

OPINIONS



STAFF EDITORIAL

Celebration of accomplishments must include reflection

HOW WE SEE IT

Black History Month is a powerful time to reflect on past accomplishments while still looking forward to growth

On the second floor of the Moseley Student Center in the African American Resource Room, Elon University students, faculty and staff members can find a wall of firsts. In framed photographs, one can find anyone from the first black student to attend Elon to the first black student to be inducted into Phi Beta Kappa.

In 1963, Glenda Phillips became the first black person to attend Elon. In the 55 years since then, there have been dozens more firsts and achievements for the black community. Elon's administration has made diversity and inclusion a priority for our campus, and with that has come an increase in

enrollment of black students and more positive experiences.

It is no question that our community has come a long way since Phillips attended Elon, but that does not mean the fight for equality, inclusivity and respect on campus is close to over.

Black History Month is a time to recognize and celebrate the growth and accomplishments of black people within our different communities. It is a time for reflection and celebration, but this cannot be without criticism and looking toward growth.

There is a great difference between achievements in diversity and achievements in inclusivity. While the black

community has grown considerably in size and prominence at Elon, racially insensitive incidents of the last several years — including students standing on an NPHC fraternity's plaque and students dressing in racially insensitive costumes to parties — have shown the ongoing need for in depth conversations on what it means to be an inclusive community. These events may be far different from what the first black students at Elon experienced, but we shouldn't settle for an experience that is better, but one that is the best.

Equality isn't just about the number of students of color on campus or the photographs of students achieving firsts — it's about the need for a quality of life at Elon that is consistent with the experiences of all students. Increasing the racial and ethnic diversity of our campus can help with inclusivity, but it is not the only way.

Throughout Black History Month, the Elon community should consider ways in which we can continue to move forward towards a more inclusive campus where everyone will feel like they truly belong.

This month, consider attending some events across campus for Black History Month, such as the Circle of Hope Dialogue Series, showing of the film "The Mountaintop" in Turner Theatre or the Black History Month Dance Concert. These events are excellent ways to celebrate while also considering need for change.

It's important to reflect and celebrate, but we cannot let ourselves settle in our success. Instead, we must constantly be looking forward to how we can still improve, while always considering the immeasurable value of the accomplishments of those before us.

CAMPUS VOICES

Find ways to celebrate this Black History Month



Brandon Bell
Assistant Director of
The Center for Race,
Ethnicity, and Diversity
Education

Each year, agencies and institutions across the United States take time to observe February as Black History Month — a month within the year to acknowledge the heritages, histories, contributions, legacies and lived experiences of black identified persons to the United States and greater global communities. A somewhat familiar observance and activity in the 21st century, it is imperative that communities take the time to revisit the historical relevance of black identified persons in America and their role in the modern day understanding of civil rights.

Black History Month began as Negro History Week as an initiative created by Carter

G. Woodson in February 1926. Believing that the black experience was too important to only be discussed by historians and other academics, Woodson understood black history and culture to be imperative tools for racial uplift and the advancement of civil rights. Negro History Week was designated during the second week of February in order to commemorate the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass and their roles in the abolishment of slavery in the mid to late 1800s.

Negro History Month was extended for a full month as a result of a proposal made by the Black United Students of Kent State University in

February 1969. In February of 1970, the inaugural celebration of Black History Month was held at Kent State University and other institutions began to follow suit. In 1976, the bicentennial of the United States, President Gerald R. Ford expanded African-American week into a full month.

Black History Month is an integral part of our nation's tradition in which we continue to promote positive examples of poignant historical events, exemplary leaders and steps towards societal change. This remembrance is not only deeply meaningful for the African-American community, but imperative for the greater understanding of national and

world history. As you think about the ways in which you will celebrate Black History, I offer a few suggestions.

First, celebrate with knowledge. In addition to Google, access the number of books, articles and multimedia that chronicles various dimensions of the black experience in Belk Library. The archives of Belk Library are a treasure trove of information about Elon University and hold many gems regarding the impact that black people have had at Elon University. You are encouraged to check that out.

Second, engage the community. February has become a time designated for reflection, open dialogue, interdisciplinary education and

shared advocacy initiatives. The Center for Race, Ethnicity and Diversity Education (CREDE) in partnership with many university offices and academic departments have created a robust array of programming to celebrate black history. Check E-Net and the CREDE website for a complete list events.

Every race is connected to the rich history of this nation, and by celebrating Black History Month everyone can be included in a tradition of acknowledgment, inclusion and community engagement. If you have questions about Black History Month feel free to contact Brandon Bell at bbell5@elon.edu for more information.