

DON'T LIMIT MY DAYS

Written by Jeffrey L. Boney, Associate Editor
Wednesday, 06 February 2013 00:00



Black History Month is acknowledged by people all across the United States every February. At the same time, countless U.S. citizens could care less about hearing about the contributions that Black people in America have made. I can appreciate Black History Month's foundational roots, in that one of my favorite African-American authors was responsible for its inception.

In 1926, Carter G. Woodson pioneered the celebration of "Negro History Week", which he designated for the second week in February, to coincide with marking the birthdays of President Abraham Lincoln and African-American abolitionist Frederick Douglass. After "Negro History Week" became widely accepted, it was extended to a full month; which we now celebrate as Black History Month. Carter G. Woodson devoted the majority of his life to historical research and towards working to preserve the history of African-Americans in this country. Woodson believed that, "Race prejudice is merely the logical result of tradition, the inevitable outcome of thorough instruction to the effect that the Negro has never contributed anything to the progress of mankind." He accumulated a collection of thousands of artifacts and publications because he felt that the contributions of African-Americans in this country were being overlooked, ignored, and even suppressed by the writers of history textbooks and the teachers who use them.

I hate the notion that I, as a Black man, should be thankful that I am "given" an entire month to celebrate my history, when in fact my history is a major part of American history. Black history should be celebrated and acknowledged in America, 365 days a year - 7 days a week - 24 hours a day. Aren't the founding fathers heralded and celebrated daily? Better yet, aren't all of the standard textbooks distributed to students in schools, colleges and universities across this country full of main characters that don't look like me? Yeah...yeah...yeah - I know we have Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Harriet Tubman and a few other Black notables who are briefly mentioned in textbooks, but there are so many other Black Americans who have made major contributions to our society. They deserve the same top-billing that Christopher Columbus gets for somehow finding a land that was already inhabited by people.

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Why isn't Black history a complete part of the overall school curriculum from elementary to high school? Why does Black history, or the study of it, have to be an additional course that students in our American universities and colleges choose as an elective in order to learn about Black history? Why should the contributions of Benjamin Banneker who helped survey the city of Washington, D.C. or the discoveries of hundreds of new uses for fruits and vegetables (particularly peanuts) by George Washington Carver, be limited to one month? Why should Charles Drew, who pioneered the techniques for Blood Banking and Blood Transfusions, be limited to only 28 days of discussion in February and then archived until the following year? Why shouldn't all students in the U.S. know about Edward Alexander Bouchet, the first African-American to earn a Ph.D. in Physics from Yale and only the 6th American to earn a Ph.D. in Physics in the U.S., and yet with all of those credentials couldn't even get a job because he was Black?

These are but a few of the many African-American contributors to this wonderful country that we proudly call America. These Americans.....yes, these Black Americans, should be embraced and exalted to the highest level of significance all year-round, not just in February!

On top of that, the overall experience of Black Americans in this country is a story worth being taught to every student and should be taught by every professor and by every teacher in our schools, colleges and universities all across America. Black history should be included in every curriculum and a part of countless research projects, the same way the Holocaust taught and researched. Interestingly enough, while the Holocaust didn't even take place in America, it gets more attention in all of our American history textbooks; way more attention than the experiences of the African slaves who endured the hardships of slavery in America.

I hear many people argue that February is the shortest month of the year and that "THEY" could have given "US" a month that has more days in it, but the question I have is, who is "THEY" and how do "THEY" dictate how and when the contributions of Blacks in this country get acknowledged? I mean, if Black history isn't being embraced by Black Americans, what difference would some extra days in the month really make?

I believe that everyone, regardless of race, should:

Advocate for an increase in the amount of Black history information in textbooks being taught to students in every school, college and university in the U.S.

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Begin teaching Black history to our children in our homes

Volunteer to work with young people at schools, churches and other outreach activities to share information and history about the wonderful Black contributors to our society; both past and present

Volunteer to participate in a Black history program during Black History Month and year-round

Join and/or financially support groups that have an emphasis on Black history education

Further your own education about Black history through reading books and through Internet research

I applaud everyone that makes it a commitment to highlight the contributions of Black people during Black History Month, and I challenge us to make Black history a year-long tribute that will make an educational impact in the lives of our youth and on every American citizen for years to come.

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