

# BLACK HISTORY MONTH



**JENNIFER BROWN**  
CONSULTING

# Black History Month

February is Black History Month. During February, we are reminded of the rich ancestry and many contributions of Black people in the United States. But the month also pushes us to deepen our knowledge and understanding of the nation's history of colonization and slavery and the legacy of discrimination, marginalization and oppression of Black people that persists today.

The ideology that Black people are less than White people – the underlying tenet of White supremacy – has reinforced discriminatory systems and led to mass incarceration, unequal access to education, discriminatory housing policies, health disparities, voter suppression, and a still growing wealth gap between White and Black communities in the United States.

Celebrating Black History Month alone will not bring fundamental change, but it can foster education and awareness and propel an open and honest dialogue about Black history and the work that is still ahead of us if we are to achieve a more equitable future.

Today, Black people still experience racism at every level of American society. But millions of Americans are marching, advocating, rallying, and organizing to put an end to that. Many companies are making public commitments to become anti-racist organizations. But to be truly anti-racist is to be actively against racism and to advocate for anti-racist ideals, policies, practices, and procedures **every single day**, not just during Black History Month.

**So, what can companies and individuals do to move beyond an awareness of racism to play an active and engaged role in creating a just and equitable society?**

## For organizations. . .

**Commit to becoming an anti-racist organization.** Examine how your organization may be reinforcing systemic racism and commit to change that. Establish goals to drive tangible change and move the company forward. Consider forming an accountability group of Black employees and allies to

keep the company in check and to maintain momentum. But also recognize the emotional toll that holding an organization accountable to anti-racism can take on Black employees.

**Listen to and amplify Black voices and perspectives.** Don't assume the needs of your Black employees and colleagues, just ask. Create workplace forums where they can voice their needs. Foster a compassionate environment: don't challenge the experiences of Black people, listen and understand. Invite Black employees to share their stories. Learn what important moments in Black history mean to them.

**Share educational and informational resources within the workplace.** Help to reframe the narrative of American history to be more inclusive of Black history and Black voices. Center the contributions and lived experiences of Black Americans in workshops, resources and conversations. If there is a company newsletter, podcast, or social media page, recognize important events in Black history and ask employees to contribute. This could be Black employees sharing their perspectives and experiences, or non-Black employees sharing information about their journey to be an ally and the steps they are taking to contribute to an anti-racist society.

## As an individual and an ally. . .

**Reject apathy.** Question how you as an individual may be contributing to systemic racism and a society or workplace that is not equitable for Black people. Understand your biases and how they impact your decisions and behaviors. Use your privilege and influence to promote equity and amplify and hold space for Black voices.

**Decentralize "White guilt".** White guilt is the guilt and shame that a White person experiences from their whiteness and contribution to racial injustice. White guilt can often overshadow the real-life issues and violence that Black people face every day.

**Educate yourself and learn more.** Expand your knowledge and understanding of Black history and the Black experience in America. Share what you learn. Visualize

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having discussions that may feel uncomfortable. Understanding what is missing in the history we were taught can trigger defensiveness, denial, avoidance, anger, shame and guilt. Feel and experience all of that, and then get to work!

**Get involved with an employee resource group (ERG).** If your organization has a Black ERG, seek information there to learn more: it is a good starting place for identifying resources to learn more about Black history and how the Black experience continues to play out today. But remember it is not the responsibility of the ERG members to educate you. Explore joining the group as an ally, but enter these safe spaces respectfully and be sensitive to the importance of single-identity spaces.

## Conversation Starters

As organizations and individuals continue to reckon with racial justice and commit to a culture of having difficult conversations, this moment calls for a deep reflection on how we are supporting, advocating for, and understanding the history, needs, and visions of Black people.

We invite and encourage you to reflect on these questions:

- How did our society mischaracterize the history and continued legacy of slavery and oppression against Black communities?
- In what ways does society continue to overlook and/or dismiss the needs and voices of Black communities?
- How can we make our workplaces more equitable and inclusive to Black people?

The curriculum that has been taught in American schools has often left out significant events in Black history. In fact, the American history that is taught in the education system is often more accurately described as being 'White history.'

It's time to unlearn the dominant history that we have been taught and to relearn the history of Black people in the United States.

Here are a few places to get started. . .

## To watch. . .

### [Slavery by Another Name](#)

90-minute documentary that challenges one of Americans' most cherished assumptions: the belief that slavery in this country ended with the Emancipation Proclamation.

### [13th](#)

Netflix feature that examines how Black Americans are disproportionately incarcerated and the loophole in the 13th Amendment.

### [I am Not Your Negro](#)

Based on James Baldwin's unfinished book, this visual essay explores racism through the stories of Medgar Evers, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.

## To read. . .

### [The Case for Reparations](#)

In this article, Ta-Nehisi Coates discusses the continued impact of two hundred fifty years of slavery on Black populations. In particular, Coates discusses racist housing policies and urges everyone to reckon with our compounding moral debts to Black communities.

### [Right Within](#)

In this book, Black author Minda Harts, offers strategies for women of color to speak up during racialized moments with managers and clients, work through past triggers they may not even know still cause pain, and reframe past career disappointments as opportunities to grow into a new path.

### [1619 Project](#)

Developed by The New York Times Magazine, The 1619 Project is an ongoing initiative that began in August 2019, the 400th anniversary of the beginning of American slavery. It aims to reframe the country's history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of Black Americans at the forefront of our national narrative.

## For parents and young readers. . .

### [A Kids Book About Racism](#)

Authored by a Jelani Memory, who recognized that racism was an unavoidable conversation when raising a multicultural family, this book discusses what racism is, how it makes people feel when they experience racial discrimination, and how to identify racial discrimination when it occurs.

### [Let's Talk About Race](#)

In this acclaimed book, the author of the Newbery Honor Book *To Be a Slave* shares his own story as he explores what makes each of us special. A strong choice for sharing at home or in the classroom. Karen Barbour's dramatic, vibrant paintings speak to the heart of Lester's unique vision, truly a celebration of all of us.

### [Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You](#)

This remarkable reimagining of Dr. Ibram X. Kendi's National Book Award-winning *Stamped from the Beginning* reveals the history of racist ideas in America, and inspires hope for an antiracist future. It takes you on a race journey from then to now, shows you why we feel how we feel, and why the poison of racism lingers. It also proves that while racist ideas have always been easy to fabricate and distribute, they can also be discredited.

## JBC resource guides. . .

[The Long Road to Gender Equity and Equality](#)

[How to Support Employees on Juneteenth and Every Other Day of the Year](#)

## Our Story

**We are proud to be a Women-and-LGBTQ owned business.**

Everyone deserves the opportunity to thrive as their full self in the workplace. This is the belief—and lived experience—that inspired Jennifer Brown to start JBC in 2006. Having navigated the corporate world as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, Jennifer was deeply familiar with the devastating individual and organizational impact of a workplace where employees feel pressured to cover essential layers of their identities. JBC, both in its own structure and in its work with clients, was built as an antidote and alternative to workplaces where assimilation is a prerequisite to belonging. The way we work, true belonging is achieved by recognizing, understanding, and celebrating one another's differences.

## Our Philosophy

**DEI is not compliance work.**

In our experience—and when practiced the right way—DEI is soul-healing, culture-transforming work that everyone can benefit from, not only for their teams and organizations, but to unlock their own full potential.

We demonstrate how implementing long-term DEI strategies gives leaders access to their most authentic selves, so that they can open up that possibility for their employees, their colleagues, and their communities.

In our work, we are constantly reminded of the possibilities that effective DEI strategies can unlock on a company, community, and societal level. Getting there takes time, thoughtful planning and accountability, and a collective practice of compassion — JBC can be your coach and accountability partner at every step along the way.

We're not in the business of shaming or blaming our clients. None of us moves through life without internalizing bias, and just as we learn it we can unlearn it. JBC is here to help you see what's possible with a custom-made and thoughtfully implemented DEI strategy, and to guide you forward.

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