Black History Month a time for celebration, recognition

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February is fast approaching, and with it comes Black History Month. My own personal qualm with Black History Month is the idea that “black history” is something entirely separate from the rest of history, so there should be a singular month dedicated to observing both the contributions and struggles of the black community.

Black history is just history, period. You cannot erase the stain of black blood from the history of the U.S. Our founding fathers built this country’s economy from slave labor and then slave trading when the transatlantic slave trade was made illegal. (There were still illegal trades that happened after that ban, by the way.)

However, Black History Month can be a time for celebration and recognition within the African American community.

This Thursday, Feb. 1, there will a Black Heritage Ball presented by ASA and the NAAACP. It will be held at 7 p.m. at the Alumni Center. There’s no entry fee, but it is highly encouraged to donate at the door. Wear your dashiki or any traditional African clothing attire and come enjoy the music, the food and the people.

My heritage has been on my mind for a while now. If you weren’t the descendant of a slave and especially if you’re of European descent, you probably have an idea of where your family originated from and the stories behind these origins. Even if you don’t, there’s plenty of services that would have no trouble locating these documents for you, because your family was recorded somewhere at some point, and those records were (usually) well kept.

That is not the case for black people. I don’t know what tribe or what country I was from. I just know that I’m brown. There’s bits and pieces of my identity that I’ve found here and there, but I can’t say definitely one way or another what blood runs through my veins without putting in an amount of time, money and effort that makes it seem impossible. From Frantz Fanon’s “Black Skin, White Masks,” this quote struck a chord with me:

“What sort of men were these, then, who had been torn away from their families, their countries, their religions, with a savagery unparalleled in history?”

It’s a quote that rings true. People were ripped from their homelands and implanted somewhere completely alien to them. Then, they weren’t regarded as autonomous human beings. They were viewed like cattle, and it was rare that anyone would acknowledge the names they carried with them and where they were from. I may never know the identities of those first family members that came here. I will never know if they were even buried with a headstone. They could have been thrown into the ocean, fed to dogs, hung from trees or had their heads stuck on pikes. If any of these ideas are shocking to you, then you truly don’t have an understanding of the atrocities of slavery.

I’ve been trying to figure out what sort of men I came from. I know I’m not the only one. There’s a strong disconnect I’ve felt from my identity as a black man as a result, but I’m building what being black means to me every day.

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