

OPINION/EDITORIAL

How relevant is the historical black aspect of our university?

Bridget Armstrong
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

There has been a 30 percent increase of white enrollment at Historically Black Colleges and Universities since 1970. A extreme example of the increase is Bluefield State, a HBCU in West Virginia, which is now 91 percent white. This truly defies the historical aspect of an HBCU, because the only thing black about this school is its history and foundation.

With all of the inevitable changes taking place within HBCUs, including Winston-Salem State University, one has to examine the effects that this will have on our college experience and the experience of future students wanting to attend an HBCU.

At the State of the HBCU forum on Feb. 19 in the Thompson Center, student panelists talked about why they to come to a HBCU. They said that they wanted to attend a HBCU to be around others like them and to be in an atmosphere among other black intellectuals. Panelists also spoke of the rich historical tradition of HBCUs as motivation to attend. This sentiment is much affirmed among the student body population.

"The HBCU, particularly Winston-Salem State University, should not become more racially inclusive because doing so will be abandoning the principles in which it was founded, and doing so would also erode the very foundation of this university and universities like it," said sophomore Erica Gonde.

However, many students welcome the changes happening at HBCUs.

"Winston-Salem State raising admission requirements is a good change. It means that the university will begin to recruit a higher quality of students thus the graduation rates will increase," said senior Merid Fetahi. "In addition to this, a more racially inclusive university will attract more funding and programs, which will be good for the university and the students attending. The changes that are happening to HBCUs should not be looked at in a negative manner but should be considered as an evolution of HBCUs to a higher plateau."

When the facts are examined regarding the HBCU and what the HBCU is becoming, one is left to contemplate what all of these alterations truly mean. If change causes an increase in funding and programs, is that not a good thing for the university? Or are we selling our principles and identity for funding?

If admission requirements are raised, what does that mean for black students who do not have high GPA's or SAT scores, who often turn to the HBCU for a chance to obtain higher education? On the other hand, do under-qualified black students not deserve to be at the university? Is there even a need for the HBCU in 2008?

As we see WSSU become a part of the Division I athletics, the university recruits more racially diverse students in addition to raising admission requirements. We as students must take an active interest in what happens at our university and decide where we stand about the issues at hand.

The HBCU is becoming less true to its name. As HBCUs become more diverse, we must decide if this change is positive or negative. Whether you agree or disagree, I challenge all students on this campus to take note of what is going on because inevitably we are tied to this university and its fate.

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Black History: One month isn't enough

LaTasha Miles
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

Many African-Americans think that in Black History Month (BHM) being celebrations in February are some kind of conspiracy. Many of those people think that BHM was "donated" as the month to focus on African-American accomplishments because it is the shortest month of the year?

Well contrary to the popular belief, BHM originated as Negro History Week in 1926 by Carter Godwin Woodson. He selected this celebratory week in February in regards to Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglas's both being born in this month. In 1976, Negro History Week officially became a month long celebration.

Has this month turned out to be the only time we focus on black history and the contributions of our African-American pioneers and leaders? Do we overdose on the achievements to succumb to its commitment by March 1?

"I'm not going to be, as the kids say 'pimped' during the month of February, only to become 'invisible' by months end," John Price told the Associated Press.

Price is the only black county commissioner of Dallas, Texas. He has vowed to no longer make any public appearances during February. He feels there is a continuing need for BHM that must go on beyond the month of February, and so do I.

By attending Winston-Salem State, a HBCU where black history is incorporated within the establishment and often surpasses our African-American culture classes. Nonetheless, what about expanding our knowledge outside of WSSU?

Excluding BET from this equation, February is the only time we can turn on our TVs and see "The Rosa Parks Story" on Lifetime television network, "The Vernon Johns Story" on WGN, or the story about Matthew Henson on the history channel to name a few.

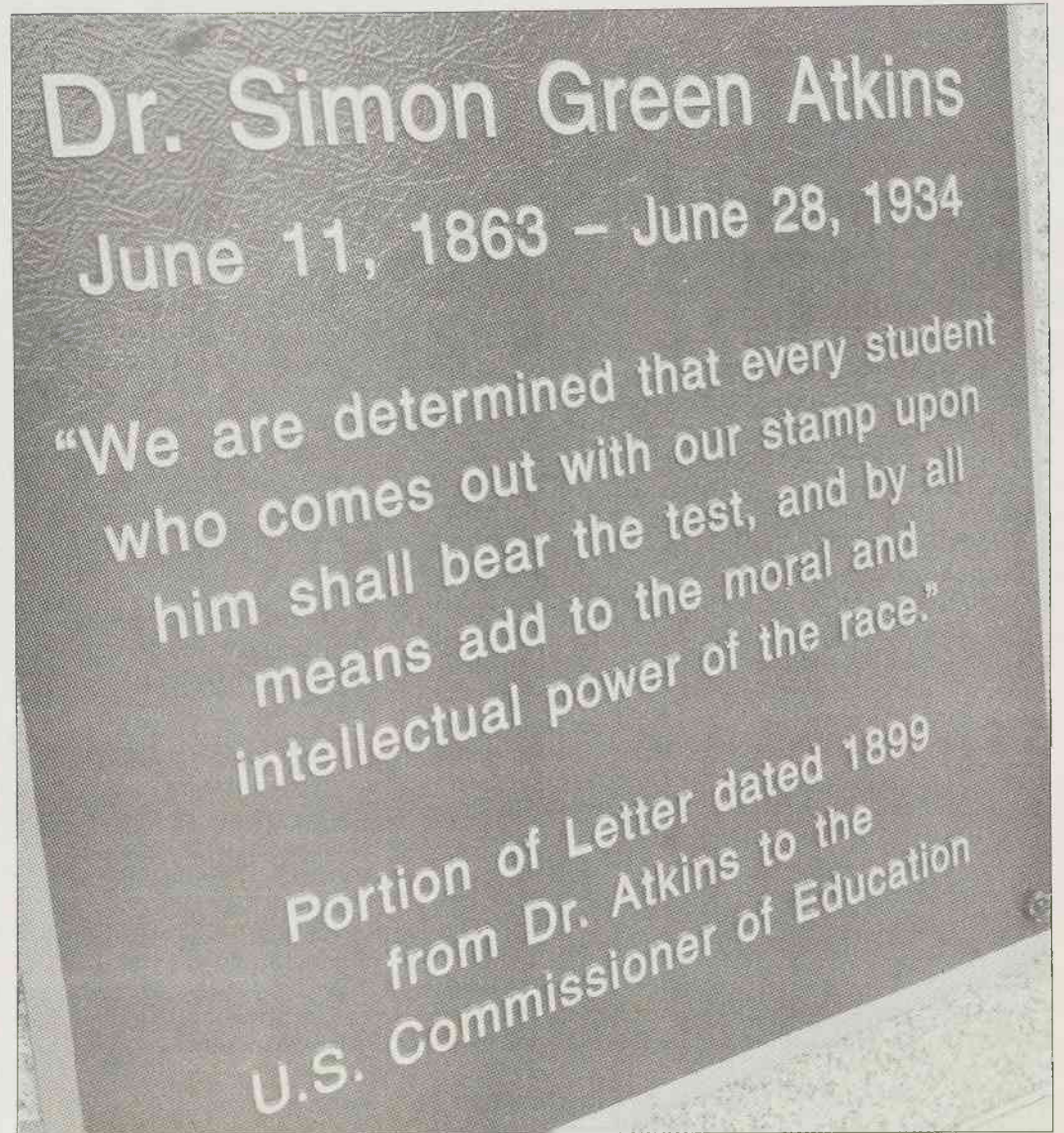
Are these historical triumphs not significant enough to be seen on our TVs outside the month of February? According to a February 2005 article posted on tolerance.org by staff writer Camille Jackson, "race relations have never been easy in this country, and segregating black history to one month—when white history is the bedrock of American Academia all year long—adds insult to injury."

"In my own estimation, the mainstream majority of white Americans has tuned out from black folks—other than in entertainment," said Dr. Amilcar Shabazz, director of the African-American Studies program at the University of Alabama.

Shabazz also added that he has heard debates that BHM was originally designed as "internal group work" with the only purpose to make whites feel bad and uncomfortable.

"In order to diffuse it, the celebration has been taken out of context, and has damaged its initial meaning," he said.

BHM was originally designated to promote black pride. BHM derives from humble roots and has expanded into a genuine culture of



Photos courtesy of WSSU Media Relations

ABOVE: The base of the S.G. Atkins statue on campus displays a portion of his letter. BELOW: The statue was dedicated by former chancellor Harold Martin in 2005.

embracing African-Americans throughout February. To some degree, there is still a lack of knowledge about African-American traditions contributions in areas such as language, ideas, food, education, and philosophy.

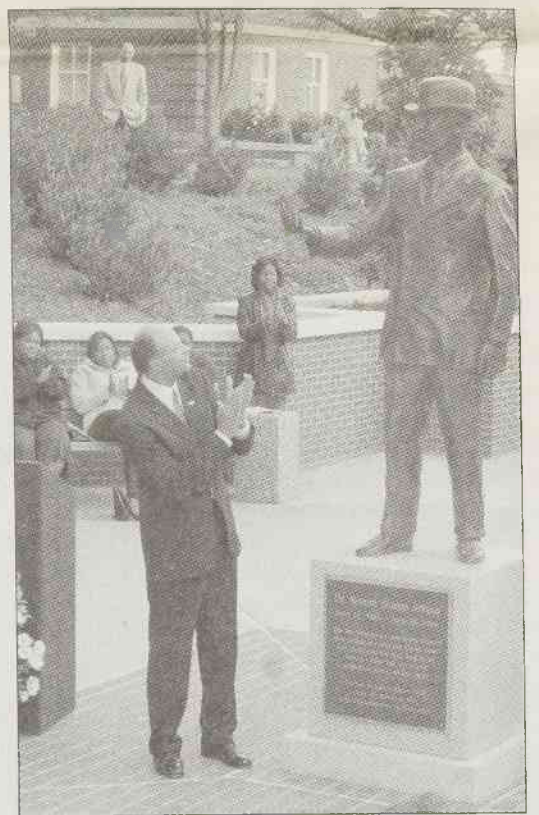
Overall, February should not be the sun around which black history revolves. It is imperative that black history message is carried out the entire year.

"Rather than simply honor the principles of Dr. King, for example, we should do what we can to live those principles," said Kevin Johnson, professor and associate dean of the UC Davis Law School.

Having an on-going commitment to promoting education and cultural understanding is an act that must be carried out in February and beyond.

African-Americans have made so many of our daily tasks more feasible, we must make a conscious effort that they are acknowledged more than 28 (or 29) days out of the year.

Be enthusiastic in your pursuit on acquiring new knowledge about black history. Be relentless in uncovering rare facts about the enduring accomplishments of African-Americans.



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