



In The Name Of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

المعهد الإسلامي في تورنتو

Islamic Institute of Toronto

Education for Virtuous Living

Why Black History Month?

Another February has come upon us with its shorter days and colder weather. Strangely enough, this month has been designated as “Black History Month”, a time to focus on the lost history of African people in the Western Countries.

The idea of Black History Month can be traced to the Great Migration of the early 20th century, during which millions of African people from the South of the United States and the Southern Hemisphere moved to the northern cities of the USA, Canada and Europe hoping for better job opportunities. This mass migration was extremely significant to the growth and development of a number of these large urban areas yet it is rarely spoken of.

For this reason, Carter G. Woodson, the Black American Historian, was one the most significant educators of the 20th century. He’s often referred to as “The Father of Black History.” There was very little interest in Black history before Carter G. Woodson. Many of the historians of the 19th century and early 20th century left African Americans out, and those who included them in their history books distorted facts and included many untruths. What people refer to as the modern Black history movement was begun by Woodson in 1915, when he created the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, which is now called the [Association for the Study of African American Life and History](#).

African Americans, many of whom had never been allowed to read and write during slavery, had not been known for maintaining family records, so many people couldn’t produce documents to prove that they had made important contributions to society. Woodson set about to direct them, then he encouraged newspapers to write about significant African Americans. He believed racial discrimination would be lessened when whites and other races



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realized that African Americans also made contributions to the world. He believed there was only one history, but he had to settle for promoting black history until he could get blacks included in the other books. In his most famous book, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* [1933], he attacked the black middle class and educated Black elite for adopting white values and attitudes, and he attacked Black colleges. After slavery, most of the Black colleges had White presidents, and they were slow to include Black history in their curricula even after they got Black presidents. Woodson caused a revolution in the teaching of Black history on college campuses and Black Americans took to the streets after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. Today, there is a Black Studies department on most college campuses, the government of the United States declared Black History Month in 1976 and even the Government of Canada proclaimed Black History Month in 1975! You didn't have those before Woodson.

Although Islam is a way of life that strongly condemns racism and discrimination, Muslim people have not always lived up to that high standard. In the time of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) himself, racism reared its ugly head but the standards were too high and justice was being implemented. In later generations, tribalism and discrimination appeared at different points in time and scholars had to stand up to defend Islamic teachings. Here are some of the anti-racist works that were written by well known authors in defense of the dignity and rights of Black African people:

- Abu Uthman ibn Bahr Al-Kinaani Al-Jahiz: “The Preferences of Blacks over Whites”.
- Abu Abbas Ali ibn Muhammad Al-Anbar: “The Merits of Blacks over Whites”.
- Abu Bakr ibn Khalaf Al-Baghdadi ibn Al-Marzubaan: “The Book of the Sudan (Land of the Blacks) and their Merits over the Whites”.
- Abu Muhammad Jafar ibn Ahmad ibn As-Siraj Al-Qari: “The Merits of Black People”.



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- Abu Al-Farj Abdur-Rahman ibn Al-Jawzi: “Illuminating the Darkness concerning the Virtues of Black People and Abyssinians”.
 - Jalal-ud-Deen As-Suyooti: “Raising the Status of the Abyssinians”.

These powerful rebuttals would not have been necessary if there were not glaring prejudice and racism in the writings and dealings of the Muslims of their times. Therefore, it is critical for all Muslims and people of sensitivity to the needs of our age to recognize that the scourge of racism is not gone but alive and well. Ignorance and fear are being used to divide people based on color, ethnicity and tribe. This month is at least some reminder that solutions do exist through seeking knowledge of true history and making it available to our youth.

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