

The Importance of Black History Month

As the city of Kelowna experiences a cultural evolution, it behooves us to celebrate the diverse cultures which create a Canadian tapestry enriched by our human diversity. Equally important is that all Kelownians cultivate an appreciation of all our peoples' stories. Indeed, the acknowledgement of a people's history gives birth to an appreciation and respect for our colleagues, neighbors and friends. In such an environment the seeds of division cannot flourish.

The importance of Black History Month is that it is not simply the story of a people, it is the story of humanity. It is the story of an indomitable people whose struggle, determination and faith in the face of almost insurmountable odds does not fail to inspire. It is the story of a great inhumanity being bested by all that is noble and honorable in the human spirit.

It is important because it is what inspires writers like Crawford Kilian to chronicle the precious records of a people whose stories of loss, love, sorrow, triumph, and joy could so easily have been lost. Black History Month retains its relevancy because Harriet Tubman begat daughters bearing names like Olive Senior, Itah Sadu, and Charmaine Lurch. Strong independent Black women who seek to ensure that the voice she bequeathed to them would never be stilled.

Black History Month is necessary for it ensures that the history and contribution of Black Canadians is chronicled and recognized. It is necessary because it fosters a sense of pride in our children, and our people. It is necessary because it proclaims, and reclaims the dreams of Malcolm, Martin, and Rosa Parks, of Abraham and Mary Shadd, and of William Wilberforce, and Lincoln for the next generation. Their visionary dreams, and the eloquence of their suffering and their fortitude form the wellspring from which young writers like David Odhiambo and urban poet Kevan Cameron seek and find the seeds of their inspired art.

Black History Month enables us to appreciate the true nature of Canada and its people. The Black experience in Canada speaks to the magnanimity of a country and a people who provided a haven and a sense of self-worth for those weary passengers on Harriet Tubman's Underground Railroad, fleeing the bloodied chains of enslavement. It recognizes the historical role which Canada played in the liberation of a people searching for freedom. When freedom fighter, Harriet Tubman set her passengers on the Underground Railroad, her cry to them was 'if you want a taste of freedom, keeping on running' – the country they ran to was Canada.

Most importantly, Black History Month is the history of every Canadian, for the destiny of one group of people in a nation, is the destiny of that nation. When each and every group is acknowledged, respected and deemed worthy, our country becomes greater than the sum of its parts, it prospers and the tapestry is strengthened.