A dialogue continued...
by Gail M Stephens

“How do we stop racism? Stop talking about it. I’m going to stop calling you a white man and I’m going to ask you to stop calling me a black man … I don’t want a Black History Month. Black history is American history.”

This statement was made by Morgan Freeman during an interview with Mike Wallace in 2005. Whether you agree with the statement or not, we definitely haven’t stopped talking about it and moving all of us further in ridding ourselves of racism, sexism, and multiple “isms”.

I was just a ‘twinkle in my parents’ eyes’ when Brown vs. Board of Education was decided in 1954. But I was in the third grade when public schools in Martin, Tennessee were integrated. I remember thinking that black students were different because of their skin color. That’s what I had been taught and in a segregated small town 50 years ago, a child had no way to interact with anyone who was different. By the time I was in high school it was “normal” to have black classmates who were friends—but friends only in school, not outside that domain. College for me, as for many, was a time of learning; not just in the classroom, but about others whose experience was not the same as mine.

Over the years many things have changed, but racism is not dead. Even those who strongly believe in equality have some bias whether we are aware of it or not and sometimes we are all just tired of being told what we should think. Today’s realities: a story in the Huffington Post and other news outlets includes photos of students holding posters containing racially charged comments they have received. Reports of racism continue as reported in this story on a California campus in November. Questions have been raised about the unintentional segregation of students by universities (a follow up is here). CUNY closed its Morales-Shakur Center suddenly in October. Failure to recognize diversity in patients is a public health concern.

So, should we stop talking about it?

Comments? Send us an email equityanddiversity@utm.edu
Black History Month

As a Harvard-trained historian, Carter G. Woodson, like W. E. B. Du Bois before him, believed that truth could not be denied and that reason would prevail over prejudice. His hopes to raise awareness of African American’s contributions to civilization was realized when he and the organization he founded, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH), conceived and announced Negro History Week in 1925. The event was first celebrated during a week in February 1926 that encompassed the birthdays of both Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. The response was overwhelming: Black history clubs sprang up; teachers demanded materials to instruct their pupils; and progressive whites, not simply white scholars and philanthropists, stepped forward to endorse the effort.

By the time of Woodson’s death in 1950, Negro History Week had become a central part of African American life and substantial progress had been made in bringing more Americans to appreciate the celebration. At mid–century, mayors of cities nationwide issued proclamations noting Negro History Week. The Black Awakening of the 1960s dramatically expanded the consciousness of African Americans about the importance of black history, and the Civil Rights movement focused Americans of all color on the subject of the contributions of African Americans to our history and culture. The celebration was expanded to a month in 1976, the nation’s bicentennial. President Gerald R. Ford urged Americans to “seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history.” That year, fifty years after the first celebration, the association held the first African American History Month. By this time, the entire nation had come to recognize the importance of Black History in the drama of the American story. Since then each American president has issued African American History Month proclamations. And the association—now the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH)—continues to promote the study of Black history all year.

(Excerpt from an essay by Daryl Michael Scott, Howard University, for the Association for the Study of African American Life and History)

Little Known Facts about Black History

The 25th dynasty of Egypt dates back to 746 to 653 BC. This was also the dynasty known as the “Kings of Kush.” The Kingdom of Kush was an ancient African kingdom that flowed along what is now the Republic of Sudan. The Kings of Kush ruled as Pharaohs and believed that they were the bodily sons of the God Amun. They also worked to reunite the ancient original domain of Amun, with Egypt in the north and Nubia in the south. (more)

The banjo originated in Africa and up until the 1800s was considered an instrument only played by blacks.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1929 – 1968) was stabbed by an African–American woman in 1958 while attending his book signing at Blumstein’s department store in Harlem. The next year Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his wife Coretta Scott King visited India to study Ghandi’s nonviolence philosophy.

Buffalo Soldiers is a name respectfully given to the African–American cavalries during the 1800s by the Native American Kiowa tribe. These soldiers received second class treatment and were often given the worst military assignments, but had the lowest desertion rate compared to their white counterparts. The Buffalo Soldiers served in the Spanish American war, various Indian wars and helped to settle the west by installing telegraph lines, and protecting wagon trains and new settlements. More than 20 Buffalo Soldiers have received the highest military award, the Medal of Honor—the most any military unit has ever received.

Harriet Ann Jacobs (1813 – 1897) was a slave who published “Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl” in 1861 under the pseudonym Linda Brent. The book chronicles the hardships and sexual abuse she experienced as a female growing up in slavery. Jacobs fled slavery in 1835 by hiding in a crawlspace in her grandmother’s attic for nearly seven years before traveling to Philadelphia by boat, and eventually to New York. Jacobs was active in feminist anti-slavery movements.

Robert L. Johnson (1946 – ), founder of Black Entertainment Television (BET) is the first African-American billionaire.

The African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), founded by Richard Allen (1760 - 1831) became the first national black church in the United States in 1816.

Charles Henry Turner (1867 - 1923), a zoologist and educator, was the first person to discover that insects can hear.

Black Swan Records, founded in 1921 by Harry Pace in Harlem, was the first U.S. record label owned and operated by African-Americans. It was originally the Pace Phonograph Corporation and was renamed Black Swan Records after the 19th century opera singer Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, who was known as the Black Swan.

For more facts go here and here.

Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, ‘What are you doing for others?’ —Martin Luther King, Jr.
NOW IS THE TIME... EQUITY AND DIVERSITY NEWSLETTER

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RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

January

- 17 Blessing of the Animals - Hispanic Catholic Christian
- 18 through the 25th Week of Prayer for Christian Unity – Christian
- 19 World Religion Day - Baha’i
- 19 Timkat - Ethiopian Orthodox Christian
- 25 Conversion of Saint Paul - Christian
- 28 Feast of the Holy Family - Catholic Christian
- 31 Chinese New Year - Confucian, Daoist, Buddhist

February

- 2 Candlemas – Christian
- 2 Four Chaplains Sunday - Interfaith
- 2 Presentation of Christ in the Temple - Anglican Christian
- 2 Imbolc - Lughnassad - Wicca/Pagan
- 3 Setsubun-sai - Shinto
- 4 Vasant Panchami ** - Hindu
- 14 Saint Valentine’s Day - Christian
- 15 Nirvana Day ** - Buddhist - Jain
- 16 Triodion begins - Christian
- 26 - March 1 Intercalary Days * - Baha’i
- 28 Maha Shivaratri ** - Hindu

Read the rest of Lilly Ledbetter’s op-ed piece in the Washington Post.

Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act

The fifth anniversary of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act is just over a week away. Lilly Ledbetter was the plaintiff in the discrimination case Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. and the namesake for the first bill President Obama signed into law. “A 2012 study by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) controlled for factors known to affect earnings, such as education, parenthood and hours worked, and found that college-educated women still earn 7 percent less than their male peers just one year out of school — even when they have the same major and occupation. That’s not a small amount, and it gets worse over time, as most benefits and raises are based on wages. These pay disparities harm women, their families and the nation’s economy.”

A book review:

I just read Blind Spot: Hidden Biases of Good People, written by Mahzarin R. Benaji and Anthony G. Greenwald. The writers, along with colleague Brian Nosek, are the co-developers of the Implicit Association Test. They seek to understand how the mind operates in social contexts. Evidence from their labs and more than fourteen million completed tests at implicit.harvard.edu is presented in this book. Written for a general audience, I found it easy to read and very informative.

“I know my own mind.”

“I am able to assess others in a fair and accurate way.” These self-perceptions are challenged as the authors explore the hidden biases we all carry from a lifetime of exposure to cultural attitudes about age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, social class, sexuality, disability status, and nationality.

‘Blindspot’ is the authors’ metaphor for the portion of the mind that houses hidden biases. They question the extent to which our perceptions of social groups—without our awareness or conscious control—shape our likes and dislikes and our judgments about the human mind and that gives us a glimpse into what lies within the metaphoric blindspot.

‘Good people’ are those of us who strive to align our behavior with our intentions. The aim of the book is to explain the science in plain enough language to help well-intentioned people achieve that alignment. By gaining awareness, we can adapt beliefs and behavior and “outsmart the machine” in our heads so we can be fairer to those around us. Reading this book is an invitation to understand our own minds.”

--Excerpted from book cover

From www.interfaithcalendar.org

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