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# Black History is Now

By Janiel L. Henry, PsyD



February marks the time in the US and around the world where the works, achievements, and history of Black Americans and the Black community are celebrated. Since 1976, each president has designated February as Black History month, giving us an

annual opportunity to celebrate all around the country through events, activities, and programs. The origin of Black History month, though, goes back even further to 1915. That's when an organization called the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), led by historian Carter G. Woodson, was formed. This organization dedicated themselves to the research of the achievements of black Americans and others of African descent.

This year's timely and highly relevant theme was *Black Health and Wellness* which celebrates and brings our attention to not only traditional ways of healing and wellness but other ways of healing—medicine that has contributed to the health, resilience, strength, power, and connections of Black Americans and the African Diaspora for centuries.

I remember sharing my decision to be a psychologist with family members—a field where only 3-4% of psychologists are Black. Initially, this wasn't received positively—and understandably so. In this country, psychology has historically had roles in oppressing people of color (as was poignantly summarized and shared in the Historical Chronology Project for the American Psychological Association). While we have come far from our psychology origins, we still have further to go in supporting the mental health and wellness of the Black population. While the need for more Black psychologists is apparent, research has shown us that matching clients by race and gender does not necessarily improve outcomes. This means that we, as psychologists, no matter our background or identity, are gifted with the opportunity to support positive outcomes for Black and African-American clients. We can do this by advocating for change and elevating the wellness of our clients, not only by increasing our personal awareness, knowledge, and skills, but by also supporting our Black and African-American clients on both a macro and micro level. While the Black and African-American identities are not a monolith, below are a few suggestions for you to consider.

1. *Improve your understanding of Black Diversity.* The history of the Black Diaspora spans far and wide. In the US, varied cultural and ethnic identities such as Black, African, African-American, Afro-Latino, Afro-Caribbean coupled with regional differences and identities, as well as socioeconomic differences, bring a complex, layered, and rich cultural context and history to the therapy room, and the diverse practice settings you may work in. Educate yourself. Learn the history. Expand your awareness.
2. *Validate experiences of racism, discrimination, and systemic oppression.* Encourage spaces that affirm,

and actively work towards change as an anti-racist and change agent. Within recent years, social justice issues have been on the forefront and yielded increased shifts in conversations and actions in response to the personal and collective experiences of Black people in this country. What's in your personal and collective power to support efforts of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)? Reflect. Identify your Role. Challenge yourself. Take Action.

3. *Familiarize yourself with wellness resources available in the community* that are specific to the needs of the Black community and add them to your resource list so that you can share with your clients. For example:
  - a. Black Mental Wellness, Corp.: [blackmentalwellness.com](http://blackmentalwellness.com).
  - b. Therapy for Black Girls: [therapyforblackgirls.com](http://therapyforblackgirls.com).
  - c. Therapy for Black Men: [therapyforblackmen.org](http://therapyforblackmen.org).
  - d. Muslim Wellness Foundation: [muslimwellness.com](http://muslimwellness.com).
  - e. Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective (BEAM): [beam.community/tool-kits-education](http://beam.community/tool-kits-education).
  - f. Glad Communities of African Descent Resource Kit: [glad.org/publications/coadkit](http://glad.org/publications/coadkit).
4. *Celebrate the now*—Are you aware of the current research and contributions of Black psychologists, healers, and wellness providers in your professional community? The legacy of Black history continues to blossom into the present. For example, Dr. Erlanger “Earl” Turner, Dr. Joy Harden Bradford, Dr. Thema Bryant-Davis, Dr. Patrice N. Douglas, Dr. Allen Lipscomb, and Dr. Sayida Peprah to name a few-- most of whom are local to Southern California, and have contributed significantly to the field and community.
5. *Be open to collaborating*--with faith communities, community leaders, and alternative healers and wellness providers. The history of the importance of the faith community for some Black people runs deep and continues today. Additionally, in some Black communities, alternative wellness practitioners are sought for healing mind, body, and soul—which aligns with beliefs and practices of an appreciation for nature, and a holistic and integrative self. Collaborating with these providers can provide a powerful opportunity to assist your clients in meeting identified goals.

Wherever you are on your journey of diversity awareness and cultural sensitivity, I invite you to reflect on this quote by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. “If you can't fly, then run. If you can't run, then walk, if you can't walk, then crawl. But by all means, keep moving. May we keep moving forward towards change, justice, wellness, healing.”

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