

CIDNY SAYS

In Celebration of Black History Month

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February is Black History Month. It's unfortunate that such an important topic, rich with history that has had a prolific impact on the history of the United States, is celebrated during the shortest month of the year.

The contributions of Black people with disabilities should be celebrated year-round. It's also unfortunate that a large portion of people don't know about the contributions of many Black people with disabilities, or are familiar with their names, but don't know they had a disability. In celebration of Black History Month, we hope to highlight the work of some Black people with disabilities.

We're proud to know about the pioneers of the disability rights movement who were Black and all the strong Black leaders in our movement today across the nation. We salute our Black Board members and staff members who bring their experiences of living at the intersection of being Black and having a disability to all that we do.

This list does not begin to do justice to the accomplishments of those mentioned or the many more who deserve to be mentioned, and I encourage you to learn more.

Octavia Butler was a science fiction writer with dyslexia. She was a recipient of the MacArthur Fellowship - the "Genius Grant" and the Hugo Award, the highest literary honor in science fiction. Her work is currently being developed for TV. We salute you Octavia Butler.

Harriet Tubman had a brain injury and a seizure disorder and was a great leader in the liberation of slaves. Today, an organization evokes her memory in its work. The "Harriet Tubman Collective" advocates for the inclusion of the narratives of Black disabled people into important organizing and advocacy platforms in the Black community. We salute Harriet Tubman and the Harriet Tubman Collective.

Fannie Lou Hamer had a physical disability and was a Civil Rights leader with a strong focus on voting rights. She was fired from her job for trying to register to vote, influencing her to advocate for her own rights and those of others. You may even have heard the famous quote attributed to her, "I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired." We salute you Fannie Lou Hamer.

Keri Gray is the Founder and CEO of the Keri Gray Group and works with the AAPD. In her own words, "Keri's work centers on exploring the intersections of race, gender and disability across the workplace." Her work is inspiring and transformative for young professionals. We salute you, Keri Gray.

LeDerick Horne is a poet and advocate who uses poetry to open up discussions around topics relevant to people with disabilities and inclusivity. A number of his discussions and poetry are available on his YouTube page. We salute you, LeDerick Horne.

There are so many we would love to include - the masterful Maya Angelou, the legendary Harry Belafonte, the iconic James Earl Jones and many more.

To all the heroes, activists and artists out there, known and unknown (for now), we salute you.

-CIDNY is the Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY