

## **Black History: Strengthening the Soul of the World**

**“The more you know of your history, the more liberated you are”**

~Maya Angelou~

Admittedly, I love and lament Black History Month simultaneously. I love it because it gives us the opportunity to celebrate the beauty, the boldness and oftentimes the backbone of our heroes and sheroes. I lament it because, too often, it is the only time we collectively reflect on the many contributions and influences of Black people. And perhaps most harmful, we often limp back to American chattel slavery as the starting point of Black history, which is, at best, myopic and at worst, insulting.

Intriguingly, there are a number of scholars who describe American chattel slavery as the interruption of Black history, using the logic that the era was not initiated or carried out by Black hands or Black thought, so therefore, it should not be considered Black history. Most believe, of which I agree, that in order to fully appreciate Black history, we must have a reasonable understanding of African history; that we must continue to position Africa in its rightful place as the birthplace of humanity. It builds the collective self-esteem of African American people to know that our lineage extends back to the beginnings of civilization. It also invokes better judgements in others when they know this history too.

Our brothers and sisters from China, Japan, the Middle East, Russia and Scandinavia, to name a few, all have full access to their classical histories. Likewise, African Americans must highlight ancient African civilizations like Benin, Djenné, Ghana, Kush, Meroe, and Songhay as we celebrate Black history, but more importantly, as we position Black people as important citizens of the world’s population. Renowned attorney, activist and author Randall Robinson believed that, “No people can live successfully, fruitfully, triumphantly without strong memory of their past, without reading the future within the context of some reassuring past, without implanting reminders of that past in the present.”

Most people believe that human beings have souls. Because we have souls, I believe that the world, itself, has a soul. The world’s soul is strengthened when its people develop a strong sense of self. Knowing one’s self, which includes a reasonable grasp of one’s history, creates not only a sense of self, but a sense of belonging. The world is literally a better place when we know our history.

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