*#TheNext400*

** **By Harry D. Sewell**

**Why I stopped celebrating Black History month,**

**and started celebrating Black History**

**February 28, 2021**

**H**istory was made when…

* “Twenty and odd” Africans landed in Virginia in **August of 1619;**
* Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her bus seat in **December of 1955;**
* France awarded the Croix de Guerre, its highest military honor, to the entire 369th Infantry Regiment, known as the “Harlem Hellfighters”, in **May of 1918;**
* Barack Obama was elected President of the United States in **November of 2008;**
* Thurgood Marshall won the Brown v Board of Education case in **May of 1954;**
* Jack Johnson was crowned Heavyweight Champion in **December of 1908;** and
* The Black Panther Party for Self Defense was formed in **October of 1966.**

The point being, in the over 400 years since arriving in the Virginia colony, African Americans here, and abroad, have been inextricably and indelibly part of American history. And not only in February.

Time was (and still is in most places) that every town had a black section. While it had stores, schools and churches, that section was not considered as good as the neighborhood “on the other side of the tracks” (except for maybe Tulsa, Oklahoma, but that’s another story). That’s where the “best” schools, stores and churches were thought to be. We still hear people say, when some heinous crime is committed in one of those “good neighborhoods”, “nothing like that ever happens around here”, like it should be expected anywhere.

In cities across America, kids from those “bad neighborhoods” hesitated to venture downtown or to the “nice sections” for fear of being accosted by the police for “driving while black”, “walking while black” or just being black. And in their own neighborhoods they were “stopped and frisked” on suspicion of… well, anything, with regularity. By these actions they were taught to stay in the ‘hood’, in their place.

Why should we treat our history the same way? Confined to a single month like we were confined to a single part of town. The obvious fact is that our story is being lived every day, week and month of the year. Would we accept that all black people, regardless of when they were born, married or died, all had to celebrate or mourn in February? Treating our history the same way is just as ridiculous.

I never learned about math genius Katherine Johnson profiled in the book and movie “Hidden Figures” when I was growing up. Never heard of Pvt. Henry Johnson, who the Germans called “Black Death”, who was a member of the 369th and was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor by President Obama. Never learned about the “Red Summer of 1919” or Colfax, Louisiana.

No one told me about Ralph Bunche, winner of the Nobel Prize in 1950 for negotiating the first peace deal between the new State of Israel and its Arab neighbors, or explained the irony of Dr. Charles Drew’s life, the physician who pioneered blood transfusions, widely suspected of dying for lack of one because a “white hospital” in North Carolina would not readily admit him after a car accident.

Black History is American History. As much as the story of the Pilgrims, the Alamo and any of the other stories of events or heroes we teach our children about. January to June and July to December, we should recognize the triumphs and tragedies of our fellow Americans as they happened. And the stories of exceptional black Americans should take their rightful place alongside the other giants of their time, and not as mere asterisks lumped together. Just as Major League Baseball recently corrected its records by including players from the Negro Leagues in the official stats of the game.

Each day of the year there is someone to be proud of, some achievement to celebrate. There are also some injustices that need to be remembered, so as not to be repeated. Because it’s not only “his-story”, it’s our story too.

***#CelebrateBlackHistory365***

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