

Greetings Beloved,

This month is considered Black History month. Some may wonder why do we have an entire month dedicated to Black History? Some may even wonder why the entire month of February is allocated for the celebration? And some may even think that this is something that is divisive, and some have mistakenly labeled it as being racist. Black History month or National African American month is an annual celebration to honor the achievements made by Black Americans who have shaped the course of American History. It's also a time of remembrance and reflection of where our African American culture started, where we've been, what we've been through, and where we are today. It helps to remind us of the discrimination African Americans have endured and the continuous struggle against the remnants of slavery, segregation, and racial legacy. So how did we get to this point of having a Black History celebration for the month of February? In 1915, Dr. Carter G. Woodson founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History mainly because of the dearth of information on the accomplishments of African Americans. About a decade later, Woodson's group sponsored a National Negro History week, and they selected the second week of February to coincide with the birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln. The event started to inspire schools and communities nationwide which also led to local celebrations, establishing history clubs, and host performances and lectures. In 1976, President Gerald R. Ford officially recognized the entire month of February as Black History Month. He called upon all Americans to take the opportunity to honor many of the too often neglected accomplishments of African Americans in every aspect throughout our history. Since then, every American President has endorsed a specific theme for Black History Month. In 2021, the theme for Black History Month was "The Black Family: Representation, Identity, and Diversity." This year's 2022 theme is "Black Health and Wellness." This theme acknowledges the legacy of not only Black Scholars and Medical Practitioners in Western medicine, but also acknowledging the many contributions made by African American medical pioneers both past and present. James McCune Smith (1813-1865) was the first Black American to receive a medical degree, the first black person to own and operate a pharmacy in the United States, and the first black physician to be published in U.S. Medical Journals. Charles Richard Drew (1904-1950) who is known as the "Father of blood banking" because he was the one who pioneered blood preservation techniques that led to thousands of lifesaving blood donations. He also led the first American Red Cross Blood Bank and created mobile blood donation stations that are now known as bloodmobiles. Patricia Era Bath (1942-2019) who was the first African American to complete an Ophthalmology Residency in the 1960's. She noticed that the rates of blindness and visual impairment were much higher at the Harlem Hospital's Eye Clinic. She then conducted a study that determined that the rate of blindness among African Americans was twice the amount compared to whites. She became the first African American Woman Doctor to receive a patent for a medical invention. She discovered a method for removing cataract lenses when she transformed eye surgery using a laser device making the procedure more accurate. This new technique is called the "Cataract Laserphaco Probe", many people refer to it as "Laser Cataract Surgery." These great African Americans are just a few of a long list of brilliant people who have made huge contributions throughout our history that many of us take for granted. Of course we know about great leaders like the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., W.E.B. DuBois, Rosa Parks, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Sojourner Truth. We admire great poets and authors like Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou. We salute influential athletes like Jackie Robinson, Muhammed Ali, Althea Gibson, Jesse Owens, Wilma Rudolph, and Jim Brown who not only broke the color barricade but also stood against injustice. All of these people had something in common – they all wanted to abolish institutional racial segregation, discrimination, and disenfranchisement throughout the United States. In looking back at everything we've been through in comparison to where we are now, it's pretty obvious that there is still some mountains to climb, some roads to be traveled, and some bridges to cross. The leaders of the past have done all they can do, so the bigger question is left to

be answered by us who are still here. What will you do to make a difference? Here are some quotes in "blue" from the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King that can help us move forward:

As a Pastor I can't help but think about what we can do to make this world a better place? "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'" There will be times in which I will have to stand up for what I know is right because "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy." We must continue to work even when things don't seem to go our way and understand that our plan can be overridden by God's plan. "We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope." Remember that love gives us the power to conquer all things. "Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend." So keep the Faith understanding that "Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase." In everything that you do, make sure you do your best, to be your best, because that's who God created you to be. "If you can't fly then run, if you can't run then walk, if you can't walk then crawl, but whatever you do you have to keep moving forward." And don't forget to give God all the Glory!!

Black History Month is an integral part of history and our Nation's tradition. Let us continue to promote positive examples of historical events, exemplary leaders, and continued steps towards societal change. The remembrance of great African Americans and their contributions is not only deeply meaningful for the African American community, but the celebration is imperative for the greater understanding of both United States history as well as World history.

The "Dreamer" lost his life, let's make sure that the "Dream" continues to live.

Respectfully submitted,

Pastor Mark R. Claiborne, Sr.