

Skadden Celebrates Black History Month

Skadden

Skadden colleagues reflect on how Black history, culture and community inspire them.



Eman Cuyler
Associate, Tax / Washington, D.C.

I'm inspired by the commitment of Black lawyers to consciously and intentionally foster diversity and inclusion in the legal profession. Due to the shared experience of most Black lawyers in America, there's a desire to create an equitable and inclusive atmosphere where individuals from all underrepresented backgrounds have opportunities to contribute, succeed and grow, generating a positive impact across the board. There is a true sense of community among us. When I joined Skadden, many Black lawyers went out of their way to welcome me and make sure I was connected and could thrive. That really stayed with me. Now I do the same for attorneys new to the firm.

I think about what Black people around the world have experienced and it's been a tough journey, to say the least. Despite this, we've seen Black people everywhere thrive. That's inspiring. Looking at the history of Black people in America specifically, I am extraordinarily grateful for the work and struggles of Black Americans, including those that shaped the civil rights movement. We stand on the shoulders of giants who have fought to provide us with the opportunity to do what we're doing. Understanding the cost of this opportunity motivates me to take advantage of it. I've been given so much from people who have never met me. Now I have a responsibility to give back to those around me and those I may never meet.



David Farhat
Partner, Tax / Washington, D.C.



Samantha Hawkins
Associate, Investment Management / Houston

Black history is American history. The collective influence of Black people on fashion, music, science and innovation — from country to hip-hop, the cotton gin to the traffic light — can be felt in every corner of American society. This rich history and the tremendous impact of Black culture inspire me to strive for excellence in all that I do. As for community, ours is inviting and magnanimous. It's a testament to the character of Black people that we're able to break bread with those who, not long ago, refused to share public resources with our parents and grandparents, and to move forward as one people. I'm thrilled to have a month to focus on Black influences and to celebrate them in this country.

When I think about the history of Black people in America, from slavery to the civil rights movement, I think about the fight for liberty, justice, equal rights, equal access and equal opportunity. These struggles continue — different from the past in some ways and very much the same in others. I'm inspired by the incredible resilience of Black people, facing adversity and working doggedly to overcome it, and I am motivated by that example and have always sought to excel as tribute to that legacy and those struggles. When I was a junior associate at Skadden, my mentor instilled the notion that “we lift as we climb.” I am ever mindful of this as I engage with the Skadden community and beyond.



Janine Jjingo
Partner, Banking / New York



Anthony Joseph
Associate, Corporate Restructuring / Chicago

We often hear about efforts to fix Black communities — improve their work ethic and focus on the family. Yet hard work and close family bonds are qualities that characteristically define us. It's inspiring to know that, time and again, Black people in this country have completely embodied these values. For instance, despite being forcefully separated, Black people found a way to stay connected and replicate family structures. Some of this persists even today as part of our traditions — when I was a kid growing up in the South, almost every older Black lady close to my family was called “Auntie.” A lot of this stems from the way Black people adapted to systemic racism and institutions created to oppress, always finding a way to overcome, survive and strive.

I'm filled with pride when thinking about the strength, tenacity and foresight of my ancestors, and I'm amazed at the influence Black American culture has around the world. In Dubai recently, I saw the influence of the music common in my community when our taxi driver asked if he could play a song — one of his favorites, he said. He was from Pakistan, so I expected Arabic or Pakistani music, but instead he put on a rap song from a Black artist here in the United States. It was a wonderful feeling. My history, culture and community inspire me, every day, and have shown me that anything is possible.



Taren McCombs
Assistant Director, Human Resources / Washington, D.C.



Berni O'Garro
Senior Attorney Development Evaluation & Compensation Systems Manager / New York

This is a moment to express my thankfulness to those who have paved the way for me to be where I am today — to feel safe and free and to be able to express my opinions. It's also a time to celebrate the achievements of Black people everywhere. I'm an avid reader and love authors like Kiese Laymon, Akwaeke Emezi and Ingrid Persaud. I look to those who write about Black experiences and provide a window into the wealth and legacy of the Black community as a whole, of which I am proud to be a part.

As we highlight the important contributions of Black people throughout history, I think of these extraordinary accomplishments by these extraordinary people and feel inspired and encouraged to believe that I can reach my goals as well. Black culture, instilled in me since my upbringing in West Philadelphia, is my foundation; I interact with the world through the lens of a Black man. I now view my community as the larger diaspora of Black people, with varying backgrounds and experiences from different parts of the world. I love the idea that whatever your goal, you're going after it within this amazing community.



Demetrius Warrick
Counsel, M&A / New York