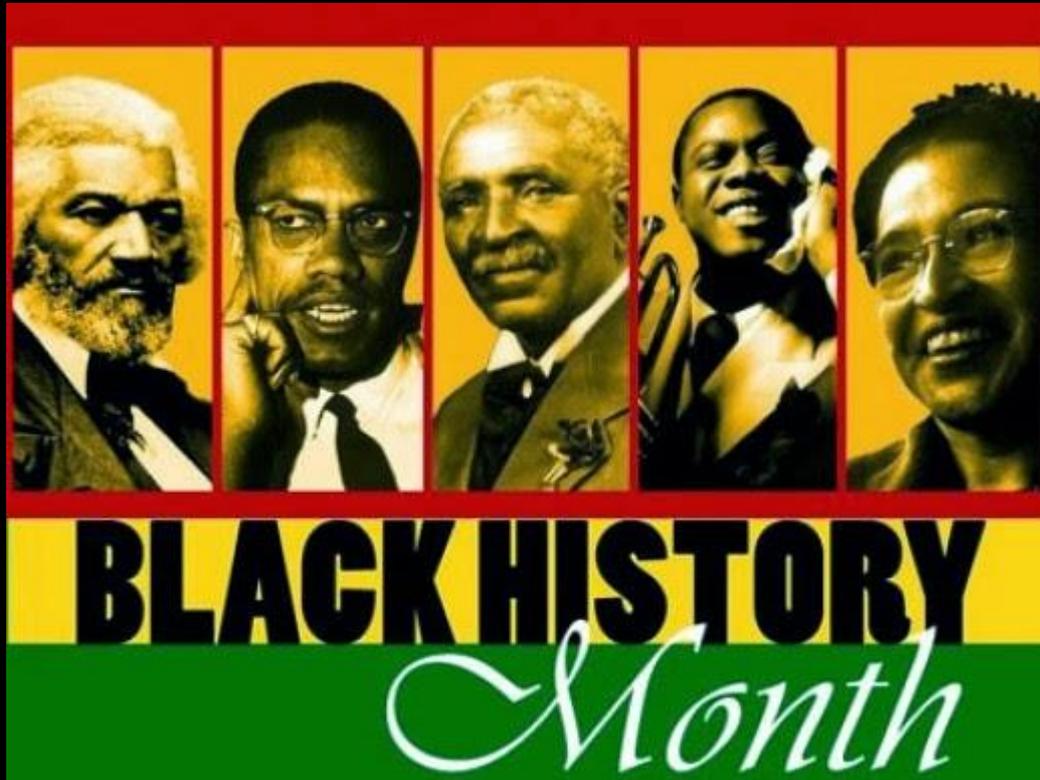


We Should Call Black History Month Black History Year - by [Norman Samuda Smith](#)



In 1973, my friends and I entered our Social Studies class, settled at our desks and waited for our teacher to start the lesson. He handed out some text books and told us to turn to Chapter 5; the title of the chapter, SLAVERY. He began to speak from the premise that the British Empire once ruled one-third of the world, how Africans were taken from their homeland as slaves to the West Indies and forced to work hard on the plantations and how the slave trade was part of the reason which made Britain prosperous. He went on to explain what life was like on the plantations, the slave master, the overseer, the punishments. The white pupils began to laugh and arrogantly boasted that *their* families could have owned *our* families back in the day. Then came the N word and remarks of us being sons and daughters of slaves. Well, the atmosphere in the classroom became heated; arguments and fights broke out during and after that lesson, and I witnessed many of my friends make sure those white pupils never used the N word, or called us sons and daughters of slaves again.

In hindsight, the reaction to the information received on both sides of the racial divide that day was not surprising. For some of my friends, hearing about slavery in that lesson was their first time. For me, I was lucky enough to be told of this by my Mother from an early age. She was a great story-teller and boasted that she was and I am an off-spring of the Maroon Nation of Jamaica, as was Jamaica's national heroes Nanny of The Maroons and Marcus Garvey.

The history of the Maroons in brief goes like this: During a volatile period in the West Indies, the Spanish were the first colonial rulers of Jamaica until the British decided they wanted the island. So when the British waged war against the Spanish for control, the Spanish freed the slaves in an effort to cause havoc. This decision back-fired on them, because the slaves created confusion to both armies. Many of the slaves dispersed and formed their own communities in the Trelawny, St James and St Thomas parishes of Jamaica, at night; they raided the plantations for food and weapons. When the Spanish realised they were not going to hold on to Jamaica, they fled to Cuba, leaving the British in control of the island, but now the British were left facing the resolve of the Maroons who fought the British army (The Red Coats) for 94 years to preserve their freedom. In 1738, Cudjoe (Mountain Lion Chief of the Maroons) and Red Coat Colonel Guthrie signed a treaty at Petty River Bottom. The Maroons achieved their right to govern themselves and autonomy from British rule, a treaty that still exists today.

In 1975 when I left school and was going to the popular reggae dance halls around town, the reggae artists of that era became my history teachers. Burning Spear, Bob Marley, Bunny Wailer, Peter Tosh to name a few, encouraged me through their music to read more history books and learn about our glorious past. They and my mom ignited my passion for history and the ongoing importance of sharing Black History.

Fast forward to 2012 and a meeting I had recently with people who for years have worked in education in Birmingham. They told the story of their experiences of Black History Month in schools they have worked in. Most white teachers pin our s/heroes on the school notice boards with no commentary of who they are. So when the children stroll by and take a look, they don't know who these people are or what their contribution to history was; plus the teachers see it is an excuse to ask black teachers to cook some West Indian cuisine, play reggae music and have a party. On top of that, slavery is still taught in schools,

nothing is taught of the Kings and Queens of Africa, before, during and after slavery. So today's black pupils are experiencing the same reactions I experienced 39 years ago.

I know that the Ma-afa (**Maafa**: Swahili, meaning holocaust or great disaster) is important and should never be forgotten, however my questions are: Why don't the schools teach what our ancestors have brought to the world for example: Astrology, Algebra, the Pyramids, the Traffic Light, the Ironing Board, the Elevator and...oh yeh, the mobile/cell phone? – So has Black History Month done its job? – Do we need it anymore?



I say we should get rid of the title Black History Month and re-name it Black History Year, cos as far as I'm concerned, Black History is with us every second, minute, hour, day, week, month and year.

I'm not a historian saying that this is the book that started it all for me. I have a sense of place and culture, and if you like, the music that I 'n' I listened to in particular, and a powerful oral history tradition through my mom, not forgetting my dad and reggae music reinforced this.

I bring this article to a close and tease your thoughts about Black History Month and how it should be central to *all* our histories – a 365 day thing – not one month.

Everyting – Bless

Comments:

Chaz Walker from Oakland California

Nice article brother, I agree, Black History Year, not month.