

BLACK HISTORY MONTH OBSERVED...

By Gary James

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The month of February is known in America as BLACK HISTORY MONTH, and we will talk about the occasion. I understand the History Month is also acknowledged in the Virgin Islands, and I find that particularly interesting. I find it interesting because the advent of Black History Month was advanced by author and historian Carter G. Woodson, and its purpose is educational, as described in the name of the occasion. It was invented because black Americans constitute a minority population, and the history of black folk is not included in the public schools education curriculum...

Although in many parts of the country public schools were predominantly comprised of black students, history and social studies classes taught Greco-Roman, European and American history, to the exclusion of Africa, and black American history. Therefore, Black History Month was devoted to filling the gap in history that excluded African American and black history. The occasion began as Negro History Week, and was subsequently expanded to a month. Negro History Week was a practical follow-up to the book entitled "The Miseducation of the Negro" authored by Mr. Woodson in 1933. With the demise of the term "Negro" during the black consciousness movement, which replaced the term "Negro" with black and the week was extended to a month long event. The occasion is also acknowledged in the Virgin Islands and I find that particularly interesting because the population in the VI is overwhelming of African ancestry... Therefore, it would seem logical that in the Virgin Islands, the name of the occasion should be in reverse, vis-à-vis, White History Month...

BY THE WAY, I HIGHLY RECOMMEND MR. WOODSON'S BOOK "THE MISEDUCATION OF THE NEGRO" BECAUSE THE BOOK

REMAINS RELEVANT, ALTHOUGH THE WORK IS 80 PLUS YEARS OLD.

Black history in America begins with the enslavement of Africans, which lasted for centuries until the advent of the abolitionist political movement. Emancipation occurred in 1865, with the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation by President Abraham Lincoln. The period of "Reconstruction" followed emancipation, and Reconstruction lasted for about 10 years wherein Federal troops were deployed in target states in order to enforce the civil rights of the freed African Americans. Reconstruction ended in 1876 with the "great compromise" which called back federal troops from protecting the civil rights of black Americans. With the absence of federal troops black Americans were terrorized and lynched.

Concomitantly the advent of "Jim Crow" laws, and "black codes" were enforced by the KKK, and other white supremacists organizations. The "great compromise" occurred when the presidential election of 1876 did not determine a winner. Therefore a political deal was struck between the parties that resulted in Republican Party candidate, Rutherford Hayes to emerge the victor. The caveat in the nefarious deal was that President Hayes would recall federal troops. Lynching and wholesale terror was visited upon black Americans and they were prevented from voting by ridiculous tests, rules and regulations specifically designed to prevent blacks from exercising their rights as citizens.

The 1954 Brown V. Board of Education Supreme Court decision, the murder of Emit Till, in 1955, the ten plus bombings that occurred in Birmingham, Alabama, one of which killed four children in a church, among other egregious acts was the impetus for the modern civil rights movement. The civil rights era occurred in conjunction with black power and black consciousness period which all peaked by 1975. The period is famous and infamous depending on who makes the political assessment and analysis. But the civil rights movement a

famous and popular in the public narrative because of the enactment of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965 respectively, as well as Affirmative Action initiatives in education, employment, housing etc. From then to now many black Americans have been elected to public office to the extent that African Americans have the most elected officials as compared to other political minorities in the country. Yet black Americans are the political weaklings as compared to other more recent political minorities in terms of political leverage. In summary, the political, social and economic advances that black Americans achieved during the 19th and 20th centuries have not been substantially realized and sustained. Accordingly, here in the middle of the 2nd decade of the 21st century, the black American community at large remains at the bottom of the pecking order.

The conundrum that continues to beset the African American community is complex, sophisticated and sublime with no apparent extrication on the horizon. While there are structures, systems, and institutions that maintain the status quo, black Americans have the potential within their hands to significantly improve their at large situation. Compelling and persuasive arguments have been advanced pointing out that the black community can be more effective in the way political, economic and social business is conducted going forward. However, bad habits and inadequate strategies, tactics and conclusions present challenges and a political inertia which keeps black folk under enormous pressure.

Moreover, the structures, systems, institutions, complexity and sophistication of the challenges that confront the black community at large should not be underestimated. Structured, systematic and institutional racism is often highlighted as a primary factor that relegates black folk on the whole to marginalization. Although racism, bigotry, and discrimination remain among the facts of life for black Americans, the race issue is structured in virtually every aspect of the America experiment. While the concept of “the races” has been crystalized in popular imagination, the fact remains

that the idea of multiple races is in fact a fallacious invention that has positioned black folk as less than a human being. Invention of “the races” occurred many centuries ago with a hierarchal vertical pecking order that positioned the “white race” as superior to the other races, with the “black race” as inferior and at the bottom of the hierarchy.

The motive for establishing and enshrining a racial hierarchy was based on the need for a “beast of burden” to provide free labor for the colonial masters in perpetuity. Hence, for centuries the free labor of enslaved Africans economically enriched European countries, which facilitated and financed the industrial revolution and established wealth in the United States and Europe. Currently, African Americans are paid for their labor, but wages are marginal and cannot generate wealth for the individual or community, as a practical matter. In addition, black folk, by and large, aspire to be wage earners and focus their education and training on landing a “good job.” While preparing for and seeking a “good job” is laudable and necessary, it will not generate economic wealth as many argue that aspiring to be a wage earner at the end of the day may amount to volunteer slavery in some instances...

Moreover, in many instances wage earning inhibits a person from engaging, contemplating, and pursuing a greater good for family, community, and the opportunity for the creation of wealth. Additionally the demands associated with being a wage earner minimizes the extent to which one can invest time in learning how to do things that help advance the community from point A to point B.

Perhaps the most impactful and consequential development to occur that has the potential to generate a paradigm shift in America in general and the African American community in particular is the recent scientific finding. Current science asserts without equivocation that there are no biological factors that distinguish the “races.” Therefore, human beings comprise one race, and all the people on the planet today have a common ancestor that

originated in east Africa millennia ago. Although science has debunked and discredited the theory of multiple races and have published the findings broadly, it is not likely that this confirmed data will be translated and applied to the structures, systems and institutions that define America. Specifically, the theory of the multiple race hierarchy is structured in the education, politics, economic and social systems that constitute how business is conducted. Moreover, as the result of centuries of these invidious ideas about race, the race dynamic impacts has a practical sensibility and the popular imagination views reality in race based terms.

Perpetuation of the race idea is convenient to many, and rewriting the historical narrative and revising the structures and systems, such as they are, will change the paradigm that underpins the America project. Hence, application of the updated scientific conclusions from the top down will never occur, in the view of this writer.

On the other hand, African Americans, and other ethnicities of good will have a central role to play in this regard, going forward. Although the historical narrative will not be rewritten by the relevant parties, comparative and parallel accounts will generate greater understanding about the human phenomenon, and behavioral proclivities...Concomitantly, the primary role of black Americans to initiate “affirmative action” (first person singular) on multiple levels cannot be overstated...