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OPINION

There's No Denying We've Defied the Odds

Black excellence is about who we have become

BY TRACEY L. ROGERS

Across the country, Black History Month came and went with little celebration due to coverage of the impeachment trial and 2020 presidential primaries. As disappointing as this has been, it did have one surprising highlight: a video and print campaign (which included the Portland Observer) compiled by Google celebrating black history makers who received the most online searches in the history of the internet.

Dr. Maya Angelou, for example, was the most searched female poet. Serena Williams was the most searched tennis player. Oprah Winfrey was the most



searched talk show host, while Malcolm X was the most searched autobiography.

Their recognition was significant; these four black Americans were the most searched individuals, without race as a qualifier. Beyoncé, for example, had the most searched "performance" on Google, not the most searched "African American" performance.

The short month of February is never enough time to adequately capture just how much black people have done for this country, and how much we have contributed to American society.

Black History Month is not just a time to replay the speeches of civil rights leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr. We must also remember a movement that saw legions of black people overcome America's original sin.

It is through our perseverance

and contributions that black communities have coined the phrase "black excellence," a phrase that defines the hardships black people have defied, and the accomplishments black people have achieved.

The meaning behind black excellence is extensive, dating back to a time when black Americans, as a writer for Essence put it, "pushed back against racist caricatures of Blackness as not only ignorant, but incapable of true leadership."

Such caricatures are why black people have been raised with the narrative that in order to reach success and be offered a seat at the table, we must work twice as hard.

In many ways, this narrative has been harmful to the black community, perpetuating the myth that our acceptance in American society is contingent on how hard we work. But it is also a narrative that instilled in us an innate determination to push through adversi-

ty, beating the odds that are forever stacked against us.

Just as black history can't be reversed in only 28 or 29 days, black excellence is not solely attributed to those extraordinary individuals, athletes, poets, and artists who have reached celebrity status. Black excellence happens every day.

It is in the way black organizers and activists continue the fight for criminal justice reform in a country where the rate of incarceration for blacks is five times more than that of whites. It is in the insistence that black lives matter when the risk for being killed by police is more pronounced for black men. It is through our cultural contributions — music, fashion, the arts — too often appropriated for their excellence.

That we are still able to thrive in a country with racist ideas encoded into its rule of law, and where median white wealth

is still 41 times median black wealth, is all symbolic of black excellence.

After 246 years of slavery and another 89 years of segregation and Jim Crow, we have only had 66 years of formal civil liberties and protections. Even these remain under threat in 2020.

And yet, as Dr. Maya Angelou said in the title of one of her most famous poems, "Still, I'll rise."

Black excellence isn't just about what black people have achieved. It is who we have become as a result.

That's why I'm proud to be Black, and I do not need a month on the calendar to remind me of my excellence. The legacy of black people — our humanity and resistance to oppression — will always be worthy of celebration.

Tracey L. Rogers is an entrepreneur and activist living in Philadelphia. Distributed by OtherWords.org.

Chilling ICE Arrest

ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) took its cruelty to a new low, sending a chilling message to families last week when they separated a father from his children, detaining him at a school bus stop in Washington County - in front of a school bus full of children.

We should all be outraged by these heartless and terrifying tactics that fly in the face of Oregon's values. Our children deserve to go to school without fear of having their families torn apart by Trump's immigration enforcement machine. Instead, we are seeing cruel family separation right in our own backyard. These attacks inflict trauma on our children, and instill fear an entire community that believed our schools - and by extension, school bus stops - were safe.

At the Latino Network, we believe access to a quality education is one of the most fundamental human rights, and we encourage parents to be active partners in their children's schooling. We stand in solidarity and resilience with our community, and we refuse to allow our families to be pushed further into the shadows.

We applaud the Tigard-Tualatin School District for their support of the impacted families and their advocacy for greater protections for all children. We join them and our local elected leaders in calling for immediate legislative action to prohibit ICE enforcement at school bus stops.

The Latino Network is committed to providing support and wrap-around services. If you or someone you know is going through an immigration-related emergency, reach out to us at 503-283-6881.

Sadie Feibel, director of the Early Childhood Division at the Latino Network.

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