



Celebrating

UK BLACK

HISTORY

MONTH

2021



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Celebrating Great British Blackness

For this year's Black History Month, we at Transmission would like to celebrate the important role that Black British icons had, and continue to have, in shaping the UK's cultural landscape.

To help us do that, we've put together a list of pioneers, authors, and artists we think you need to know more about - not just because of their blackness, but because of what they've achieved.

So, take some time to learn about an often overlooked part of our beautifully diverse past, some present leaders, and future Black trailblazers.

Learn with us

While fascinating tales of Black Tudors are being unearthed by historians, many believe that Black British history remains a neglected part of the school curriculum.

As Black History Month seeks to address this issue, join us in learning about Black British icons we believe deserve more of your attention - celebrating their achievements and contributions to the UK as a whole.

Black British Icons you should know about



Olaudah Equiano

Born in Nigeria circa 1745, he spent eight years as a slave before he bought his freedom and eventually settled in the UK.

Here, he published his autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano; or, Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself*. One of the earliest and most compelling arguments against slavery.

Equiano's words were so popular his book sold out and ran through nine English editions.

Equiano is widely regarded as the pioneer of the slave narrative and a prominent abolitionist.

Sadly, he died in 1797, meaning he didn't live to see slavery abolished.

Fanny Eaton

Born in 1835, Fanny Eaton changed the ideals of beauty in the Victorian era and has been labelled the first Black British supermodel. Born in Jamaica, she came to London as a child, shortly after slavery was abolished in the British colonies.

She began modelling in her twenties and had a career that lasted for 10 years, sitting for artists including John Millais, Rebecca Solomon and Frederick Sandys.

During the Victorian era, people of colour were usually painted as objects and not subjects. Wealthy British households often hired Black people as nurses, cooks, and coachmen, some of whom would appear in paintings as status symbols.

Some have argued Eaton was fetishised as the "other", while others say her presence was empowering.



Walter Tull

In 1888, Walter Tull was born in Kent to a Barbadian man and English woman. Both parents died when Tull was aged nine-years-old, so he and his brother were brought up in an orphanage.

From 1908, Tull took to football. He was soon signed by Clapham FC, then in following years by Tottenham Hotspur and Northampton Town. When the First World War hit, Tull gave up his sporting career and enlisted.

In 1916, Tull returned to England and trained to be an officer - the first black person ever to do so. Two years later, aged 29, he was killed while leading an attack on German trenches.

Tull was recommended for a Military Cross after his death, but never received one.



Claudia Jones

Claudia Jones was born in Trinidad in 1915, but moved to the United States as a child. A prominent feminist and communist, Jones was deported for her political activities in 1955.

She gained asylum in the UK, where she launched Britain's first major black newspaper, the West Indian Gazette.

Confronted by "No blacks, no dogs, no Irish" posters, Jones became a leader in the emerging black equal rights movement.

In 1959, she helped to found Notting Hill Carnival, with the hopes that showcasing Caribbean culture and heritage would empower her community.

Jones died aged 49, leaving quite a legacy - Notting Hill Carnival is currently Europe's biggest street festival.

Rose Hudson Wilkin

Rose Hudson-Wilkin was born and raised in Jamaica, aged 18, she travelled to the UK to train as an evangelist at the Church Army College.

She was ordained as a deacon in 1991, after initially being discouraged by the Church because she was a wife and mother.

For almost 17 years, she served as a priest in Hackney. 10 years ago, she became the first female Chaplain to the Speaker of the House of Commons, where she leads daily prayers.

Last year, Hudson-Wilkin was hired as the new bishop of Dover.

She's the first black British woman to become a bishop, though she told The Guardian she "longs for the day when we stop having firsts".



Malorie Blackman

Malorie Blackman, 58, was born in south London. She began her career as a computer programme, but eventually enjoyed astronomical success as the author of fiction for children and teenagers.

Her first published book was Not So Stupid! (1990), a book of short stories.

Since then she has written numerous books and has continuously advocated for the representation of black children within fiction.

Blackman's most well-known books form the Noughts and Cross trilogy, which was recently adapted to a BBC television series.

In 2013, Blackman became the first black Children's Laureate.

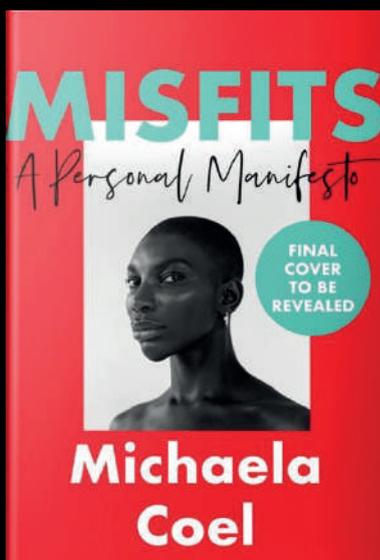
Read with us

Books by Black British Authors to read this Black History month

Books for...

- For coming-of-age stories;
- For life advice;
- For love;
- For womanhood;
- For fantasy & Sci-fi.

Being a Black British author isn't just about blackness. So, we'd like to highlight some books not because of who wrote them, but because of the amazing content inside them.

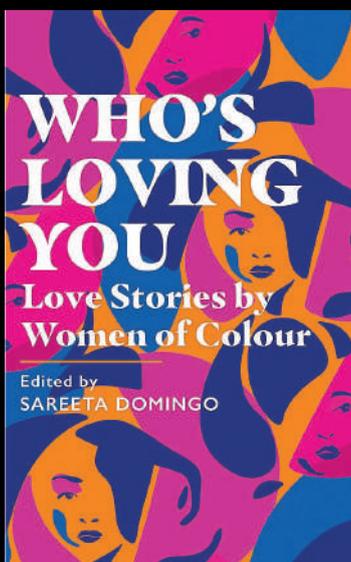
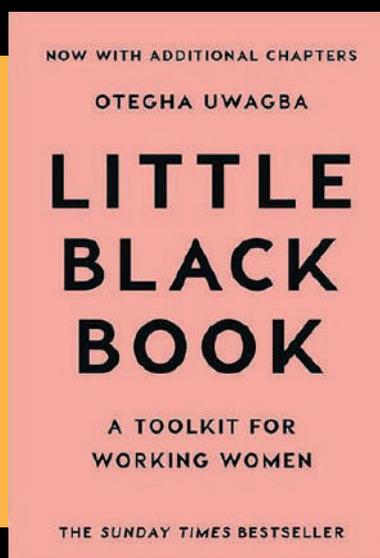


Misfits: A Personal Manifesto by Michaela Coel

From the creator of the BAFTA-awarded *I May Destroy You*, and *Chewing Gum* before that, writer and actor Coel gets candid about her personal-growth story. Using her Mactaggart lecture at Edinburgh Festival as a foundation, she draws on her experiences and looks back over her life to give insight into shifts in her perspectives, and how this expanded her sense of power and creativity.

Little Black Book: A Toolkit for Working Women by Otegha Uwagba

A handbook for navigating the creative industry as a woman, featuring contributions from author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Refinery29 co-founder Piera Gelardi, amongst others. From payrise negotiations, crafting a personal brand, and networking like a pro, to pushing back against creative block and finding your rhythm with public speaking.



Who's Loving You: Love Stories by Women of Colour by Sareeta Domingo

A collection of ten short love stories by Black and other women of colour, with talented new voices, seasoned writer favourites, and award winners in the mix. You'll find "The Watchers" by actor, activist, and Say Your Mind podcast host Kelechi Okafor in here, where time and love intersect as "healers." Capturing the complexity and messiness of love and how it evolves in full, the anthology presents readers with a wide-lensed look at romantic and other types of love through a non-white, feminine lens.

Candice Braithwaite

I AM NOT YOUR BABY MOTHER

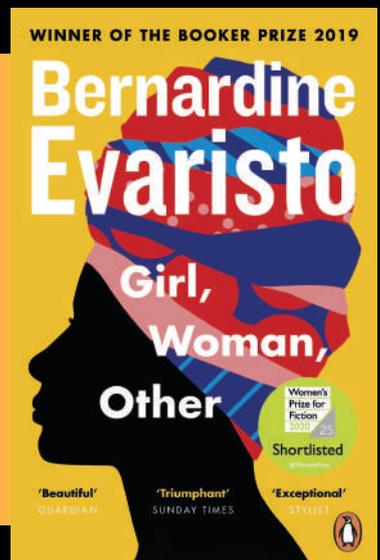
What it's like to be
a black British mother

I Am Not Your Baby Mother by Candice Braithwaite

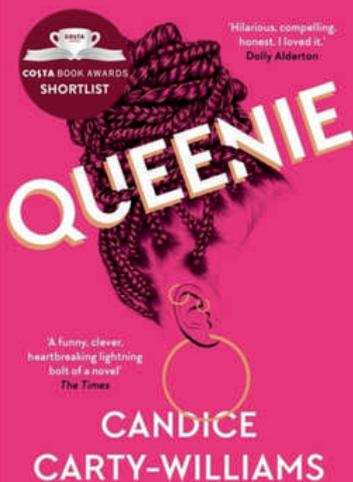
Braithwaite candidly delves into the full width of what it means to be a Black mother in modern Britain. The book expands on Braithwaite's campaigning about the devastating statistics around Black maternal death rates in the U.K. (which is five times that of white women), the anxiety that mothers of Black boys face, as they try to raise them in a hostile environment, and the lack of Black voices in the mainstream motherhood conversation in the U.K.

Girl, Woman, Other by Bernardine Evaristo

Though it's Evaristo's eighth novel, *Girl, Woman, Other* has dominated book charts, and the pages of basically everyone on Instagram. Following 12 different characters – predominantly Black British women – Evaristo tells their stories across different eras and locations. Exploring themes that intersect with Black womanhood, like patriarchy, racism, and colourism, Evaristo weaves a complex, sprawling narrative through her experimental writing style (which largely omits full stops). The novel not only comes widely recommended by our sources, it's also universally acclaimed. *Girl, Woman, Other* made Evaristo the first Black woman to win Author of the Year at the British Book Awards in 2020, and the first Black woman to win the Booker Prize in 2019, which was shared with Margaret Atwood.

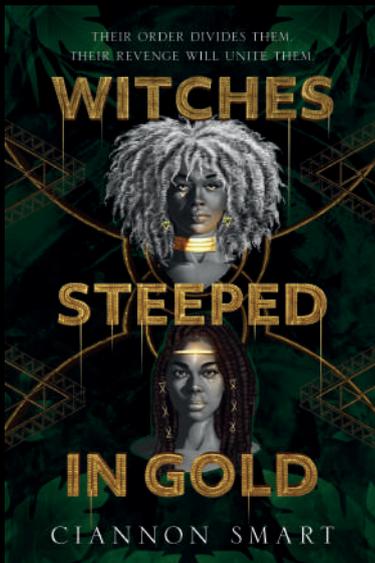


THE SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLER



Queenie by Candice Carty-Williams

Considering this debut novel took home Book of the Year at the British Book Awards in 2020 (making Carty-Williams the first Black British author to receive this accolade), it's no surprise that *Queenie* comes highly recommended. Written from the perspective of Queenie Jenkins, a 25-year-old Black woman in London, Carty-Williams's novel paints a funny, topical portrait of a relatable protagonist. Through *Queenie's* candid narration, the story tackles issues such as consent, racism, classism, and the mental health struggles of younger generations, in a refreshingly honest way.

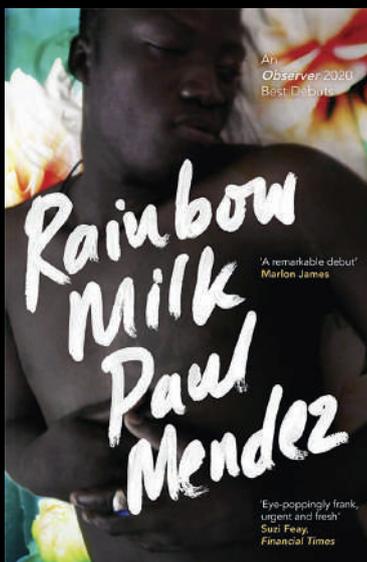
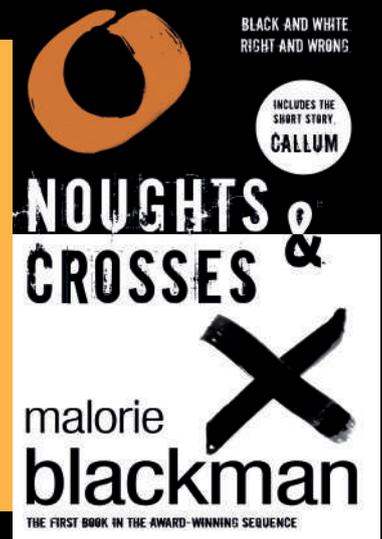


Witches Steeped in Gold by Ciannon Smart

A magical story about witches, dynasties, stolen birthrights, and reclaiming power, with Jamaican influences throughout, this YA novel is a two-tale story of power, theft, family legacy, and relentless pursuit both ways. If you were a fan of Children of Blood and Bone by Tomi Adeyemi, you might want this one on your reading list, too.

Noughts & Crosses by Malorie Blackman

The first book from the series Endgame concludes, Blackman's highly acclaimed YA novel exists in an alternate history where Africans have colonised Europe, with dark-skinned people known as "crosses," and light-skinned people known as "noughts." Following the tortured relationship of childhood best friends Persephone (or Sephy) and Callum, Noughts & Crosses reimagines structural racism and inequality from a different reality. The first in a hugely successful series of canonical young-adult books, Noughts & Crosses has been adored by readers of all ages since its release in 2001.



Rainbow Milk by Paul Mendez

Rainbow Milk features era-defining songs throughout its narrative, alongside being something of an ode to the accepting, diverse community of London. Fleeing everything he knows, including his Windrush-generation family and their Jehovah Witness faith, 19-year-old Jesse comes to London, where he comes to reckon with his identity. Mendez's debut shines a light on the experiences of Black gay men in the U.K., particularly those who engage in sex work; exploring religion, race, sexuality, and more with a compassionate hand.

Listen with us

There's something about music that's distinctly human. As times change and eras come and go, music continues to be part of our cultural backbone - reflecting and recreating the times.

As part of our celebration for this year's Black History Month, we'd like to highlight some Black British artists that we think have played a role in shaping our cultural fabric. From jazz to indie to RnB, join us in celebrating British Blackness in all its beauty.

Oh, and feel free to add any other artists and songs you think we might've missed!

