

Black History 365

This timeline is the first of a series produced by UCU in close collaboration with the Black Members' Standing Committee. It is just one of the ways that UCU is taking the lead in highlighting and challenging racial inequality.

Smaller portraits of important individuals in black history will be made available in the next 12 months,

thereby helping to shift from Black History Month to Black History 365.

Black people have played a pivotal role in human history. A history that especially in the last four centuries has been repressed and marginalised, but now can no longer be ignored.

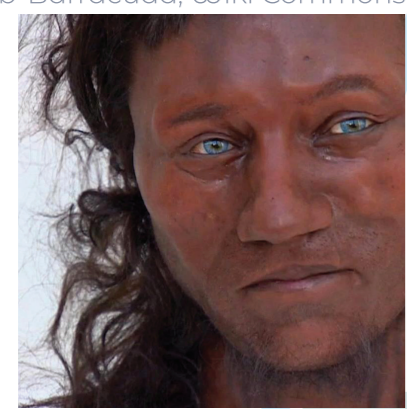


c100,000BC Human beings migrate from Africa

Bathtub-Barracuda, Wiki Commons

c10,000BC Cheddar Man

DNA samples from a man who lived near Cheddar Gorge 10,000 years ago show that the first inhabitants of the British Isles were actually dark skinned.



c5,000BC Africans and the origins of human civilisation

Some of the earliest human civilisations in human history seem to have had their origin in Africa or amongst dark skinned peoples possibly from Africa.

From the early civilisations, from the Kingdom of Kush to Ancient Egypt, Africa plays a pivotal role in human history for many millennia (Check out the: c751BC Kingdom of Kush; 100AD Kingdom of Ghana; 145-211AD An African Roman emperor Septimius Severus, rules parts of British Isles; 1250-1450 Great Zimbabwe).

Suffocation begins

c1500 The biggest forced migration in human history

The Atlantic Slave trade is established between Europe, Africa, and the Americas. An estimated 12 million enslaved Africans are kidnapped and then worked to death. This creates incredible wealth in Europe and for certain states in the Americas.

1588 Elizabeth I removes Africans

Historical records seem to suggest that Elizabeth I signs a decree to remove Africans from her kingdom. Recent research has shown a more complicated picture but arguably this is the first overt piece of legislation in this country that is based on skin colour.

1739 Facing down the Empire

The Maroons, a group of escaped enslaved Africans, form independent communities across the island of Jamaica. Following many years of wars with the British, a peace treaty was signed with the Maroons under the leadership of Cudjoe in 1739.

Queen Nanny of the Maroons

1787 Abolition hits the streets...

The abolition movement in the UK gains strength as the Society for the Abolition of slavery society is formed. The industrial centres like London and Manchester provide strong support, with every English county being represented by 1792 (substantial contributions being made from Scotland and Wales too).

...then Parliament

The largest number of petitions, 519 in all, are presented to Parliament to abolish the slave trade, meaning that Wilberforce could exert more pressure in Parliament.

1791 The Haitian revolution: the only successful slave revolt in human history

After 12 years in which the most powerful European armies – French, Spanish, British – invade and fail to reimpose slavery, the enslaved Africans under the leadership of Toussaint L'Ouverture and Jean Jacques Dessalines sound the death knell of Atlantic slavery.

1807 Abolition of the slave trade

The slave trade is abolished in the British Empire. The British Empire dominates much of the globe based on white supremacy, a legacy of the Atlantic slave trade.

1831 Sam Sharpe rebellion

A massive revolt of enslaved Africans involving 20,000 freedom fighters seizes control of parts of the islands under the leadership of Sam Sharpe.



1833 Abolition of slavery...

Slavery itself is finally abolished across the British Empire, representing the victory of the combined efforts of enslaved Africans themselves and the abolitionist movement. The slaveholders are paid millions, the formerly enslaved Africans nothing.

...but it leaves a legacy

It opens the door to the subjugation of Africa

The depopulation of Africa between 1750-1850 leaves it open to imperialist exploitation in the 19th, 20th and 21st century.

Colourism

Colourism is where Black people with lighter complexions are treated better and afforded more opportunities than darker skinned Black people. This system arose out of the Slave Trade in which the proximity to whiteness could increase chances of 'slightly' better treatment.

Black skin meant a person was property. Under this system, proximity to whiteness could increase your chances for freedom.

1833 Indentured Indians are brought to the Caribbean colonies from India

1848 Chartist movement

The Chartist movement, a trade union movement, initiates a fight for widening suffrage.

1859 The growth of scientific racism

Scientific explanations are sought to justify white supremacy and empire. Galton, who founded the science of biostatistics, argues that Africans are genetically less intelligent than all other ethnic groups pioneering eugenics. These ideas underpinned the Holocaust, and still have many adherents today.

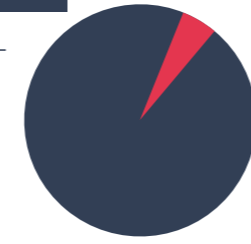
1860 Civil War

The American Civil War ends slavery in the USA. It doesn't however, end racial inequality.

Suffocation continues

1884-85 Africa dismembered: the Berlin conference

In 1876 10% of Africa was ruled from Europe, by 1900 it was 90%. The continent was divided between European powers with thousands of ethnicities being lumped together in colonies.



1892 The first ethnic minority MP

Dahabhai Naoroji is elected to the UK Parliament.

1912 Marcus Garvey's ideas deepen in London

Jamaican Marcus Mosiah Garvey helps publish The African Times and Orient Review; the first political journal produced by and for Black people ever published in Britain.



1914-1918 World War I undermines colonialism

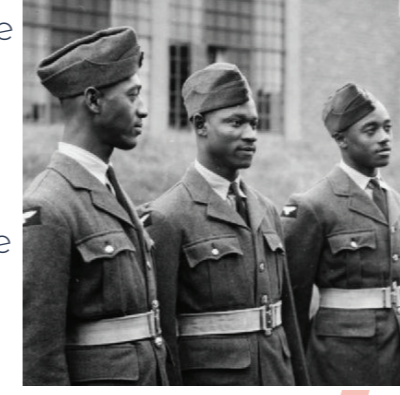
The First World War undermines colonial rule. Four million non-white soldiers fought in the war but found themselves discriminated against. An upsurge in anti colonial resistance explodes in places like India.

1919 Race riots and uprisings

Surplus labour after WWI, led to an outbreak of race riots against Black and other ethnic minorities in major seaports in London, Liverpool and Bristol.

1939-1945 World War Two helps sound colonialism's death knell

Many black people join the war effort but still find the racial discrimination from the First World War intact. 12,000 plus black people served in the Royal Air Force alone, finding themselves being treated like third class citizens.



1955 The Bandung conference & the start of the civil rights movement

The Montgomery bus boycott is launched, making Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks household names. At the Bandung conference in Indonesia leaders from Africa, Asia and the Asian subcontinent challenge racism.

1957-62 Colonialism ends in Africa and elsewhere

After a bitter struggle (the Mau Mau in Kenya) the British Empire is forced to grant independence in Ghana and Nigeria, and Gabon became independent from France.

1965 Black nationalist leader Malcolm X visits the UK weeks before his assassination

1966 The Bristol bus boycott

Paul Stephenson leads the struggle to end a legacy of racial inequality and segregation left by the likes of Edward Colston (see 2020 entry). The boycott is successful.

1968 Martin Luther King is assassinated

1977 Lewisham, London

An extreme right wing party, the National Front, is stopped from marching storm trooper style through Lewisham.

1978 Rock Against Racism

The Rock against Racism concert brings all ethnicities together against racism.

1979 Sisters united against racism & Blair Peach

The Southall Black Sisters are formed, winning respect with their uncompromising anti racist stance. Blair Peach, a white teacher, is murdered on a demonstration against the National Front.

© Southall Black Sisters

1981 Brixton uprisings

The year begins with a fire in a house party in New Cross, London where 13 young black people died in a suspected racist attack. Later, the Brixton riots explode across the UK. The Scarman report leads to the SUS laws that saw young black people being stopped being effectively scrapped.

1987 Election landmark

The first Black History month is marked in the UK as four black MPs are elected in a historic election.

1991 Bill Morris becomes the first black person to lead a major trade union

1993 Murder of Stephen Lawrence

Stephen Lawrence's murder transforms the struggle for racial equality leading to The Macpherson report describing the police as being 'institutionally racist'.

1994 Freed

Nelson Mandela is released from prison heralding the end of Apartheid - racial segregation - in South Africa.



2008 First Black president elected in US

Barack Obama wins the American election and goes on to win again in 2012.

I can't breathe

2010 Stopping of the BNP and EDL

The BNP are defeated at the polls, and the EDL on the streets, by the anti racist movement in places like Barking, Tower Hamlets, and Bradford.

2011 Mark Duggan

The killing of Mark Duggan by the police leads to riots across the UK.

2012 Trayvon Martin and the rise of Black Lives Matter

The murder of teen Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman leads to mass protests across America. It is here that Black Lives Matter slogan first appears.

2014 The Black Cultural Archive opens in Brixton, London

Ferguson uprising, USA

The shooting of Michael Brown by police officers leads to mass and major unrest in Ferguson. Black Lives Matters now enters international consciousness.

2015 Still paying off the debts of slavery

The debt to pay off the money given to slave owners in 1833 to accept abolition is finally paid off.

Birth of a movement

The Rhodes Must Fall campaign starts in Cape Town university. It demands that all statues of Cecil Rhodes must be taken down on campus. Decolonise the Curriculum spreads, demanding that universities free themselves from all colonial legacies.

I can't breathe

Eric Garner dies at the hands of the police in the US. Garner's dying words, 'I can't breathe' become a slogan of resistance. The following year Sarah Reed dies at the hands of the London police.

2016 Take the knee

NFL player Colin Kaepernick takes a knee against racism during the American national anthem.

2017 Trump presidency

The Trump presidency brings racial division into the mainstream.

A new course

Birmingham City University establishes the first black studies degree in the UK

2018 Windrush Scandal

The children of people that had come after the Second World War to rebuild Britain are denied NHS treatment and systematically deported until a campaign forces a U turn.

2019 Changing the curriculum

The Black curriculum is founded to address the lack of Black British history in the UK curriculum.

2020 Covid 19 and Ethnicity

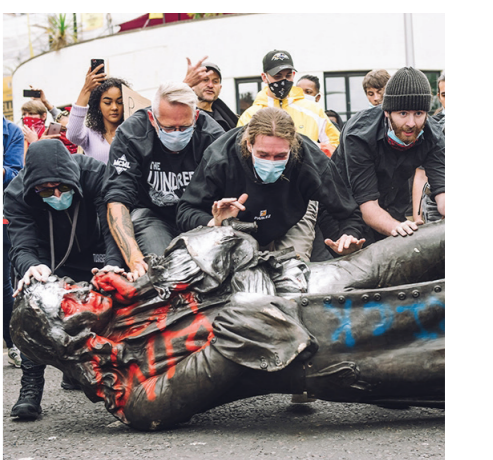
Public Health England produces a report pointing out that 'historic racism' might be a factor in the disproportionate death of ethnic minority people.

Murder of George Floyd: the UK isn't innocent

George Floyd, an African American, is filmed being murdered by a white police officer. Protests immediately explode across 60 countries. Protests in the UK demand that institutions in Britain start to confront institutional racism.

Into the river of history

The statue of Edward Colston, a major Bristol slave, is thrown into the River Avon. The movement spreads across the United States and Belgium where statues of Southern generals and the King Leopold III are taken down as well.



Ready to decolonise yet?

In June only 24 out of 128 university education institutions agree to address their colonial legacies.

Black Lives Matter: the new Civil Rights Movement

Black Lives Matter enters a new phase, arguably becoming as significant a movement as the civil rights and abolition movements.

We are still fighting for breath

2026 Anniversary of Black History Month

This will mark 100 years of Black History Month first established by Carter Woodhouse in the US.

References & acknowledgments

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This timeline is part of a series of monthly black history posters featuring eleven inspiring individuals

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