



A reflection on the significance of Black History Month

by Dr. Shayla Griffin

We celebrate Black History Month to recognize the sacrifices, contributions, and achievements of African Americans to the United States and the world.

Many of us, were educated in schools in which the perspectives, experiences, and discoveries of Black Americans were not an integral part of our learning. Too few of us know about the work of Fannie Lou Hamer to secure Voting Rights for African Americans, or about Ida B. Wells' leadership in the Women's Suffrage Movement. Too few of us have learned about the efforts of labor leader Asa Philip Randolph who worked alongside Bayard Rustin to organize the March on Washington. Too few of us have read the novels of Octavia Butler, the essays of James Baldwin, the poetry of Gwendolyn Brooks, or the plays of August Wilson. Too few of us know of the mathematical genius of Majorie Lee Browne and Katherine Johnson or the scientific contributions of Joseph Graves and George Carruthers. Instead, the narratives most of us have about Black Americans has led to inaccurate stereotypes, biases and prejudices. Black History Month provides the nation with an opportunity to hear the voices and experiences of people who have historically been oppressed, ignored, marginalized and overlooked in our country.

While Black History Month cannot replace the important work of making our curriculum and pedagogy cultural relevant year round, building authentic relationships with students and colleagues across difference, and ensuring that discipline policies, procedures, and practices are equitable, this month is an excellent opportunity to reflect on where we are as an organization and a nation, and can be a great catalyst for more accurately acknowledging the contributions of African Americans to the United States throughout the year.

Black History Month is not just a time to celebrate Black Americans who have paved the way for us all to thrive, it is also a time to consider how we can create more justice in our daily lives and institutions. How can we help schools become places in which all the students we serve, especially African American students, thrive? How can we make sure that all families, especially those from Black American backgrounds, feel welcome in our classrooms and buildings? How can we support educators from all racial backgrounds in developing their personal knowledge and awareness of the contributions of Black Americans so that they can teach the diverse students they serve more accurately? How can we create office environments in which the people sitting in the cubicle next to us from backgrounds that have historically been marginalized feel valued?

During Black History Month, let us pause and reflect on our own biases, stereotypes, gaps in knowledge, and relationships across racial difference so that we can be leaders in creating an education system in which equity, inclusion, and social justice are at the forefront.

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