

Celebrating Black History at Elon

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Features Editor

What is now known as Black History Month began as Negro History Week, started in 1926 by Dr. Carter G. Woodson.

Every year during the month of February, everyone is reminded of blacks who struggled for the right to vote and be seen as equal. Martin Luther King, Jr., Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman become household names. But are the names Eugene E. Perry, Bryant Colson or Dr. Donna Hill Oliver familiar? They should be, especially to Elon students, faculty and staff.

These are some of the African-American students who helped to shape not only Black history, but Elon's history.

Black History Month provides the opportunity to recognize the legacy of pride the African-American community has built and the extraordinary gifts that have enriched our nation. Following are a few names of past Elon students and their significance in the college's history.

Eugene E. Perry ('69)—Perry was the first black to graduate from Elon College. Elon, along with other southern colleges and universities, did not begin admitting blacks until 1963. Perry graduated with a bachelor's degree in Social Science/Secondary Education. He then attended Andover Newton theological School in Boston, where he received a Master of Divinity in Pastoral Theology in 1973. Currently, he is the chaplain at Anderson College in Anderson, SC.

Gail Parker Fonville ('70)—Fonville was the first black female to graduate from Elon. Currently, she is the owner and director of the Love-a-Lot Daycare and Preschool, Inc. in Burlington.

Bryant Colson ('79)—In 1978, Colson became the first black

president of the Student Government Association (SGA). He then went on to become the first black editor-in-chief of *The Pendulum* the following year.

Mary Carroll Williamson ('81)—What started out as a prank by a white fraternity became history for Elon. Carroll was nominated for Homecoming queen and won in 1979, making her the first black queen. When the yearbook failed to publish a Homecoming section, however, students took it as a sign of racism. Rumor has it that many of the 1979 yearbooks were burned in protest.

Dr. Donna Hill Oliver ('72)—Dr. Oliver was the first black alumni to receive the Alumni of Distinction Award. She received her PhD from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro; currently, she is the Vice-Chancellor at Bennett College in Greensboro.

Tonya Taylor ('93)—Taylor was the first black female editor-in-chief of *The Pendulum*.

William Walker ('93)—Walker was the first black president of the Student Union Board. He held this office for two years. He was also elected Vice-president of SGA, making him the first black to do this. Walker held both of these positions consecutively. Currently, he is the Director of Residence Life at Methodist College in Fayetteville.

David Bynes ('96)—In 1993, Bynes achieved two "firsts;" he became not only the first black Homecoming King, but the first King, period.

Michael Rodgers ('97)—Rodgers became the first black youth board of trustee member. He is currently a Rotary International Ambassadorial Scholar at the University of Liege in Belgium.

More information can be dis-

covered in the African-American Resource Room, Moseley 221C, on the "Wall of Fame." It is a wall containing a pictorial history of the accomplishments of Elon's African-Americans.

"African-American history is important wherever you are, wherever you are," said Wilhelmina Boyd, Associate Professor of English.

"The contributions that African-Americans have made and are still making to Elon College and society are important; it is only when we understand ourselves and each other that we can create a unified whole," she said.

L'Tanya Richmond, Director of Minority Affairs and Associate Director of Admissions, agrees.

"Black History Month should be an important experience for the entire college community," she said. "We have a special history of commitment involving the African-American community... evidenced in our efforts to expand opportunities for success at the college as well preserve and enrich life for African-Americans."

Black History Month

Feb. 15-21— Clothing Drive for American Red Cross Relief Fund.

Mon., Feb. 16— Speaker on Sickle Cell Anemia. 7p.m. Covington

Tues., Feb. 17— AIDS penny drive, followed by speaker 8p.m. Moseley 221C

Thurs., Feb. 19— Ailey Rep, 8p.m. McCrary.

Fri., Feb. 20— Excellence in Storytelling w/Jamal Koram. Whitley, 6:30p.m.

Tues., Feb. 24— Speaker, Marvin Delaney. TBA

Wed., Feb. 25— Forum TB

Thurs., Feb. 26— Talent show emphasizing Black history. Whitley, 7p.m.

Fri., Feb. 27— "War of the Wits." Whitley, 7p.m.

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has been involved in since his freshman year.

"In high school, I considered myself kind of like a big fish in a small pond," he said. "I didn't want to come to college and become swallowed, so as soon as I arrived, I tried to make a big splash," he added.

Smith became involved in as many organizations as possible. Now, Smith is concentrating on graduating and making sure he has a competitive GPA for graduate school. He isn't as involved as he was freshman year. He spends most of his time with his fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha; as a college ambassador, and working as student assistant to Mary Ruth, director of Parent and Alumni Relations.

"Basically, I'm chillin' this year," he says with a short laugh.

Smith's years at Elon have been filled with experiences and memories, and he has the resume to prove it.

"The more I think about it, I realize that my resume is one of the most valuable things," he said. "I can actually look at it and be proud, because it's cumulative of my experiences here."

Smith also remembers when he joined his fraternity. "Before I joined, I was so naive, so... green," he said. "My fraternity brought out a lot of my leadership qualities that I hadn't tapped into yet."

Winning Homecoming King in 1997 was something he'll always remember as well.

"To win in front of so many people, that's when I felt that I was where I needed to be," he said. "I had accomplished all of my goals—social events, academics and volunteering.... I didn't want to leave here not accomplishing any of those things," he said.

Smith has no regrets. There was nothing he wished he could have done or didn't get a chance to do.

"I wouldn't change anything," he said. "I can't complain."

Smith's ultimate goal is to get his PhD, then teach students. Eventually, he wants to inspire others to do what he did.

With all of his involvement on campus, Smith realizes the need for more leaders, especially in the African-American community at Elon. However, he feels that leadership can't be forced on others.

"Once folks decide for themselves that they are going to be a leader, they'll get involved," he said.

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