

## **WFHA is celebrating Black History Month October 2023**



### **What is Black History Month**

Black History Month is both a time to celebrate and a time to learn about and understand Black history and culture.

For the entire month, a wide range of events are held across the country celebrating African and Caribbean cultures and histories, including everything from food festivals to music workshops, educational seminars and lectures.

This years theme is “Celebrating our Sisters, Saluting our Sisters, and Honouring Matriarchs of Movements”.

We wanted to give you some of the history of how Black History Month came to be. If you want to find out lots more, you can visit the Black History Month website directly - click on the links below:

<https://www.blackhistorymonth.org.uk/>

If you are interested in finding out what is happening during the month in the London Borough of Waltham Forest, click here:

<https://www.blackhistorymonth.org.uk/listings/region/greater-london/waltham-forest/>

## **When is Black History Month 2023**

In the UK, Black History Month takes place every October.

## **How did Black History Month start**

Looking back in history, the Black History Month we know today has its origins in Negro History Week which was created in February 1926 in the United States by African American historian Carter G. Woodson.

This celebration was held annually on the second week of February, as Black communities celebrated Abraham Lincoln's birthday on February 12 and Frederick Douglas's on February 14.

In the aftermath of the slave trade, the purpose of the week-long celebration was to remind and educate the African American people about their contribution to the world and its history.

At the time, Woodson felt that the teaching of black history was essential for the physical and intellectual survival of the race within broader society, "If a race has no history," he said, "it becomes a negligible factor in the thought of the world, and it stands in danger of being exterminated."

During Negro History week, teachers and churches would distribute the Journal of Negro History which was the official literature associated with the event.

## **Black History Month 1970**

As Negro History Week grew in popularity, black educators and students at Kent State University argued that a week was not long enough and proposed a month-long event. The first Black History Month was celebrated at Kent State University from January 2February 28, 1970.

In 1976 Black History Month was celebrated across the country in conjunction with the United States Bicentennial celebrations.

At this time President Gerald Ford formally recognised the month and urged Americans to “seize the opportunity to honour the too-often neglected accomplishments of Black Americans in every area of endeavour throughout our history”.

## **Why is October Black History Month in the UK**

During the Thatcher era, following the Brixton, Tottenham and Toxteth riots, Black Britons were experiencing high levels of marginalisation and racism.

In response to this, Akyaaba Addai-Sebo, a Ghanaian analyst and activist, who was working as the Special Projects Officer at the Greater London Council coordinated the first official Black History Month event on 1st October 1987, with speaker Dr Maulana Karenga, the originator of Kwanzaa.

The annual celebration of African American culture is held from December 26 to January 1 in the US.

Since then, the popularity and breadth of celebrations have grown exponentially into the widely celebrated national programme that we see today.

## **Is there a theme for Black History Month in 2023**

Each year, Black History Month has a different theme to focus on throughout the month. This year it is “Celebrating our Sisters, Saluting our Sisters, and Honouring Matriarchs of Movements”.

## **Why is Black History Month important**

Black History Month is an opportunity to start conversations about race everywhere – including our communities and in the workplace.

Conversations about race are important to have because it supports and encourages a two-way dialogue. This is important for building relationships, rapport and trust.

WFHA is an anti-racist organisation and we are passionate in our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). If you would like to read our policy, please click [here](#).

## **Understanding the controversy over Black History Month**

Despite its widespread growth, the celebration of Black History Month, both in the United States and the United Kingdom, has not been without controversy.

For example, some believe that the intense focus on the topic of Black History for just one month a year is misplaced; instead, the focus should be on integrating Black History into mainstream education, news, and culture.

Additionally, others feel that Woodson's original inspiration for the celebration; educating and reminding Black people of their contribution to the world and its history, is often reduced to representations of Black Historical figures as simply slaves and colonial subjects.

As part of these celebrations, it is critical that we dig deep and explore the origins of Black History within our countries, debunk any myths, and look broadly at the contributions made by Black people across a range of disciplines and areas of public life.

Another often-raised criticism is that the act of separating Black stories and Black historical contributions helps to further perpetuate racism and separation.

For example, in 2005 actor Morgan Freeman noted, "I don't want a Black history month. Black history is American history."

Building on these perspectives, there is now a growing consensus that we cannot rely on Black History Month alone to address systemic issues of racism, nor can we rely solely on what is taught in schools.

We all need to be conscious of the positive achievements and contributions of Black people in our countries as well as relevant colonial history. We need to take individual responsibility for our education and levels of awareness and reflection.

Combined, all of these approaches will help to chip away at entrenched attitudes, behaviours and biases and support wider culture and structural reform in our organisations.