

Commentary

**Hajar Yazdiha**



This year we welcome Black History Month amid the onslaught of “shock and awe” executive orders including rolling back long-established civil rights protections, banning DEI initiatives, and challenging birthright citizenship. In this landscape, it is not entirely clear if Black History Month itself is still allowed. (It is, though the administration has ordered it be “downplayed”). The dawn of this political era has been likened to the rise of European fascism a century ago. Yet, it is Black history itself that shows us that our answers to how we got here and why this is happening are rooted right here, in the histories of the United States. More critically, our answers lie in understanding how and why political elites have ensured we remain willfully ignorant to these histories.

*“...Distorting the past is a powerful political tool for creating an alternative social reality that justifies everything from re-segregation to genocide.”*

*-Hajar Yazdiha*

As Dr. King once warned, “Nothing in the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity.” In my book *The Struggle for the People’s King*, I document the right wing’s long game of sanitizing, distorting, and misusing memories of Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement to render White Americans the “true” victims of the Civil Rights era. The danger of distorting the past is not only that it is untrue. As we see, playing out in real time today across the globe, distorting the past is a powerful political tool for creating an alternative social reality that justifies everything from re-segregation to genocide. Distorting the past ensures we do not learn the histories of everyday people of all stripes, coming together, organizing, struggling, and resisting. Instead, we remain helpless and scared, atomized and pitted against one another.

More than ever, Black history is vital not only for understanding the past that led us here. Black history is vital because it affords us the vision and will for a collective path forward.

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### **Willie Mack**



Efforts by conservative and racist politicians and activists to ban the teaching of Critical Race Theory (CRT), diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs in schools, government offices, and businesses, and books that discuss race and sexuality, have proliferated in states like Florida, Oklahoma, and Texas, just to name a few. Conservative lawmakers and activists claim that the banning of CRT, DEI, and books that deal with race and sexuality is crucial because they are too “woke.” However, what these conservative and racist activists are doing is endeavoring to erase the long history of racism and white supremacy in this country, a symptom of our nation’s inability to reconcile with the legacies of slavery and colonialism.

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*-Willie Mack*

In 1926, amongst a period of virulent racial violence against Black people, Black historian Carter G. Woodson established Negro History Week in the second week of February. Carter chose February to coincide with Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass’s birthdays. However, Carter established the holiday as a year-round celebration, not simply one month. It was not until 1986, amongst the punitive War on Drugs and rise of mass incarceration that disproportionately

targeted Black communities, that U.S. Congress designated February as National Black History Month. Regardless, Black History Month was established as a celebration of resistance against white supremacy and the erasure of Black history. It is now more important than ever that we carry on Woodson's life goal of celebrating and preserving Black history year-round, year after year.

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### **Michael McEachrane**



In this age of "Make America Great Again," "America First," "White Pride over Civil Rights," and "Profit for the Few over Welfare for the Many and our Planet," Black History Month may be more important than ever. At its core, it is about social equality and justice. It is about fairly including people in the grand narrative of U.S. history who may otherwise be sidelined. It is about coming to terms with the origins of U.S. history in colonialism, genocide, enslavement and racism. And it is about struggles for the equal dignity, freedom, rights, opportunities, and voice of all Americans.

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At its very best, Black History Month is also about global history. The transnational and fleeting nature, rich diversity and ingenuity of human culture, including the pioneering civilization of Ancient Egypt and its roots in Black Africa. The global impact of European colonialism,

enslavement and racism, including on the unequal formation of the global economy. The similar situations and struggles of Africans and people of African descent across the world. And even the possibilities of a social, economic, and environmentally sustainable development that leaves no one behind, to speak the language of *Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development*.

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