

The Greatest of Africa and the African Diaspora

The greatest thing about Black History Month is the opportunity to become enlightened by the wealth of knowledge now easily accessible, as opposed to the not too distant past, when Black stories were muffled and seemingly deemed irrelevant. Africa has been called the mother of mankind, so the history of those from the African Diaspora is understandably huge.

Jamaica's own Marcus Mosiah Garvey (1887-1940), one of the most widely known advocates for the rights of Black people, once said - Mankind must know their history in order to chart their destiny. On February 7, 1926 the first Negro History Week was founded by American historian, Dr. Carter Godwin Woodson (1875 - 1950) and it was later expanded in 1976, to become Black History Month. In the United Kingdom, Black History Month is celebrated in October each year.

It is a very long journey back in time, and as we sift through a legacy of slavery, suffering, trials and triumphs, precious segments of Africa's and the Black Man's past emerge like newly discovered jewels. This priceless information takes us back to the times of Imhotep (2667 B.C. - 2648 B.C.), who was a poet, an architect and physician-priest. He is best known as the chief architect of the step pyramid at Saqqara - the world's first known monumental stone building.

Another example, is the uncovering of stories found in the Kebar Nagast, or the Glory of Kings, where facts about Makeda, the Queen of Sheba (c. 960 B.C.) also come to light. This beautiful love story about King Solomon of biblical times and his infatuation with Ethiopia's Queen, Makeda, was embedded in this chronicle of the rulers of Ethiopia called Kebar Nagast.

Accounts about great kings like Abraha Al-Ars*ham (d. A.D. 569), an emperor of Ethiopia, whose adoption of Christianity is said to have altered the face of the world, come to the forefront during Black History Month, as does the history of Jamaica's Maroons and their leader, Cudjoe, who around 1730, valiantly rebelled and for 140 years defied white slave owners, finally forcing them to seek a treaty of peace.

There is the untold story of Canadian slavery in 1734 with its poignant tale of Marie-Joseph Angelique who was hung after setting fire to her slave owner's home in Montreal to avoid being sold and to run away. Then of course there was emancipation and its implications for Black slaves all over the western world – and post slavery days, when the dominant society's opinion that Blacks constitute second class citizens became prevalent.

The struggle to obtain basic rights and freedom in a world that claimed equality for all ensued and folk like Marcus Garvey (1887-1940), who founded the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) emerged as forerunners to great freedom fighters like Dr Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968).

Black History Month gives the world a chance to learn vast amounts of information, historically ignored in mainstream educational systems. It also facilitates the showcasing of international, national and regional achievements of Blacks in our modern world. - yardFlex