

Have you heard of Black August?

Br Ryan W Roberts, OLF; Institute Justice Team

I would venture to say that most people in the United States know about Black History Month in February, a time to remember the accomplishments of people of African descent. There is another month of the year when the focus is more on the struggle for liberation: Black August.

Black August began as a commemoration in prisons across California in the 1970s in recognition of Black resistance to oppression. The founders wanted to honor political prisoners and the many historical milestones in the movement to overcome the colonization of Black lives. From Emmitt Till's lynching to Nelson Mandela's arrest, from the March on Washington to the prison killings of members of the Black power movement—especially the assassination of George Jackson—the month of August has marked many potent moments in the history of the African diaspora's resistance to white supremacy. All the way back in 1619, August marked the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in Jamestown, Virginia. More recently, in 2018, thousands of people imprisoned by the United States organized a prison strike, including work stoppages and hunger strikes. Remember that the 13th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution permits enslavement and forced labor as punishment for crime, a practice liberally used by our prison system to this day.

While some of the events commemorated in Black August used violence to pursue equality and freedom, the Mercy community can honor the Black struggle for liberation by pursuing anti-racist endeavors in the nonviolence at the heart of Catherine McAuley's work and vision. Black August lifts up the values of education, self-reflection, self-determination, and community service. Fasting and abstaining from some activities honors the sacrifices of those who have lost life or freedom for the cause. Our faith can exhort us to follow the lead of those who disrupt systems of oppression that surveil, police, criminalize, and incarcerate people in unjust ways.

This Black August, I'll be learning more about how this struggle has been carried so I can learn my place in what comes next. I invite you to do the same. A number of articles can better elucidate by offering several perspectives on the history and continuing observance of Black August:

- [CNN's 2020 article](#)
- [Wikipedia's article, including a list of August commemorations](#)
- [Forbes's 2023 article](#)
- [Black-August.com: Origins and Principles](#)
- [The Hill's 2020 article](#)
- [Center for Constitutional Rights 2021 article](#)
- [Liberation School: Study, Fast, Train, Fight](#)