

Program at LCCC sought to offer a more complete history of African-Americans



Tyrone Gadlin looks through one of many books at a table detailing the history of Africans and African-Americans during an African-American History Symposium on Saturday at Laramie County Community College in Cheyenne. The event also included speakers, singers and videos. Blaine McCartney/staff

CHEYENNE - History is a complicated, multifaceted thing with many perspectives.

At least that's according to some of those involved with the first black studies media symposium, which happened Saturday at Laramie County Community College.

"When I describe history, I always tell my students it's like a train wreck, in that what the conductor says happened isn't what a witness says happened and isn't what a passenger says happened," event speaker and LCCC instructor Mary Ludwig said. "You have all these different perspectives."

The more exposure that people have to different histories or different aspects of history, the more complete their understanding and informed their views become, she said.

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The event included a display of media records from several time periods including the civil rights movement and African-American history and culture from both a domestic and foreign perspective.

The texts were part of the collection of event organizer James Peebles with Sankofa African Heritage Awareness Inc.

The original pieces were collected by his grandparents and added to by other members of his family, he said.

Along with the display, there were speakers, singers and videos. Others involved in setting up the program included the LCCC History Department with funding from the Wyoming Arts Council, Peebles said.

"The mission of Sankofa is promoting African culture, and historicity and philosophy as they developed from antiquity to the present day," he said.

Often, students say they don't explore many aspects of African or African-American history in class, or that their textbooks don't go into much depth, he said. The symposium is an effort to address those areas.

One goal of the symposium was to introduce people to a wider understanding of that history, Peebles said.

"The stress is on the black history side. What is there that confronts our young people and how they can combat that through education, and self-knowledge and knowing from whence they came," he said.

It is important in a community like Cheyenne, which isn't as diverse as other locations, to have these events, he added.

"The reason I'm here is to set up an educational movement, an appreciative movement of diversity," Peebles said.

Several members of the audience said they attended to deepen their own understanding of the subjects.

Attendee Kira Stone said she was interested in hearing a contemporary perspective.

"More of what it's like today, and more of what they deal with today in different

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countries and the U.S.," she said.

Attendee Ted Mills shared some of her thoughts.

"There's more to explore and understand," he said. "I'm looking to enlighten myself."

Others said they came to take part in the day's events.

Singer Tanya Salih preformed at the event as a way to bring in new energy, she said. She preformed several songs by black artists to help add to the culture of the event.

"Music is so universal, and it's something people can connect to," she said.

Similarly, Ludwig offered a brief lecture on the origins of the Civil Rights' Freedom Summer.

"This is the issue of the 20th century, civil rights, in terms of our social history, and this is just, to me, it's so self-evident that we need to bring attention to these kinds of movements in America," she said.

"There's been so much sacrifice that has happened that we should recognize that."

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If you go....

What: Fourth annual African MAAFA international event.

Where: Laramie County Community College

When: 8:30 a.m. Saturday, April 18, 2015

Why: Event is a day of remembrance of the scattering of people from Africa

Contact: Sankofa, Jillmerry@aol.com / Phone: 307- 635-7094