## **Black History Month**

## By Federal Glover

Truth be told, I don't much like Black History Month.

Most of the history books we use in school were written from the perspective of European Americans and tended to gloss over or minimize the contributions of all the ethnic groups, including the first Americans, the American Indians.

America's story didn't start in 1492. When Columbus stumbled upon America he found civilizations that went back thousands of years.

There are those who think including black history, the history of American Indians, Latinos and other ethnic groups in the story of America is "rewriting" history. I disagree. By including the roles and contributions of all these people, we are simply presenting a more accurate accounting of events, a more complete history.

Carter G. Woodson founded Negro History Week, selecting a seven-day span in February that included the Feb. 7 birthday of abolitionist Frederick Douglass and the Feb. 12 birthday of Abraham Lincoln. He thought it necessary because the historic roles of African Americans were not mentioned in history books of 1912.

That week eventually grew to a month. Twenty-eight days.

Instead of 28 days of Black history, there should be 365 days of studying African American inventors, scientists, adventurers, teachers, cowboys, soldiers and politicians.

That is why I don't like Black History Month, or for that matter, Hispanic Month in September or Asian American History Month in May. America's history should include the accomplishments of all these people and weaved throughout the entire course all year round.

How can you teach the Declaration of Independence without telling how the beliefs of the Iroquois Confederacy inspired our Founding Fathers?

Why does the story of the West always start from the east? There was also an equally influential movement from the south when the Spanish explorers and Mexican colonists

moved into the southwest and California. When the Pilgrims landed in Plymouth Rock, Saint Augustine, Florida was already 60 years old.

And how can you talk about the West without talking about the Buffalo soldiers in pacifying the frontier and other black cowboys?

If an honest history of the deep South is ever written, Dr. George Washington Carver will stand out as one of the truly great men of his time. Born of slave parents in 1860 in Missouri, Dr. Carver almost single-handedly revolutionized southern agriculture.

The names of Frederick Douglas, W.E.B. Dubois and Ralph Bunche should be as familiar to history students as Martin Luther King, Condoleeza Rice and Barack Obama are to students of contemporary culture.

Despite my feelings towards Black History Month, I can appreciate why we still need to observe it.

Because of Black History Month, most elementary school students – at least in East County -- know about Harriet Tubman and Sojournor Truth. You couldn't make that statement 20 years ago and I guess we have to be thankful for that small measure of progress.

For the time being, Black History Month is necessary if for nothing else but a reminder hat what is past is not necessarily past and sometimes the truth can be unpleasant: Benjamin Franklin borrowed political advice from American Indians, George Washington had slaves and laws against inter-racial marriage were still on the books in 16 states until 1967.

I appreciate that East County's schools, libraries and community groups hold special events marking black history including the Unity March in Pittsburg on Saturday.

As East County continues to change from a rural, small-town atmosphere to a suburban environment, it becomes even more vital that we accept the diversity that our new neighbors bring into our community. One way of doing that is by learning that their goals are not that much different from our own and their journeys and histories are intertwined with our own.

I look forward to the day Black History Month becomes an anachronism and we all learn to accept the missing chapters of the ongoing story of America.

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