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Can you make this house a home? Are Black spaces enough to foster a sense of belonging at Ohio Wesleyan University?

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Can you make this house a home?

Are Black spaces enough to foster a sense of belonging at Ohio
Wesleyan University?

Jeremiah Anderson '23

Roni Cody '22

Dr. Quaye

Classes of Dr. Fink and Dr. Hildebrand

Content of this research

* We are still in the process of completing this research, so this presentation will not have a concise conclusion.

We are looking for more interviews in the next week and are also handling with last minute cancellations of interviews. We hope to reach a total of 30 respondents to participate in our oral history research that will be turned into an archive.

We hope this will inform the campus and administration to expand OWU's commitment to inclusion and enhance students' experiences by having this data for recruitment and retention. We hope that this can provide opportunities and create spaces for all students to have a place they want to spend 4 years.

This research is important to explore and to create because, as of right now, it doesn't exist in one place. It is also important to include the voice and experiences of Black students that have been in this space where HBC has been a source of empowerment. Oral histories have proven to be one of the most long lasting and impactful types of storytelling and this is immune to that. It would show a full history as well as the complacency of whiteness in a PWI.



Abstract

In her seminal book, "Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?", Beverly Tatum explores among other issues, what it feels to be black and a minority in a society that sees Blacks. To quote Dubois, "as a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's souls by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Dubois, p.38). The purpose of this research is to investigate and explore the degree to which the House of Black Culture (HBC) serves as a space of belonging for BIPOC students at Ohio Wesleyan. In 1970, when the House of Black culture (HBC) was created, it was one of a handful of residential spaces that were solely for Black students. Now it remains the only Black residential space on Ohio Wesleyan campus. As cited above W.E.B Dubois is credited with the development of the term "double consciousness." The term appeared in his acclaimed book, *The Souls of Black Folk*. Consistent with this theme, The House of Black Culture similarly provides a space where Black students feel safe and welcomed. The house allows Black students to free themselves from the "gaze" of whiteness and foster a sense of belonging at predominantly white institutions (PWI). Our research will document the lived experience of Black alumni using oral history traditions and interviews. It is our goal that this research sets foundations for any further research conducted on campus, illuminates the contributions and stories of Black students, makes HBC more visible, and tell the story of HBC through Black students.

Relevant Literature

As important as it is for Black students to have a sense of belonging, belonging is only a part of having a strong sense of identity on a college campus at a PWI.

“...although Black students found it important to feel a part of a community, they used knowledge gained through PAS courses and from reading Black authors to become their own advocates.” (Adams, 2005)

“When applied to the university setting, a PWI that does not acknowledge the differences in experiences nor provide the necessary support structures for safety for all of its members can be considered an unhealthy organization. “ (Smith, 2015)

“One way to make a bold commitment to increase enrollment and retention rates of Black students is to increase the number of Black faculty, administrators, and staff in PWIs. It is important to remember that the student population is changing and Black students are more selective” (Credle, 1991)

Research Questions

Some of the questions include:

04 Sections

Each section focused on a different theme: 1.

Background – diving into people’s childhood and foundational years (used for building rapport) 2.

General Questions about the University (depth questions) 3. HBC specific questions and 4.

Experiences as a student and alumni

- Who were some important people in your life back then? Why were they important?
- How would you describe your relationships with your peers at OWU?
- How would you describe your relationship with your professors at OWU?
- In what ways were you able to negotiate your way around barriers around the broader campus?
- Are Black residential spaces relevant on predominantly white college campuses?
- If you lived in other residence halls as well, how did your experiences vary from HBC vs everywhere else?
- How would you describe OWU’s response to any racial incident or event that you can recall?
- Did you have a colleague or friend that left? Do you have a general sense on why they left?
- How did your experience at OWU prepare you for your current profession?

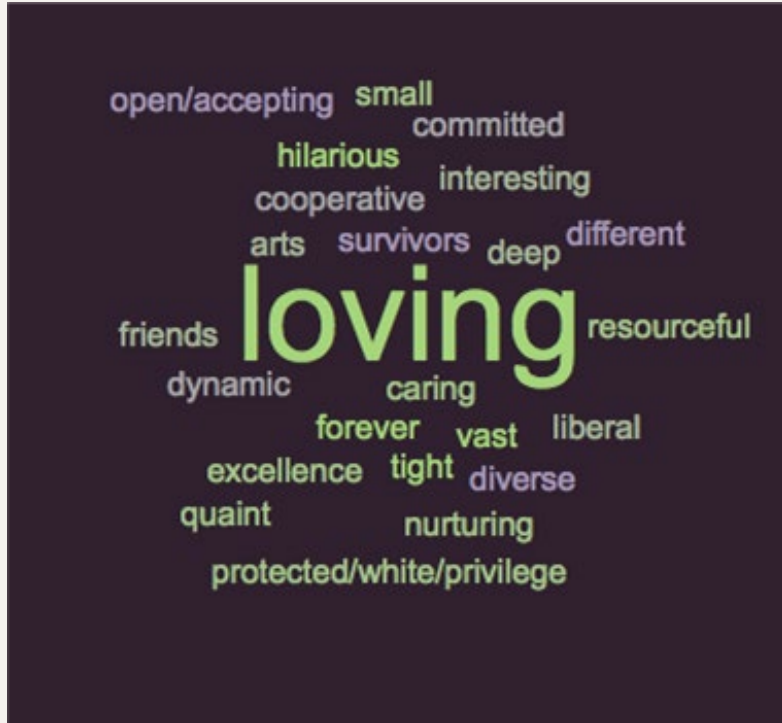
Methodology

- Content analysis– themes throughout interviews
- Used interviews as a way to create an oral history archive.
- We used a survey to collect demographic information of the respondents to save time in the interview process.
- We used a convenience sample based on alumni we had connections with and would be interested in participating
- We used Otter.AI, a transcribing software and Zoom to perform the interviews



Findings

Describe the OWU community in 3 words



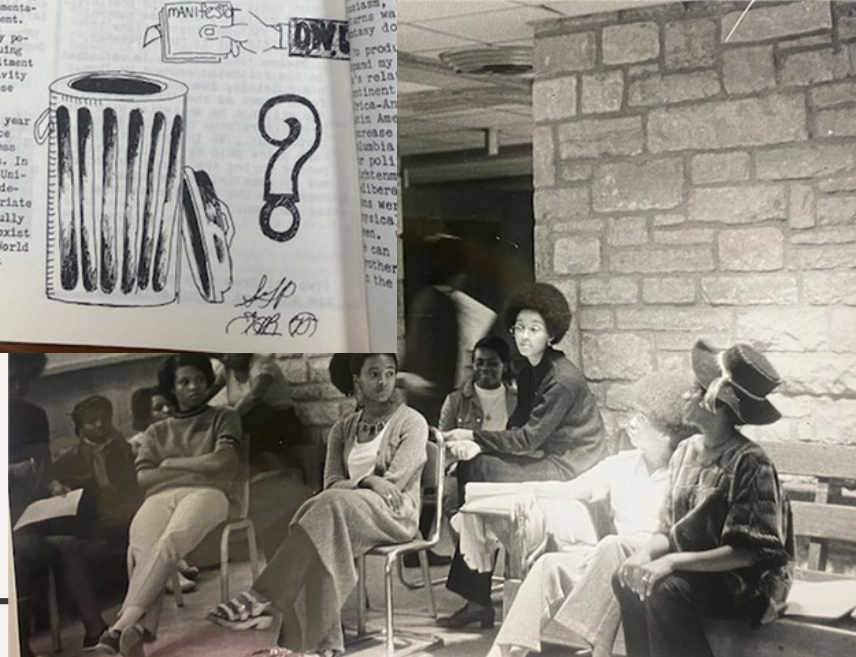
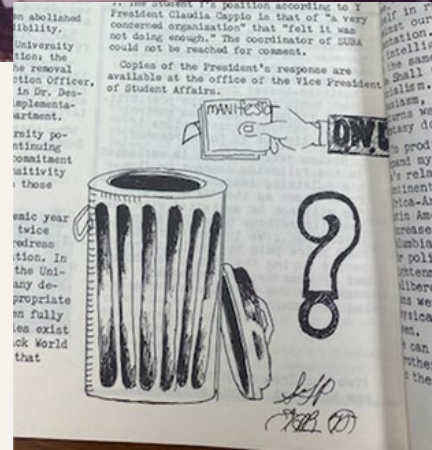
Based on your experience, how comfortable/willing would you be to recommend your children or family members to attend OWU? :

After describing that multiple family members left OWU, this respondent stated, “You have to bring yourself there you have to know who you and don't accept the negativity that you experience because you're a black person or because you're gay or because you're tall or whatever.”

“ I wouldn't be as comfortable in the aspect of (finances). That's the only thing I would hold back on when recommending. OWU's not for everybody... I don't see people I grew up with leaving here and going there and having a positive experience.”

Other answers include:

- “No, just flatout no.”
- “I used to push OWU all the time, and then the financial aid just kept getting worse and worse and worse. There was that massive cut of hell a professors that went down, and it just leaves a sour taste... Don't go to OWU, go somewhere else.”
- “It's the personal environment outside the classroom and in the classroom. If it's not welcoming and affirming students of color, I would not recommend it to my family and my kids... I can't in good conscience endorse OWU and say 'that's where you should go'”



Limitations

- We are currently working with a pool of respondents that mimics a convenience sample.
- As a white person asking Black alumni their experiences on what it was like at a PWI, there may be some things that respondents hold back or don't want to disclose.
- Having a time limit on interviews
- Our questions may not get to everything.



Future Research

- The respondents we interviewed were all Black alumni; in future research, it may be helpful to include current students as well and gather their perspectives currently on campus.
- It would be helpful to create large blocks of time to do the interviews so they aren't cut short at an hour.
- Expand sample selection coming from different backgrounds and intersectional identities
- Follow up interviews for those that we didn't have to time to get to and to get more information that came to the respondent after the completion of their interview

Implications

As of right now, we can recommend:

- The University needs to hire more Black faculty and staff and support the departments that these faculty and staff members are in.
 - In order for a sense of belonging to continue, OWU needs to invest in Black spaces, not just send statements of support to the Black community without actions behind it.
 - There is an incredible amount of information to be learned from Black alumni if you only ask.
 - The community that is felt is created by the students, so investing time, money, and energy into those students will benefit the entire community
 - The reason retention is not high in Black students is because 1. Financial aid is not provided all 4 years and tuition increases change the financial situations of students. 2. A lack of university support for marginalized students decreases the sense of belonging and alienates entire groups of students. The university needs to invest in support systems and mechanisms that alleviate the problems of 1 and 2.
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