



HER LEAD

CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY MONTH

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Black History Month started with the prominent historian Carter G. Woodson, who created an event called “Negro History Week.” In time, this became Black History Month, which has been recognized by every US president since 1976. Black History Month is now a time to study and celebrate Black American history and achievements.

As we all know, Black history is American history — not a part of it, an aberration, an index, or a supplement. It is embedded in the fabric of what America was yesterday, is today, and will be tomorrow. Unapologetically delving into Black American history to get the full and accurate picture, and being intentional in celebrating Black Americans is bold, simply because doing so is still not the norm for most Americans. So, to get started, here are a few ideas of how you and your community can celebrate Black History Month in 2021.

- Let's start with something you can do on your own, beginning right this second: educate yourself on Black American history. Because of systemic racism, the achievements and contributions of African-Americans are not widely known. We all know Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks, but how about Maggie Lena Walker or Benjamin Banneker? To make learning super easy, snag the card game “Black History Facts” and flip through a few cards every week. It is equally critical to learn how State-sanctioned racism, such as redlining, sharecropping, and Jim Crow laws shaped and are still shaping the trajectory of so many African-Americans today. I suggest reading essays and books by Ta-Nehisi Coates, Jacqueline Woodson, Harriet A. Washington and Richard Rothstein. Most importantly, don't forget to share what you learn with others — knowledge is power!
- In your school, work, or other community space, hire a Black field expert to speak on a panel or give a presentation about something relevant or interesting. Do you work on environmental issues? Hire a Black ecological activist. Are you a member of your Student Government Association? Hire an activist to speak on racial disparities in education. Since women and people of color are often underpaid for their speaking engagements, be sure to pay fairly.
- Find local Black-owned businesses in your area. Commit to visit a different Black-owned coffee shop, restaurant, bar or boutique weekly during the month of February. The app eatOkra can help you find businesses in your area. If you enjoyed your visit, spread the word, invite family and friends, and leave positive reviews. This is especially important since, according to [this Brookings study](#), “Black-owned

businesses start with approximately a third less capital than their white peers and have difficulties raising private investments from mainstream investment systems. Only 1% of Black business owners obtain loans in their founding year, compared to 7% of white business owners.”

- Find national, local or grassroots organizations doing racial justice work. Get involved or consider becoming a monthly donor.
- Do you know if your city, town or neighborhood is upholding racist legacies, such as redlining or school segregation? Find out and get involved in local politics! Attend council meetings and vote for politicians who are committed to ensuring a fair city government. Go canvassing or support tenants in your neighborhood who are standing up to slum property owners. The options are endless!