

# BLACK HISTORY CELEBRATION

by LINA SALEH

“Some people have said that the country doesn’t need a black history month, but black people have gone so unrecognized through so many parts of history that it’s kind of their only chance to be remembered,” sophomore Andrea Kimpson said. “Having this one month to recognize these figures in history and politics is just so important to me personally to see these people appreciated.”

With the calendar’s entrance into February, thoughts of Groundhogs bursting from the dirt to predict the seasons, red hearts and roses for romance, and presidential history all come to mind when thinking can about the second month of the year here in the United States. However, surrounding these little day events is the overarching month-long holiday known as Black History Month, a celebration dedicated to focusing on the accomplishments of black individuals throughout history.

For Kimpson, Black History Month has always captured her excitement for celebration.

“For me being a black person, Black History Month has always held significance in my life,” Kimpson explained. “I went to a predominately black preschool, so we always had that emphasis on learning about black history, and I’ve just always been accustomed to celebrating it through February.”

The concept of Black History Month first originated in 1926, when the Association for the Study of African American Life and History began to sponsor a national African American history week, choosing the second week of February in order to coincide with the birthdays of both Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass.

Since the 1970s, this recognition of the holiday has evolved in school education. However, while many of us remember Black History Month through its annual themed lessons in the classroom, some students have found that this celebration of black historical figures doesn’t quite reach good educational standards.

“They tell us the exact same stories every year,” sophomore Allison Louderbough said. “Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks; that’s all I really know. There’s a lot more stories out there that I don’t even know because they don’t teach it.”

“Every February, I look forward to celebrating great black leaders, but I think it just gets overlooked,” junior Noah Boykin explained, commenting on black history in schools.

While Louderbough and Boykin can still find appreciation for the holiday, students like senior Drayon Morant question the good behind Black History Month.

“The month in and of itself is benevolent and good, but I don’t think it should be a separate month,” Morant commented. “If you have to have a month to celebrate an entire race of people and the sacrifices they made, I feel like it just kind of diminishes the point.”

The importance of celebrating the sacrifices made by black figures for the good of the African American community, Morant explained, becomes hidden and more difficult to understand when the entirety of the holiday is fitted within one month.

“Because it’s in one month and not spread out throughout the year, you can’t appreciate all of the sacrifices and all of the history,” Morant said.

Alongside Morant and Louderbough, Kimpson agreed with their beliefs of a lack of integration of black history throughout the entirety of the school year, and a lack of attention toward certain stories.

“I do personally feel like there needs to be more integration of black figures from prominent historical events,” Kimpson said. “Like recently, my family and I went



South Carolinians walk through the streets of downtown Columbia on Martin Luther King Day 2017 in remembrance of Dr. King and in support of civil rights.

to go see the Hidden Figures movie, and I have to admit that I had no idea that there were black people, let alone black women, working at NASA at the time.”

Hidden Figures, a movie released in late 2016, depicts the story of three African American women who worked under NASA in the 1960s as human computers to calculate by hand the mathematical equations that would allow for astronauts to safely travel through the atmosphere. Based off a nonfiction book of the same name written by Margot Lee Shetterly, the widespread success of the film adaptation revealed the long-standing obscurity of these women who worked as hidden figures in the space program, and continue to be such in history.

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SOPHOMORE**

“I had no idea,” Kimpson remarked about the film. “I had never heard their names and I never got to learn about them. The thing is that I learned about NASA in school, we learned about the space program, the space race, how it started, and how they got people on the moon, but I never heard anything about those women.”

For Louderbough, this lack of attention toward certain stories within Black History Month reveals a deeper issue in how schools discuss black history education.

“It’s just that there are so many people out there that have done so much for black history, and they don’t get recognized at all, and I don’t think that’s fair,” Louderbough said. This undermining of stories within black history, Louderbough explained, isn’t helped when schools choose to only glorify a few figures during the short time they have to discuss black history at length.

This glorification of certain individuals, Morant argues, isn’t something that’s meant to happen in the

celebration of Black History Month, but seems to occur anyway.

“People take out what they want from history, including black history, to celebrate, but sometimes they forget about the smaller persons,” Morant said. “But I don’t think everyone’s accomplishments can be celebrated if you do it that way, so the best solution is really to just not glorify anyone so we can just celebrate the accomplishments and milestones and sacrifices as a whole.”

By focusing on black history as whole without using February as a starting point, Morant explained, the history might be better celebrated in the long run.

“I prefer not to have the month, since it just can’t focus on everything important about black history, so I think rather than it being a separate month, it should just be something we celebrate every day,” Morant said.

Along with Morant, Kimpson agreed that the placement of black history into one consolidated month does make it more difficult to remember and honor in the months outside of February. “I feel like people tend to forget that black history continues throughout the year,” Kimpson said. “It’s just something that requires a deep self reflection within the country of how we respect African Americans in what happened in the past.”

However, in slight opposition to Morant, Kimpson argued that for all its drawbacks, Black History Month serves a necessary role within schools. “I don’t feel like it limits where you can explore black history, but I feel like it does limit the amount we decide to study and learn about.”

“It’s a good thing to have a month designated for it, but I still feel like it should be recognized all year long,” Boykin commented. “We just have to remember that it’s not just about one month, it’s about a continuation of things that have happened.”

While the expansion of black history within education and the importance of remembering stories of African American individuals is not something to be taken lightly or crammed into a single month, the recognition behind the events is something that can be appreciated by all throughout February and beyond the designated month.

“Black History Month isn’t just for black history,” Boykin said. “It’s for everybody.”

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