

theGuardian BLACK HISTORY timeline

These are historic times. Next month Barack Obama will become the first man of African descent to stand for a mainstream party in the United States' presidential election. In Britain, this year marked the 60th anniversary of the arrival of the Empire Windrush which began the wave of postwar migration that has made Britain a modern multicultural society.

It is fitting, therefore, that in this particularly significant Black History Month, the Guardian marks the contribution of Africans and their descendants to British and global history.

This poster, published in five parts starting today, celebrates some of the greatest stories almost never told. Stories of world-shaping individuals, from emperors to writers, freedom fighters to inventors. But let us be clear: this is not about creating a separate history; it is about adding a rarely heard story to the history we are already familiar with. A story which shows that African people's history did not begin with slavery, but, from the Romans onwards, has been intertwined with Europeans and others around the world.

Along the top of this chart are mini-profiles of some of the key history-making individuals; our main timeline charts African people's global story; below that is a history of the US since the 1950s civil rights era began; and along the bottom are individuals and key moments from black British history.

Of course our selection cannot be comprehensive, but we hope it will provide an introduction to the many powerful stories and key events that have so often gone untold.


If you have any comments, please visit our website: guardian.co.uk/blackhistory




Septimus Severus
African-born Roman emperor (AD145-211)
Septimus Severus (pictured) ruled the Roman empire in AD193-211. He was one of a number of Roman emperors born in Africa. The reign of Severus saw Rome briefly return to glory. He spent most of his reign quelling revolts (including in England) and died in York.
African-born Quintus Lollius Urbicus became the governor of the Roman province of Britannia. He led a number of campaigns on and around Hadrian's Wall.




Zenobia
Queen of Palmyra, Syria (c AD274)
On the death of her husband, King Septimius Odaenathus, Zenobia (left) became the ruler of the Palmyrene empire, later conquering Egypt.
A Roman writer said: "Her complexion was dusky or dark brown. She was acquainted with Greek, Latin, and Egyptian." She later became a prominent philosopher.



Augustine
The African saint (AD354-430)
Born in Africa in the town of Tagaste, Augustine wrote many books which had an enduring impact on western literature, including City of God and The Confessions. During his lifetime he saw the sacking of Rome.



The Moors
Africans in Europe (711 to 15th century)
The Moors – as the Arabs, north Africans, and west African Muslims were labelled by Europeans – invaded the Iberian peninsula (modern Spain and Portugal) in 711. They ruled much of the region for seven centuries.
They oversaw the translation of scientific works from other languages, and their technology was the most advanced in Europe. The leading character of Shakespeare's play, Othello, is a Moor.




John Blanke
Trumpeter in the king's court (c 1509)
One of the earliest images of a black person in Britain, this shows John Blanke, a trumpeter at the courts of Henry VII and Henry VIII. We also have a receipt that shows he was paid the sum of 8d a day.



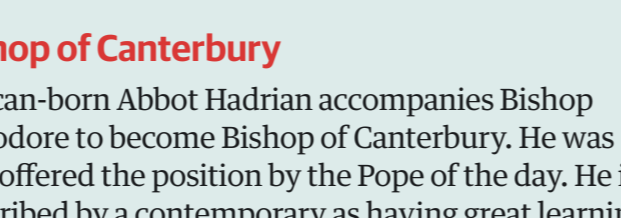

Roman rule in Britain begins
The Numerus Maurorum Aureliorum, an African auxiliary unit, takes its position on Hadrian's Wall (c100-c400) as part of the Roman army and helps guard the outermost reaches of the empire.



General Tariq ibn-Ziyad
Conqueror of the Iberian peninsula (Spain and Portugal). The rock of Gibraltar is named after this Moorish general (also known as general Tarik). He led an eight-year campaign to conquer modern Spain and Portugal in AD 711.




Bishop of Canterbury
African-born Abbot Hadrian accompanies Bishop Theodore to become Bishop of Canterbury. He was first offered the position by the Pope of the day. He is described by a contemporary as having great learning.

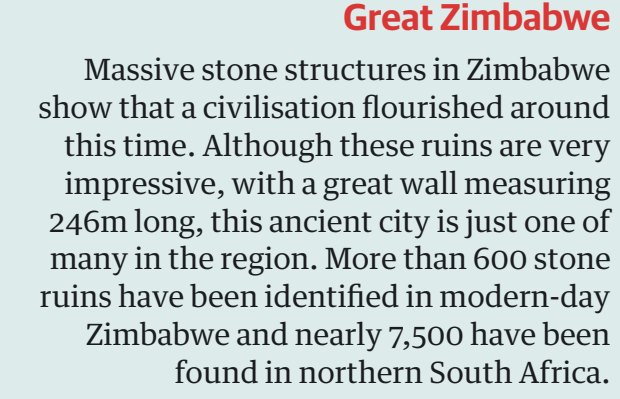


Islam in Africa
Religion of Islam starts to slowly spread across sub-Saharan Africa.

Kingdom of Kanem-Bornu founded
Around this time Kanem-Bornu is established by Dugu, first king of the Zaghawa dynasty. It occupied much of present day Chad. According to an Arab geographer writing in the 10th century the kingdom was 15 days' journey wide.



Great Zimbabwe
Massive stone structures in Zimbabwe show that a civilisation flourished around this time. Although these ruins are very impressive, with a great wall measuring 246m long, this ancient city is just one of many in the region. More than 600 stone ruins have been identified in modern-day Zimbabwe and nearly 7,500 have been found in northern South Africa.



Kingdom of Kongo
The highly centralised state is established during this period and is surrounded by the formidable kingdoms of Teke, Tio, Dembo and Ndongo. One of its kings, Mani Kongo Diogo I, tried unsuccessfully to stop the Atlantic slave trade.




Earliest image of a black Briton
This picture was discovered in an abbreviated part of the Domesday Book used to collect taxes.



A black presence
A poem by William Dunbar called Ane Blak-Moir suggests that there were black people in Britain during this period.

First English slave trade expedition
John Hawkins is the first Englishman to lead a slave trading voyage from the west coast of Africa. Later, Britain would become one of the biggest players in the Atlantic slave trade which led to the enforced transportation of 13 million Africans (according to a recent estimate). In spite of high mortality rates, the enslaved African population produced 1 million tonnes of sugar between 1766 and 1791 in the Americas. There are now a number of exhibitions across the UK that detail the close connection between the growth of cities – such as London, Bristol and Liverpool – and the Atlantic slave trade.



From Alabama to Obama

1955 Rosa Parks starts the Montgomery bus boycott when she refuses to give up her seat for a white passenger in Alabama (the boycott lasts for 11 months). This launches the civil rights movement in the United States which aims to remove the legal barriers to equal access to voting and education for African Americans.

1957 President Eisenhower calls in federal troops and the National Guard to make sure that nine black students in Arkansas can get past bigoted crowds which oppose them attending the formerly all-white high school. The students became known as the Little Rock Nine. In 1954 the US supreme court had outlawed segregation in public education in a landmark case (Brown v Board of Education).

1959 A TV documentary called The Hate That Hate Produced raises the profile of the Nation of Islam, introducing a broader audience to its brand of black nationalism. Malcolm X is featured in the documentary and later becomes one of its most prominent members.


1960 The Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee mobilises students to challenge segregation in the south. Action includes freedom rides and lunch-counter protests.

1963 Images of non-violent protesters being attacked by the police in Birmingham, Alabama, are caught on camera and shock the world.

1964 August Martin Luther King delivers his landmark "I have a dream" speech to more than 250,000 people in Washington. September Bomb attack on a black church in Birmingham kills four black girls. March 12 Malcolm X breaks from the Nation of Islam after months of rumours following his suspension from the organisation for saying that the assassination of President Kennedy was a case of "chickens coming to roost". July The Civil Rights Act is passed, making it illegal to discriminate on the basis of race, colour, religion or national origin.


Olaudah Equiano
(1745-1797)
Writer and anti-slavery agitator

Thought to be born in 1745 in Nigeria, Equiano launched what was probably the first political book tour across the British Isles. Hundreds of people came to hear him talk about his varied life both as a freed man and an enslaved African. His autobiography, The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African: Written by Himself, was published in 1789 and dealt a blow against the slave trade. His book was recognised as a classic at the time by many including Mary Wollstonecraft, author of the seminal The Vindication of the Rights of Woman. It was published in German, Dutch and Russian, and ran through nine editions in his lifetime.



Mary Seacole
(c1805-1881)
Pioneering nurse

Born in Jamaica, the daughter of a herbalist and a Scottish soldier. Seacole went into nursing and became renowned for her humanitarian work during the Crimean war, where she set up the "British Hotel" on the battlefield (unlike Florence Nightingale's hotels, which were three days' sailing away). After the war, she was awarded several medals for bravery. Her autobiography, Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands, was published in 1857.



Dadabhai Naoroji
(1825-1917)
A first in British politics

The first minority ethnic MP, elected in 1892 to represent Finsbury Park. Born in Mumbai and an accomplished professor of mathematics and natural philosophy, he never forgot his roots and campaigned about the terrible conditions in India. He gave his support to the Irish independence movement as well the Pan-African Conference held in London in 1900. In later life he dedicated himself to writing books, such as Poverty and Un-British Rule in India.

