

Black History Month celebrated at UW-Fox Valley

Fox Cities event marks nine years of sharing history

BY PETE BACH
FOR THE NEWS-RECORD

MENASHA — Diane Ballinger came to the Fox Cities' ninth annual Black History Month celebration Saturday at the University of Wisconsin-Fox Valley expecting to be educated.

"I think it's all of our responsibility to educate ourselves in that part of history we never got in school," said Ballinger, of Harrison. "The celebration of black history is a celebration of our history."

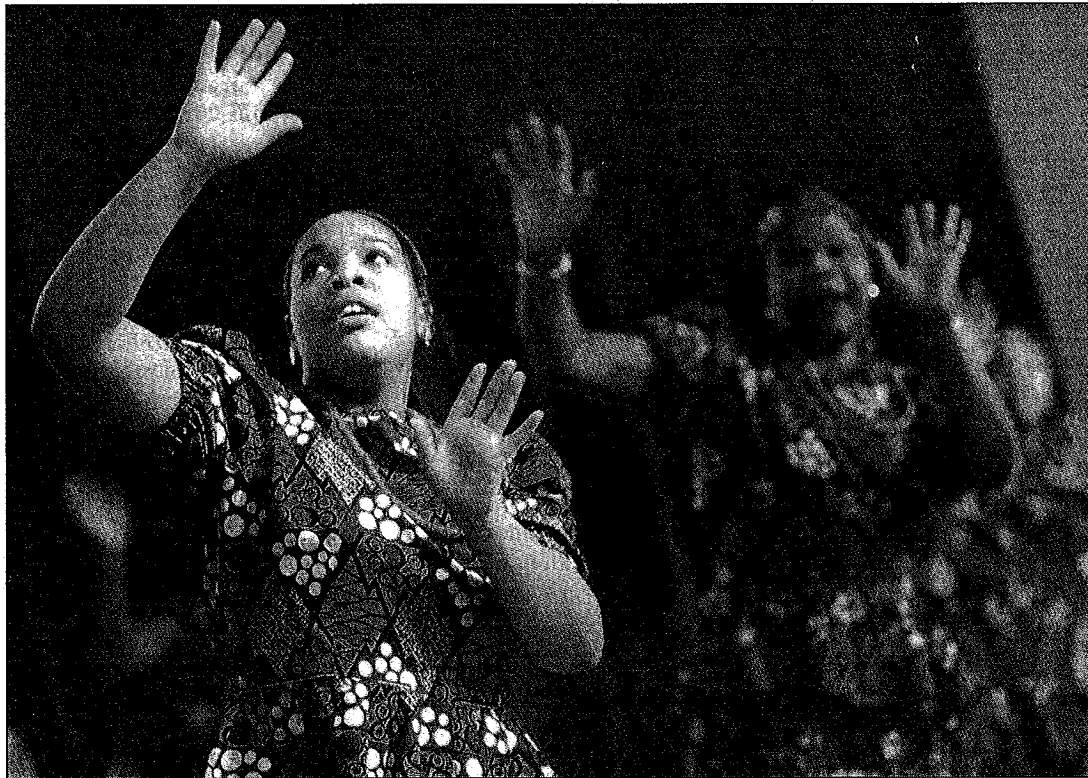
The keynote speech, delivered by Mary Oling-Sisay, vice president for student life at St. Norbert College in De Pere, was tailor made for her inquisitive mind. Oling-Sisay explored the life and times of Ida B. Wells-Barnett, an obscure former slave (1862-1931) whose tireless efforts paced a campaign that eradicated the scourge of black lynchings in the South.

Students won't find her name in the history books, though.

"I believe she was left out largely because of her gender," said Oling-Sisay.

The speaker said Wells-Barnett was shunned by black leaders and vilified by whites. Despite the scorn, she persevered in exposing raw injustices as she saw them. And things changed.

"Mostly she used her pen. She used her pen to do a lot of investigative reporting," Oling-Sisay said. "At one point, there was a bounty put on her head and she had to go into exile."



JERNIKA MOUTRY performs with the Nia Dance Group, which is based at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, during the Fox Cities Black History Month program and celebration at University of Wisconsin-Fox Valley in Menasha last weekend.

News-Record photo by M.P. King

The timing of the celebration meshed perfectly with Democratic presidential hopeful Barack Obama's campaign swing through Wisconsin. His name came up more than once as several speakers took their turns at the podium.

Appleton Mayor Tim Hanna said his college-age daughter phoned from UW-Eau Claire on Saturday to say she was waiting in line to catch a glimpse of Obama.

UW-Fox Valley Dean/CEO Jim Perry called this point in American history "a watershed moment

for diversity and inclusiveness. We stand on the cusp of what may be the first African-American president of the United States."

Ken Tucker, a member of

African Heritage, gave a tribute to Carter G. Woodson, who created the organization that established the forerunner to modern-day Black History Month in

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Black History Month has its roots with Carter G. Woodson, the son of former slaves who lived from 1875 to 1950. Woodson created the organization now known as the Association for the Study of African-American Life and History, which in 1926 established the modern-day Black History Month's predecessor, Negro History Week to bring attention to the contributions of black people throughout American history.

Source: Infoplease.com

1926.

The celebration continued with a dinner of sumptuous soul food prepared by event sponsors, African Heritage Inc., Kimberly-Clark's African American Employee Network and the university.

The audience of about 120 also was treated to a drum and dance presentation by the Nia Dance Group from UW-Green Bay. They could also take part in a silent auction of black heritage items, including African art and traditional clothing.

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