

Black History Month Reflection

January 31, 2008

Students from the Black Student Union reflect on the month's meaning and events.

Duration 5:51

Transcript

[C. Robertson] Good afternoon. My name is Courtney Robertson and I am the president of Black Student Union here at IUPUI.

Black History Month originally started out as Negro History Week. And it was started back in 1926 by Dr. Carter G. Woodson. Since it has become a part of American history and part of the American people, it is an excellent thing and it should be here. It's important because we have to recognize our black leaders, our black inventors, our black engineers - all of the people who helped to make a difference in our society. Because, we go throughout the year studying European history, and we only have this one month to focus in and get people to actually recognize these people. That's why it's so important.

I feel that it should be celebrated every day. That it should be taught to all students, everywhere. I know that, in America especially, they focus so much on European history to where the African-American history is kind of set aside. And, in other countries, they focus on the African-American history a lot.

It's definitely important, and it's important to me because I like to know about my past so that I can know where I'm headed. I have to know about the people who came before me, who helped to pave the way so I can be here today.

[J. Ivy] Black History Month to me, it means everything to me, because this is the time when we actually have a chance - we being African-Americans - actually have a chance to express our culture more up front. I just love it so much because a lot of people don't know a lot about our culture. We're not taught so much about Black History Month, you're just taught in very compartmentalized portions about what black history really is.

[C. Robertson] Since I've been here at IUPUI, the Black Student Union, every February, has several events that they do to kind of highlight the month.

[J. Ivy] My favorite event is what we do in Black Student Union, and it's called Images in Black. That's where we take certain clips from the media and how they portray African-Americans, and we just have a huge debate about it. We've been talking about issues like the O.J. Simpson case, how Oprah is portrayed, or how women are portrayed in the media, and how men are portrayed as well. It's just nice, because you never know what people are thinking until you throw it in their face and ask them to elaborate on it. So, that's my all-time favorite event.

[C. Robertson] Another event that I particularly enjoy myself is Soul Cinema. It's an event where we pick a film with an all-black cast, of course, that kinda portrays or depicts the life of black people. This year we're showing the movie Claudine, starring Diane Carroll, I believe. It's

just about an African-American mom's struggle as a single parent, living in the ghetto, having to depend on welfare but not necessarily wanting to, but trying to make the best life that she can and provide the best way that she can for her family.

We try to encourage not only African-American students to come to our events, but the student population in general. We definitely advertise it to everyone, but the majority of the time, we only get African-American students to come, which is a downside, too. But, I feel that we do our part as far as advertising it to other people, inviting other people to come out.

We get a lot of support from the Latino Student Association, and we also co-sponsor an event with them during the month called Black & Brown Get Down. What that event is - we have a panel of some of our members and some of their members and sit there. We have different questions that come up, as far as the stereotypes that are placed against Latino students, and the stereotypes that are placed against African-American students. We just kind of dispel those.

The event usually lasts about two hours, and the first hour is usually dedicated to the question and answer type thing. For the last hour, we have a small mixer where we have a D.J. come in, and we all hang out together, dance together, and enjoy food together.

[J. Ivy] The purpose of Black Student Union is, of course, it's not just for African-American students, it's for people who are accepting of all cultures. It's just a chance for us to come together as a family, get the types of educational resources that we need, like we have study tables every single week - we need to keep these G.P.A.'s up. So, we do that. We also love to have a family-type atmosphere. We do that through social programs and we also are big in civic engagement, so we have to do community service. Then, just getting awareness of what our culture is, so everybody can learn something from us.

[C. Robertson] We're all about trying to uplift our people, trying to make sure that we all have some common ground, somewhere we can all go to feel comfortable. Because, we are in the minority here, and we're aware of that. But, being in the minority doesn't necessarily mean that you can't achieve, that you can't excel, and we want to instill that in people. Because, I know that a lot of times, people come to predominantly white campuses, African-Americans in particular, kind of feel intimidated by those surroundings. So, we kind of make it conducive to them, make them feel comfortable, and have a place they can come to if they want to talk about a problem, talk about a class. Because, sometimes, other people just don't understand and you just need that type of family bond, I guess I would say, to make you more included, make you feel like "I belong here, and I can achieve no matter what".