



Week of January 29, 2018

From The Desk of Mayor Don Ryan

Fresh on the heels of celebrating the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., perhaps our most famous African-American, February marks the start of Black History Month. The concept of Black History Month was first conceived by Carter G. Woodson in 1929. Mr. Woodson was born to slave parents in 1875 and neither could read or write. To help his family, Carter worked to earn money and as a result, did not begin school until later than most children.

But a late start did not deter this ambitious young man. He continued with his education and became a high school teacher. Disappointed that none of his students went on to teach the history of black Americans, Mr. Woodson established the American Negro Academy to study the myriad of accomplishments that were achieved by black people. On February 19, 1929, Woodson established "Negro History Week", chosen because it included the birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln. In 1976, the month-long celebration was implemented and thus was born Black History Month.

In nearly every field there have been significant accomplishments by black men and women. From science to art to government to education to athletics, we have seen so many African Americans flourish in their fields.

For instance, Daniel Hale Williams performed the world's first successful open heart surgery without the use of anesthesia in 1893. In 1958 Alvin Ailey founded the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater Company, which was the first modern dance troupe to perform in the Metropolitan Opera House. And who could forget Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald and countless others? These talented musicians brought a new light to jazz as we know it. Not to mention that Ms. Fitzgerald was the first African-American to win a Grammy music award.

In politics, Thurgood Marshall was the first African-American to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court from 1967 to 1991, and Shirley Chisolm was the first African-American woman to serve in the U.S. Congress from 1969 to 1982. And of course in 2009, Barack Obama became the first African-American president in U.S. History.

As far back as the 1800's in education, Charlotte E. Ray was the first black woman lawyer in the United States, as well as the first to argue before a District Supreme Court in Washington, D.C. John Mercer Langston was the first black man to become a lawyer when he passed the Ohio bar in 1854. Langston went on to serve as the Dean of Howard University, where he also founded the law department.

In athletics, Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in major league baseball in 1947, and in 1949 was the first black man to receive the National League's Most Valuable Player Award. And could we mention athletics without mentioning the likes of Hank Aaron, Michael Jordan and our own local basketball great Dr. "J" Julius Erving, just to name a few? I think not.

There are so many accomplishments that African-Americans have made in so many areas. And we have only touched the tip of the iceberg. I encourage all residents of Hempstead Village to pay tribute to Black History Month by educating yourselves about the numerous contributions that black men and women have made to American society. Better yet, take some time to participate in some of the activities that will be held in and around our Village in recognition of Black History Month. Details about some of those events will be covered in next week's column.

Sincerely,

Don

Don Ryan
Mayor of the Incorporated Village of Hempstead