Knowledge of Diversity Improves Service Delivery

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By JC Vazquez

In the past few months I have spent time providing and polishing cultural and linguistic competence training among the various divisions at the CPD and other agencies/organizations outside the university. One of the areas of emphasis is to better understand the diverse community we serve. Understanding some cultural practices and history is imperative to relate, establish relationships of trust and deliver services in an appropriate and sensitive manner. The more we know about our clients, partners, families and people we serve, the better off we become at establishing relationships of trust and quality service delivery. This month we celebrate, as a nation, Black History Month. I hope the information provided in this blog will help us acquire more knowledge and a simple, yet historical perspective of Black History Month.

What we now call Black History Month originated in 1926, founded by Carter G. Woodson as “Negro History Week.” The month of February was selected in deference to Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln, who were both born in that month.

As a Harvard-trained historian, Woodson believed that truth could not be denied and that reason would prevail over prejudice. His hopes to raise awareness of African Americans' contributions to civilization was realized when he and the organization he founded, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH), conceived and announced Negro History Week in 1925. The event was first celebrated during a week in February 1926 that encompassed the birthdays of both Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. The response was overwhelming: Black history clubs sprang up; teachers demanded materials to instruct their pupils; and progressive whites, not simply white scholars and philanthropists, stepped forward to endorse the effort.

The celebration was expanded to a month in 1976, the nation's bicentennial. President Gerald R. Ford urged Americans to “seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history.” That year, 50 years after the first celebration, the association held the first African American History Month. By this time, the entire nation had come to recognize the importance of Black history in the drama of the American story. Since then each American president has issued African American History Month proclamations. And the association—now the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH)—continues to promote the study of Black history all year. (Source: Library of Congress)

Who doesn’t recognize Muhammad Ali?

Muhammad Ali, born Cassius Clay in 1942, rose from humble beginnings to become one of the most famous men in the world. He was a boxing titan, a civil rights warrior, an anti-war protester, and a charismatic celebrity. Ali's complexity and passion matched the spirit of the turbulent 1960s.

Ali's career milestones include an Olympic gold medal (1960); first heavyweight title (1964); refusal to serve in Vietnam on religious grounds for which he lost his boxing title (1967); vindication by the U. S. Supreme Court (1970); recapture of the title (1974); and a third title victory (1978). One of his most memorable fights was “The Rumble in the Jungle” against George Foreman in 1974 in Kinshasa, Zaire (now Democratic Republic of the Congo). Ali won by knockout putting Foreman down just before the end of the eighth round. It has been called “arguably the greatest sporting event of the 20th century.”