

THE DECREE

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Bishops Commemorate Black History in Their Own Ways

By Amanda Lucci & Decree Staff

When she was a child, junior Caitlin Leggett said, her teachers short-changed her in their lessons on Black history. The Durham native said the material was made “digestible.”

“Teachers breezed through slavery and touched on MLK Jr only by having us watch ‘My Friend Martin,’ but that was about it,” she said. “Slavery was barbaric and MLK Jr. was impactful, but that’s not the end of our history. Our accomplishments should be taught with pride because of their influence on our future.”

Sophomore De’Asia Clark expressed similar frustration with the educational system. “We learn about the same three people every year,” she said.

Black History Month took on more prominence in 2021 following the death of George Floyd and other events of the past year, said Leggett, who finds echoes

of the Civil Rights movement in today’s community activism. “Black History Month is more significant this year because people are listening,” she said.

Jason Buel, assistant professor of communication, agreed that events of the past year have given Black History Month added urgency in 2021. He pointed to the “momentum generated by Black Lives Matter protests” over the summer.

Abigail Shah acknowledged that recent civil unrest has heightened interest in Black history, both in schools and among the general public. She sees this as a positive. “Black history is important, and it should be taught accurately because Black people make up a large part of the population,” she said. “Everyone deserves to know their ancestral history.”

Sophomore Hannah Golden believes the pandemic has prompted more Americans to spend time on social media, whose posts on race and social justice issues have

led to greater awareness of Black History Month. She expressed the hope that the new Democratic administration would help foster better race relations in the U.S.

At Wesleyan, Black History Month is a time of reflection and celebration of Black Americans throughout our history. Though the campus activities were limited or altered by the pandemic, the college continued its BHM traditions by presenting an array of programs, which included an art show in the Dunn Center, the “I Am 400” exhibit in the Hartness Center, the Black Student Association’s trivia night, and the Ebony Ball. During February, President Evan Duff sent out weekly emails that highlighted notable Black historical figures.

While some Bishops participated in on-campus events, others took part in celebrations that occurred in their community or even online.

Leggett, a published poet, said she honored BHM by speaking at middle schools and high schools. “I use poetry as a medium to educate students on Black history,” she said.

College switchboard operator Gail Fields said she likes to watch documentaries about the contributions made by Black Americans. She added that her church holds a Black History program each year, presenting poetry readings, musical performances and skits.

Senior Chasadie Searcy tries to honor her forebears not just in February, but year-round. She reads and posts important information about the richness of Black history and Black empowerment on social media. She also volunteers her time at her church and helps preteens and teenagers in her hometown of Detroit.

Shah said she seeks to find ways to support Blacks in her community. “On any normal day if I see on my Instagram page that there’s a Black-owned small business, whether it’s a coffee shop, barbecue place or boutique in my area, I’m sure to visit and support it,” she said. “If I see a book written by a Black author or a biography about a Black historical figure that I admire, I’ll read it. If I see a charity that supports the Black community or a school that might need fundraising, I donate.”

During February many Bishops paid tribute to particular Black historical figures. Clark said that Billie Holiday has been on her mind. The jazz singer is the subject of a new film “The U.S. vs. Billie Holiday.” Clark cited Holiday’s “amazing voice,” which changed American culture with landmark songs such as “Strange Fruit.”

Fields opened up about prominent Black historical figures that stand out to her. She said that Martin Luther King Jr is the first. “I see him as a man who loved God, his family and all mankind,” she said. “He wanted a beautiful Godly world for all. I appreciate the peaceful methods he used to attain his goals.” She lamented that Dr. King was assassinated on her 16th birthday. “It was not so sweet,” she said.

She also cited the contributions of four African-American women featured in the novel and film “Hidden Figures.” Working for NASA in the 1960s, the women, Dorothy Vaughan, Mary Jackson, Katherine Johnson, and Christine Darden, blazed the trail for others to follow in mathematics and engineering, Fields said.

Dr. Buel singled out Fred Hampton, Lucy Parsons, Angela Davis, Ben Fletcher, Kwame Ture, and Barbara Smith. “All have fought for justice,” he said, “and most have been generally forgotten.”

There was a consensus among many members of the Wesleyan community that Black history should be taught and recognized year-round, not just in February.

Clark noted that “Black history is American history,” adding, “We should learn it in school along with the rest of the history. Black history shouldn’t just be celebrated in February but every day of the year.”

While she thinks Black History Month is important, Searcy concurs that the promotion of Black heritage should not be limited to one month. She added that she’s pleased that “more Black people are educating themselves and becoming more self-aware of their place in society.”

Shah also believes that we should honor

the history of Blacks and other minority groups year-round. The daughter of an Indian father, she said she does not observe Asian Pacific American History Month (in May) either. “I never thought a large ethnic group’s history should be narrowed down to only a month of recognition,” she said.

Golden maintains that Black History Month fulfills an important purpose. She

considers it a time to reflect on the many impediments that African Americans have faced throughout our country’s history. “They deserve to be recognized for the battles they’ve been forced to fight, and for the obstacles they’ve overcome,” she said, expressing the wish that such reflection would “bring us a step closer to unity in this country.”

Graduating Seniors Express Concerns about Job Search In Wake of Covid Pandemic

By Chasadie Searcy Editor-at-Large

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, seniors have high hopes of graduating in the spring. However, job scarcity is raising concerns for many.

Maria Padron

Caracas native Maria Padron, a psychology major, is still weighing her options.

As an international student, she’s limited when it comes to finding a job after college. She is seeking optional practical training (OPT), which is temporary employment related to the student’s major. That way

she can work in the United States for a year after graduation from NCWC.

She wants to work as a technician or research assistant until she can afford graduate school. She’s open to any job opportunity, just as long as it’s in her field.

Last year she enjoyed an internship at Tarboro Pediatric Psychology, where she provided psychotherapeutic services for children and adolescents.

The internship enabled her to strengthen her research and writing skills, but, due to the pandemic, she worked remotely for part of the time, robbing her of the opportunity to interact more closely with patients and sharpen her communication skills. “I really hope I gain those skills while doing OPT or in graduate school before I work in the clinical psychology field,” Padron said.

So far Padron has identified work opportunities by perusing sites like LinkedIn, Indeed, Glassdoor, and SimplyHired. She’s aware that as an international student, she can only work in the states for 12 months unless her employer decides to sponsor her. “Whatever job I find,” Padron said, “I hope it allows me to prepare well for my career as a clinical child psychologist.”

Kneciya Tripp

Kneciya Tripp, a criminal justice major, plans on getting her master’s degree sometime in the near future. “I wasn’t planning on looking for a (job) just yet. I was going to try to attend grad school first,” Tripp said, noting that she’s looking at Bowie State University in Maryland.

The Edenton native expressed concerns about the number of jobs that will be available to her after graduation from Wesleyan, but that’s not because of the pandemic. “I do think it would be difficult (to find a job) because in criminal justice you need a lot more education than a bachelor’s degree to be making a good amount of money,” Tripp said, adding that she believes there is a “who-you-know” factor involved in securing employment.

Instead of stressing about the long-term future, Tripp remains encouraged. Her goal is to gain as much knowledge and experience as possible. She also wants to make sure the job she finds is enjoyable rather than just a way to make money. “Really my expectations are just to be happy in what I do,” Tripp added. “That’s it, to be happy and successful.”

Over the summer, Tripp plans on working as an investigator as part of a paid internship with the Department of Transportation.

Jerrian Arnold

Business major Jerrian Arnold anticipates that it will be a tough job market

for her, but not because of the pandemic or insufficient education. She’s concerned about her lack of job-related experience.

“It’ll be difficult looking for a job right now because of the little experience I have in my field,” she said while acknowledging that a four-year degree gives her an edge over other applicants.

Instead of jumping right into the job market, Arnold has applied to Wesleyan’s new MBA program and hopes to enroll next fall.

The Roper (NC) native knows that she must be on top of her game for the future. She explained that she’s taking advantage of her educational opportunities before she launches her career.

Timothy Marinus

Timothy Marinus hopes to begin a career in psychology right after college, but fears the pandemic and its aftermath will complicate his search.

In recent years the Clayton resident added a second major in criminal justice to complement his studies in psychology and better prepare him for a career. Then after taking courses from Dr. Chad Ross and Dr. Jonathan Sarris, he decided to add history as a third. “The educational resources were so great that I didn’t want to pass them up,” Marinus said.

Marinus sees the job market as competitive even in non-pandemic times. “Not only are there not a lot of jobs open, but there are so many candidates applying for a finite number,” he said.

He sees the military as a potential way to serve his country while using his knowledge and skills. “I would like to help soldiers with PTSD,” he said. “It seems like the best of both worlds.”

Yazline Santiago

A native of Bridgeport, Connecticut, Yazline Santiago hopes to find a job in criminal justice.

Her job search is well under way. She’s begun to prepare her mind for her life once she leaves Wesleyan. “I’m hopeful that an opportunity will become available,” Santiago said. “It just takes faith and a lot of prayer.”

Since she believes there’s a surplus of opportunities in the criminal justice field, Santiago is confident she will find a job soon. Remaining optimistic despite the pandemic, she said she’s been actively looking for a position.

She would like to begin as a police officer, with the ambition to rise to higher positions in the criminal justice system. She plans to relocate to North Carolina from her home state, she said.

As she ponders her new career, Santiago said she’s become concerned about racial tensions in our society.

“I want to go into this field and feel as though I can make a difference,” Santiago said. “For me, this is more than just money. I could have picked a different major for that.”

Santiago wants to become a role model for young Americans who come from similar backgrounds. “I want people that look like me, people that grew up in communities with so little promises, to see that there are endless opportunities,” she said. “You just have to work hard against all the obstacles placed against you.”

Wesleyan Urged to Continue Covid Protocols as Staff Begin Vaccinations

Wesleyan reported 20 active Covid cases among students and none among employees as of March 12. Since the beginning of spring semester, there have been a total of 70 students and two employees who have tested positive for the virus.

The Decree interviewed Jessica Brys-Wilson, Director of Health Services, about recent Covid-related developments on campus and around the state.

Q. The college has changed its approach to testing since last August. Could you update us on what you’ve been doing?

A. For most of last semester students had to get tested off campus. We first tested on campus in November with the surveillance tests that were offered right before students left for break. We continue to use these rapid antigen tests on campus. The new tests have been helpful in limiting the number of students who need to quarantine. This has helped minimize the students’ time out of class. Antigen testing has helped prevent spread on campus by allowing us to catch positives before the students have had a lot of direct contacts. With assistance from the athletic trainers, we’ve conducted 811 tests since January 21.

Q. Compare the number of Covid cases so far this spring to last fall.

A. Sixty-four students tested positive for all of last semester. Because we’ve done an increased number of testing, this has resulted in a higher rate of positive cases.

Q. Have there been any Covid-related hospitalizations among NCWC staff and students since January 21?

A. Not to my knowledge.

Q. How does this winter compare so far in terms of the incidence of flu, strep throat and stomach virus, etc.? Are you seeing many cases of illness other than Covid?

A. We’ve had a decrease in cold and flu cases on campus. We’ve had a stomach virus and conjunctivitis going around, but the cases are lower than what I normally see this time of year. I attribute this to increased hand hygiene and mask use.

Q. Are there plans to give earlier Covid vaccinations to college-age students with underlying health problems (e.g., diabetes, obesity, asthma)? If so, when?

A. They should be eligible beginning on March 17. That’s when the state moves to Group 4.

Q. When can students without underlying health issues expect to get vaccinated?

A. Likely in very late March or April.

Q. The governor moved the date for the vaccination of college employees to March 4. And the college has arranged for the Nash County Health Department to give injections. What would you tell employees who have expressed reluctance to get a job?

A. Employees need to weigh the risks versus benefits of the vaccine. We don’t have long-term data about the vaccine, but we also don’t have long-term data about Covid. Current indications are that having a Covid infection may increase your risk of heart or lung problems in the future. I would recommend the vaccine in most situations.

Q. Are all college employees eligible, or only those 50 and older?

A. All college employees are now eligible.

Q. There are now three vaccines available in the U.S. There have been reports that the newest one, the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, was less effective in trials (around 66 percent vs. 90-95 percent for Moderna and Pfizer). If given the chance to get the J&J shot, should one get it?

A. Though the data indicated a 66 percent effectiveness in preventing moderate to severe Covid infection, it was 100 percent effective in preventing hospitalizations and death from Covid. It’s worth noting that this shot is a one-time dose, which will help with compliance when it comes to being fully vaccinated.

Q. Will the on-campus protocols (e.g., mask wearing and social distancing) remain in place all semester, even after faculty and staff have gotten two shots (or one with Johnson & Johnson)?

A. I don’t anticipate a change in the mask mandate or social distancing protocols. We’re going to be conservative with prevention measures, as our first priority is always the safety of our students, faculty, and staff. We have about 150 employees being vaccinated this week (March 1-5), but most students have not been vaccinated yet. Also keep in mind that one is not fully vaccinated (and protected) until about two weeks after their second dose (or first with J & J).

Q. What other message would you like to impart to members of the campus community regarding Covid and their overall health?

A. Hang in there! Our county numbers are looking better and, as a campus, we’re doing quite well. Keep wearing your masks. Wash your hands with soap and water as often as possible. Keep social distancing and get your vaccine as soon as you’re eligible, unless your provider has advised against it. We will get through this.



Myrayna Watkins and the women’s basketball team won the East Division title. See story page 3. SI photo