

MEETING IN A BOX

AN EDUCATIONAL
RESOURCE



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Meeting in a Box: Black History Month - Empowering Minds and Elevating Voices

Black History Month is an annual observance celebrated in February that highlights the achievements, contributions and struggles of Black people throughout history.

In this Meeting in a Box, we explore how the Supreme Court decision on race-conscious admissions in higher education has made Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) even more crucial for Black students. We also highlight five Black leaders advancing fairness by sharing their stories and advocating for civil rights.

This cultural competency tool features facts, figures and a timeline of some critical events in Black history. In addition, Fair360's Five Firsts celebrates the 2024 theme: "African Americans and the Arts" by highlighting five groundbreaking achievements of Black Americans in the arts.

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The SCOTUS Decision and HBCUs: Fortifying Investment and Support

For nearly two centuries, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have made education more accessible to historically underserved Black communities.

Today, HBCUs provide a rich talent pool for companies seeking to make their workplaces more inclusive. The recent landmark Supreme Court ruling ending race-conscious admissions practices in higher education has brought heightened attention to these esteemed institutions.

A Call to Action for HBCU Investment

In a commentary, the Brookings Institution said the SCOTUS decision erodes racial equity in higher education and is likely to lead to Black enrollment declines at predominately white institutions. HBCUs can help fill the gap. However, to meet the demand, corporations, states, philanthropies, and individuals need to re-prioritize investments in HBCUs. In a [previous report](#), Brookings found that the ten largest HBCU endowments were 100 times smaller than those for predominantly white institutions in 2020.

Over the years, many companies have supported HBCUs through initiatives like financial contributions, scholarship programs, internship placements and recruitment efforts. By supporting and collaborating with HBCUs, companies can work toward internal fairness commitments in a way that develops future leaders and benefits Black communities.

Expanding Resources for HBCUs

In 2023, Fair360's Top 10 Companies for Diversity committed to improving opportunities for ethnically diverse populations in the coming year. All companies also have a formal recruiting relationship with at least one HBCU.

Southern Company (No. 24 on the 2023 Top 50 Companies list and No. 1 on the Top Companies for Black Executives) became a founding partner of PROPEL in 2020, a technology hub for HBCUs. While PROPEL plans to build a physical campus connected to Atlanta University, it currently partners virtually with over 100 HBCUs. Students at participating schools have access to the digital PROPEL platform, where they can take entrepreneurship, talent development and technology courses.

Meanwhile, the Southern Company Foundation has partnered with organizations like the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) to provide funding grants to HBCUs. These grants fund higher education for Black students and provide skills training and talent development for the communities surrounding HBCU campuses.

Toyota North America (No. 4 on the 2023 Top 50 list and No. 2 on the Top Companies for Black Executives) also partnered with the UNCF to fund 11 HBCUs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Toyota supplied a grant to the UNCF to help students and universities cover unexpected costs. The support included unemployment assistance for students who lost on-campus jobs due to the pandemic. Financial help was also given directly to HBCUs that no longer received room and board payments from remote students.



The SCOTUS Decision and HBCUs: Fortifying Investment and Support

HBCU Recruiting

Eli Lilly and Company (No. 5 on the 2023 Top 50 list and No. 6 on the Top Companies for Black Executives) ramped up recruiting for Black employees through partnerships with several HBCUs. In 2021, it established recruiting relationships with Morehouse School of Medicine and Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science. In 2022, Eli Lilly launched its first annual HBCU day. This event provides networking opportunities for HBCU STEM students and expands the company's recruiting at HBCUs without an existing Eli Lilly partnership.



In addition to these individual recruiting practices, Eli Lilly also partners with the Business Roundtable. This network of CEOs collaborates with the Thurgood

Marshall College Fund to provide scholarships and professional development opportunities to HBCU students. Such investments work in tandem with HBCU recruiting partnerships to improve the talent pipelines for Black professionals.

Best Practices for an Effective Talent Pipeline

A study by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) explored the most effective strategies for recruiting from HBCUs.

Internships provide a pathway to employment and are an effective recruitment tool for entry-level positions. Another finding was the value of internships in kickstarting an HBCU recruiting program. Because internship turnover is so quick, often a year at most, assessing and tweaking the program can be done at regular, short-term intervals. The timing allows companies to analyze their recruiting strengths and weaknesses before implementing changes to improve recruiting for non-intern positions.

READ MORE: The Benefits of Internships and How to Find One



The same study also found that long-term relationships with HBCUs produce the most sustainable pathways to employment for Black students. Collaborating with on-campus career centers virtually and in person increased the visibility of potential candidates. Employed HBCU alums can also mentor interns and new hires to help them settle into the company and develop professionally. This cyclical recruiting system maintains a reliable, diverse talent pool and builds organizational trust among HBCU graduates.

5 Black Leaders Advancing Fairness

While some progress has been made in elevating Black voices, people of color continue to be underrepresented, whether it's in business, sports or the military.

It's not always easy to talk about challenges and painful experiences. But it's necessary to advance fairness. Audre Lorde once said, "When I dare to be powerful, to use the strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important that I am afraid."

This article highlights five Black leaders who have spoken at Fair360 events and advanced fairness by sharing their stories and advocating for civil rights.



Joy Fitzgerald

Joy Fitzgerald is the SVP and Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer at UnitedHealth Group. She's also a speaker, author and life coach under her company, Speaking Joy.

Fitzgerald has over 25 years of leadership experience across various business sectors. She champions diversity as a business strategy and has dedicated her career to helping people better themselves in the public and private sectors.

During Fair360's 2023 Women of Color and Their Allies event, Fitzgerald emphasized including women of color at high-level tables.

"It is not an education issue. It is not a performance issue. It's not an intellect issue. It's not a capability or a competency issue. I'm going to submit to you some of this is our issue because we're still waiting on men to help us," Fitzgerald said. "I wouldn't be where I am today if a man hadn't helped me, but I don't see (enough) women showing up in this conversation to

help other women that don't look like them like we need them to."

She said allyship and analyzing who currently has a seat at the table is a start to uplifting women of color.

"It is our time to take our power and leverage it for the good of other women and stop worrying about what that means for your career. Your value system and your integrity should be worth the cost of doing what you believe is right. That's when we will win for everyone."



Rev. Jesse Jackson

Civil rights activist Reverend Jesse Louis Jackson, Sr. has served in many roles in the fight for social, racial and economic justice. In addition to being a civil rights leader, Jackson is an ordained Baptist minister and a former presidential candidate.

Jackson formed The National Rainbow Coalition in 1984 following his first presidential campaign. It countered President Reagan's policies that disproportionately affected minority communities. In 1996, the organization merged with Operation PUSH, evolving into the Rainbow PUSH Coalition (RPC). RPC aims to achieve civil rights, economic parity, global peace and justice.

Rev. Jackson has been a longtime supporter of Fair360 and has spoken at our Top 50 event through the years. At the 2022 Top 50 event, he called on professional sports teams to make their procurement and supplier contracts more inclusive.

Procurement and supplier teams are the "backside" of what makes sports teams function, Jackson said. They are what draw in the fans and make each game a memorable experience.

5 Black Leaders Advancing Fairness

"We must fight for the backside of these industries that make them happen," he said.



Minda Harts

Minda Harts is a workplace equity subject matter expert, a professor of public service at New York University and an author. She is the CEO of The Memo, LLC, a career development platform for women of color.

Harts is transparent about her struggles as a Black woman in corporate America. At Fair360's 2022 Women of Color and Their Allies event, she spoke of the importance of recognizing abuse in the workplace, unpacking it and healing from trauma.

"As women of color, we've normalized the mistreatment in the workplace," she said. "The intention might not have been bad, but the constant harm is damaging to us."

Read the full article to learn Harts' [plan of action](#) for when workplace abuse occurs.

MUST WATCH: Career Advice:
Minda Harts



Colonel Yvonne Spencer

Colonel Yvonne Spencer has served in the United States Air Force for nearly 30 years. She was one of the first Black and first female to lead the Air Force's

Heavy Engineer Combat Unit. Spencer moved to Montana to take over the unit, where she found that racism and sexism were abundant.

When addressing her unit, Spencer had to stress the importance of integrity. She reminded them that service comes before "self and excellence in all that you do," which discrimination and sexism has no part in.

"Everyone is treated not because of the package that they were wrapped in, but what they brought to that fight," Spencer said at Fair360's 2022 Women of Color and Their Allies event. "I had to ask myself what am I representing? Are they seeing an African American? A woman? Or a leader that believes in the values that should be instilled upon everyone when they don the cloth of our nation?"

MUST WATCH: Career Advice:
Colonel Yvonne Spencer



Howard Bryant

Howard Bryant is an author, sports journalist, radio and TV personality. During our 2022 Top 50 event, Bryant shared insights from his book titled *Full Dissidence: Notes from an Uneven Playing Field*.

Full Dissidence confronts injustice in America by exploring inequities in sports and divisive cultural narratives. It delves into the ongoing struggles of Black Americans in a society overshadowed by authoritarianism.

5 Black Leaders Advancing Fairness

Bryant said Colin Kaepernick kneeling at a San Francisco 49ers preseason game in 2016 was one of the first displays of an athlete showing political activism since the 1960s. Between the 1970s and 2000s, some thought athletes were spared from social injustices because of their financial success.

“As much as we talked about power and control and these athletes making so much money, how much power do you actually have if you lose your

entire career by speaking? Maybe these athletes have a lot of money, but they don’t have a lot of control. They don’t have a lot of agency. And money and power are not the same thing,” he said.

Bryant also spoke of increasing Black representation in leadership ranks, erasing Black identity as a condition of success and holding leadership accountable. [Read more.](#)



Fair360 2023 Top Companies for Black Executives

1	Southern Company
2	Toyota North America
3	Comcast NBCUniversal
4	Johnson & Johnson
5	Cox Communications
6	Eli Lilly and Company
7	The Cigna Group
8	Humana
9	The Hershey Company
10	Blue Shield of California
11	AbbVie
12	KPMG
13	U.S. Bank
14	Northwell Health
15	Northrop Grumman
16	Randstad
17	Stellantis
18	EY
19	Medtronic
20	Ecolab
21	ADP
22	Linde
23	TD Bank
24	Hackensack Meridian Health
25	Dow
26	The Boeing Company
27	Abbott
28	Hilton

Fair360 Black Workforce Facts - Top 10 Companies

Black Women



5.65% of the
overall workforce



3.78% of overall
management total turnover



3.24% of overall
management



2.17% of the 10% Highest
Paid representation



3.04% of overall
management promotions



5.91% of Board of Directors

Black Men



4.83% of the
overall workforce



3.17% of overall
management total turnover



2.92% of overall
management



2.40% of the 10% Highest
Paid representation



3.08% of overall
management promotions



8.45% of Board of Directors

Black American Facts and Figures

Population



In 2021, the number of Black people in the United States reached a new high of **47.2 million**

Income



In 2021, the median household income for Black Americans was \$46,400. Fifty-two percent of Black U.S. households earn less than \$50,000, while **48%** make \$50,000 or more.

Educational attainment



As of 2021, **42%** of all Black U.S. adults ages 25 and older have, at most, graduated from high school (or earned an equivalent such as a GED certificate). Thirty-two percent have completed some college, while **26%** have a bachelor's degree or more education.

Source: Pew Research

Unemployment



In April 2023, the Black unemployment rate fell to a record low of **4.7%**. This is the first time the rate dropped below 5% since the Department of Labor began tracking the data in 1972.

Source: Department of Labor



The highest unemployment rate recorded for Black Americans was **21.2%** in January 1983.

Source: St. Louis Federal Reserve

Fair360's Five Firsts - African Americans and the Arts

The theme for Black History Month in 2024 is “African Americans and the Arts.” Black contributions to the arts have been both profound and transformative, spanning centuries and encompassing a rich tapestry of creative expression. In Fair360's Five Firsts, we take a look at five groundbreaking achievements for Black Americans in literature, art, print, film and music.

Lucy Terry was the first known Black American and slave to compose a work of literature with her poem "Bars Fight" in 1746. The poem tells the tale of an ambush by Native Americans on two families.

Sculptor Edmonia Lewis was the first Black American and Native American artist to rise to national and international prominence.

Freedom's Journal was the first Black-owned-and-operated newspaper. It was founded in 1827 by a group of free Black men in New York City.

Hattie McDaniel was the first Black American to win an Oscar. In 1940, McDaniel won the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress for her role as "Mammy" in *Gone with the Wind*.



"I sincerely hope I shall always be a credit to my race and to the motion picture industry. My heart is too full to tell you just how I feel and may I say thank you and God bless you." – McDaniel's acceptance speech

In 1986, Aretha Franklin was the first Black woman and the first woman to be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

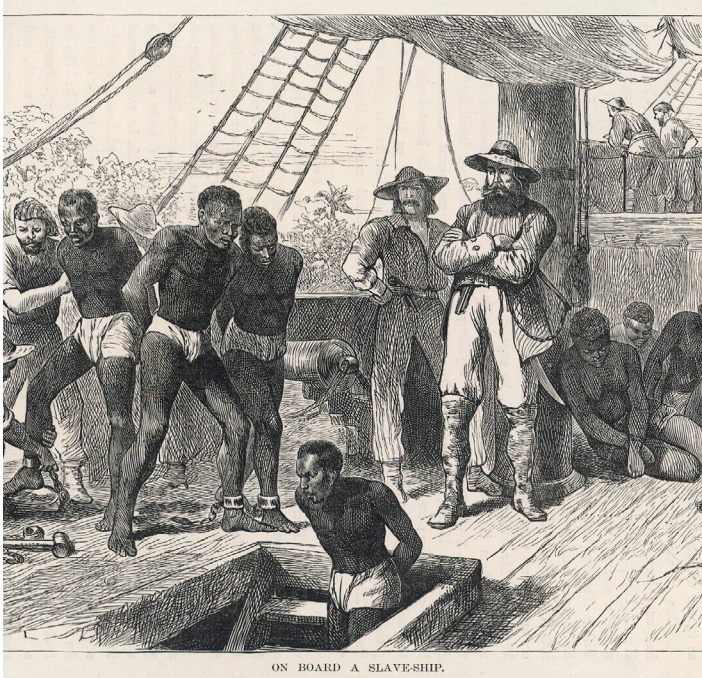


"We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us..." – Freedom's Journal editors

Timeline of Black History Events

16th to 19th Century

The Transatlantic Slave Trade transported between 10 million and 12 million enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas. The largest number of enslaved people were taken to the Americas during the 18th century.



1777

Not yet part of the newly formed United States, Vermont became the first colony to abolish slavery in its constitution.

1817

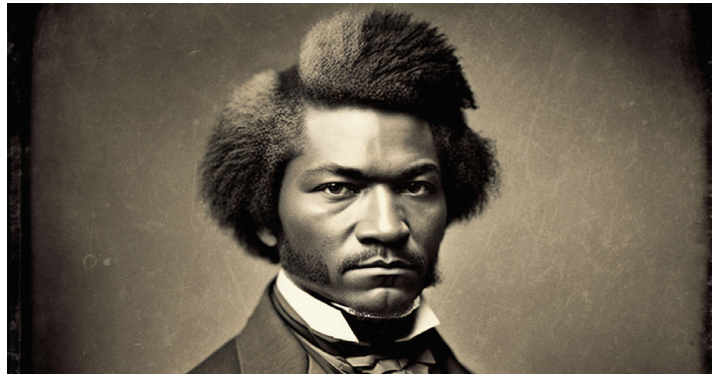
The American Colonization Society was established. Its mission was to transport freeborn Blacks and those freed from slavery to Africa. The society would go on to establish a colony in Africa in 1822 that would become the Republic of Liberia 25 years later.

1831

Nat Turner led the largest slave rebellion before the Civil War in Southampton County, Virginia. Rebellious enslaved people killed more than 50 individuals.

1847

Abolitionist Frederick Douglass founded *The North Star*, an anti-slavery newspaper based in Rochester, New York. The paper eventually gained over 4,000 readers across the U.S., Europe and the West Indies.



1849

Harriet Tubman escaped to Philadelphia and helped approximately 300 enslaved people via the Underground Railroad. The network of secret routes and safe houses aided enslaved people to freedom.



1857

Dred Scott, an enslaved man, sued for freedom for himself and his wife, Harriet Robinson Scott. The case, *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, became a nearly decade-long fight through several courts before reaching the Supreme Court. The Court ruled 7-2 against Scott, saying that no Black person could claim citizenship in the U.S. The decision helped stoke the fire for the Civil War in 1861.

1865

On June 19, 1865, Union soldiers arrived in Galveston, Texas, announcing the end of slavery, two and a half years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. This day came to be known as "Juneteenth" by the newly freed people in Texas.

1868

The 14th Amendment was ratified, allowing Black people to be considered as U.S. citizens.

1870

The 15th Amendment was ratified, guaranteeing that the right to vote couldn't be denied because of race, color or previous condition of servitude.

Hiram Rhodes Revels became the first Black and Native American member of Congress, representing Mississippi as a Republican.

1888

The True Reformers Bank, the first officially chartered Black-owned bank, was founded by Reverend William Washington Browne, a former enslaved person and soldier. It opened a year later.

1889

Journalist and activist Ida B. Wells became co-owner of the Memphis Free Speech and Headlight newspaper. It was founded in 1888 by the Reverend Taylor Nightingale and launched an anti-lynching campaign.

1896

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that segregation doesn't violate the 14th Amendment's equal-protection clause if the conditions provided are "separate but equal."

1900

William H. Carney was the first Black soldier awarded with the Medal of Honor for his courageous work protecting the regimental colors during the Battle of Fort Wagner in 1863.

1909

A group of Black and white activists, including W.E.B. Du Bois and Ida B. Wells, founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).



1921

The Tulsa Race Massacre, also known as the Black Wall Street Massacre, took place as mobs of white people attacked the economically thriving Black neighborhood in the Greenwood District of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Hundreds of people were killed and thousands were left homeless, leaving a devastating mark on Black wealth in the U.S.



1926

Black History Month originated in the United States in 1926. Historian Carter G. Woodson and other prominent Black Americans designated the second week of February as "Negro History Week" to coincide with the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. The aim was to raise awareness about Black contributions to history that had been overlooked or minimized. It expanded in 1976 to a month-long celebration and renamed Black History Month.

1939

Singer Billie Holiday gave her first performance of the biting anti-lynching song "Strange Fruit" at Café Society, New York's first integrated nightclub. The song was one of Holiday's most gripping performances in history.

1950

Ralph J. Bunche became the first Black person to win the Nobel Peace Prize for his work with the U.N. in the 1940s to mediate the Arab-Israeli conflict in Palestine.

1954

In *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in public schools violated the 14th Amendment.

1955

Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white man in Montgomery, Alabama. Her actions inspired the leaders of the local Black community to organize the Montgomery Bus Boycott, led by a young Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



1961

Freedom Rides began in Washington, D.C., as activists rode buses throughout the South to protest segregation on buses.

1963

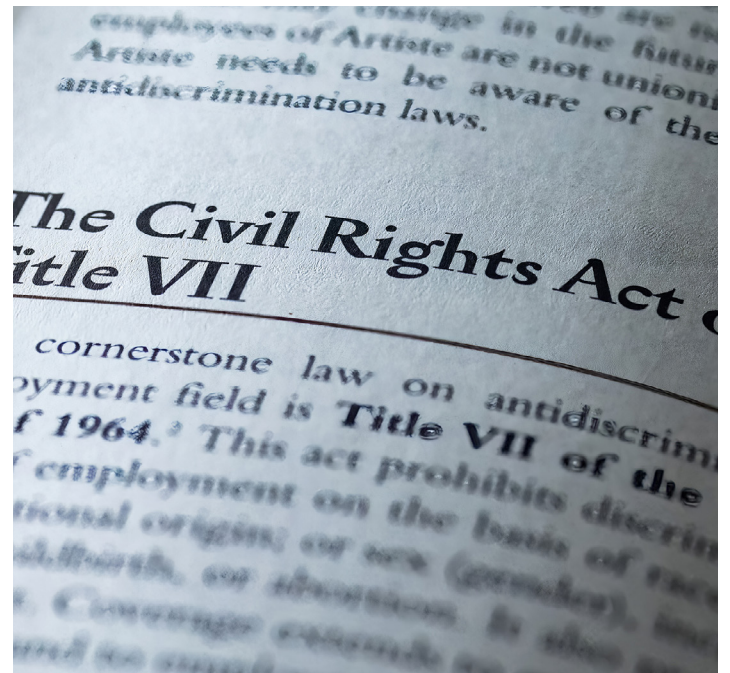
More than 200,000 people marched on Washington, D.C., to advocate for the civil and economic rights of Black Americans. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his historic "I Have a Dream" speech.

1964

President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, giving the government more power to protect citizens against race, religion, sex or national-origin discrimination.

1965

Malcolm X, a civil rights activist and former minister in the Nation of Islam, was assassinated in New York City.



1967

Thurgood Marshall became the first Black U.S. Supreme Court justice. Some of his notable stances include opposing the death penalty and supporting the right to abortion.

1968

Dr. King was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee.

Democrat Shirley Chisholm became the first Black woman elected to the U.S. Congress, representing New York's 12th district. She went on to become the Secretary of the House Democratic Caucus.

1969

President Richard Nixon authorized the Office of Minority Business Enterprise – later renamed the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) – to support the expansion of minority-owned businesses.

1970

The Black Business Association was founded to support the entrepreneurship and development of Black-owned businesses.

1971

Hair care company Johnson Products (founded by the husband-and-wife team of George and Joan Johnson) became the first Black-owned company to be listed on the American Stock Exchange.

1972

Democrat Shirley Chisholm became the first Black candidate from a major party to run for president.

1983

President Ronald Reagan signed the King Holiday Bill into law, designating the third Monday in January a federal holiday in observance of civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



1984

Civil rights activist Rev. Jesse Jackson became the second Black person to make a bid for the presidency, running as a Democrat.

1987

Dr. Clifton R. Wharton Jr. of TIAA-CREF became the first Black chairman and CEO of the Fortune 500.

1990

Democrat Lawrence Douglas Wilder of Virginia became the first Black person to be elected governor.

1991

Black Entertainment Television (BET), founded by Robert L. Johnson, became the first Black-controlled company to be listed on the New York Stock Exchange.

President George H.W. Bush signed the Civil Rights Act of 1991, strengthening employment discrimination laws. It provided the legal right to trial by jury on claims of discrimination and the possibility of emotional distress damages, as well as limiting the monetary amount a jury could award.

1993

Dr. Joycelyn Elders became the first Black Surgeon General, known for her views on progressive issues such as drug legalization and distributing contraception in schools.

1995

The Million Man March was a political demonstration held in Washington, D.C., consisting primarily of Black men. The march aimed to promote unity and address various issues affecting the Black population, including racism and economic disparities. Estimates of the number of marchers ranged from 400,000 to nearly 1.1 million, ranking it among the largest gatherings of its kind in American history.

2001

After selling BET to Viacom for \$3 billion, Robert L. Johnson became the first Black billionaire.

Republican four-star General Colin Powell became the first Black Secretary of State under President George W. Bush.

2003

Talk show host Oprah Winfrey became the first Black woman billionaire on Forbes' "World's Richest People" list. Winfrey grew up in rural poverty and worked her way up as a news anchor to eventually host her syndicated talk show.

2005

Condoleezza Rice was the first Black woman to serve as Secretary of State.

2009

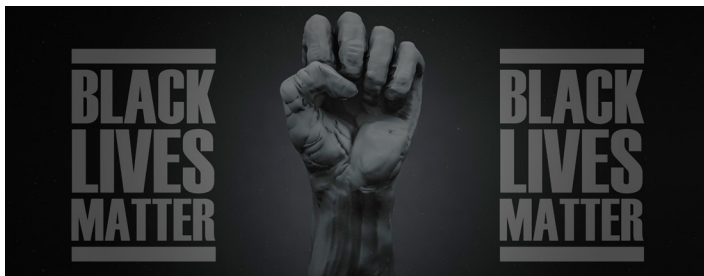
Barack Obama was inaugurated as the first Black President of the U.S.

2010

Poet and author Maya Angelou was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom for being one of the most prolific writers and activists of her time.

2013

Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi created Black Lives Matter, a Black-centered activism movement calling for racial justice.



2014

NYPD officer Daniel Pantaleo placed Eric Garner in an illegal chokehold, killing him. Garner was unarmed. His last words, "I can't breathe," become a Black Lives Matter rallying cry. Pantaleo was ultimately removed from the NYPD, but federal prosecutors decided in 2019 not to bring charges against him.

2017

Lt. Gen. Stayce D. Harris, the highest-ranking Black female pilot in the U.S. armed forces, was inducted into the Women in Aviation International's Pioneer Hall of Fame.

2019

Congresswoman Maxine Waters, a Democrat from California, founded the Subcommittee on Diversity and Inclusion as part of the House Committee on Financial Services.

Evanston, Illinois, became the first city in the United States to enact a government-funded reparations program to address the historical injustices faced by Black residents.

2020

George Floyd, a Black man, died in May 2020 after being handcuffed and pinned to the ground by Minneapolis police officers. The killing of Floyd and other unarmed Black people triggered nationwide protests against systemic racial injustice in America.



2021

President Joe Biden signed legislation establishing Juneteenth, or June 19th, as a federal holiday commemorating the end of slavery.

California Senator Kamala Harris became the first Black and South Asian woman to be sworn in as Vice President of the U.S.

2022

Acclaimed poet, author and civil rights activist Maya Angelou became the first Black woman to appear on an official U.S. coin. The United States Mint began circulating the new U.S. quarter featuring the late Angelou on Jan. 10.



Wes Moore made history as the first Black Governor of Maryland.

Karine Jean-Pierre became the first Black, openly LGBTQ+ person and immigrant to serve as White House press secretary.

Mike Grier became the first Black General Manager in National Hockey League history.

2023

Hakeem Jeffries became the first Black lawmaker to be nominated for Speaker of the House.

Anthony G. Brown was sworn in as Maryland's first Black attorney general.

Claudine Gay was selected as the first Black president of Harvard University. Gay has faced calls to resign after her testimony before Congress on antisemitism and allegations of plagiarism.

In a historic decision, the U.S. Supreme Court ended race-conscious admission programs at colleges and universities nationwide. Although the ruling was limited to college admissions, it challenges companies' efforts to operate workplace fairness initiatives.

Employee Discussion Questions

- What lessons can we learn from the achievements and struggles of the Black community throughout history and how can we apply them to create positive change in our workplace?
- What steps can be taken to support research partnerships between our organization and HBCUs to drive innovation and knowledge exchange in our industry?
- How have perspectives from Black leaders influenced your approach to problem-solving, teamwork or innovation?
- Do you have any suggestions on how the organization can better cultivate an inclusive environment that fosters the growth and advancement of Black employees into leadership positions?
- How can we continue these discussions and actions beyond Black History Month to ensure ongoing progress and support for the Black community in our workplace?