

## BLACK HISTORY MONTH – THE FAQs

### 1 When was Black History Month set up in the UK and by whom?

Akyaaba Addai Sebbo is widely regarded as the person who set up Black History Month in the UK. Addai worked with Ken Livingstone at the Greater London Council (GLC) as co-ordinator of Special Projects. The first event was held on 1st October 1987, when the GLC hosted Dr Maulana Karenga from the US to mark the contributions of Black people throughout history.

Addai then drew up a plan to recognise the contributions of African, Asian and Caribbean people to the economic, cultural and political life in London and the UK. Since 1987 as part of African Jubilee Year, other boroughs began to formally institute this as Black History Month in the UK.

### 2 Why was Black History Month established and what is its aim?

Black History Month's purpose is nicely encapsulated in these words from Ken Livingstone "In order to enrich the cultural diversity of the Greater London area, it is imperative that Londoners know more about African influences on medieval and renaissance European music so that accepted ideas about European music is changed. Despite the significant role that Africa and its Diaspora have played in the world civilization since the beginning of time, Africa's contribution has been omitted or distorted in most history books."

### 3 What form do events take and where are they held?

Initiatives take place across the UK with

voluntary groups, local authorities, primary care trusts, museums and libraries often taking a lead in planning events. All projects use the skills and experiences of the local workforce and community in the planning and delivery. Smaller groups do equally good work on limited budgets, e.g. running supplementary schools, which incorporate history, or incorporating the Black History Month theme into existing events.

There is always a rich programme of events: storytelling, historical walks, theatrical productions, comedy and panel debates are a few examples, but all have history as an integral part of their purpose.

Some employers, especially local authorities, can earmark specific budgets that groups can apply for at the beginning of each financial year. Other councils pick up and absorb publicity or venue hire costs in some cases.

### 4 If Black History Month derives from the US, why and when was it set up there?

Carter G Woodson initiated the Negro History Week in 1926, which then became Black History Month. He chose February because the birthdays of the two influential figures - Abraham Lincoln, US president and Frederick Douglas - who he believed to have impacted on the conditions of the "Negro" fell in February.

The late African-American writer, John Harnik Clarke wrote: 'If we are to change tomorrow, we are going to have to look back with some courage, and warm our hands on the revolutionary fires of those who came before us.' This quote was a catalyst for Addai's plans at the GLC in 1987.

### **5 What are the dates for Black History Month and why October?**

Black History Month runs throughout the month of October.

There has long been concern about the experience of black children in the UK, and this was a key factor in setting October as the Black History Month. It is at the beginning of a new academic year and can instil pride and identity into young black learners.

October is also a period of tolerance and reconciliation in African culture. Black history is therefore a reconnection with the African source, hence the Black History Month symbol of Sankofa – learning from the past – with the benefit of hindsight.

### **6 Who celebrates Black History Month?**

Can anyone participate, or is just for Black people?

Black History Month is open to participation by everyone and is ideally developed, delivered and managed as an educational and historical awareness experience by Black people – African, Asian and Caribbean heritage – and should be shared by everyone as world history.

### **7 Who runs Black History Month – is one official body behind it?**

There is no one official body behind Black History Month. However, leading political figures like Ken Livingstone, the Mayor of London, still put on some of the biggest events and have set a standard while also providing support for other bodies to do the same. Visit:

[www.london.gov.uk/mayor/bhm/index.jsp](http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/bhm/index.jsp) for the GLA web site.

### **8 Why do Black people need a history month?**

In an ideal world, the month would not be necessary, because educational establishments and the national curriculum would fully recognise and appreciate the contribution of black people throughout history. Sadly that is not the case.

The Black community uses this history month as an opportunity to share with the world its vast contributions: a time to demonstrate pride in its creativity, respect for its intellectual prowess and a celebration of its cultural identity which is far too often misrepresented, when it is not being ignored, in the mainstream.

### **9 Why is there a Black History Month magazine, where can I get it?**

There are two magazines in existence one called Black History Month Magazine and the other is Black Heritage Today. They are available free from libraries across the UK. See the links section for details.

### **10 Black History Month recognised by the government?**

Are there government-backed events? Black History Month is recognised by the government and many MPs get involved in hosting and charring events, speaking at launches, and have provided forwards for the two magazines. The GLA, local authorities, and the Home Office have black workers' networks which organise seminars every year for staff. Ask your local politicians to support your initiatives.