

features

Column: A look into Black History Month

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Reporter

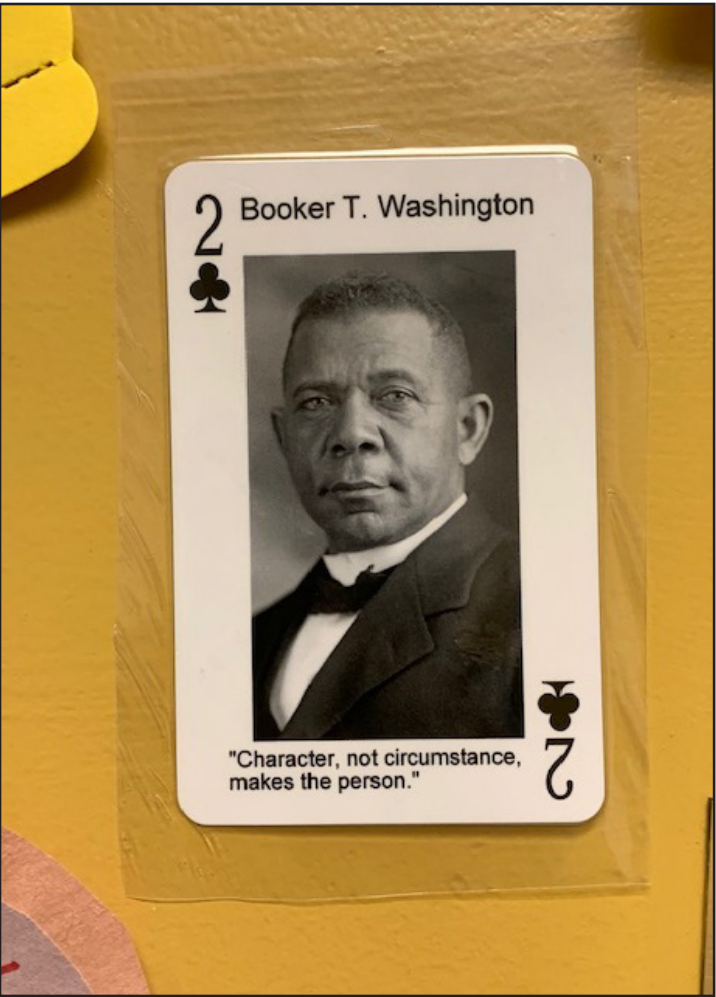
Every February marks the start of Black History Month. This is a recognition that many classrooms, companies, and cities around the country have begun to celebrate.

The celebration is on account of many popular Black figures within history. Stories of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass and many more dominate many social media websites, recognizing the journey that many African Americans overcame.

While the need for Black history to be shared and learned is necessary, commercialization has dug its fingers into the month just like how it happens to the rise of black culture being popularized, while before it was heavily mocked against black people.

Origins of Black History Month and Carter G. Woodson

Dr. Carter G. Woodson, known as “The Father of Black History,” was an American historian, educator, editor and author. Wood-



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A door decoration created by sophomore RA, Ty Young.

son was also the one to begin the works of getting the celebration of African American history rolling.

According to the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), Woodson was born to former slaves in New Canton, Virginia.

He attended Douglass High School, a segregated school where he graduated in two years. After graduating high school, Woodson attended Berea College where he obtained his Bachelors of Arts. Later, Woodson would be the second African American to earn his Ph.D. in History in 1912 from Harvard University.

Prior to being called Black History Month, it was referred to as “Negro History Week.” With the help of his fraternity brothers of Omega Psi Phi, one of nine black Greek organizations in the nation, they began the start of Negro History and Literature Week.

That was then changed to Negro Celebration Week, and starting in 1926, the name Negro History Week was created in celebration, and education spread across the nation allowing citizens of all ages to learn and appreciate their ancestors.

Reasons for choosing February as the sole month for Negro His-



CHANTE RUTHERFORD
The Pan-African flag created by Marcus Garvey and photoshopped by Chante Rutherford.

tory Week was to fall within the birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln.

The seven-day celebration was not enough for Woodson and he would not see the biggest evolution of this due to his death in 1950, but many would see to cre-

history consistent throughout the year.

“As an educator, I push black and indigenous peoples’ narratives into the classroom content constantly, so there really isn’t “more” during February as far as what I teach,” Lee Ann Rutherford, a teacher from the Westerville School District, said. “Because I am very intentional about black history and black perspective generally in my life, I just use the opportunities that are embedded in this month as a way to amplify the work that I am doing, and many others are doing, the other 364 days of the year.”

Many educators around the country have implemented black history into their curriculum year-round. This allows many students to hear the names of people they may have never heard of like Marcus Garvey, Katherine Jackson and Fannie Lou Hamer.

“Black History Month to me means being able to attempt to speak out about my community with as little backlash as possible,” said sophomore Ty Young. “It is a month that I am able to be unapologetically black without the fear of having to apologize for it later.”

Many black Americans across the world have had times where they are told to “turn down their blackness” even during the month dedicated to celebrating black history and culture.

This can be seen in the form of dress codes. Black students across the nation have been humiliated by being called out by their hair.

In an article from CNN, a New Jersey high school wrestler was told to either cut his locs or not be

able to participate.

The result?

His locs were cut in front of a crowd of spectators and other student-athletes. Even in a normal school setting, students are targeted by outdated dress codes.

WDSU tells the story of a girl from Louisiana who was sent home simply because she had box braids.

“I think it is underappreciated because people see Black lives as a profit pool instead of seeing us as human beings,” Young said. “For this reason, things we have contributed to society, especially America, are looked at as a ‘favor’ or debts that we ‘owe’ them for being on this land.”

Black History Month has been underappreciated or used as a tactic to draw attention to their business or organization.

Last summer, large corporations were donating to Black Lives Matter in response to the public asking why they would not speak on the deaths of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery.

With many protests and demonstrations happening across the country, these companies used these deaths as part of their marketing and the same can be said for Black History Month.

Clothing centered around black empowerment, famous black leaders and more is rolled out for the month. Once March rolls around, everything is taken away.

“On one hand it is a good thing that more emphasis is being put on this, but it is also frustrating because there are moments where it feels like it is just temporary and no real substantial change will be

made,” Rutherford added.

White Voices Speaking on Black Issues

In modern times, many Black kids, teens and adults have taken to the platform of social media and used the space to educate on famous black people in history, events centered around black people and black culture.

Twitter and TikTok, being the biggest platforms, have creators speaking about untold facts that people may not know about such as the Tulsa Massacre of 1921 or how Henrietta Lacks was the sole person for the HeLa cell used for intense medical research due to their high reproduction rate and long life.

With these spaces come awareness campaigns about events and speaking on topics that many resonate with. While black people are using these spaces, many others who are not black, more importantly, white people, begin to chime into the conversation.

“White voices speak up for Black voices in situations where they are not needed and often do not care to speak on the issues the way we would,” Young said. “They talk about it in a way that makes them feel as if they should be applauded for defending us.”

Countless tweets, videos and posts have mentioned how non-black/white voices should not input themselves into the conversation on how black people feel in their society no matter where they live.

Growing up and living in an urban area does not mean you have “lived in the hood.” Your skin color has given you privilege in the world we live in.

Black women get the worst treatment out of any person in the world. This can be in the form of job discrimination, hair, fashion, body features and the list goes on.

“As if listening to them pretend to know what it is like to be black because ‘they grew up in the hood too’ is any match to growing up in the hood as a Black woman,” Young said. “They want so badly to relate that they overspeak on our issues and attempt to make them their issues.”

During this month, and throughout the entire year, educate yourself on black history.

The number of achievements and inspiration the black community has given to society is endless.

Read the rest on AU-Live.com



CHANTE RUTHERFORD
The bulletin board on Ty Young’s dorm floor that celebrates Black History Month.