

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Black History Month slowly losing its blackness

Black History month is becoming increasingly non-black. That's reason for joy and agony, at the same time.

The fact that more people of all ethnicities are getting involved in Black History Month activities and working to learn more about the innumerable contributions of African-Americans is a welcoming development.

For too long, other races have tip-toed around black history, choosing to honor those African-American leaders who are widely accepted among the general populace. Mainstream black leaders have always been more palatable to the masses. They could easily be packaged and repackaged to fit America's view of what a black leader should be.

Black leaders — and yes they were and are leaders — such as Malcolm X, Louis Farrakhan, Al Sharpton and others don't fit the easy-to-mold mold and thus their efforts have been largely sidelined to the bench while other leaders get to call the plays and supposedly speak for 36 million African-Americans. (Some people still think we're monolithic).

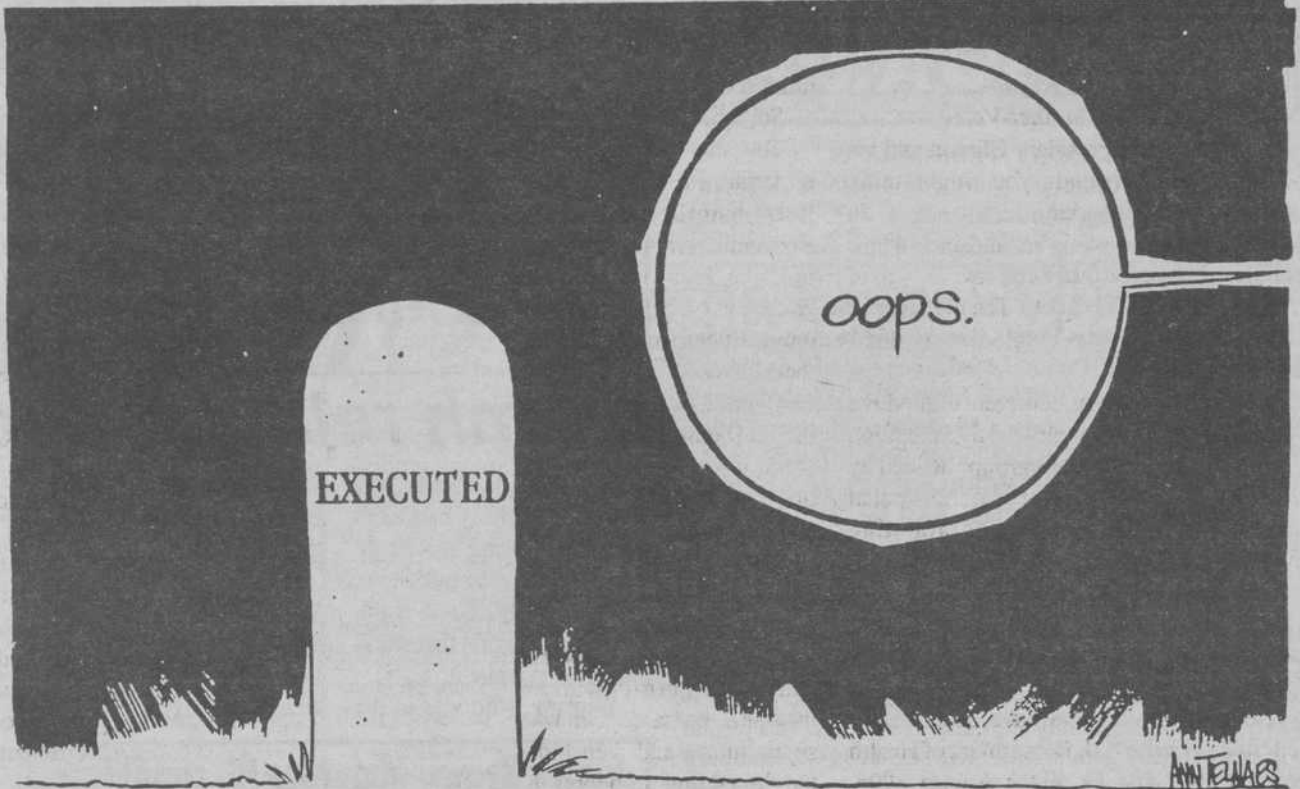
That other races are embracing black history signifies progress. They're making an effort to learn about us. That's a big step considering that human beings fear what they don't know and many fear black people.

Black history is en vogue now. It's cool to know about Jan Metzger inventing a shoe-lasting machine; it's hip to know that Charles R. Drew discovered the lifesaving technique of blood plasma transfer — the forerunner of blood transfusions — its kosher to talk about the how Buffalo Soldiers got their names and of their heroic exploits in saving future president Theodore Roosevelt in the battle on San Juan Hill, or how the Tuskegee Airman never lost a plane on any mission.

It's not cool, however, to have people of other ethnicities taking more stock in Black History Month than we do. More and more, non-blacks are the ones participating in local Black History Month celebrations. That's to be applauded. That more blacks aren't showing up is a shame. Soon, other ethnicities will know more about black history than we do.

It's a trend already prevalent in the billion-dollar rap music industry. More than 90 percent of rappers signed to labels are black. White youth are the main consumers of hip-hop music. Ditto for sports apparel. It's not uncommon to see children of all hues sporting Michael Jordan jerseys. Clothing from black-owned companies and designers dress millions of non-black youth. Black History Month could soon follow in the same path. In some academic circles, more and more white authors are writing about problems plaguing black America.

It's time for blacks to wake up. If we keep going at this pace, Black History Month won't even be ours.



The strongest argument against capital punishment

Black history incomplete without telling economic story

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

During this, our month of Black history, we will be deluged with the images and sounds of our people as they struggled to win their freedom.

We will revisit, via our television sets and dominant print media, the stories of how we have come so far and are still striving to "overcome."

We will hear tales of a people who, despite the tremendous odds they faced, fought and died for the right to vote, to eat in the restaurants of others, and to sit where they pleased on any bus. I am sure we will hear many speeches, take more pop quizzes on Black inventors, memorialize the Underground Railroad and watch Shaka Zulu a few times.

A recent report on National Public Radio informed us of a musical being planned in Bridgeport, Conn., I think it was. It is titled "Hang Him From A Tree" — maybe it's a take-off of Lady Day's Strange Fruit — and covers the gamut of Black history. As one of the White performers said in an interview, it features the parts of history that make some of us angry and others "uncomfortable."

Oddly, this play is billed as an event that will help bring the races together, especially because of its mixed cast of Blacks and whites. Why can't we bring the races together with business deals and economic development? It's always about "talking" rather

than doing.

We had "dialogues on race" last year and we continue to have conversations on race all over the country as we desperately attempt to mend the torn racial fabric of the United States. With all that we have done and all we will do this month, we should be well on our way to fixing this "race" problem we face. I hope we do.

But I say, enough of the condescending commercials, the same tired euphemisms, the weak attempts to regurgitate one aspect of Black history, and the concentration throughout the month on merely feel-good vignettes and "what we should do" scenarios.

How about some Black history like the spot I heard on WCIN Radio in Cincinnati recently in which actor Dorian Harewood featured a little known Black man who advocated self-help and business development. His name was Martin Delany. Now that's Black history.

I want our children to hear about Black men and women who showed us the way to economic self-sufficiency. I want them to know more about our people than I knew when I was growing up and attending school.

They should not only learn about slavery and civil rights, they should be very familiar with Mary McLeod Bethune, S.B. Fuller, Madam C.J. Walker, Anthony Overton, Phillip Payton, Isaiah T. Montgomery and A.G. Gaston.

I also want them to know

about Cincinnati's famous Black entrepreneur, Horace Sudduth, whose daughter I had the pleasure of meeting and having lunch with recently. Sudduth served as the president of the National Negro Business League in the 1940s and 1950s.

We must not continue to allow the telling of our history with omissions of the economic strides Black people made. Our history is an array of achievements, rich in progress and milestones. It is a full-feature documentary of economic enterprise. We must tell the complete story and not be lulled to sleep by tales of woe and racism, the "can't we all get along" mantra of Rodney King, the drum beating and dancing, and the commercialization of Black History Month by those merely interested in ripping off another Black dollar.

Tell your children about our forefathers and mothers who built towns, opened banks and insurance companies, established colleges, sold and developed real estate, started beauty and

barber shops, funeral parlors and built hotels.

Talk to them about the great Black men and women who took the risks and built wealth in their communities. They were brave souls too. If you have not heard of these and the many other Black economic pioneers, make Black History Month a time of reading and learning about these men and women. Then teach your children. They need business role models too.

Let's define our own history. Tell the whole story. Then let's take that glorious history of ours and make our ancestors proud by not only remembering and celebrating their accomplishments but also by emulating their spirit of economic self-help. If they could do all they did in their day, just imagine the possibilities we have in ours.

Remember: Black business is Black history too.

James Clingman, Jr. is the founder and executive director of the Greater Cincinnati African-American Chamber of Commerce.

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