

HISTORY

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

It was 1926. Dr. Carter G. Woodson, a brilliant historian, announced Black History Week! It was a bold, but important concept. Dr. Woodson knew the contributions, struggles and accomplishments of African Americans. He felt deeply and strongly that time ought to be set aside to honor men and women of African descent.

Father of Black History

As with most of his work, he had thought about the idea. Dr. Woodson, considered "the father of Black History," decided that the week should be celebrated during the month of February. Why February? He reasoned that February contained the birthdays of two great Americans: 1) President Abraham Lincoln (February 12), and 2) Frederick Douglass (February 14). President Lincoln called for the end of slavery. The Emancipation Proclamation which he conceived and signed set free thousands of Black people who were held in bondage.

Frederick Douglass was a slave until age 21, when he escaped from the plantation of Maryland. In Massachusetts and New York he spoke out against the evils of slavery. Often, this great orator described what it was like to be a slave. Mr. Douglass traveled widely and was, during his time, one of the most prominent abolitionists and leaders.

Black History Week-1926

One can easily see why the birthday month of these two Americans was chosen as a time to honor the contributions of African Americans. Carter G. Woodson was a man of great insight and vision. The idea of "Negro History Week" caught on and was a source of pride to Black people.

Black History Month-1976

Later, the week was renamed "Black History Week." In 1976, it was expanded to the entire month of February.



Carter G. Woodson, Father of Black History

Why Study Black History?

African history goes back to at least 400 B.C. or earlier. Since the continent is the ancestral birthplace of African Americans, the history is old and awesome.

The critical question is not "why study Black History?" Rather, the question should be "why not study Black History?" There are several important reasons for including the history, culture and contributions of African Americans in the fabric of the textbooks:

1) American history is incomplete without Black History. Even before Columbus discovered this country, there were Black people here. To study the history of this nation without learning about the enormous contributions of the ancestors of the 30 million Black Americans today means the knowledge has large gaps;

2) African Americans and their ancestors have deep roots in Africa. Without question, studying about this ancient continent and its early contributions to civilization as well as its struggles and current developments provides vital information about ances-

tors of the people called African Americans;

3) Learning Black History can be a source of pride and inspiration for all people of color and can develop accurate perceptions on the part of non-Black people. In other words, it is very important for all students to study Black History;

4) The contributions of African Americans have been legendary, whether one is referring to enormous inventions, magnificent literature, extraordinary music, or many other significant advances. Such rich history can be woven into various subjects, thus making the curriculum more multicultural.

The inclusion of Black History is a major step toward democratizing educational curricula and removes stereotypes and enhances positive images. After all, that is one of the purposes of education.

When people of all ethnic and racial backgrounds appreciate differences and diversity, their ability to communicate and respect is greatly enhanced. Clearly, one's life is enriched when prejudice and discrimination based on race are not present.