

# Black history on the books at Lehman many years

By KYLIE SHAFFERKOETTER  
Post Staff

**LEHMAN** - In 1976 the federal government designated February as Black History Month with the purpose of honoring and raising consciousness about the black experience in the United States. At that time, history from the African-American perspective was generally not incorporated into the curriculum at public schools. But one Lake-Lehman history teacher was years ahead of many schools across the country.

Around 1977 John Comitz and Bob Roese, who has since passed away, designed a class called American Studies. This class combines both an honors English and honors History class that not only studies great works of literature, but the period in which they were written.

Comitz has been teaching this course with Jane Smith for the last three years. He and Smith do not make a stir about Black History Month because it's already secure in the curriculum and seen as an already integral part of American history.

"Whoever's history, it's all part of American history," said Comitz. The class is unique because its syllabus includes an in-depth look into history and perceptions written by African Americans.

The students who wish to take the class must first read Maya Angelou's "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," during the summer and write a critical essay about it.

This week the class began "Narrative of a Slave" by Frederick Douglass, an ex-slave who documented his experience with white oppression.

The class covers a whole range of people, events and literature.



POST PHOTO/KYLIE SHAFFERKOETTER

Studying Black history, Lake-Lehman students from left, foreground; James Pitcavage, Brooke Posatko, Lyndsay Amyx, Valerie Fiore, Crystal Copeland, Karen Cole. Behind; Michael P. Casey, Dusty Rhodes, Eric Nygren, Rob Weaver.

*"Whoever's history, it's all part of American history."*

John Comitz  
Lake-Lehman teacher

For example, the students will study Booker T. Washington's Atlanta Exposition speech, in which he urged blacks to get a vocational education and practical occupations, and his foremost critic W.E.B. DuBois, the first African American to receive a Ph.D. who argued that Washington was essentially advocating submission. The class then moves on to Restoration, the Civil Rights Movement and contemporary black authors.

Comitz and Smith not only see the class as a means to an education, but to tolerance. "It's a lack of understanding and knowledge that contribute to a lot of problems," said Smith. "The students are interested in understanding different groups of people."

To Comitz the class puts today's society into perspective. "It's a real eye opener for the kids," he explained. "They pick up that racism just wasn't pigeon-holed to one period of history or one part

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Jane Smith  
Lake-Lehman teacher

of the country."

Some of the students who began reading Douglass's "Narrative of a Slave" said the firsthand account of slavery enlightened them to the true horror of the time. "It's shocking how much abuse there was, how little they received to live. In many cases they had no blankets and children working in the fields on plantations were only given shirts and nothing else," said Valerie Fiore, a junior. "You don't really realize how bad it is until you read a firsthand account like this. It's eye opening to realize how much they suffered."

Lindsay Amyx, also a junior, said that the African-American experience is inherently part of the whole. "(Black history) is an important part of American history and not separate from it," she said.

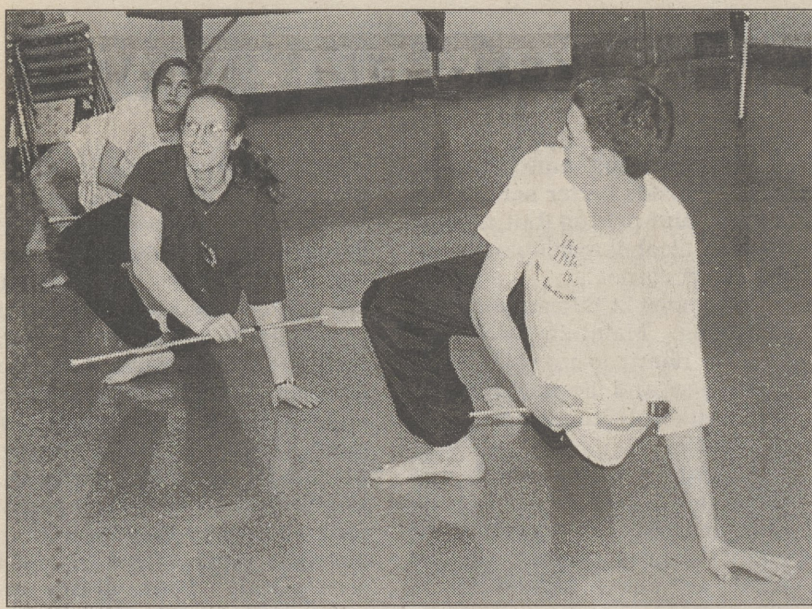
Four years ago Comitz taught a class at Wilkes University with Dr. Robert Heaman and his wife, Dr. Pat Heaman. The class was called The African-American Experience. "It really helped bring new ideas to the high school level," said Comitz.

Dr. Robert Heaman, who continues to teach the class, thinks classes like Comitz's and Smith's are essential to fully understanding the history of the United States. "It is so important to our times that we understand the rich culture of our heritage. The African-American experience is central to our culture. You can't fully understand America until you understand the struggle," Heaman explained.

"In many ways it's what it means to be an American, bringing together all these cultures and understanding who they are in relation to one another," Heaman said. "The greatest challenge of the country is to figure out how to work through the racial issue."

Heaman said that in the last 10 years public schools across the country are infusing a more in-depth study of African-American history and literature in their curriculum.

"For example, the literature has permeated the canon and is now taught in mainstream classes," said Heaman.



POST PHOTO/CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK

Rebecca Scott and Brian Marsh worked on the floor portion of the Lake-Lehman Indoor Guard program.

## Color guard

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goals," said assistant instructor Maureen Richards. "Our job is to make the kids shine, so it's really all for them," added Taggart.

The staff wishes to thank the Lake-Lehman Band Sponsors. "For all their help, with things like transportation and equipment," said Richards.

Due to lack of competition in the area, Lehman competes throughout Pennsylvania and New

Jersey. "If someone has never seen an Indoor Guard competition, they should if they get the chance, because it's something that you remember forever," said Taggart. "It's a really special event, almost like a Broadway show."

The Lake-Lehman Indoor Guard has a local performance tentatively scheduled for April 12 at the high school. For further information contact Edward Richards at 675-7458.

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