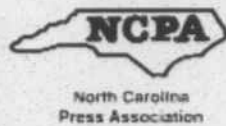


OPINION/ FORUM

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Celebrating Black History Month 2011

The importance of knowing history is to learn from it. We remember to thank historian Carter G. Woodson for first establishing Black History Week as a "celebration" of African American achievement back in 1926. During the years we have come to celebrate Black



Ben Chavis
 Guest Columnist

History Month in the month of February not only in America, but also throughout the world.

Black people are often, in too many instances, the object of daily racial stereotypes and negative cynicism in the mainstream media. The month of February each year, at least for the majority of African Americans and others who have a sense of the value of diversity and inclusiveness, is the time for reflection and celebration of the progress and achievements that African people have made in the United States and across the globe. Black History Month, therefore, is an annual time when there is a more visible, positive energy and consciousness about African American progress.

Of course, we all know that our struggle for freedom, justice, and equality continues even while we recognize our achievements. It is also most important that we take the time to share the teachings and learning from our history with the children of our communities. African American youth will be proud of our history to the extent to which we will take more time to tell it, explain it and to make sure that our youth will understand and appreciate it. Again, this is why the African American press is important in all of its multiple media formats. The good news is there is a hunger and thirst by millions of young people in our communities for more awareness and knowledge about African American and African history.



Carter G. Woodson

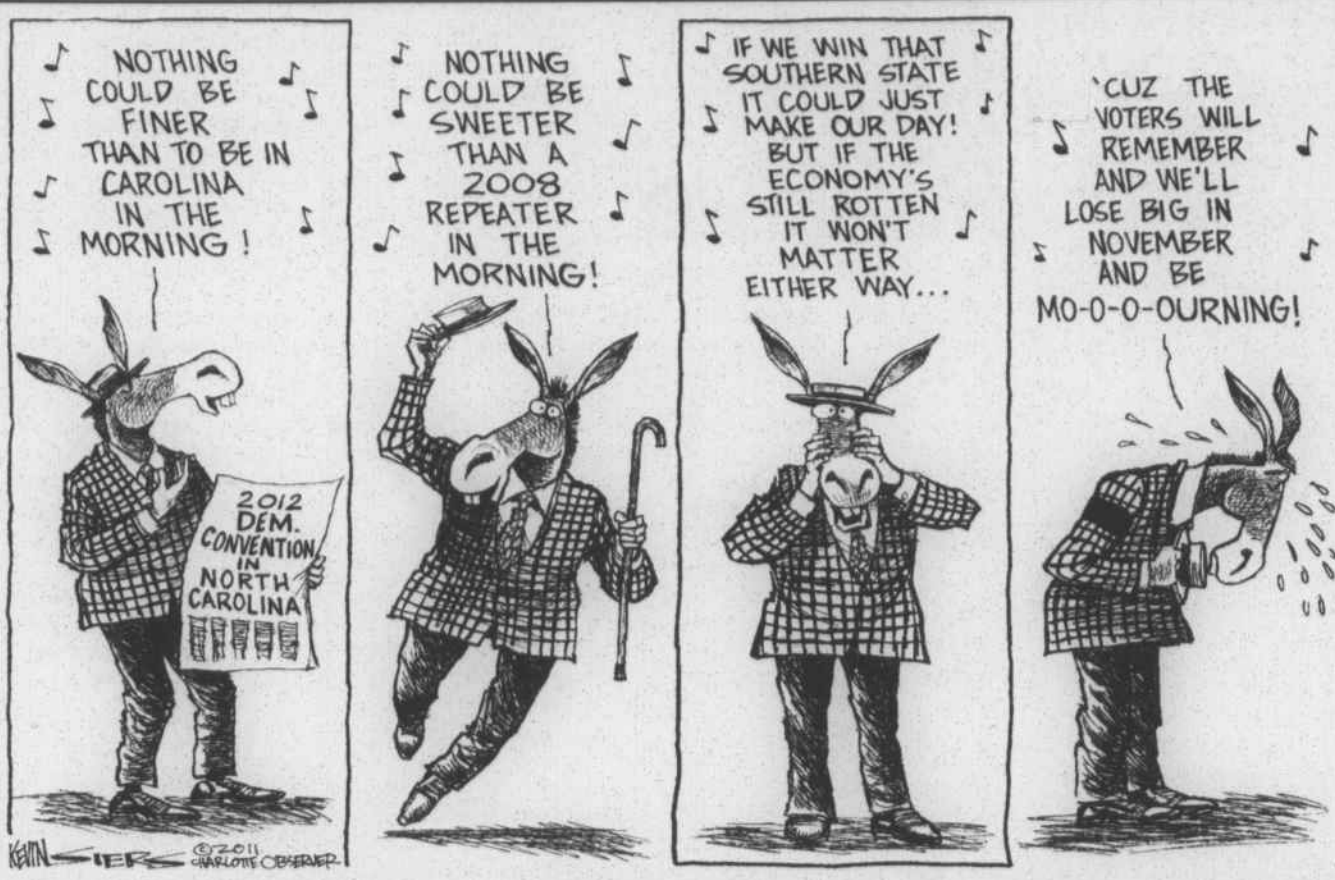
The historic transformation of Egypt during this Black History Month observance is noteworthy. Egypt is one of the oldest nations in the world, although 60 percent of the population in Egypt is under the age of 30. The dramatic changes in Egypt that were led by the youth of that African nation should serve as a global reminder that the future destiny of the world is not in the hands of those who live vicariously in the past blindly with no vision, hope or plan to make social, economic, political and cultural progress. The future is in the hands of young people who know their history and take their responsibility for freedom and progress seriously.

February 11, 2011 was the day of transformation in Egypt. But, we also should remember and continue to celebrate that February 11, 1990 was the day that Nelson Mandela was finally released from prison in South Africa after spending 27 years in prison unjustly as a political prisoner held by the apartheid regime. Mandela stated, "Our march to freedom is irreversible."

Here in the United States, one of the most significant recent historical moments was the election of President Barack H. Obama in November of 2008. Not surprisingly, the U.S. Census Bureau is now reporting the voter "turnout rate" in the 2008 national elections was the highest for Black Americans (65%) as compared to all other racial groups identified by the U.S. Census Bureau. We all should know that the age group within the African American community that had the largest percent increase in voter turnout from 2004 to 2008 was the "18- to 24-year-old citizen black population." Now, between Black History Month 2011 and 2012, we've got some homework to do to make sure that this trend in Black American civic participation and historic voter turnout continues.

Let's make sure here in the United States that our march to freedom is also "irreversible." Once again, the history of voting and the blood-soaked price that African Americans, in particular, had to pay to get the right to vote should never be forgotten or taken for granted. Yes, we have a lot to celebrate. There has been progress. But, we also have a lot to be sober about: high unemployment, imprisonment, high school dropout rate, poverty and too many in a state of disillusionment. But, we must not be cynical and self-destructive. There are solutions to all these problems. If "Black History" has taught us anything that we should always remember, it is that our struggle for freedom is protracted. We will have victories and we will have defeats, but through it all we must never let our spirit be broken. Trials and tribulations should strengthen us, not weaken us. We have come too far to let new winds of oppression blow us off course. Let's raise up a new generation of freedom fighters.

Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr is Senior Advisor to the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) and President of Education Online Services Corporation.



Iraq's Impact on Arab Revolts?



Bill Fletcher
 Guest Columnist

Something very weird is afoot. I have been hearing commentators suggest that the invasion of Iraq and the ouster of Saddam Hussein in 2003 set the stage for the current Arab democratic revolt. The story goes something like this: The people of the Arab world saw that a dictator could be overthrown and they then saw the benefits of an alleged democracy. This, according to the story, sparked their desire to move to overthrow various Arab despots.

When I first heard this, I assumed that someone was joking or being sarcastic. The thought that the U.S./British invasion of

Iraq, in clear violation of international law, followed by the installation of puppet regimes would have inspired a democratic revolt eight years later is a bit absurd. If you leave aside some level of delusion, what is one to make of these suggestions?

The foreign policy view of the so-called neo-conservatives--the largely Republican group that dominated foreign policy debates during the George W. Bush administration--was one calling for an active and interventionist role in installing pro-U.S. governments. The neo-cons called these governments "democratic," but what they meant by that was permitting people to vote as long as they vote for pro-U.S. candidates. This is why U.S. ruling circles so bitterly hate Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and Bolivian President Evo Morales. These leaders were both elected legitimately and

have moved to take their countries in a direction that U.S. ruling circles have failed to approve. As such, the neo-con view has nothing to do with democracy but revolves instead around whether a regime is perceived as being pro- or anti- the objectives of the U.S. ruling circles. Two other examples of this the cynical manner in which this plays out were the coups that overthrew Haitian President Aristide (2004) and Honduran President Zelaya (2009). In both cases, democratically-elected leaders were overthrown with either the active support or at least the knowledge and permission of the U.S. government, yet, this was not at all seen as a threat to democracy by the neo-cons. Instead, the neo-cons applauded such actions as necessary efforts to restore democracy!

The Arab revolt that we are witnessing has nothing to do with Iraq. The Iraq

invasion and occupation was reprehensible as far as the Arab World was concerned. Today's revolt is a revolt against tyrannies, including those openly supported by the U.S.A. (such as Egypt). As such, these are not only revolts against domestic tyrants but they also represent revolts against a global system that has helped to place such tyrants into power and reinforce their rule during the decades.

The next time that you hear someone suggest that the Iraq invasion was a step forward for democracy and that it inspired the Arab masses to revolt, well, it is fine to laugh.

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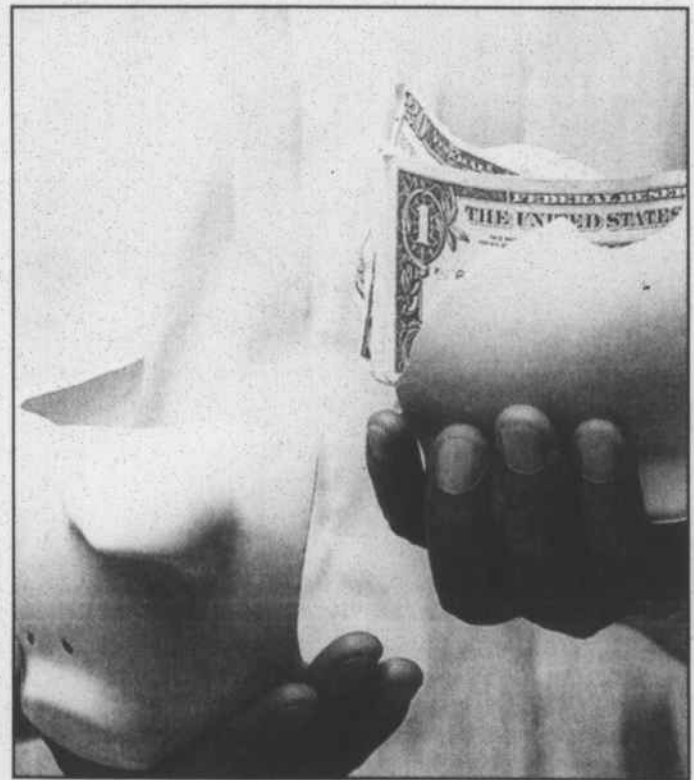
Embracing Black Economic History



Julianne Malveaux
 Guest Columnist

I was doing my thing a week or so ago, on another HBCU campus, supporting Brother President and the students who'd earned honors at the school. I was delighted to be there, as I always learn when I visit other campuses. Delighted and yet astonished when a young man, a senior, stepped up to me to ask if I really thought Black History Month was still relevant. Thoughtful, pointed, and articulate, the young man told me that in this "post-racial" era we should not settle for February. He fussed that we segregate ourselves by embracing a month for Black History. He said he would rather see our accomplishments and facts peppered through the year. And, then he stomped his foot and said he found Black History Month irrelevant.

Can I share that I was stunned?—Dr. Carter G. Woodson founded Negro History Week, which blossomed into Black History Month because there was scant attention paid to the accomplishments of people of African descent in our country and in our culture. He picked the second week of February, the week that encompasses both the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln (February 12) and the self-proclaimed birthday of Frederick Douglas (February 14, remembering



that the birthdays of enslaved people were often not recorded). The Association for the Study of African American Life and Heritage (ASALAH) has been the organization to set, each year, a theme for Black History Month. They've reminded us of the many ways that African American people have been contributors to our nation's work. Now we have come so far, it seems, that a student at an HBCU is critically thinking that we don't need to celebrate us anymore. Give me a break! I do not think that we have yet embraced the greatness of our people of our history, of our journey. I do not think that we understand how well we play a game that is stacked against us. We play and sometimes we win.

I think of Elizabeth

Keckley, the seamstress who supported the White folks who owned her when they fell on hard times. Eventually, she paid them for her freedom, made her way to Washington, D.C. and was the tailor for First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln. I wonder, often, what kind of temperament allows someone to purchase herself, as opposed to simply running away? And, I relish and revel in the absolute temerity of a sister who would be free, no matter what. If we decide that we won't celebrate Black History Month, where do we put Elizabeth Keckley's story? Is it simply a story of courage and entrepreneurship? Or, must it be located in a month and a moment that celebrates the tenacity, the audacity of a people whose thirst for freedom could not be quenched?

For every name we know, every Elizabeth Keckley, there are names that history swallowed because there were stories that many chose not to record. There were men and women who set aside pennies each week to self-emanipate, and then there are the stories of those who ran away, self-emanipating in a different manner. Slavery required Black and White people to suspend faith and rationality, to warp reason and integrity. People of African descent cut and pasted their reason and their consciousness to manage a system that was nothing less than evil. And, too many Whites knew it was wrong, but went along to get along, preserving in the case of President John Adams, evil in the name of keeping the union together.

And, a young brother at an HBCU, undoubtedly not the only young man or woman, says he thinks we should not "do" Black history anymore. We are past that. Not really. We must embrace this history that is ours because it is a history that inspires and empowers. Our economic history, much as the rest of our history, reminds us that we are a mighty people. We have survived. We have thrived.

We continue to sometimes win a game that is totally rigged against us.

Julianne Malveaux is President of Bennett College for Women in Greensboro, North Carolina. Her book *Surviving and Thriving: 365 Facts in Black Economic History*, is available at www.lastwordprod.com.