LET'S CELEBRATE

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

HONOURING OUR COMMUNITIES

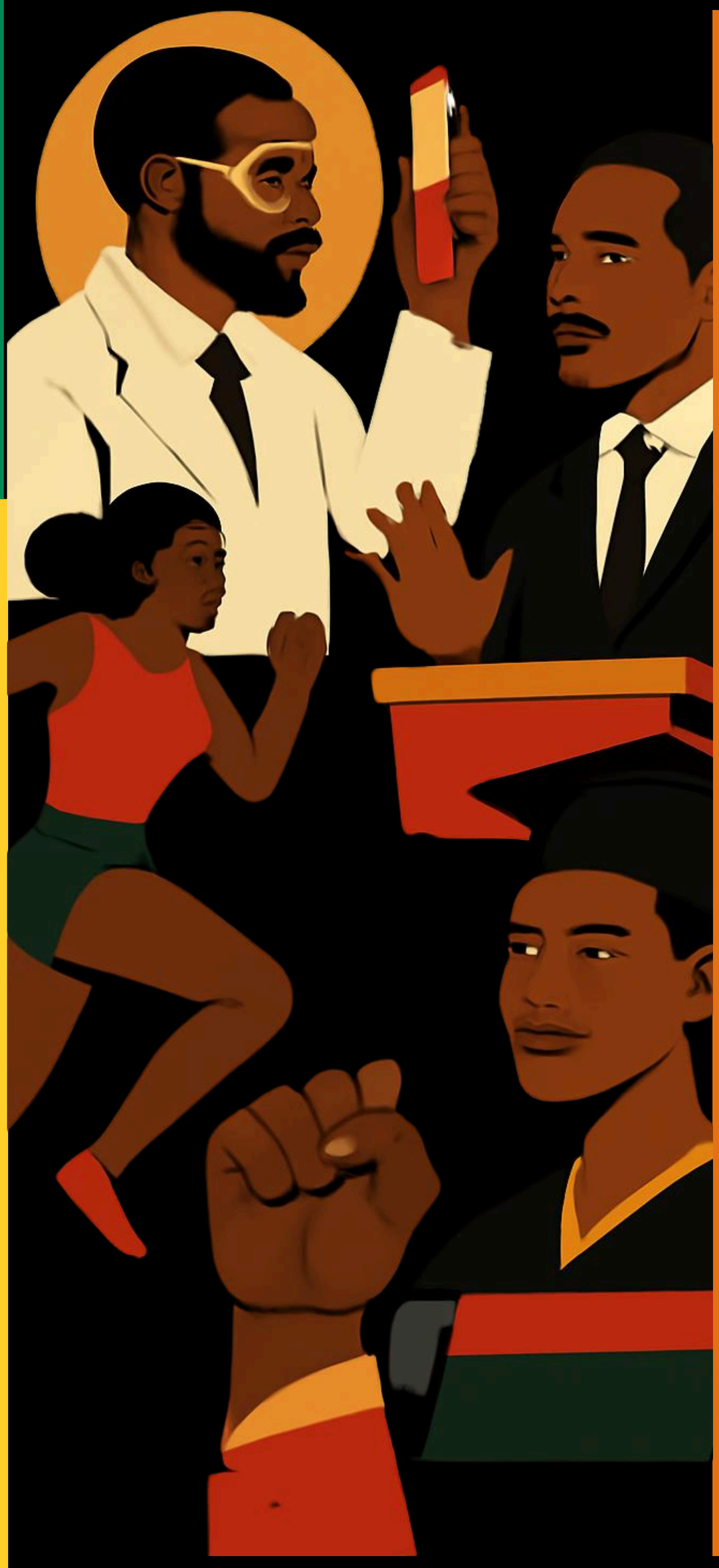
OCTOBER 2026

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HONOURING OUR COMMUNITIES



This Black History Month, we invited colleagues to celebrate the Black individuals who inspire them and make a positive difference in their lives and communities.

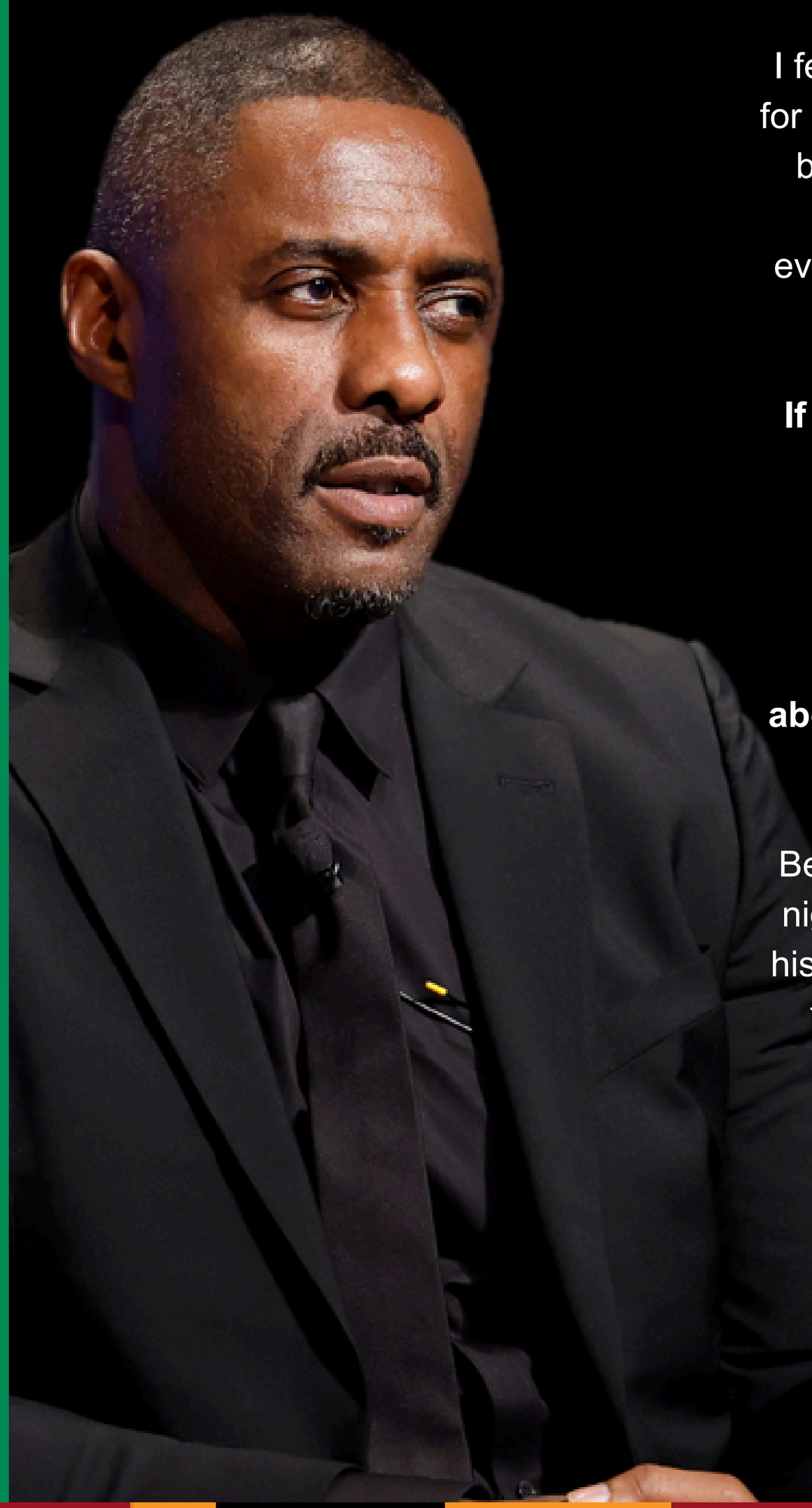
From family members and friends to colleagues, community leaders and inspirational figures, each nomination shines a light on someone whose contribution deserves to be recognised and celebrated.

These are their stories. These are the people our colleagues chose to honour.

THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO SHARED A NOMINATION.

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IDRIS ELBA



Why did you nominate this person?

I feel that Idris Elba is a fantastic ambassador for the UK, particularly in the US where he has become a household name. His journey and success are really inspiring, and despite everything he has achieved, he has remained connected to his roots.

If you had to describe this person in three words, what would they be?

Erudite. Grounded. Personable.

Is there a particular achievement or fact about this person that you would like us to highlight?

Before his acting career took off, Idris worked night shifts at Ford in Dagenham to help fund his early acting career. It's a great reminder of the hard work and determination behind his success.

- Alun Read

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RENI EDDO-LODGE



Her insightful work directly addresses white privilege and the structural racism that impacts so many people. In her book she doesn't shy away from directly talking to white people and holding them accountable for the impact racism has on people of colour.

I learned so much from the book and it caused me to really sit with myself, acknowledge my privilege, and understand what I can do to improve to be a better person that fights for equality and inclusion.

She writes and speaks in such a clear, approachable and thoughtful way that I frequently recommend the book as reading for anyone that wants to be an ally and actively engage in intersectionality.

Since her book rocketed her to a level of recognition, I also really respect the way she has navigated the ensuing phenomenon and protected herself while continuing to have a voice, and continued to share her thoughts on her podcast.

-Charlie Barnes

OPRAH WINFREY



After a difficult childhood and early career setbacks, she built a media empire including The Oprah Winfrey Show, Harpo Productions and the OWN television network. Her journey is a powerful example of turning personal adversity into influence and opportunity.

Three words I would use to describe Oprah is Adversity, influence and opportunity

-Sharon Willis

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MAYA ANGELOU

Growing up, Maya Angelou's writing had a huge influence on me and played an important part in developing my love of literature. Her work inspired me to study English Literature at university and encouraged me to see the world from perspectives beyond my own.

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings had a particular impact on me. I admired how Angelou used her writing to share the experiences of Black women and bring greater representation into literature and the arts.

For me, Maya Angelou reflects what Honouring Our Communities is about. Her work showed me the importance of hearing stories beyond our own experiences and how powerful it can be when people see themselves represented. Her influence has stayed with me from childhood into adulthood and continues to shape how I view literature and the world around me.

- Natasha Paramasamy



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MAX THOMAS

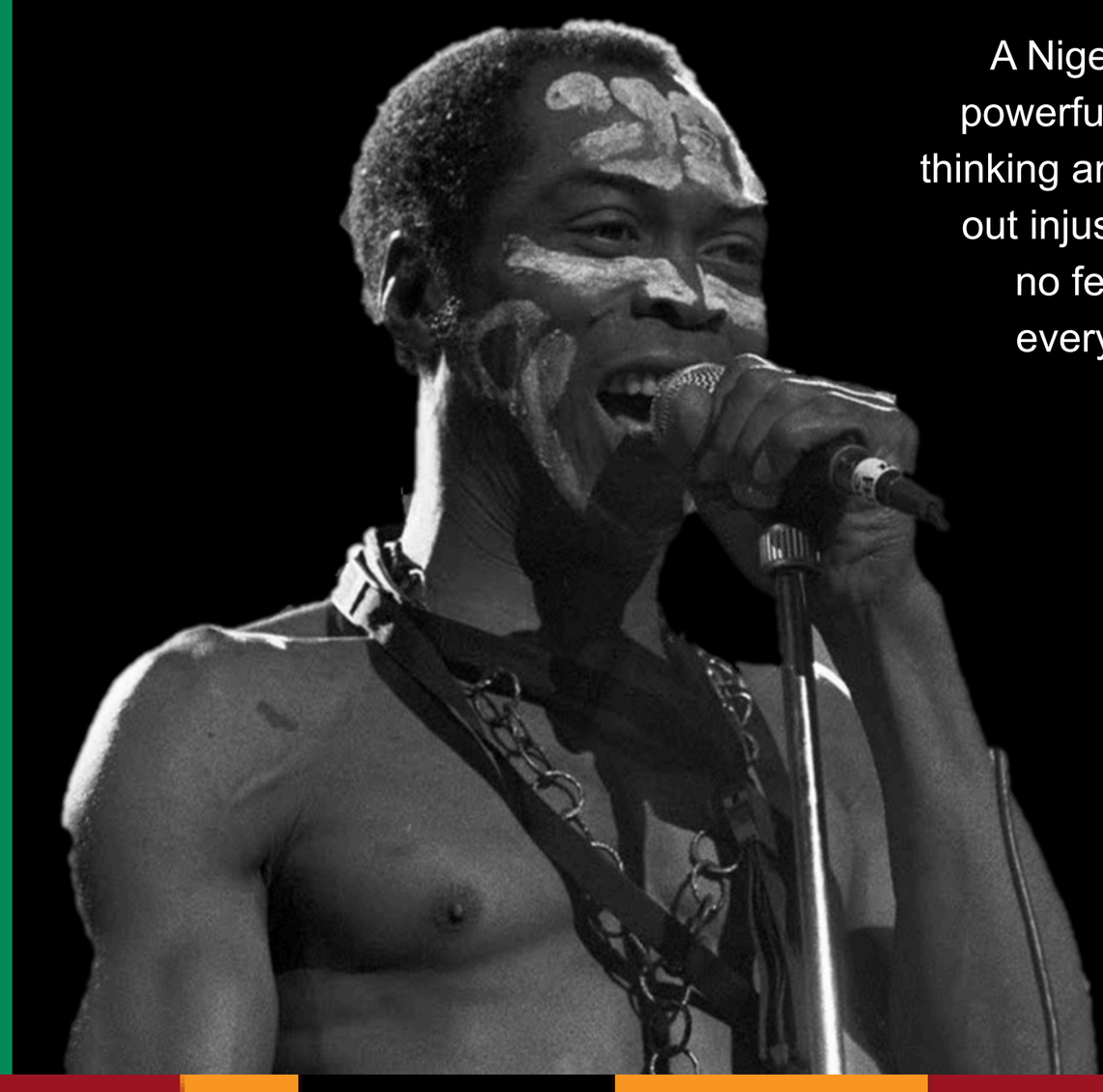
Founded the Ipswich Windrush society and opened a Reflection Room in the town centre for people to come and celebrate their heritage. Diverse communities from the diaspora have seen and noticed that we have more in common than differences. He also runs a Men's group where Black men can talk freely and inspire one another. He also goes to schools to talk to kids about the importance and beauty of diversity.

'Pray with me, pray for me, but dont prey on me'. is one of his sayings. He has won a few Community Awards for the work he has done for the Afro and Carribbean community. However, he does not get the recognition he really deserves.

-Peter Edwards



FELA RANSOME-KUTI



A Nigerian musician and political activist, he used his music as a powerful voice against injustice and inequality. His bravery, radical thinking and strength inspire me to stand up for what is right and call out injustice in our society. His words, “The secret of life is to have no fear” and “I want peace. Happiness. Not only for myself. For everybody,” reflect his fearless approach to life and his belief in creating a fairer and more peaceful world for everyone.

-Olulola Oduleye

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NANNY OF THE MAROONS

Nanny of the Maroons was a revolutionary leader in Jamaica whose extraordinary courage, determination and leadership made her a powerful symbol of resistance, freedom and resilience. As a formerly enslaved woman, she played a significant role in resisting British colonial rule and fighting to protect the freedom and independence of the Maroon communities. Her strength in the face of oppression and her determination to stand up for her people have made her an enduring and inspiring example of leadership.

Iconic, inspiring and indomitable, Nanny's legacy continues to represent the courage it takes to challenge injustice, break down barriers and fight for the freedom of others. Her story is a powerful reminder of the difference one person can make when they refuse to accept injustice and instead stand proudly for their community and what they believe is right.

– Barney Riley



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CHIEF OBAFEMI AWOLOWO

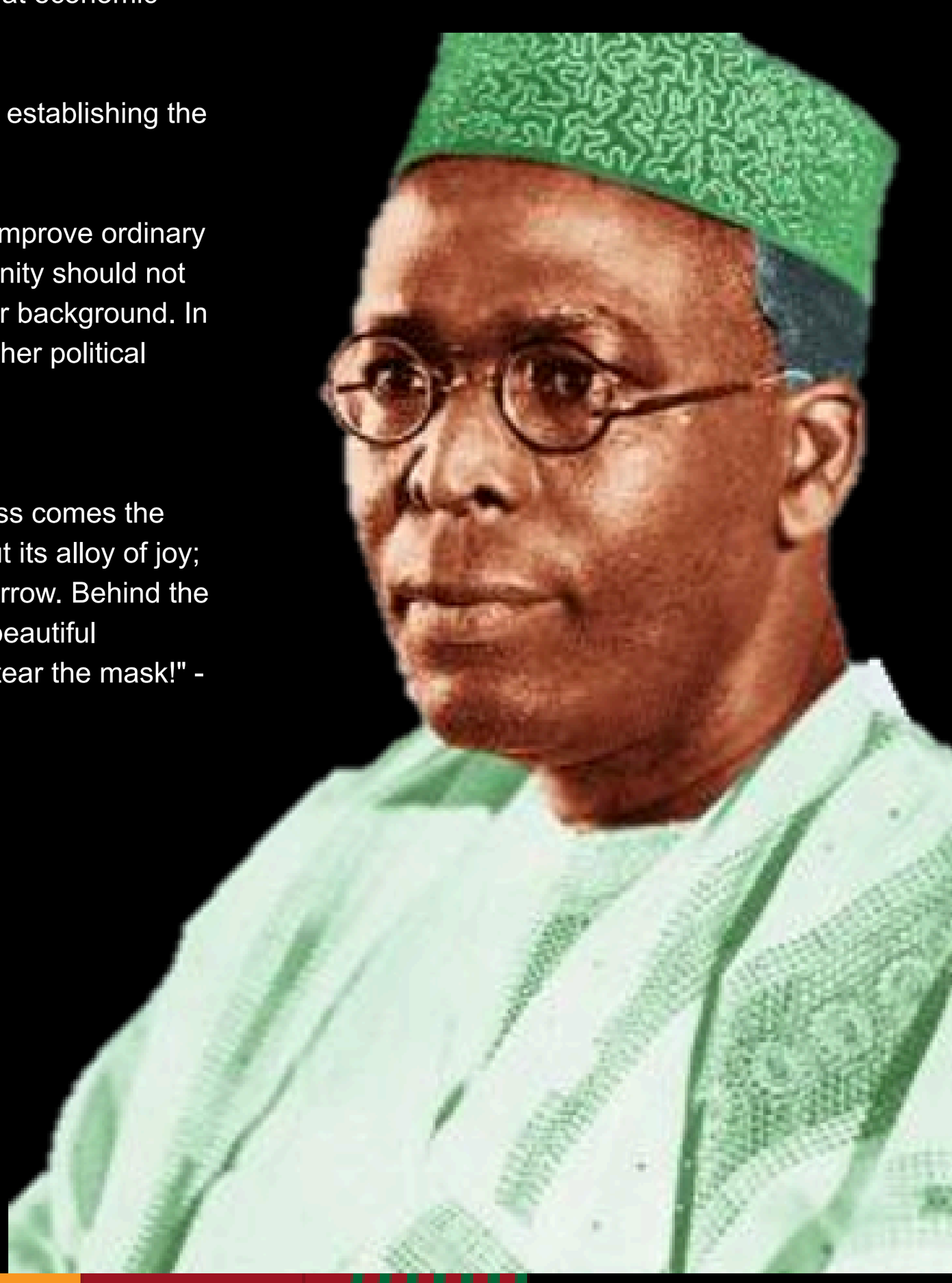
He was a visionary Nigerian politician and statesman. As Premier of the Western Region, his government introduced free universal primary education in 1955, to expand access to education. His administration also pursued welfare-oriented policies, including healthcare initiatives, alongside programmes aimed at economic and agricultural development.

His government was also responsible for establishing the first television station in Africa in 1959.

He had a belief that government should improve ordinary people's lives and that access to opportunity should not simply depend upon someone's wealth or background. In my view, Nigeria has yet to produce another political leader quite like him.

"After rain comes sunshine; After darkness comes the glorious dawn. There is no sorrow without its alloy of joy; there is no joy without its admixture of sorrow. Behind the ugly terrible mask of misfortune lies the beautiful soothing countenance of prosperity. So, tear the mask!" - Chief Obafemi Awolowo

-Dapo Odeleye



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DAVID OLUSOGA



David Olusoga is a British-Nigerian historian, writer, broadcaster and BAFTA-winning filmmaker, widely known for bringing overlooked stories of race, empire and slavery into the heart of British history. Through his documentaries and books, including Black and British: A Forgotten History, Britain's Forgotten Slave Owners and The World's War, he has helped challenge traditional narratives and encouraged people to look at Britain's past from a broader and more inclusive perspective. His work has been instrumental in giving me and my children a greater understanding of our British history, particularly the experiences and contributions of Black people that have too often been overlooked.

Fearless, determined and trustworthy, he uses history to educate, challenge perceptions and create greater understanding between people. His belief that "the study of history can help us cultivate empathy and understanding towards different cultures and experiences" perfectly reflects why his work is so important and inspiring to me.

-Jean Kelly-Toulon

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HONOURING OUR COMMUNITY: UKPN EMPLOYEE NOMINATIONS

COLIN BURKE

Colin is a naturally wonderful role model, I feel privileged to have worked with him, and he will be greatly missed when he retires in 2027. A few of his attributes:

A welcoming, warm, kind person.
Uplifting. He livens up any dull moment!
Always approachable, and listens. His door is always open
Supports and facilitates people development
Very professional, and his dedication is visible

Colin has had a significant positive impact on me through his support, encouragement and generosity with his time. He is someone who empowers others by sharing knowledge rather than keeping it to himself, helping colleagues build confidence and develop their own skills. What stands out most is his willingness to step in when help is needed, whether it's a complex problem or a last-minute request. He helps create a collaborative and supportive working environment where people feel valued and able to succeed.

-Laura Thompson & Liudmyla Hills

JEAN KELLY-TOULON

Jean Kelly-Toulon is an inspiring, kind and thoughtful role model who has made a real difference to colleagues through her passion for diversity and inclusion. She continually helps to raise the standard, break down barriers and challenge stereotypes, while generously sharing her knowledge, experience and talents across the company. Jean has personally given me the confidence to grow, reach out to different communities at work and play my own part in promoting inclusion and bringing people together. She has a wonderful ability to make people feel valued, supported and encouraged, and I know many colleagues share the same love and respect for her. No matter the situation, Jean will always find a way to help and will go above and beyond to resolve a problem or support someone who needs it. I always come away from speaking to her feeling better, more confident and genuinely valued, which is a reflection of the positive impact she has on the people around her.

-Zahra Shah

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HONOURING OUR COMMUNITY: UKPN EMPLOYEE NOMINATIONS

ANDREW ALABRABRA

Andrew is a former manager, colleague and friend who has been a great inspiration throughout my professional journey in UKPN. I know him for being supportive, encouraging and for genuinely believing in people and helping them recognise their potential. Andrew has had a very positive impact on me personally and professionally. Coming from a different cultural background, I did not always have the confidence to recognise my own abilities. Andrew believed in me, encouraged me and helped build that confidence. He taught me a great deal and supported my development and I will always be grateful to him for helping shape the person I am in my career today. His encouragement gave me the confidence to grow, take on challenges and believe in what I could achieve.Andrew believed in me at a time when I was still learning to believe in myself. His support and encouragement helped give me the confidence to become who I am professionally today, and I will always be grateful for that

-Gayathri Ekambaram

MATTHEW CLARKE

Matthew Clarke, Senior Planner at Heathrow, has made a positive impact by bringing greater awareness and appreciation of Jamaican culture into the workplace. Through sharing the richness, traditions and many wonderful aspects of his culture with colleagues, Matthew has helped create a stronger sense of community and encouraged people to learn more about and celebrate different backgrounds. Positive, upbeat and always dependable, he brings great energy to those around him and is someone colleagues can rely on. His willingness to share and celebrate his heritage helps make the workplace feel more inclusive, connected and welcoming for everyone.

-Anonymous

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HONOURING OUR COMMUNITY: UKPN EMPLOYEE NOMINATIONS

PATRICK CLARKE



Patrick is a passionate advocate for diversity, inclusion and creating opportunities for others across the industry. He has been a strong supporter of AFBE-UK and Urban Synergy, helping to champion initiatives that encourage young people from underrepresented backgrounds to explore careers, build their skills and grow their confidence.

He is also a big advocate for women in the industry, showing his support through events including International Women in Engineering Day, and actively championing greater representation within engineering and STEM. Patrick has supported skills development through initiatives such as Power Among Us and the Urban Synergy Work Experience programme, helping people gain valuable workplace exposure, develop new skills and see the opportunities available to them.

His continued commitment to inclusion, development and opening doors for others makes him a fantastic community changemaker.

-Natasha Paramasamy & Jean Kelly-Toulon

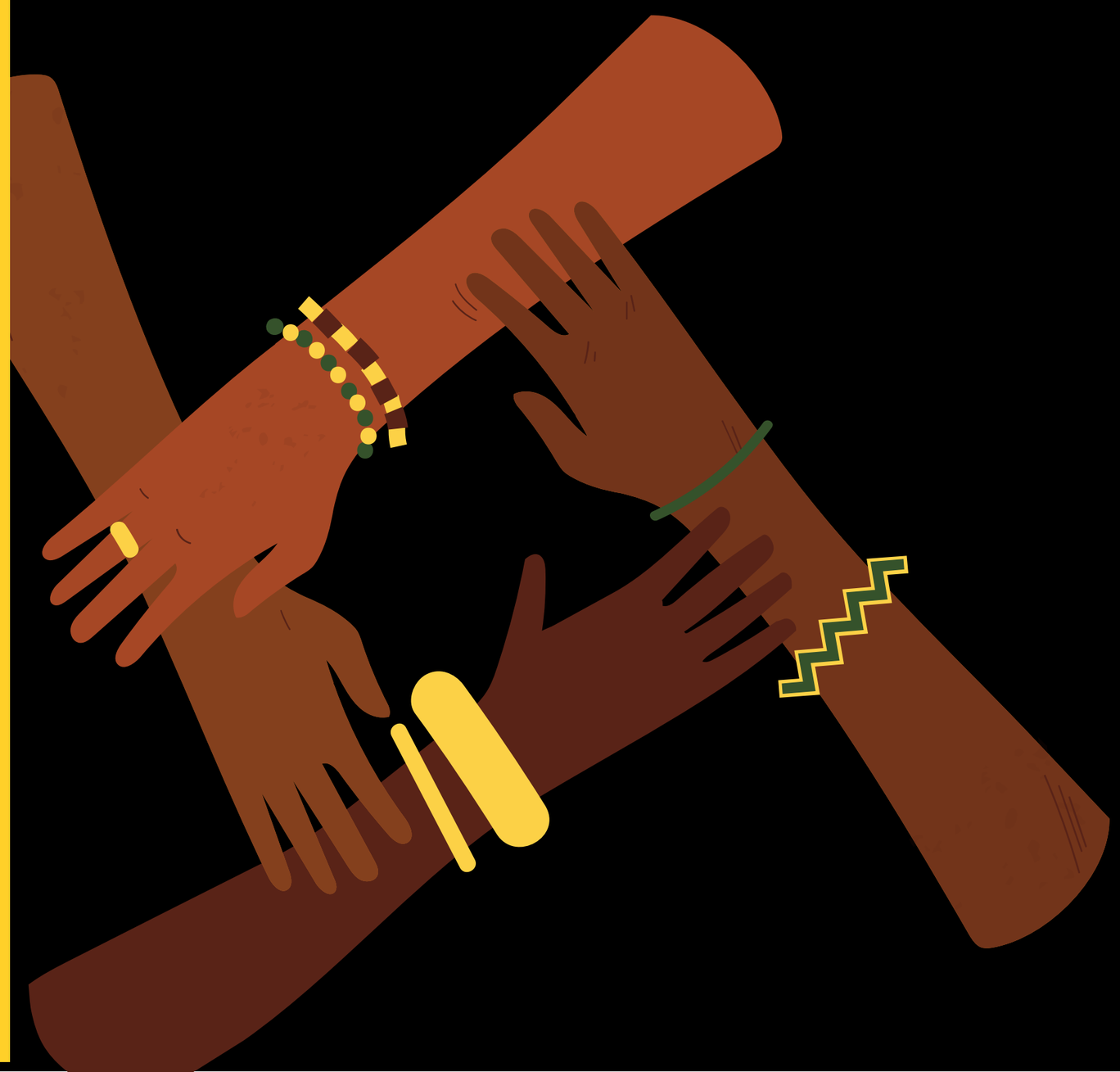
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THE INDIVIDUALS FEATURED HERE REPRESENT JUST A SMALL NUMBER OF THE MANY BLACK PEOPLE WHOSE CONTRIBUTIONS HAVE HELPED SHAPE AND ENRICH BRITISH SOCIETY. FROM WELL-KNOWN FIGURES WHO HAVE MADE HISTORY TO EVERYDAY CHANGEMAKERS MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN OUR WORKPLACES AND COMMUNITIES, THERE ARE COUNTLESS OTHERS WHOSE STORIES DESERVE TO BE RECOGNISED AND CELEBRATED. AS WE BRING BLACK HISTORY MONTH TO A CLOSE, WE TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO HONOUR AND THANK ALL THOSE, PAST AND PRESENT, WHOSE ACHIEVEMENTS, DEDICATION AND CONTRIBUTIONS CONTINUE TO MAKE A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE TO BRITISH SOCIETY.



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