

## Importance of Black History

Program leaders are responsible for ensuring that classroom teachers acknowledge, teach about, and celebrate special times of the year. Black History Month presents the opportunity to support teachers as they highlight people who worked and still do work for social justice.

For me, Black History Month is a time to remember those influential African Americans who have contributed to the United States. In my younger years, I remember learning about great African American men and women in history who made an impact in their communities and around the world. I can't say that I remember everyone off the top of my head, but I certainly remember most. Now, as a professional in the field of early care and education and as a grandmother, it is important to me to make sure I continue to learn and teach about Black history.

Below is a brief spotlight on a few important aspects of Black history that I hope you can learn from and share with your staff and the children and families you serve.

### DR. CARTER G. WOODSON

Historian Dr. Carter G. Woodson is considered the father of Black History Month. He was born in New Canton, VA, on December 19, 1875. Dr. Woodson was the founder of The Journal of Negro History. He was the second African American to graduate with a doctoral degree from Harvard University. The National Museum of African American History and Culture mentions him as “founding the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in Chicago.” He also spent a little time in Chicago at the Wabash Avenue YMCA and in the Bronzeville neighborhood.

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FEBRUARY

I do not remember learning why Black History Month was in February. I have heard many people ask, “Why do we get the shortest and the coldest month?” February was chosen as Black History Month to coincide with the birthdays of President Lincoln and Fredrick Douglass. According to The Association for the Study of African American Life and History, Black communities have celebrated Black history together during February since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### BLACK EDEN

I also do not remember learning about “Black Eden” in school; I never heard my elders speak of it. In fact, 2022 was my first exposure to a place that Blacks had frequented for years, even though it is only four hours away from where I live. Beginning in 1912, Idlewild, Michigan, became home to a vacation resort that catered to Black families and lovingly became known as “Black Eden.” From 1912 until the Civil Rights Act of 1964, segregation and racism made Black Eden one of the only safe places where Black people could own vacation property, relax, and freely enjoy time with friends and family. Some well-known black

entertainers such as Della Reese, Jackie Wilson, The Temptations, and Aretha Franklin have all performed at Idlewild over the years. Dr. Daniel Hale Williams, W.E.B. DuBois, and Madam C.J. Walker are among the famous Black figures who owned land there.

## THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY

A common saying goes, “My people perish for the lack of knowledge.”

Over the years, the Black Panther Party has often been portrayed as a militant group of Black people who were racist. But when we research and learn more about the group, we discover that this is not at all what the organization was about.

The Black Panther Party was established in 1966 as a Black power movement against police brutality. The organization focused its attention on the community and had a program called the “survival program.” The program provided free breakfast to 20,000 children each day as well as free food to families and elderly community members. The Black Panthers also distributed clothing, provided transportation, had legal aid offices, and sponsored community schools. They had health clinics and sickle-cell testing centers in many cities. These organized community outreach programs that the Black Panthers built are rarely mentioned in history books.

As we look back on history to see how things have changed since the time of the Panthers, we find many things have remained the same. There is still police brutality and injustice, and opportunities are still not equal. Our work for equality is far from over.

How do we keep Black history relevant beyond Black History Month? By always remembering the contributions that African American people have made worldwide.

Next steps:

- Encourage staff to reflect on the people and events in Black history that inspire them.
  - You may need to provide some inspirational stories to get staff started. Use some time at staff meetings to learn together.
- Share with staff the parts of Black history that inspire you.
  - Model a sense of regard for the work and actions of others. Do some independent research to demonstrate the importance of learning new things to your staff.
- Help staff work to bring components of Black history into the classroom so that the next generation will know how important it is to honor Black history.
  - Incorporate a variety of media, including books, justice-oriented songs, art, and photographs.

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