

THIS HOUSE SUPPORTS THE CELEBRATION OF BLACK HISTORY MONTH



WHAT IS BLACK HISTORY MONTH?

The month of October is Black History Month in the UK. It has been celebrated nationwide for over 40 years, and began in London in the 1980s as a way to celebrate and recognise the contributions of Black people to British history. The campaign to dedicate national holidays and recognition to Black History began in 1926 by a man called Carter Wilson. He was a African-American academic and historian, who believed that Black Americans were not being taught about their ancestors or their own history. Black History Month was founded to fill the gaps in mainstream education and public awareness. It is normally recognised by schools and museums as well as businesses, and involves celebrating the achievements of famous Black Britons, as well as learning more about pivotal moments in Black history like colonialism, abolition and the Civil Rights movement.

WHAT IS THE DEBATE?

Black History Month is widely acknowledged and celebrated as an important part of our calendar. It is a time to recognise and amplify the achievements of black people across the world. However, some people believe that Black History Month is outdated. Why should Black History be taught in a single month? Has Black History Month just become another way for businesses to signal that they are anti-racist without really doing anything about it? Does the way we learn 'Black History' really allow us to understand the complexity and reality of racism in Britain today?



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PROPOSITION

Learning about Black History is vital

History is an important tool to understanding the present, and **learning Black History is vital to our understanding of race in Britain today**. It is clear that there is still a huge problem with racial discrimination in the UK, from both individuals and the institutions we rely on (for example: the justice system, or our government). **An understanding of the history of Black people within the UK makes sure that students value the contributions of Black Britons, as well as understanding why many of the problems we see today still exist**. For example: if we had more education on the Windrush generation in the UK, maybe there would have been more opposition to the Windrush Scandal and Immigration act, before so many people were wrongly deported.

BHM addresses inequality in our curriculum

Our classrooms are currently a lot more diverse than our curriculum. No British child makes it through their compulsory education without learning the names and dates of famous Tudors, Victorians and English Kings and Queens. However, **many children are leaving education without a basic understanding of Britain's role in the transatlantic slave trade, and having not even heard of many of Windrush, the Bristol Bus Boycott or the Notting Hill Riots**. The lack of representation within the curriculum and public education means that Black History Month is still so important, as it means schools and museums have to focus on Black History for at least one month a year.

BHM forces representation

The recognition of Black History Month by schools, museums and businesses ensures that every October there is a representation of Black narratives, creatives, writers and celebrities. While some people may argue we should have this representation all the time, it is clear that we live in a society where racism still exists, and we don't get that kind of representation day to day. Therefore, Black History Month is important, because it means that **powerful actors (like companies and places of education) will definitely represent Black people and their experiences during this time**. This representation, even if it only in one month a year, promotes long term inclusion and diversity as people may start to follow the stories or work of these individuals.

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OPPOSITION

We should learn Black History all year round.

When Morgan Freeman was asked about Black History Month in an interview, he once famously said “You are going to relegate my history to one month a year?”. **Black history is part of British history, and separating it and teaching it in only one month of the year does it a disservice.** Celebrating Black History Month simply accepts the status quo as it is, and means that topics like the transatlantic slave trade, the civil rights movement and the Windrush generation end up being viewed as ‘specialist’ topics which we only teach in October, instead of pushing for them to be a part of our curriculum. **Black history is being made 365 days a year, so why would we only talk about it in October?**

BHM has become commercialised and co-opted by businesses.

Some of the strongest opponents to BHM argue that it is no longer valuable, and has instead become **a chance for businesses to advertise their anti-racism without making long term change.** One example of this was in 2018, when the company ‘Ram Trucks’ used clips of Martin Luther King’s ‘I have a dream’ speech in a Black History Month themed car advert. Examples like this really undermine BHM as a whole, and shows how some corporations will use this month as a way to use the experiences of Black people to make money.

What even is ‘Black History’!?

Even the idea of ‘Black history’ is confusing. There is no single category of history for Black people, as Black people have been in the UK for hundreds of years, and would have all had completely different experiences. **Separating ‘Black history’ and putting it into its own category, suggests there is one single narrative of Black experience in the UK, which couldn’t be further from the truth!** It is important that Black history is integrated into British history, and that we understand the roles and experiences of all kinds of communities. We should learn about the experiences of Black people and all people in all our history classes, instead of giving it a separate minority status.