That question was never more powerfully expressed than in the penultimate line posed by Curtis Mayfield and The Impressions in the title track of their 1969 album, "This Is My Country:"

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I have a rule about this month. If it's February, I know that somebody somewhere has given an interview or written an article declaringAmericano longer needs Black History Month.

And, sure enough, the conservative National Review Online of February 4 has given us the article of one Charles W. Cooke. Its title is succinct – "Against Black History Month: This month is Black History Month. Let's hope it's the last."

That snarky comment is revealing, isn't it? Even if you're opposed to Black History Month, no one would credibly think there's any chance that this month's, or next year's, or the year after that's, or … you get the picture … would be the *last* Black History Month American society

commemorates? It's not a serious comment, of course, and it indicates we're not going to get a logical argument from Cooke.

But then, that's not entirely Cooke's fault. That's because there is no logical argument against commemorating Black History Month. Indeed, now it's more important than ever that we plumb the facts and complexities of African-American history.

This is not a matter of "segregating" American history into racial and ethnic enclaves. It is a matter of acquiring a fuller understanding of American history by not pretending that considering American history primarily through that of White Americans is the only approach that counts. Indeed, it's clear that Carter G. Woodson, the great scholar who established Negro History Week in 1926, had two goals in mind. One was to enable African Americans to see that Blacks had a rich history before their capture and transport to theAmericas; and that pursuing the truth of the Black experience inAmericawas the only way to construct anAmericaworthy of its ideals.

Cooke's article follows the usual scheme of the attack on Black History Month. He asserts that the undertaking was necessary before the 1960s, when *de jure* and *de facto* segregation ruled the land. Now, however, it's outlived its usefulness and in fact is harming the ability of all Americans to gain a shared understanding of American history. Black History Month should be eliminated and the Black American experiences should be integrated into schools' regular curriculum. "If there is still too little 'black history' taught inAmerica's schools," Cooke writes, "or if 'black history' is being taught incorrectly – then we should change the curriculum. If black Americans remain unfairly in the shadows, then the solution is to bring them out, not to sort and concentrate them by color."

This is an argument built on sand. For one thing, Cooke cites no actual examples of the supposed sins of Black History Month – no examples of schools or school systems where Black history is taught only in February and ignored in the curriculum the rest of the year. No examples of colleges where Black studies courses ignore the impact of the other currents of American society. No examples where in either elementary and secondary schools or colleges there is what he calls the "equally absurd" repetitive focus on heroic Black figures.

These attacks on Black History Month ignore many things: They ignore how deeply Black history has already been "integrated" into broader examinations of American history, as even a cursory perusal of popular and scholarly books would indicate. They ignore how complex and searching explorations of Black history have become – as a forthcoming documentary airing

next week on the Public Broadcasting Service on Whitney M. Young, Jr., the charismatic leader of the National Urban League from 1961 until his untimely death in 1971, will show.

Most of all, they ignore why over the last four decades other sub-groups of Americans have adopted the "special month" model. Cooke does list some of these: Women's History Month, South Asian Heritage Month, Asian-Pacific American Heritage Month, Haitian Heritage Month, Jewish American Heritage Month, Caribbean-American Heritage Month, National Hispanic Heritage Month, National American Indian Heritage Month, and Alaskan Native Heritage Month.

Revealingly, he merely lists them, ignoring the implications of their founding, and the fact that, just like Black History Month, their establishment was approved by acts of Congress, and signed by Republican and Democratic presidents. In fact, just as Black History Month does, they underscore valid – and widespread – educational practice of focusing on particular facets of a broad topic and the widespread social-group practice of closely examining their particular experience inAmerica.

And they do something else. They all echo the question that Carter G. Woodson's Negro History Week, now Black History Month set before the nation more than 80 ago.

That question was never more powerfully expressed than in the penultimate line posed by Curtis Mayfield and The Impressions in the title track of their 1969 album, "This Is My Country:"

"Shall we perish unjust," the song asks, "or live equal as a nation."

Lee A. Daniels is a longtime journalist based in New York City. His latest book is Last Chance: The Political Threat to Black America.