

A Reflection on Black History Month

As we celebrate Black History Month, I am honored and humbled to reflect upon the instrumental role and profound impact Black Americans have played in shaping our nation. As we know, our country stands enriched by individuals across a broad and beautiful tapestry of racial and ethnic backgrounds.

With that said, I have always found personal inspiration in our Black heroes for their tremendous accomplishments in the face of oppression and against seemingly insurmountable odds. As a kid, I recall listening intently to the harrowing accounts of Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad, along with the words and actions of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as he delivered his “I Have a Dream” speech from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. I was captivated by the bravery and conviction of Rosa Parks to stay seated on that bus in Montgomery, Alabama while staring down bigotry and violence. I listened in awe to the role of the Tuskegee Army during World War II and how they risked their lives to eradicate evil on foreign soil, while knowing their treatment was far less than equal at home. Later, a college course exposed me to the essays of WEB DuBois in [The Souls of Black Folk](#), which offered a glimpse into life as a black man in early 20th century America, long after the end of the Civil War.

What is it about the history of Black America that commands our respect and attention in such a deep and meaningful way? Clearly, these monumental figures and their triumph in the face of adversity are more than worthy of our esteem. And, perhaps their example evokes a call in all of us to play our own part in seeking justice, demanding equality, and striving for a more perfect Union for all; only then can we ensure that the many heroic acts before us were not performed in vain.

I must add that in hearing the words of our nation’s first-ever Youth Poet Laureate, Amanda Gorman, I’m equally inspired by the future – the voice and vision of contemporary Black America. In her Inaugural delivery of “[The Hill We Climb](#)” she observes:

*And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us
but what stands before us
We close the divide because we know, to put our future first,
we must put our differences aside*

With this in mind, I encourage all of you to take some time this month to reflect on Black History with respect and gratitude; for the countless number of Black women and men who have so profoundly shaped our history and in turn have enriched our lives today. I also suggest that we each take responsibility to live out their example and do what we can as individuals to support the fight for equal opportunity for all.

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At JBG SMITH, the recent launch of our Inclusion Community presents a unique and powerful opportunity for all of us to impact change. Under the leadership of Dawnita Wilson and a fantastic committee of employees representing various business areas, we are continuing to move the needle in ways we never imagined.

Furthermore, the pandemic has reminded all of us how much we cherish a sense of community and belonging. I am confident that the Inclusion Community at JBG SMITH will help serve this purpose for many across our company. If you haven't already, I encourage you to join us as we press forward with great excitement and a sense of optimism for the road ahead.



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