young minorities in fulfilling their potential.

Rosa Parks



It's hard to believe, but in the last century, black people were made to use separate facilities, schools and even water fountains in the United States. In 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat for a white person on a bus in Alabama and was arrested. Four days later, the black community declined to use the buses in the city in protest over the treatment of non-white people. This act of support lasted for 381 days until the Supreme Court ruled that Alabama's segregation laws were unjust. Rosa became an icon for the civil rights movement and was nicknamed 'the mother of the freedom movement'.

Harriet Tubman



Harriet was born into slavery in Maryland. She escaped to the north using the 'Underground Railroad'. This wasn't a real railway track, but a network of homes where slaves could safely hide. She joined the network and risked her life to help an estimated 3000 slaves escape, and later became a nurse during the Civil War. She also led a successful mission across South Carolina's Combahee River. A true superhero!

Marcus Rashford



Not only a star on the football pitch, Manchester United and England player Marcus Rashford hit the news headlines in 2020 for his part in raising millions of pounds for the food waste charity Fare Share. Marcus – who grew up on free school meals himself – pressured the government into providing free school meals for children over the summer holiday, as many families were struggling due to employment problems due to the COVID pandemic.

Kwame Nkrumah



Kwame Nkrumah was a Ghanaian revolutionary and politician. He played an important role in the independence of the Gold Coast in 1957, after which he served as the first prime minister of Ghana from 1957 to 1960 and then as the first president of Ghana from 1960 to 1966. He also played an influential role as an advocate of Pan-Africanism.

Jomo Kenyatta



After being held as a prisoner by the British for 9 years, anti-colonial activist Jomo Kenyatta was released shortly before Kenya achieved its independence, and became the country's first prime minister and then its first president. The Father of the Nation, Kenyatta was also named Mzee, meaning "grand old man."

Kenneth Kaunda



Kenneth Kaunda is a Zambian former politician. He served as the first president of Zambia from 1964 to 1991. A major figure in Zambia's struggle for independence from British rule, he became the first president of independent Zambia. As the president, he implemented many educational and economic reforms to accelerate the rate of modernization in the country.

Winnie Madikizela-Mandela



Winnie Madikizela-Mandela had first met legendary anti-apartheid activist Nelson Mandela at a bus stop when she was barely 22. They ended up getting married the following year. Winnie's journey was marred by bans and harassment by the South African government, but she determined social worker revolutionised South African politics.

Oliver Tambo



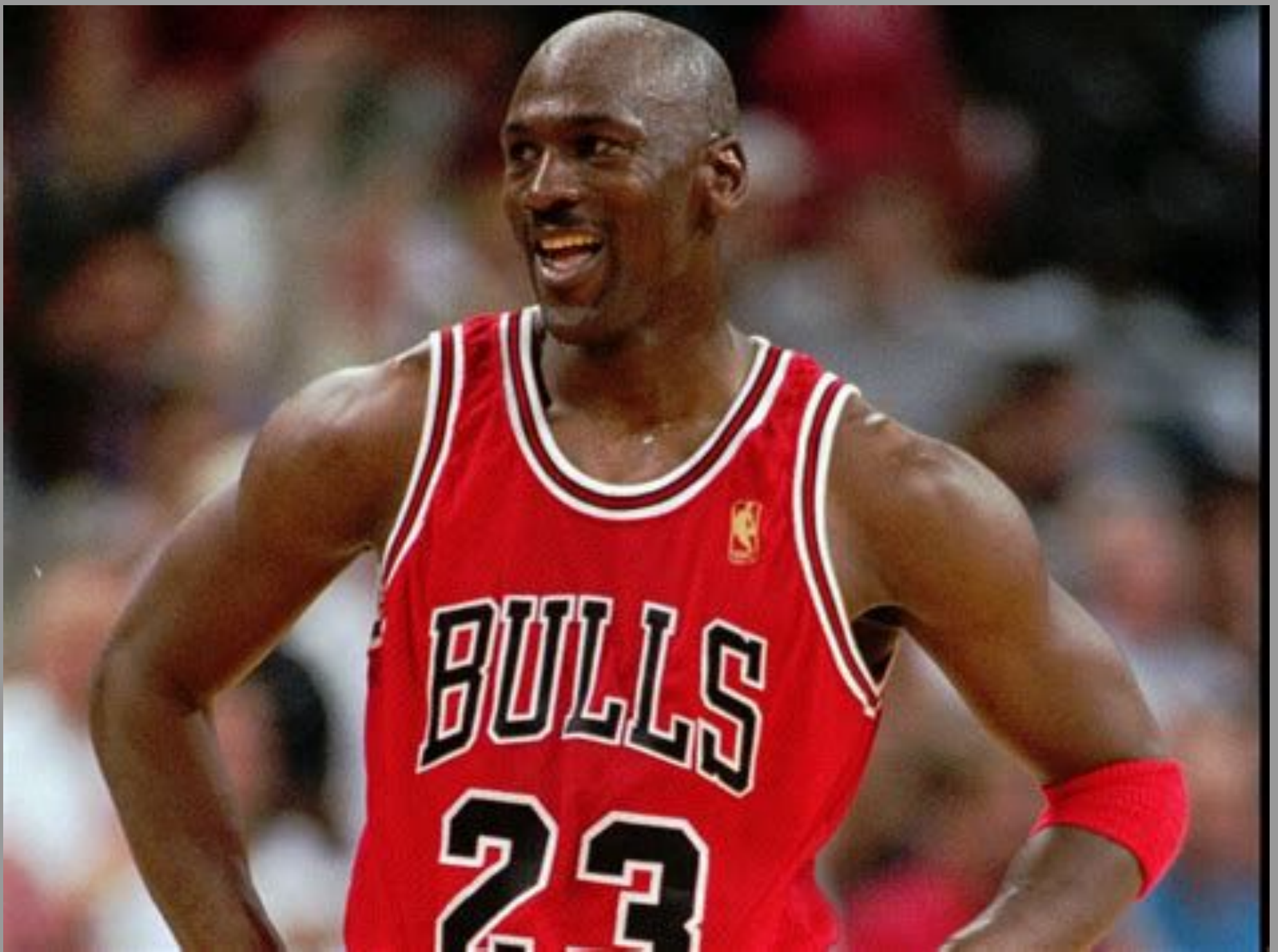
Oliver Tambo was a South African revolutionary and politician who played an important role in the anti-apartheid movement alongside Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu. In 1943, he helped found the ANC Youth League and later served as the African National Congress' president. He is also remembered for organizing several guerilla units that facilitated attacks against the apartheid state.

Professor Maathai



In 2004, Professor Maathai made history as the first African woman to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her dedication to sustainable development, democracy and peace. She started the Green Belt Movement, a community-based tree planting initiative that aims to reduce poverty and encourage conservation, in 1977. More than 51 million trees have been planted helping build climate resilience and empower communities, especially women and girls. Her environmental work is celebrated every year on Wangari Maathai Day on 3 March.









<https://www.beano.com/posts/black-history-month-10-people-who-have-helped-make-the-world-awesome>

<https://www.thefamouspeople.com/black-leaders.php>

<https://www.thefamouspeople.com/black-leaders.php>

<https://facingtoday.facinghistory.org/9-leaders-from-black-history-you-should-know>

<https://www.blackhistorymonth.org.uk/article/section/bhm-firsts/wangari-maathai/>