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University has a rich black history

February is Black History Month, and the University community has much to celebrate.

By **Tiffany Trawick** [3] February 15, 2012 (2 years ago)

Though we've barely had a taste of winter, it is already February. Obviously, this is the month of Valentine's Day, but it is also Black History Month. What may be surprising is that even though only 4 percent of students at the University of Minnesota are African-American, the University has a very rich black history, one worth celebrating.

One of the biggest events regarding our school's black history occurred in 1969, an event that has come to be known as the Morrill Hall Takeover. This was the event in which African-American students and other activists occupied Morrill Hall to protest against the lack of academic opportunity for African-American students. It was through this event that the African-American studies program of the University was founded. It also produced the Martin Luther King scholarship, a scholarship that serves students of color and still exists today.

Greg Anderson, a former student of the University and member of black fraternity Omega Psi Phi was a part of the Takeover. Anderson says he remembers that time very clearly. "It was a very radical time, not only for the U, but also for the country." He spoke about how the students knew what they wanted from the University and they weren't going to stop until they got it. "We stayed there at Morrill Hall and camped out." He was proud to note the progress that came as a result of the radical activism that took place on our campus at that time.

But our black history started even prior to the Morrill Hall Takeover. I talked to professor Walt Jacobs, department chairman of the University's African Studies program, who informed me that the first black students to graduate from the University did so in 1882.

Our black history and the efforts made by former black students have created a rich present for our community. This we celebrate, especially now, during Black History Month.

"The University of Minnesota is 100 percent behind Black History Month, both directly, by providing funding for events, and through indirect support such as operating units like the Department of African-American and African Studies," said Jacobs. And he is correct: There are numerous events during February in honor of Black History Month, including the Annual Black History Month Kickoff that is put on every year by the Black Student Union.

Despite the events that go on, however, many students feel as though Black History month is over-looked by the University.

“I do not think the University puts any effort into acknowledging, let alone participating in, Black History Month on a large scale. I have yet to see an email, poster, flyer or an event that has been sponsored by the University,” said Kynesha Patterson, a junior at the University and a member of the Black Student Union and Black Motivated Women. Other students, however, believe it is up to the student body to celebrate Black History Month. “I think it is more of the student’s responsibility to acknowledge things like this, not so much the University’s,” said Alvan Washington, a junior.

Personally, I have found that there is a lot the University offers as far as Black History Month, and in support of the African-American student body in general, for our black history is rich. Resources and institutions like the African Studies department and multicultural student groups such as the Black Student Union can help engage with black culture and history. All students, not just African-Americans, should observe Black History Month by learning about and engaging with black history and culture, especially as it relates to our campus. Our culture at the University is rich, but it is up to us as individuals to get involved.

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