African American History Month is a Time of Reflection

African Americans have come so far in a short span of time. We have emerged from slavery and ascended to The White House, from oppression to leadership. However, the struggle continues.

Each year during African American History Month, I am acutely reflective of the progress we have made. Our emergence from slavery to a world filled with opportunity for all people regardless of race, creed, gender and so forth is laudable, even legendary. Our leaders shed blood and countless tears so that you and I may equally enjoy the freedoms upon which our country was founded.

We must not take these liberties for granted. My generation faced legalized racism—separate drinking fountains, separate seating areas on public buses and the like. Inequality was the law. Many of us withstood these challenges and succeeded in spite of them. I am proud of our heritage, of how during the Civil Rights Movement we overcame racism and oppression through civil disobedience rather than violence, through the pursuit of knowledge rather than the propagation of ignorance, through unity rather than division.

Today, racism is no longer our biggest challenge. It’s apathy. I am disturbed when I see our young people resting on their laurels waiting for success to march up to them when they have limitless opportunities before them. Today, we can go anywhere, eat anywhere, live anywhere and learn anywhere. What limits us resides within us. What empowers us resides there, too.

For this reason, I am always thrilled to see men and women choose LeMoyne-Owen College to pursue their academic dreams. I am also just as happy to see them go to college elsewhere. Whenever I walk our campus and see students on their way to class, I am encouraged that our future will continue to be brighter than our past.

This year, African American History Month focuses on our strong, valiant women—whether they birthed and nurtured leaders or plowed through racial and gender discrimination to change the course of American history for the better. I hope this celebration will inspire you to take up the mantle of leadership as they did to conquer the challenges of our day and continue to not only preserve African American culture, but also enrich it.