

## Black History Month

*Black History Month is acknowledged by some and ignored by others; and while it's acknowledged by most people in this country, I believe it's a travesty that anyone, especially members of the Black community, have chosen to limit their historical focus to the shortest month of the year. Black history should be celebrated and acknowledged in America, 365 days a year-7 days a week-24 hours a day; the very same way the founding fathers are heralded and celebrated daily. –Jeffrey L. Boney, Houston Forward Times*

In an ideal world, a separate month for Black history would not be necessary. Unfortunately, though, the lives and stories of Black people continue to be minimized in narratives of American history, left out by those who have the privilege of telling our country's story. Until that changes, there is a need for Black History Month.

Carter G. Woodson, an African American historian and scholar who dedicated his life to the study of Black history, recognized this back in 1926. It is why he pioneered the celebration of "Negro History Week." Woodson wanted to uncover and preserve the history of African Americans in the U.S., hoping to instill in African Americans a sense of self-esteem and confidence that would fuel the quest for justice. A history manipulated by white mainstream culture, he said, has resulted in "No systematic effort toward change... for, taught the same economics, history, philosophy, literature and religion ... the Negro's mind has been brought under the control of this oppressor.... When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions."

A more inclusive history, Woodson hoped, would also foster understanding between whites and Blacks. "Race prejudice," Woodson said, "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." Learning about Black contributions to American history would engender greater respect among whites, Woodson believed. And though we've made progress toward teaching history in a way that fully represents the contributions of African Americans (as well as other excluded groups), we still have a long way to go.

Ironically, the history of Black History Month itself is often neglected and misrepresented. Most Americans don't know who Carter G. Woodson was or that he, a Black man, originated what became Black History Month. Another little known fact is that February was picked to be Black History Month (and the original "Negro History Week") to coincide with the birthday of African American abolitionist Frederick Douglass (as well as President Abraham Lincoln).

Of course the elevation of Black voices and a focus on their stories during the month of February does not mitigate the lack of celebration of Black contributions to American society throughout the year. It does however give us pause and a time to be mindful of those voices and stories. It allows us to reflect on the reasons why these voices and stories have been omitted in the first place.