

Black History and Women's History

Written by Dr. E. Faye Williams, Esq
Wednesday, 27 February 2013 00:00



Women and Black people have offered so much to our nation that we deserve to be honored or at least remembered in a special way every month. We should not be happy with the hand we're dealt without question or efforts to change what is. Black people have been given February to celebrate what we've done historically. That's a lot in spite of all the obstruction we've faced along the way. Women have been given March to celebrate what we do.

We've faced obstruction, too. Since I fit into both categories, I want to talk about how I feel about our efforts not being fairly recognized.

When I speak to groups for Black History Month, the audiences are mostly Black. When I speak for Women's History Month, the audiences are mostly women. Some may say they've had a different experience, but I'm not speaking for them.

As we move from Black History into Women's History Month, I want to raise a few questions that have been on my mind for a long time. I know that Black people and women do many things to make our communities better. Yet, I read a lot of newspapers and magazines. I watch a fair amount of news talk shows, television commentary and specials. Like many, I try to find myself there. When I say "myself", I don't mean me personally. I mean people like me—especially other Black women. I look at all the work done by those who're female and/or Black such as Dr. Lezli Baskerville at NAFEO, Melanie Campbell at the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation, Dr. Dara Richardson-Heron at the YWCA, Dr. Avis Jones-DeWeever at the National Council of Negro Women, Barbara Arnwine at the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and many others. I know them and others like them, but I don't see their faces on the news often enough to show the important work they do.

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When most Progressive candidates win elections, the largest percent of their votes come from Black people—but rarely do we see an acknowledgment of that. I'm not saying nobody does it, but we certainly don't get the kind of attention for our support that others do.

Walk down the halls of the U.S. Congress, and you don't see memorials to many women or Black people. Yes, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is there after a hard fought campaign. It wasn't until 2009, that the National Congress of Black Women finally got Sojourner Truth's memorial in the Capitol—making her the first Black woman to have a memorial in Emancipation Hall of the Capitol. Shortly thereafter, a portrait of Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm appeared in one of the Capitol hallways. Now Rosa Parks has become the first Black woman to have a statue in the Capitol as part of its National Statuary Hall Collection.

It's great to see them recognized, but it would be even greater to see the accomplishments of more Black women and men acknowledged on a regular basis. We now see a few Black men and women hosting television programs, but you'd need a magnifying glass to see even them discussing the great things Black men and women do. Whether we're left out is because we're Black or because we're women is worrisome. Media exposure of what we do to make a difference in communities across the country would help us to do even more. In the meantime, let us honor each other every day for the work we do—not just during the special months set aside for us as Black people or as women. It would also be good to thank the Black press and media for the job they do in covering our events and our accomplishments.