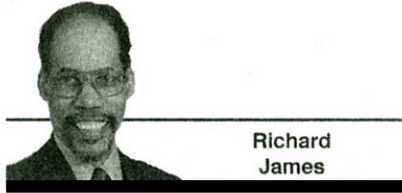


February '09: Best Black History Month ever!

Is Black History Month really necessary? In the post-racial Obama era, is a month dedicated to a racially specific history relevant? Has Black History Month outlived its usefulness?

I don't know the answer to such questions but I do know February 2009 was one of the most memorable Black History Months on record. With the inauguration of the first African-American President of the United States, the month started out on a high. I was still in a trance-like state, savoring the historical moment when Black History Month swallowed me whole.

It would be wonderful to think that Black History Month was no longer necessary. But I fear that day has not arrived. As Attorney General Eric Holder said, "Though this nation has proudly thought of itself as an ethnic melting pot, in things racial we have always been and continue to be, in too many ways, essentially a nation of cowards." I agree. Frank, honest discussions about race can easily slip into heated arguments with pas-



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sionately defended viewpoints. We avoid the uneasiness of the subject.

Carter G. Woodson created Negro History Week in 1926. He wanted to share with the world the accomplishments African-Americans because the history books almost completely ignored the contributions of blacks. Black American children were taught that their history was insignificant. Many Black Americans believed that they descended from a shameful past of slavery and nothing more.

In 1965, I recall reading about the institution of slavery in an American History high school textbook. It contained only one paragraph about slavery! The tumultuous times of the civil rights era forced colleges and universities to include African-American Studies in their curricula. By the 1970's, textbook publishers scrambled to

produce massive tomes of Black History.

In 1976, the Negro History Week was expanded to the entire month of February as part of the nation's bicentennial birthday celebrations. Unfortunately, the painful truths about race relations in American History were thrust onto minds of young children without consideration of the psychological consequences. Disruptive behavior problems erupted in the classroom. Black teens were angry and confused. They had witnessed the assassinations of their beloved Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy in 1968. We found that ignorance truly was blissful. The newly revealed knowledge called for action.

Some young people channeled their anger into self-destruction. They became convinced that racism was too firmly lodged into the American character to achieve any kind of real social equality. Illegal drug use exploded in the ghetto streets. All hope was lost. Dr. King's Dream was looked upon as just a dream.

But other young blacks dug down deep into their souls and cre-

ated a new expression for their anger. The Hip-Hop generation was born. The pseudo-sexual rhythmic beat of the music was entwined with complicated, highly sophisticated prose that exposed hypocrisy, injustice and disparity.

But today, the Hip-Hop genre has gone mainstream. The art form has been commercialized and distorted to sell to a young white audience. The image of a young black hoodlum, dealing drugs, having promiscuous sex and perpetrating acts of violence while driving luxury cars in the ghetto has filled the channels of popular media. Young black males seemingly emulate the "gangsta" ethic and embrace the thug-life.

The actor Morgan Freeman said on the TV show 60 Minutes that he did not want a Black History Month. Many people agree with him stating that the setting aside a month for blacks has become an irrelevant ritual. I disagree.

Black History Month is not just for Blacks. White students must also know the truth about how America became great. While our shared history is painful, it is a necessary ingredient for social, evo-

lutionary growth. The American path to greatness is a "Trail of Tears" that we must remember to console each other.

Although tennis star, Serena Williams reclaimed number one ranking, and Pittsburgh Steeler coach Mike Tomlin (who is African-American) is the youngest head coach to win the NFL championship, and Eric Holder became the first Black United States Attorney General, and ex-governor Michael Steele become the first African-American to head the Republican National Committee were significant accomplishments, they were not enough to offset the negative.

The day after President Obama signed the stimulus bill into law, the New York Post on February 18th, published an offensive, in my opinion, racist cartoon of a chimpanzee shot by police with the caption, "They'll have to find somebody else to write the next stimulus bill." That created a firestorm of protests and the Post apologized.

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