

# Historians: Teach more history during Black History Month

By ROBERT LAMME  
Fayetteville Observer-Times

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. (AP) — When Carter G. Woodson founded Negro History Week in 1926, most historians treated history as if American blacks didn't have a past. Few books described their lives in detail, and those that did often used scholarship to portray blacks as an inferior race with a second-

class culture and intellect. Today, the tale that most historians tell of America's past is different. History texts include blacks and other minorities and women. Black and African-American studies departments have sprung up at colleges and universities. Woodson's Negro History Week has been expanded to Black History Month. In a country where polls suggest many people know almost no history, many professors like the

idea of Black History Month. Even as they support it, though, historians say Black History Month could be improved by adding more, well, history. And one professor, Fayetteville State University's Claude Hargrove, says the annual celebration has outlived its usefulness and ought to be scrapped. For Hargrove, who has taught history at FSU since 1982, Woodson's twin goals — to make blacks visible in history and to

debunk myths and stereotypes about them — have been achieved. "It's an old battle and I think we should declare victory," he said. Hargrove argues that too many Black History Month events have become feel-good celebrations planned by non-historians to provide a one-dimensional look at the same black heroes each year. From Hargrove's perspective, the discussion of whites' role in African-American history is almost always absent from Black History Month.

And any examination of blacks' problems or mistakes, he said, is either not allowed or ignored. "Black History Month is just symbolic — meaningless, really," said Hargrove. "They do it and say, 'OK, let's acknowledge this and then forget about it the rest of the year.'" FSU political science professor Phillip McGuire, agrees that African-American history is now widespread in most colleges. But he argues that Black History

Month is still needed. McGuire said too few students — black and white — know the basic events of African-American history, such as the civil rights movement of the 1960s, the Harlem Renaissance or the importance of the Supreme Court's landmark decision in Brown vs. Board of Education. McGuire, says, however, that young people, particularly blacks, need the knowledge and inspiration that their history can provide to help them help themselves and others.

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