

ASALH Front and Center: - LET US REVISIT THE NEED FOR FREEDOM SCHOOLS By Jacqueline Hubbard, Esq.

African Americans are under assault. There is a real concern that our children cannot be taught their true History today in Florida. There has been expressed concern that if the truth of American History is told, it might make certain children feel uncomfortable because of the guilt of their ancestors. What about Black children? If there is a prohibition on teaching the truth about the Black sojourn in America in our schools, how will any children know the awful truth? What about the comfort Black Children will have in knowing what happened, historically, to Black Americans? Why can't children learn about Black Americans' ability to overcome mistreatment, enslavement, brutality, Jim Crow, Black Codes, Mass Incarceration; discrimination of every kind; and yet, in many instances, *thrive*? We, (*those among, us who study and know American History*), will have to teach them.

This had to happen before, in 1964 during the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee's (SNCC), "Freedom Summer." It began just to teach Black children how to read and write. It has to be done again in 2023, so that Black History can be taught and learned by the youth here at home. Black History is *American History* with all of its hypocrisy; lofty ideals; cruelty; enslavement; and mass incarceration. It is also about an African heritage that led to religious practices that gave hope and salvation; art; music; and a uniquely American culture used by all. What about the righteousness of Reconstruction, the courage of Black soldiers in all of America's wars, even the War of Independence? What about the amazing

Page 2.

inventions, and advances in Medicine and Science, made by Black Americans? How about the Artists; the Dancers; the Gifted Writers; the Sculptors; and, let us not forget, our Black Teachers; who knew education could and would save us?

Dr. Carter G. Woodson is the *Father* of "Black History Month." He founded ASALH in 1915. At first, it was "Negro History Week" and later, became "Black History Month." It exists to celebrate the accomplishments of Black Americans throughout the history and founding of this Nation. Lately some have come to the realization that in spite of the accomplishments of Black Americans, the legacy of racial terror, enslavement, mass incarceration, intimidation, and segregation should still *plague* American society. In part, this is due to the apathy of many American citizens, who continue to ignore both the past and the present. America needs to wake up to the present day political horror we live in, and accept that our past is responsible for this condition.

On February 17, 2023, in *The New York Times*, Dr. Henry Louis Gates, who is the director of the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research at Harvard, wrote the following:

The Harvard-trained historian Carter G. Woodson was keenly aware of the role of politics in the classroom, especially Lost Cause interventions. Starting after the Civil War. Dr. Woodson wrote: The opponents of Freedom and Social Justice decided to work out a program which would enslave the Negroes mind inasmuch as the freedom of the body has to be conceded. It was well understood, Woodson continued, that if by the teaching of history the white man

Page 3.

*could be further assured of his superiority and the Negro could be made to feel that he had always been a failure and that the subjection of his will to some other race is necessary, the freedman, then, would still be a slave. Woodson concluded:
If you can control a man's thinking, you do not have to worry about his action.*

In 1748, the French philosopher Montesquieu wrote: *The tyranny of a prince in an oligarchy is not so dangerous to the public welfare as the apathy of a citizen in a democracy.* Indeed, Black History Month cannot be celebrated in a vacuum. It is wake-up time.

As Erin Aubry Kaplan stated in her opinion in the February 19, 2020 article in the *New York Times*: "Seeing Black History in Context: It's the perfect time to get real about America's shortcomings". Kaplan wrote:

The occasion has always felt too narrow to me. We are eager to celebrate our favorite figures and their trailblazing achievements...but less eager to examine the fact that their heroism was based more often than not in fighting an American system that fought and still fights against their status as full Americans...white people would rather not examine their role in the racism that works against their status as full Americans.

As Kaplan further explains:

*... In 2020... it's urgent that we turn the lens around
... and put it on America as a whole. It's time to acknowledge what black history really reveals ...
hypocrisy, lies and political cowardice have made possible, and palatable, the political oppression*

Page 4.

and moral corruption of the current moment that threatens to wipe out democracy for everybody.

Perhaps the time has finally gotten here, where each of us, as Americans, need to acknowledge that American history has been a brutal and racist history. It has been traditionally split between Black, Native American, and Latinos on one side and white people on the other. The Native Americans suffered near genocide; the Latinos lost much of their historical land and heritage; and Black Americans were enslaved and brutally treated for hundreds of years. The truth is, the treatment of Black Americans resulted in organized *racial terror before and after the end of Reconstruction*. How do we know? People counted them. The NAACP, The Equal Justice Initiative from Montgomery, Alabama, and Tuskegee University have documented *nearly 4,400 racial terror lynchings, against Black Americans*, primarily in the Southern United States and Mid-West, from the end of Reconstruction in 1877 until 1950. There were many more, still not yet fully documented. Two of these *racial terror lynchings* occurred here, in Pinellas County, during the early part of the last century. Pinellas Remembers, which began as the Pinellas County Community Coalition; has erected a Lynching Memorial Marker at the location where John Evans was lynched in St. Petersburg in 1905. The Community Remembrance Project Coalition, (CRPC) was established in April, 2019; in collaboration with the Equal Justice Initiative, to act upon this history. The CRPC, (now “Pinellas Remembers”), honored two Lynching victims: John Evans and Parker Watson, who were Black victims of *racial terror lynchings*, right here in St. Petersburg. Preservation of Black History is critically important, because truth telling can lead to racial

Page 5.

reconciliation and healing. *We must not forget these victims. They must be commemorated. On February 21, 2023 Pinellas Remembers and its supporters will hold a Memorial Anniversary candle-light Ceremony of the installation of St. Petersburg's Lynching Memorial Marker located on Martin Luther King, Jr. Street and 2nd Avenue South at 6:30 PM. All are invited.*

Freedom Schools will teach the *truth* of Black History to our youth and their parents. Black people cannot ignore nor forget the contributions made to this nation. As a community desirous of racial healing and reconciliation, we can only change the future by honestly acknowledging Black History in America; which is our past; confronting it; vowing to making our best efforts not to allow overt racism to ever win again. ASALH acknowledges the community support it has received to soon open its "Freedom School" to teach our youth classes in African and African American History. It is necessary now.

Jacqueline Williams Hubbard is an Attorney and President of the St. Petersburg Branch of ASALH. Initially printed in the Weekly Challenger in 2023.