

Black History Month is outliving its usefulness: Phillip Morris

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By **Phillip Morris, The Plain Dealer**

It's time to think about canceling Black History Month.

Just how many more decades of racially segregated Februaries dedicated to remembering an imperfect nation must we commemorate? Just how much longer will we allow the shortest month to divide rather than unite?

When will we have reached the point where black history will simply be recognized as American history? And why can't African-Americans lead the charge to make February the most introspective month of the year - a time for comprehensive reflection upon a shared history?

Carter G. Woodson's idea of a Negro History week in 1926 was dedicated to exploring the history of the African Diaspora and imbuing a race with pride. It was a stroke of genius from both a public relations and academic perspective. It helped launch a curriculum of African and African-American studies that filled in many of the harmful and dangerous gaps that were deliberately left out of the portrait of American history.

Woodson's foresight 83 years ago this month helped changed the way the Negro viewed himself and, in turn, the way the rest of America viewed the Negro.

Woodson's work undoubtedly also helped lay the groundwork that gave America the courage and conviction to politically groom and elect President Barack Obama, less than 150 years from the end of slavery.

But now that we've reached this crowning point in our history, are we mature enough as a nation to accept as fact that our histories really are one -- and have always been one?

Can we begin to identify those things -- real or ceremonial -- that racially divide and work to systematically eliminate them?

Can we agree that our children will no longer be shielded from the graphic abominations of the past, just as emerging scholars and educators will be uninterested in hiding the tremendous social advances of the present?

At what juncture then does Black History Month run the risk of becoming a pointless exercise in race chest bumping? At what point does the celebration - or sustained memorial -- become any less acceptable than a national white history month?

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Working on a redefinition of black history month seems to make the same kind of profound sense.

Just how many more black history Februaries do we need?