

More black history is needed in the classroom

February marks the one month where people are encouraged to educate themselves on black history and the impact that black people have had on American society.

Using Black History Month as a way to introduce the history of black Americans is a good idea.

But as teenagers, it's time to realize that those little snippets are not enough. The lessons need to go more in depth. Black history extends further than just slavery and the Civil Rights Movement.

Black people have contributed far too much for their history and background to be condensed into and represented only by the likes of Harriet Tubman and Martin Luther King Jr.

Because of this, many teachers have tried different tactics at introducing black history in their classes.

"There are many black countries that speak Arabic, so I plan on playing some music from those countries and talking about that for a culture unit," Arabic teacher Ola Layaly said. "I'm also sponsoring different types of cultures for Heritage Night this year."

"I teach mostly ESOL students, so I try to include black history facts here and there," World History teacher Ashley Senior said. "Especially since most of my students have never heard about it. I'll try to give a worksheet about black history as a warm up."

But forcing these lessons isn't the right way to do it. An abrupt lesson is just awkward and leaves students confused.

"I always try to include black history into my class," Technology and Engineering teacher Phil Harris said. "But the introduction has to be natural."

But not every teacher can implement the topic into their class and that's why an event like the Black History Bowl is important.

Because participants have to study in preparation for the Bowl, it encourages all students to learn more about black history. "I learned a lot of new information while I studied for my participation in the Bowl last year" sophomore Elizabeth Dula said.

Teachers' efforts to include black history do not go unappreciated by students. It benefits all students in multiple ways.

There's no arguing that the curriculum in history classes is geared towards Europe and the U.S.

But adding even a small unit on black history would be more engaging to black students.

They would be able to connect better to important figures who share a similar background.

"I get why it's important to learn about the World Wars and stuff. But it'd be more interesting to hear about things that happen in Africa. And not just stuff like colonialism," sophomore Lamis Osman said.

Enlightening black students on the history of black people in America can also show them that the people before them were able to achieve so much, so they can, too.

Especially today, black people and other minorities are sometimes dehumanized and seen as 'thugs.'

Teaching black history could reverse that negative outlook and remind students that black people are not inferior.

"Through media and other things, we are taught to think of people as color as criminals and threats to society. Our own president has said so," sophomore Kadijah Janneh said. "But educating students and reminding them that black people were more than just forced labor can fix that damaging misrepresentation."

However, students don't only want to hear about the historical impact of black people.

The effect that African Americans have had on culture is also a very crucial topic for students to know more about.

Black culture has been more appreciated lately, particularly with hip hop music becoming more popular.

But even though hip hop is fun and entertaining to listen to, it's essential that students are able to see that black people have done more for music, film, and literature than rap songs. Many impactful books and films were created by black people. Most genres of music, such as jazz, blues, and rock, stem from the music made by slaves.

"Black people survived through times of being thought of as less than human. Through all that hardship, they were still able to develop their own culture," Janneh said. "Since it's becoming more mainstream lately, it would be beneficial to all people to learn about where it all started."

It's clear to see that students would benefit from and value more recognition of black history in classes.

Black history is an integral part of American history, and world history, and it's time that teachers' lesson plans reflect that a bit better.