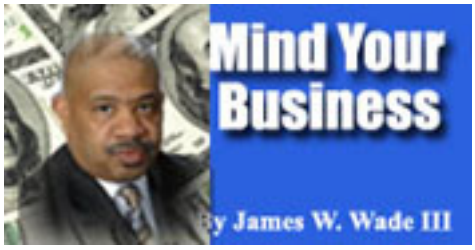

During this year's Black History Month celebration, we should not only celebrate Black America's achievements but also the underpinnings of Black America's idealism. It is a powerful move to consider the possibilities of opening more Black businesses and how it may have the ability to transform us.

Black History Month begins

Today marks the start of Black History Month, when African-American history is celebrated in the classroom, on television and in daily life. February is the month where you start to hear our Black History. Americans have recognized Black history annually since 1926, first as "Negro History Week" and later as " Black History Month ."

What you might not know is that Black history had barely begun to be studied – or even documented – when the tradition originated. Although Blacks had been in America at least as far back as colonial times, it was not until the 20th century that they gained a respectable presence in the history books.

We owe the celebration of Black History Month, and more importantly, the study of Black history, to Dr. Carter G. Woodson . Born to parents who were former slaves, he spent his childhood working in the Kentucky coal mines and enrolled in high school at age twenty.

He graduated within two years and later went on to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard. The scholar was disturbed to find in his studies that history books largely ignored the Black American population and, when Blacks did figure into the picture, it was generally in ways that reflected the inferior social position they were assigned at the time.

Woodson, always one to act on his ambitions, decided to take on the challenge of writing Black Americans into the nation's history. He established the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (now called the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History) in 1915, and a year later founded the widely respected Journal of Negro History.

In 1926, he launched Negro History Week as an initiative to bring national attention to the contributions of Black people throughout American history.

Woodson chose the second week of February for Negro History Week because it marks the birthdays of two men who greatly influenced the Black American population, Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln. However, February has much more than Douglass and Lincoln to show for its significance in Black American history.

In 1976, Negro History Week became Black History Month and Americans began to honor and learn about the achievements and rich history of African Americans during the entire month of February instead of a single week.

I personally believe we can celebrate some Black person making history all 365 days, not just in the shortest month. Woodson spent his life working to educate all people about the vast contributions made by Black men and women throughout history.Woodson died on April 3, 1950 and Black History Month is his legacy.

We have a lot of legacy in the Black community and even though we always hear about Madame CJ Walker and Garret Morgan, we have many Black's making history everyday. Just recently Judge Gayle Williams-Byers became the first Black judge in South Euclid. Yvette McGee Brown became the first Black female woman to sit on the Ohio Supreme Court.

I like talking about the heroes in Ohio and what a big difference some have made in the progress of paving ways for someone else. But even nationally it was a lady in the White House by the name of Condolezza Rice Rice who enrolled at the University of Denver at the age of 15 and graduated with a bachelor's degree in political science (cum laude) at age 19. She also received her master's in Political Science at the University of Notre Dame and her doctorate in Political Science from the University of Denver's Graduate School of International Studies.

She has written numerous articles and books on international relations and foreign affairs. Besides all of the above, Rice was the National Security Advisor for the United States and is known for her expertise on Russian affairs and arms control. Black History Month, I have come to realize, is not just the history of one race. It is an integral component of the history of humanity. It is filling in the blanks that too often exist in our knowledge of our past. Blacks are doing great things and need to be observed more and more.

The Harlem Renaissance was, in no small part, a social justice movement. Whether you sided with the Old Guard's notions of propriety or the younger artists' insistence on creative freedom, the message was clear. African Americans would be seen and heard.
Although it is certainly true that not all African-American artists are or have been politically

motivated, expressive culture for African Americans can be historically tied to issues of social justice. Sometimes those expressions have been straightforwardly political, and other times not.

The most talked about candidate in politics today is President Barak Obama . Will you be one of the record-setting number of Black voters to turn out in support of his candidacy, should he run for president? Are you registered and ready to make history?

The U.S. Census Bureau 2002 Economic Census reports that African American Entrepreneurs grew 45 percent faster than any other ethnic group from 1997 to 2002. Are you a part of this economic growth as an entrepreneur or consumer? Are you committed to a historic increase in Black economic development?

Humanity is a big tent and people of every color and creed helped to create and erect that tent. Black History Month helps to open the flaps to allow everyone to enter the warmth of that tent and, in the end, we're all better off for the experience.

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Write or e-mail him at jwade@call-post.com. Comments and questions are welcome but, because of the volume of mail, personal responses are not always possible. Please note that comments or questions may be used in a future column.