



February 2, 2016

Black History Month

Negro History Week (1926)

The precursor to Black History Month was created in 1926 in the United States, when historian Carter G. Woodson and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History announced the second week of February to be "Negro History Week." This week was chosen because it coincided with the birthday of Abraham Lincoln on February 12 and of Frederick Douglass on February 14, both dates of which Black communities had celebrated together since the late 19th century.

Black History Month (1976)

The expansion of Black History Week to Black History Month was first proposed by the leaders of the Black United Students at Kent State University in February 1969. The first celebration of the Black History Month took place at Kent State one year later, in February 1970. In 1976 as part of the United States Bicentennial, the informal expansion of Negro History Week to Black History Month was officially recognized by the U.S. government. President Gerald Ford spoke regarding this designation, urging Americans to "seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history."

Black History Month, also known as African American History Month in America, is an annual observance in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom for remembrance of important people and events in the history in America.

The history of Black History in the world, and especially in America, makes this country as strong as it is. Black History is what gives this country the will and desire to fight and the courage to overcome injustices in this country. In this country, Black History is the driving force against an unfair and unjust society. Black History gives people a reason to hope and a belief that our struggles as a people can one day be the path that made us stronger. Black, white, and brown people all have the common history of how blacks throughout the years have help shape a better America. Black History today lives on in every fight for equality and in every fight against injustice in this country. Black History tells us that freedom is not free and that we will have to fight to continue to take that freedom that we born to have.

Recently in the news we've heard opinions about whether we need to celebrate Black History Month, which is nothing new. Black History Month often sparks an annual debate about the continued

usefulness and fairness of a designated month dedicated to the history of one race. Criticisms include questions over whether it is appropriate to confine the celebration of Black History to one month, as opposed to integration of Black History into the mainstream education throughout the year. Contrary to the original inspiration for Black History Month, which was a desire to redress the manner in which British schools failed to represent black historical figures as anything other than slaves or colonial subjects, Black History Month has been criticized for reducing complex historical figures to overly simplified objects of hero worship. Another criticism, usually leveled by whites, is that the celebration is racist.

Black celebrities such as actor and director Morgan Freeman and actress Stacey Dash have criticized Black History Month, with Freeman saying, "I don't want a Black History month. Black History is American history." Freeman has argued that there was no White History Month, because white people did not want their history relegated to just one month.

We are all a little more free today as a nation because of Black History and its history of many fights. Passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was one such fight. This Act is being used today by people regardless of race, sex, religion, or sexual orientation. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is a landmark piece of civil rights legislation in the United States that outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

Black History also includes the fight for the Voting Rights Act. The Voting Rights Act, signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson in 1965, aimed to overcome legal barriers at the state and local levels that prevented African Americans from exercising their right to vote under the 15th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. The act significantly widened the franchise and is considered among the most far-reaching pieces of civil rights legislation in U.S. history, protecting the right to vote for not only blacks, but for all.

A voting rights case in North Carolina will soon decide whether a 2013 state law which reduced early voting days, ended same day registration, ended out-of-precinct voting, requires a photo ID to vote and includes other similar measures violates the Voting Rights Act and the Constitution. We must continue the fight to make it easier, not harder, for people of all races to vote, but especially for black, brown and younger voters. This is the Black History of our time, the Black History that we can form right now for ourselves and our children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'LKF', written in a cursive style.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District