

Black Man's History

An 'Unfinished Story'

By CONSTANCE L. ROBERTS

Special to the Globe-Times

Mrs. Roberts, wife of R. Wakefield Roberts, executive director of the Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley, teaches vocal music at Northeast Junior High School. She has received the Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce Community Service Award as a member of the "Know Your Neighbor Panel," and is a graduate of Howard University.

During this week in America, schools, churches, communities, newspaper, magazines, television and radio will be telling some part of the "unfinished story" of the black man in America.

From Feb. 7 through Feb. 14, the nation will observe Black (Negro or African - American) History Week and white as well as black folk will acknowledge that in all history, black men and women played an important role.

Blacks will tell whites that the debt owed to black Americans has not been paid for all the tears and blood which helped build this powerful nation. Many say, "But look around you — aren't things better today?"

The black man will answer — *** better than what?** The black man can go further and ask — "Better than what — or how much better?" Such an observance this week is a conscious recognition of how far the black man has come, and an evaluation of what direction he feels he must go. Black people know that not being a slave is better than yesterday. Those who are employed know that they are "better - off" than their brothers. Those who look around at the poverty and illiteracy which continue to plague our society does not make today totally better than yesterday.

Black children saw Martin Luther King Jr. assassinated the same as white children saw John F. Kennedy and Robert Kennedy assassinated. We have all been living witness to the division of black and white which has cursed this nation and continues to cast its ugly head whenever we least expect.

We can no longer pay lip service to this observance named Black History Week; we must now make a commitment, lasting and profound. The many who pioneered in the early struggle deserve better. Those



CONSTANCE L. ROBERTS

who paid their dues are — Frederick Douglass, Carter G. Woodson, Booker T. Washington, W. E. DuBois, Benjamin Banneker, Denmark Vessey, Chrispus Attucks, Deborah Bannett, Harriet Tubman, Phyllis Wheatley, Daniel Hale Williams, Mary McLeod Bethune, Matthew A. Henson, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, William C. Handy, The 369th Infantry Regiment, Black Civil War Soldiers, World War I and II Soldiers and Those who more recently died in the Vietnam Conflict. (War)

Now in the year 1972 we look back and view other prominent leaders who have parted this life in the current struggle which deems no less significance as those who fought for freedom and equally important Human dignity for over 300 years.

Human dignity is what "Black is beautiful" is all about. Youth today do hold the answer. They're more cognizant of heritage and they are demanding the right to know. Black History Week means setting American History straight and giving every black child the right, through public education, to know his heritage.

The recent seat quietly emptied in the arena of the life struggle was Whitney Young, who only a year ago expressed a dream he felt would pull this nation together.

Since that time the strength and tireless effort of Ralph Bunche was subdued by death on Dec. 9, 1971. These two will long be remembered because

the news media placed these man for all to see today. Many black children will never know their forerunners who contributed to the sequel of drama in events of American History.

Black children for years have studied American history omitting figures of black prominence. They have celebrated George Washington and Abraham Lincoln's birthdays as loyal citizens and never once questioned until today — "Where were our black brothers in the gigantic development of this country?"

The concept of recognizing our part in history is the original format for such an observance. Today the poets and the writers, too numerous to mention, have remedied only a part of this plight. We no longer need just one week in the year to call attention to the prominence of black men and women in the daily course of events.

Black men and women are for the first time — "Telling It Like It Is." The black youth of today are taking pages from history of the black men and women of yesterday. To be black and "proud" strips away stereo-typing and name - calling.

Many have accepted the fact that full equality of all "black brothers" is not being made easy. * They have accepted the fact that bad schools are better than no schools. They are beginning to see a world outside of their meager existence where they find themselves and hopefully they are reaching out, for something better.

Why Black History Week?

Carter G. Woodson was 22 years old before he completed high school. His family had a little money and he had to portion time for schooling along with work as a coal miner. He could have become a school teacher (in his day) and earned modest living with respect and standing in the community. But for Woodson, high school was just a start. He went on to little Berea College in Kentucky, travelled north to the University of Chicago and finally earned his doctor of philosophy degree from Harvard University in 1912.

In a year when black Americans were just 50 years out of actual slavery, Dr. Carter G. Woodson was a man who firmly believed that "the achievements of the Negro, properly set forth, will crown him as a factor to early human progress and a maker of modern

Esther:

I wrote this back in 1972 and it reflects how much more is needed for U.S. Do you remember this? (clg)

That year was 1915 and Woodson immediately demonstrated the courage of his convictions by founding the Assn. for the Study of Negro Life and History. Woodson's organization, still in existence today as the African - American Historical Assn., became strong, upright, the backbone of scholarly black history from the African beginning to the space age.

A year after founding the association, Woodson started the Journal of Negro History, a monthly publication still used by scholars all over the world and in 1937 he founded the Negro History Bulletin, a publication that is widely read by laymen interested in black history.

In addition to editing the publications and directing the association, Dr. Woodson was an assiduous scholar and a prolific writer in his own right, authoring dozens of books and countless articles.

Dr. Carter G. Woodson initiated Negro History Week in 1926 and selected the period in February that encompassed the birthdays of famed abolitionist, orator, and civil rights leader Frederick Douglass (Feb. 14) and Abraham Lincoln (Feb. 12) — also the day of the founding in 1909 of the NAACP).

Black History Week is a time when we must do something for ourselves for it has proven that no one else will do for us.

As black people — we are saying — "We, too, are Americans."

As black people — we are saying — "We are black and we are proud."

As black people — "We have helped build this nation — so let's tell it."

As black people — "We shall continue to build this nation toward a better and stronger nation for all Americans."