

Engaging Black History

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We are more than halfway through Black History Month. According to the Library of Congress, Black History Month has been a federally recognized period of commemoration for Black achievement since 1976. Since its founding many organizations have sought to find ways to celebrate this unique spotlight on the Black experience in America. There are so many dimensions to this experience, it can be approached in a number of ways.

We often see messages of hope and progress that attest to the possibility of real substantive change in our society. Black History Month serves as a reminder of all the barriers that had to be overcome in order for all sectors of American society to be able to live into the ideals of the American dream.

But if we truly take a moment to reflect, we quickly realize that the gravity of the disparities in this country cannot be fully addressed through a optimistic passivity on the subjects that truly matter.

While Black History Month is indeed a time to celebrate the achievements and profound contributions to American society that the Black community has and continues to make, it requires a deeper level of engagement from all other communities in the United States as well.

Black people can continue to do the diligent work of telling their often-omitted history and celebrating the distinctive aspects of their culture but in order to truly have an impact, member of the majority need to take responsibility and commit to being present and advocating for these same stories as well.

Opportunities to take action seem to be at an all-time high. The most important thing to do is just to start. Take a look at those reading lists every publication has been compiling. Look through collections of movies that demonstrate the Black experience. Listen to podcasts that delve into current issues impacting the Black community. Resources are bountiful. It just takes members of the majority that could easily step away from the conversation committing and recommitting themselves to education and allyship in order for the broader spirit of Black History Month to be realized.

Some members of majority feel more comfortable taking the backseat during this time. Afterall it is important the agenda is dominated by the people who typically control it anyways. Yet it is a disservice to people of color everywhere when members of the majority choose not to engage at a time when opportunities to do so are at an all-time high.

Many people don't know where to begin and that's understandable but arguably the most important thing to do is just start. You won't know what information you lack until you begin engaging in the conversation. There are millions of reading list ranging from beginner level materials to the level of those who have been engaging in this conversation for years. There are even some easier ways to start beginning from areas of culture. There is an abundance of movies and podcasts on these subjects. Pick a format and start listening.

To celebrate black history is to step into these spaces where black voices... What stories were not included in history lessons to appease white guilt.

Furthermore look to the ways the community has succeeded amidst all the challenges.

After all, white people can choose when to enter the conversation and when to take a step back. When to offer support and when to choose to prioritize other things. But people of color do not have this option.

We can't just celebrate the progress without recognizing the pain.

Furthermore, we must acknowledge the excellence in black culture. Black culture has contributed so much to what we believe it is to be America. Music, fashion, activism and so much more. A unique community has formed around this identity of blackness. While some of it may seem unfamiliar to us we do ourselves and those around us a disservice when we don't step into that uncomfortably. We ought to consider all the times people of color have felt like outsiders in spaces that cater to white comfort.

It just needs to be unveiled with a little intentionality.