

Looking back to Black History Month

During Black History Month we should understand the power of history and education to change perceptions.

To mark Black History Month 2024, I hosted a reception in The Scottish Parliament with Museums Galleries Scotland to give politicians the opportunity to hear about how museums and galleries are working to address Scotland's legacies of empire and colonisation. It is important that we understand how history, and the way it is presented by our museums and schools, shapes our perception of the world around us and our understanding of Scotland's place in it.

I, like so many others was horrified at the outbursts of racist violence seen across the UK this summer. And while Scotland thankfully avoided any major incidents, we must not become complacent and believe Scotland is completely free from racism and prejudice. These attacks highlight how important it is to invest in anti-racism initiatives.

Racism is built on ignorance. We must ensure anti-racism is at the core of our museums and school curriculum. Educating people on black history can break down barriers between cultures and build understanding, making the likelihood of future racist riots in Scotland lower.

Earlier this year Museums Galleries Scotland released their report into Empire and Slavery in Scottish Museums. They made several recommendations to the Scottish Government to ensure

anti-racism is embedded in our museums and they work to promote race equality. Including creating a dedicated space to address our role in empire, colonialism and historic slavery and working to promote anti-racism in the curriculum.

Work is already beginning on those recommendations. This summer I visited the V&A museum in Dundee to find how they are working to “decolonise” their exhibitions, including adding important context of the British empire to items on display like the Paisley Pattern. This Black History Month I would encourage people to research into how our museums and galleries are placing greater focus onto black history and learn about the figures which have been hidden for so long.

Since I first started campaigning against hate with Edinburgh and Lothian Regional Equality Council, and now as an MSP, Scotland has undoubtedly improved in dealing with prejudice and hate. But despite this, institutional racism remains. Embedding anti racism into our curriculum and museums, teaching students and public about black history, and the history of empire is one step we can take. Growing understanding of other cultures doesn't just make people of ethnic minorities feel more welcome, it creates a more equitable and welcoming society for everybody.



