

BLACK RESISTANCE: The experience of being black at MSU

JOEY ARTHUR
ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

In February 1926, American author and journalist Carter G. Woodson created the first iteration of Black History Month called Negro History Week. He created it as a way to pay tribute to the African American experience and to celebrate the success of black resistance but also the beauty of black excellence. Chosen after the birthdays of two prominent figures in black liberation (Fredrick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln), February has become a nationally recognized month set aside to celebrate African American culture, experience and history. Here at MSU, MOSAIC, in collaboration with many black-led student organizations, is keeping the history of celebrating black history via specially curated events.

"We observe black history month here at MSU as a way to bring light not just to the Midwestern community but Wichita Falls as a whole. There are a lot of things that happen and have happened at Midwestern State that directly affect black people, one of those things being the desegregation of Midwestern State and this was a momentous thing not just in Wichita Falls but in the state of Texas. So, to celebrate black history is more than just recognizing those we don't necessarily know but also recognizing those who allowed black students to be able to be here today at Midwestern State University," Jamilah Kangudja, coordinator of MOSAIC programs, said.

Desegregation was a major issue, not just on a state level but on a national scale too. Following

the Supreme Court's unanimous decision in the landmark Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka case in 1952, Midwestern University became one of the first public universities to desegregate in the state of Texas, admitting its first black students in 1954. This was possible in no small part due to the work of African American individuals and black-led organizations like the NAACP.

"When Midwestern University became a campus for all students, regardless of race, that was a huge win for black people everywhere. The national NAACP and many other organizations fought so hard for that and now we celebrate that during Black History Month. We recognize the efforts that made it possible for black students to be on this campus," Kangudja said.

The theme for this year's Black History Month is Black Resistance. Black Resistance is defined as the African American experience of battling historic, systematic and incessant forms of oppression. During this month, MOSAIC aims to highlight different sections of the African American experience, educate students on what it means to be a black person in America and to give credit to people that defined black resistance.

"Our biggest hope for students to get out of these events is a sense of community and to educate them on the experiences that their fellow black students go through on a daily basis. I believe that whether it be through music, or the performances given by the black performers at the open mic night, we hope that students can get a better understanding of the black experience

at Midwestern State University," coordinator for Men of Color Alliance and political science junior Kaleb Pierre said.

Similar to previous years, MOSAIC has partnered with black-led student organizations to bring their idea of black resistance to campus. Examples of some of these organizations are Women in Support of Empowerment, MOCA, The Wesley and more.

"It was really fun working with MOSAIC and other organizations in planning the events for Black History Month. For the open mic night, we at MOCA partnered with WISE and The Wesley and given our shared history with WISE in the past, it was very fun and enjoyable," Pierre said. "Some of us worked on food and some on music and it made the process easier and fun especially having a big event so early in the month, it was fun."

To celebrate the month and keep up with old traditions, MOSAIC selectively curated three events to commemorate Black History Month this year. They started the month with the open mic night hosted by MOCA, WISE and The Wesley, and due to icy roads earlier this month, the 90s Skate Party sponsored by MOSAIC was rescheduled for February 16th at the Family Fun Zone. The final event by MOSAIC for the month is the 8th Annual Black Excellence Gala.

Vocal performance junior Will Jones sings a self-composed song, Feb. 3.

"Picking an event for any MOSAIC-related celebration requires listening to what the student body wants, especially the certain demographics

on certain months like black students on Black History Month or Hispanic students on Hispanic Heritage Month or LGBTQ+ students on Pride Month and so on. We listen to their comments and try to create events that cater to that while serving our overall goal for whatever we are celebrating. For observances, we know that we must have an opener, a closer and one or more than one filler events in between, and those events must be modeled after the students wants while possessing an educational purpose. For example, for Black History Month we started with the Open Mic Night, Arts through Music is very big in the black community, or 90s Skate Night, the 90s were a really prominent time period for the black community and finally the Black Excellence Gala which is an annual thing at MSU," Kangudja said.

The Black Excellence Gala is a core aspect of Black History at MSU. Since its debut in 2015, The Black Excellence Gala has become a night of recognition and celebration of the achievement, success and works of Black individuals here at Midwestern State. MOSAIC awards students, faculty and staff that further the definition of black excellence.

"The very first Black Excellence Gala was held in 2015. At the time the Black Student Initiative, which were black student leaders of the Black Student Union, the NAACP, Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta and so on, all of these organizations that have historically black leaders, they wanted something that would uplift the community but also provide a nice commemoration of black his-

tory month and all the things that it encompasses as well as the trailblazers on campus, in the community and people who were here long before us," Kangudja said.

MOSAIC created events that they hoped would educate the student body on the black experience at MSU. Music ducation junior Gage Oliver said the month has been impactful.

"I think it's important and that it helps to bring a sense of community and togetherness. Black History Month gives identity and recognition to those who deserve it, and it also helps to highlight the everyday life of African Americans in today's culture," Oliver said.

Black History Month celebrates black history, but not much is said about the future of black experiences. Nursing junior Stephanie Arthur shared her hope for the future of Black History Month at MSU.

"I hope in the future, MOSAIC does more than just three events because I was unable to go to the Open Mic which I'm pretty sure was an experience that wasn't exclusive to just me. I also hope that what ever event they put on in the future educates the Caucasian demographic at MSU about what it truly means to be black because although it is important to celebrate the history of black people in America it is also equally important to educate people on what it means to be black now." Arthur said.

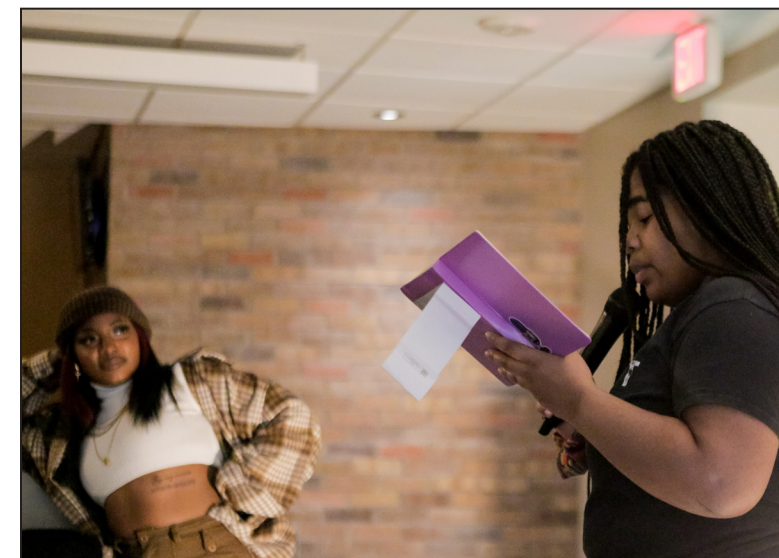


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Social work and music sophomore Janae Law reads the poem "Black People Magic," Feb. 3.



PHOTO BY COLIN STEVENSON | THE WICHITAN

Students dance along to music at the Open Mic Night, Feb. 3.



PHOTO BY COLIN STEVENSON | THE WICHITAN

Psychology junior Bailee Larkin reads the poem "How Deep?" at the Open Mic Night, Feb. 3.