



Because children depend on all of us

Black History Month **February 2008**

Why Black History Month, sometimes referred to as African Heritage Month, and what does it have to do with the Children's Aid Society of Toronto?

The month of February provides an opportunity to showcase and celebrate the positive and significant aspects of Black History and Culture. It gives us a chance to attempt to dispel the negative myths and stereotypes related to the "Black" race. Also, it is a time to raise some ugly realities of the history of our development, namely bondage and slavery.

A valid criticism of Black History Month, apart from the observations that it happens in the shortest and coldest month of the year in North America is as follows: it allows some elements of our society to acknowledge the presence of blacks, their history and culture for 28 or 29 days then totally forget about them for the remainder of the year.

Another equally valid one relates to the over abundance of "Black" activities during the month of February.

At the Children's Aid Society of Toronto (CAST), the month has been acknowledged and celebrated ever since it was proclaimed as Black History Month by the City of Toronto in 1979 and later by the Canadian parliament. However, the Black Education Awareness Committee of the CAST (BEAC) has attempted, over the years, to acknowledge "Black" history and culture for 365 days per year.

Respecting the second part of the question, the reality is that the CAST serves a significant number of children, youth and families of African heritage.

Following is an address by the president of the Ontario Black History Society which addresses the significance of Black History Month:

Why a Black History Month?

By Rosemary Sadlier



In the 1950's the Canadian Negro Women's Association brought the celebration to Toronto, Ontario. By 1978, Ontario Black History Society successfully petitioned the City of Toronto to have the monthly celebration formally recognized. This celebration is currently proclaimed across Canada.

But why have a Black History Month? African Canadian students need to feel affirmed; need to be aware of the contributions made by other Blacks in Canada; need to have role models; need to understand the social forces which have shaped and influenced their community and their identities as a means of feeling connected to the educational experience and their life experience in various regions in Canada. They need to feel empowered. The greater Canadian community needs to know a history of Canada that includes all of the founding and pioneering experiences in order to work from reality, rather than perception alone.

As a people, with roots dating back to 1603, African-Canadians have defended, cleared, built and farmed this country; our presence is well established, but not well-known. The celebration of Black History Month is an attempt to have the achievements of Black people recognized and told.

We need a Black History Month in order to help us to arrive at an understanding of ourselves as Canadians in the most accurate and complete socio-historical context that we can produce. As a nation with such diversity, all histories need to be known, all voices need to be expressed. Black history provides the binary opposite to all traditional histories. One needs traditional history to engender a common culture; one needs Black history to engender a clearer and more complete culture.

When the contributions of people of African descent are acknowledged, when the achievements of Black people are known, when Black people are routinely included or affirmed through our curriculum, our books and the media, and treated with equality, then there will no longer be a need for Black History Month.