

KIMBERLY SPURLOCK

Study black history—all year

This week will mark the end of Black History Month. It marks the end of most black-oriented events on campus and television specials. It also marks the end of most class lectures, or "Eyes on the Prize" documentaries about blacks.



If we were taught in school that there were, and still are, famous black scientists and inventors, then there truly would be no need for a Black History Month.

The end of February marks the end of the 28 days that blacks have been allotted to celebrate their African heritage and contributions to America.

Many people applaud the final days of Black History Month, a month that some think should be used for something better than celebrating the accomplishments of blacks.

Some people ask why there's no White History Month.

I tell you what, we are willing to satisfy those whites who may feel this way.

We'll give you February, and you give us March through January, OK? Cool. Now everybody's happy, right?

I question the reasons for Black History Month celebrations, but for different reasons than those mentioned above.

Does the United States use this month as a way of saying "Look, we gave you one month, the shortest at that, to celebrate your African heritage. What more could you ask for?"

Do we have Black History Month so college lecturers can ask their students to attend one black or minority-oriented program?

Do we have Black History Month so people can feel good about themselves for taking the time out of their schedules to attend an event?

I'm not saying attending these functions is bad, or everyone who does is doing so for the wrong reasons. But we must understand that even 365 days is not enough time to rejoice and celebrate the gifts African Americans brought to and continue to bring to the United States.

I do not disapprove of a Black History Month celebration, but many people, including blacks, use Febru-

ary as the only time to celebrate black history.

Black history should be celebrated every day, not just on special occasions — it is a part of American history.

I recognize the contributions that my African-American ancestors gave to this country are rarely spoken of within our educational system. This is one reason we have a Black History Month.

If we were taught in school that there were, and still are, famous black scientists and inventors, then there truly would be no need for a Black History Month.

It is important to know, especially as a child, that there are people who look like you who helped to build this country. If children only see people who don't look like them doing something worthwhile in history books — who discovered a life-saving cure for a disease or contributed to the well-being of our society — how are they going to truly believe that they too can do accomplish great things?

I applaud anyone who takes the time to learn about the history of blacks during Black History Month, but those who do so only during February and not year round, get a failing grade in my book.

If you really want to learn about black history, take the time to do so on your own throughout the year and not just when the United States reminds us that it is now time to celebrate achievements of blacks in America.

There are many black Americans

that could be included in text books, for example:

● George Washington Carver, developer of instant coffee, ink, shampoo and soaps made from peanut oil.

● Dr. Charles Drew, pioneer of blood plasma preservation. Ironically, he died of a car accident because he was refused entry into a white hospital; he needed a blood transfusion.

● Lewis Latimer, inventor of the electric light bulb. He also made the plans for Alexander Graham Bell's telephone patent.

● Garrett Morgan, inventor of the automatic traffic signal and gas masks used by firemen and soldiers in war.

● G.F. Grant, inventor of the golf tee. Isn't it ironic that blacks weren't and still aren't allowed in some golf clubs?

● Elijah McCoy, inventor of the first automatic lubricator, which allowed small amounts of oil to continuously trickle onto the moving parts of operating machines. Anyone owning this automatic lubricating device boasted about having "the real McCoy." This phrase still signifies genuine quality.

If you have a chance to learn more about another culture or your own culture — if you know little about it, do so. It will only help you understand and appreciate those cultures better.

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DEB MCADAMS

Grandma struggled, survived

I was four or five years old when my Kansas grandma died. I'd never been to a funeral before I went to hers. Nothing compares to the desolation of a funeral on the windy Kansas plains. I suddenly understood death that day, as Kansas grandma was lowered into a rectangle of darkness. I began to scream that I would never see her again. An unfamiliar lady in a navy blue suit pulled me close to her while I realized that truth.



I don't know what my Kansas grandma was made of, but it was something that endured the despair of the Great Depression without drugs, alcohol, welfare checks or much hope.

I never saw Kansas grandma again, except for the few images I retained from a child's memory. Those few images grow more valuable as I get older.

I remember the way she worked and lived while I knew her. One of the last places she lived was a small basement apartment with cold floors. Up until the last time she went into the hospital, she grill-cooked in a high-way diner. Once, when we went to see her there, she made bunny pancakes for my brother and me. I didn't want her to be working. My other grandma didn't have to go to work every day.

I don't remember seeing Kansas grandma smile. I remember the terrible veins on her legs. I didn't understand that she was poor.

My father always said we were poor, although he generally paid cash for new cars. I've since learned it was my mother who knew what it meant to be poor.

Mom was Kansas grandma's second baby, born in a boxcar beneath a coal chute in 1923. Her daddy was half-Cherokee. Kansas wasn't a generous state for any non-white person in 1923, and half-Indian was about the worst thing to be. Grandpa abandoned the family a few years after my mom was born.

Kansas grandma took her oldest daughter to live with a relative and kept my mom with her. They traveled from small town to small town, cleaning and cooking for people who could

pay them or feed them.

Years later, my mom would still say, "We may be poor, but we're not dirty."

My mother left Kansas when she was 17 and headed for the West Coast. A photo of her from 1941 hangs above my desk. She was a tiny, dark-eyed beauty in an ocelot-trimmed, green silk suit, with the hands of a woman who had scrubbed floors for 20 years.

My mother expected me to work when I was a young girl. I cleaned house, ironed clothes, snapped beans and gathered eggs. I carried dams and set tubes in the field. I cut fabric in the store she managed. I got my first paycheck when I was 11. It was \$18. I spent it on shoes.

Looking back on hard times is inversely romantic to being there. I felt abused. None of my friends had to work as much as I did. After 30 years, I figured out that my mother gave me the life she dreamed of when she was a child. It wasn't perfect, but there was a bed and hot food in the same place every night.

She doesn't talk about the past unless I insist, which I rarely do. I can see in her eyes the memories of a part-Cherokee child who beat rugs for the smug wives of small-town businessmen.

My mother is now a tiny, grey-haired beauty, living in an aging, six-room farmhouse on the edge of the Platte Valley. Most people probably see her as a bashful, simple housewife, but she is mythic. The obstacles

in her life were formidable, and it's nothing short of a miracle that laugh lines crease her face.

Sometimes, when I grow discouraged comparing my life to others' lives, I remember I can't simply look and know the measure of their success. Some people may better hold their lives together cleaning floors than others who buy and sell the floors. I know there are some grand dames flipping pancakes in this world.

I don't know what my Kansas grandma was made of, but it was something that endured the despair of the Great Depression without drugs, alcohol, welfare checks or much hope. She married wayward men and raised five children. She worked very hard for very little up until a few days before I watched the earth consume her body.

Her life was a fight, a constant struggle with fatigue and poverty. It was never connected to some greater battle against oppression or racism. No one marched or protested on her behalf. No cheering crowds ever acknowledged her daily triumph over the chronic pain that came with working too hard.

She wasn't considered a success. She never had a house, a new car, a string of pearls or a fur. She didn't go to college or travel. She lived, she worked and she died. I hope I'm half the woman she was.

McAdams is a junior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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