

CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY MONTH

WHY CELEBRATE BLACK HISTORY MONTH?

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The theme for this year's Black History Month Celebration is titled, "Empowering African-American Organizations: Past and Present." The birth of these organizations were made possible due to the courage of those willing to challenge the social, political, and economic norms of the day.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "In any cause that concerns the progress of mankind, put your faith in the non-conformist."

Black History Month is perhaps celebrated for many reasons, though primarily it's a time set aside to reflect on the culture and historical achievements of African-Americans. In addition, it's an alternative way to help fulfill the void in relation to proper exposure of this important seg-

ment of American history.

The study of Black History is credited to Dr. Carter G. Woodson, founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in 1916. In addition, the month is designed to pay tribute to the many events, achievements, and contributions by African-Americans whose historical achievements have often gone without significant notice, in the shaping of America.

It is important to understand that the study of Black history is the study of American history. Black history is a segment of American history most of us were not taught; and to a lesser extent, still aren't taught today in a respectable measure. Though it might seem to some, the celebration of various ethnic history month activities get special attention; let's not forget American Heritage Month, which covers

the study of American history for all Americans.

If you will notice, almost any country or city you might visit, or subject you might begin to study; one of the first things you will be introduced to is the history of that particular country, city or subject.

This is very important, because throughout your journey you will be better prepared to deal with, understand, and appreciate the way things and people operate. This further helps you to evaluate your level of understanding so as to function and make transitions smooth enough that you succeed in your relations with the given place, people or subject.

The celebration of African-American history is a time to set aside our personal hang-ups and prejudices, and place emphasis on the human element; and let

the last years echo and re-echo the struggles of a forgotten people and events that helped to shape the history of America and the world in general. It should be said that no American can understand themselves or their country without a confrontation with the multi-faceted images of the African-American experience.

In order for us to put a course of action in terms of a peaceful future, and deal effectively with the present; it's important to understand the past. It's equally important to understand what was, has a direct impact on what is, and what is to come.

Our society is one of many people, cultures, and ethnic

backgrounds. When the subject of race relations comes to mind we sometimes tend to refer to America as a melting pot. If we examine that phrase closer, we find that frame of thought to be incorrect. In a melting pot the elements lose their originality; thus making up a salad bowl. Most of us would probably agree that the appearance of a salad bowl is much more pleasant than that of a melting pot.

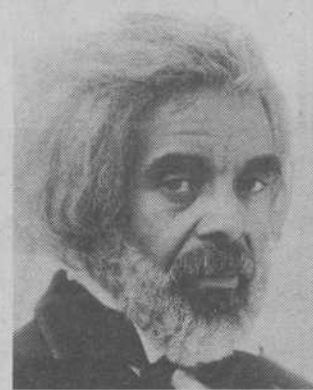
In a salad bowl we can appreciate the individuality of each element, which is part of what the celebration, and sharing of African-American history is all about. An introduction to the study and celebration of African-American history, would not be

complete, without paying tribute to the great leaders of Africa such as Tiye-Nebian Queen of Egypt (1415-1340 B.C.), Queen Amina of Zaria 1588 A.D., Hatshepsut - Queen of far Antiquity, Behanzin Hossu Bowell - King of Shank (1841-1906), Shambo Bolongongo - African King of Peace (1600-1620), Sunai Ali Ber - King of Songhay (1464-1492); all of which were brilliant military exploits and strategists.

Hopefully at the end of this year's Black History Month, you will know something about the historical contributions of Black/African-Americans that you didn't know at the beginning of the month.

Enjoy your journey!

ONE MAN PLAY FEATURING ACTOR FRED MORSELL AS FREDERICK DOUGLASS "PRESENTING MR. FREDERICK DOUGLASS" ON BILL MOYERS' JOURNAL FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 1994, ON PBS



FRED MORSELL

On Friday, February 18, 1994 from 9-10 p.m. on most PBS stations (check local listings), as part of Black History Month, BILL MOYERS' JOURNAL will broadcast the dramatic theatrical performance, "Presenting Mr. Frederick Douglass," featuring the actor Fred Morsell in his acclaimed recreation of the great abolitionist's famous speech on slavery and human rights.

BILL MOYERS' JOURNAL reflects public television's dedication to presenting programs on ideas that expand viewers' horizons.

"Presenting Mr. Frederick

Douglass" preempts the previously-scheduled JOURNAL with Rita Dove, poet laureate of the United States, which will now be aired later in the spring.

The Morsell performance of the Douglass speech will be taped by the Moyers team at the Metropolitan AME Church in Washington, D.C., where Douglass delivered his celebrated last speech, "The Lesson of the Hour," one hundred years ago this January.

With an eloquence and intelligence rarely matched, Douglass became a giant in the struggle against racial justice. He called all Americans of every color to work to fulfill the vision of a just society proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. A noted writer, lecturer of woman's suffrage, Douglass worked for two years to develop the speech he delivered in January 1894, which the Washington Post at the time hailed as "Frederick Douglass's Powerful Plea for the Rights of the Negro." Douglass died one year later.

Fred Morsell has been described as the foremost interpreter of Douglass's life and work in American history. A professional actor of the past 25 years, Morsell has performed in regional theaters in the title roles of MacBeth and Othello. His television work includes the role of Douglass in the CBS Bicentennial production, We, the Women, as well as appearances on Hill Street Blues, L.A. Law, Scarecrow and Mrs. King, and soaps such as General Hospital and One Life to Live. Morsell is a lyric baritone and has sung leading roles in 21 operas.

In 1984, a black clergyman friend, dismayed by the drug culture surrounding the children of Southwest Los Angeles, asked Fred Morsell to help develop an alternative school program to give students hope and self-respect. Morsell decided to start reading Frederick Douglass's word to children "to see if they could do with their lives what Mr. Douglass did with his." Since that time, Morsell has become a scholar on Douglass. He tours the country with programs for elementary, middle and high school students, performs his one-man two-act play, Presenting Mr. Frederick Douglass, for colleges, civic groups, churches and regional theaters.

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