



Employee NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program
February 2024

Black History Month

Adapted from History.com Editors

Since 1976, every American president has designated February as Black History Month and endorsed a specific theme.

The Black History Month 2024 theme, "African Americans and the Arts," explores the key influence African Americans have had in the fields of "visual and performing arts, literature, fashion, folklore, language, film, music, architecture, culinary and other forms of cultural expression."

By including a specific theme each year, "the intention has never been to dictate or limit the exploration of the Black experience, but to bring to the public's attention important developments that merit emphasis."

Black History Theme: African Americans and the Arts

Adapted from Association for the Study of African American Life and History

For centuries Western intellectuals denied or minimized the contributions of people of African descent to the arts as well as history, even as their artistry in many genres was mimicked and/or stolen. However, we can still see the unbroken chain of Black art production from antiquity to the present, from Egypt across Africa, from Europe to the New World. Prior to the American Revolution, enslaved Africans of the Lowcountry began their more than a 300-year tradition of making sweetgrass baskets, revealing their visual artistry via

craft. The suffering of those in bondage gave birth to the spirituals, the nation's first contribution to music. Blues musicians such as Robert Johnson, McKinley 'Muddy Waters' Morganfield and Riley "BB" B. King created and nurtured a style of music that became the bedrock for gospel, soul, and other still popular (and evolving) forms of music.

Black contributions to literature include works by poets like Phillis Wheatley, essays, autobiographies, and novels by writers such as David Walker and Maria Stewart. Black aesthetics have also been manifested through sculptors like Edmonia Lewis and painters like Henry O. Tanner.

The 1920s and 30s

The rise of the Black Renaissance and New Negro Movement brought the Black Arts to an international stage. Members of the armed forces, such as James Reese Europe, and artists such as Langston Hughes, Josephine Baker and Lois Mailou Jones brought Black culture and Black American aesthetics internationally, and Black culture began its ascent to becoming a dominant cultural movement to the world. In addition to the Harlem Renaissance, today we recognize that cities like Los Angeles, Chicago, and New Orleans also were home to many Black artists.

The 1960s and 70s

The cultural evolution known as the Black Arts Movement, continued the thread where artists covered issues such as pride in one's heritage and established art galleries and museum exhibitions to show their own work, as well as publications such as Black Art. This period brought us artists such as Alvin Ailey, Judith Jamison, Amiri Baraka, Nikki Giovanni and Sonia Sanchez. The movement would not have been as impactful without the influences from the broader Black world, especially the Negritude movement and the writings of

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Frantz Fanon. In 1973, in the Bronx, New York Black musicians (i.e. DJ Kool Herc and Coke La Rock) started a new genre of music called hip-hop, which comprises five foundational elements (DJing, MCing, Graffiti, Break Dancing and Beat Boxing). Hip-hop performers also used technological equipment such as turntables, synthesizers, drum machines, and samplers to make their songs. Since then hip-hop has continued to be a pivotal force in political, social, and cultural spaces and was a medium where issues such as racial violence in the inner city, sexism, economic disinvestment and others took the forefront.

Afrofuturism

The term Afrofuturism was used approximately 30 years ago in an effort to define cultural and artistic productions (music, literature, visual arts, etc.) that imagine a future for Black people without oppressive systems, and examines how Black history and knowledge intersects with technology and science.

Afrofuturist elements can be found in the music of:

- Sun Ra
- Rashan Roland Kirk
- Janelle Monáe
- Jimi Hendrix

Other examples include:

- Sci-fi writer Octavia Butler's novels
- Marvel film Black Panther
- British-Liberian painter Lina Iris Viktor
- Kenyan-born sculptor Wangechi Mutu
- Caribbean writers and artists such as Nalo Hopkinson, and Grace Jones

ASALH dedicates its 98th Annual Black History Theme to African Americans & the Arts

In celebrating the entire history of African Americans and the arts, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) puts into the national spotlight the richness of the past and present with an eye towards what the rest of the twenty-first century will bring.

First Choice Health EAP

As we celebrate Black History Month it is an opportunity to reflect on the importance of strengthening the human connection. First Choice Health EAP offers access to support, professional care and behavioral health services. We approach our solutions with a calm presence and human touch. Don't hesitate to connect with our team!

References:

<https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/black-history-month>

<https://asalh.org/black-history-themes/>

