

Overcomers

Black History Month at Andrews University

[Campus News](#) | Posted on March 15, 2016



Special guest speaker Damian Chandler presents at PMC during Black History Month.(Photo by Brian Tagalog)

By: Danni Francis

Throughout the month of February, several notable events occurred across the Andrews University campus in celebration of Black History Month (BHM). The Black History Month Committee, chaired by Debbie Weithers, associate dean for Student Life, planned a series of forums: “The Black Experience,” featuring the topics of Women, Men and Black on Black Love which occurred successively on the Saturdays of the month. Committee members included Michael Polite, assistant chaplain, and undergraduate students Shenika McDonald, Adrian Marston, Jannel Monroe and Esther Battle.

Notable speaker Damian Chandler, senior pastor of the Capitol City Seventh-day Adventist Church in Sacramento, California, spoke during the first chapel of the month on Thursday, February 4, as well as for Lighthouse Vespers on Friday evening and New Life Fellowship on Sabbath morning.

Additionally, New Life Fellowship and the Black Student Christian Forum (BSCF) held two sermon series entitled “Overcomers” and “Forged by Fire,” featuring Jameel Daniels and Polite as speakers.

“We chose the ‘Overcomers’ theme because we were able to find parallels between black history’s chronicling of a people that overcame much and the Bible’s chronicling of individuals who overcame much,” said Polite. “This parallel exhibits proof that oppression, both sociological and spiritual, can be overcome by a determined persistence.”

The Forged by Fire series “communicated that despite all the things we have dealt with in our past, today God is still trying to refine and help us come out stronger than before,” said Monroe, junior theology major and president of the Black Student Christian Forum (BSCF) at Andrews. “Forged by Fire” occurred each Friday night in University Towers Auditorium, featuring Keishauni George, Sam Ulett and Loreal McInnes as speakers. Monroe planned the series alongside Garrison Hayes, seminary student and BSCF religious vice president, and the BSCF team.

“In planning the series we tried to be intentional about how to combine the past and present for BHM and how we could take this in order to better our futures,” said Monroe. “The planning process was fun and the experience has greatly impacted me. I realized that though I should always look back on and remember the history of our people, I am a part of history in the making.”

The Black Experience: Women featured a panel of black female students: Dana Swann, Jacqueline Dohna, Persephanie Chiddick, Erin Musgrove, Jéssicia Felício and was moderated by Battle.

Panelists were asked a series of questions about their experiences as black women in America and abroad. Questions ranged from how they identify racially/ethnically to how gender has impacted their racial experience.

“We just wanted to do something to celebrate black women during Black History Month and I think we achieved that,” says Battle. “I think sometimes during Black History Month, black women don’t get the recognition they deserve, and this was an excellent chance to highlight our women and educate people on what we go through.”

The panelists also took audience questions such as what black men can do to support black women and the best and worst things about being a black woman.

“I definitely learned a lot about what other women go through,” says Pierrena Charles, junior political science major. “It was nice to hear the perspectives of other black women and connect with them on a new and personal level. I love that Andrews made this program a reality.”

The Black Experience: Men discussed similar ideas from the perspective of black men at Andrews. The panel included Corey Johnson, Hayes, Jonathan Leonardo, Kyle Emile and Dwagne Haskins and was moderated by Polite.

Panelists answered questions including what it means to be a black male in America and the stereotype of black male aggression.

“It was enjoyable to observe a group of black men discussing prevalent topics, each presenting various viewpoints,” says Kevvin Thaw, junior psychology major. “I was able to see different sides that I may not have seen otherwise.”

Black on Black Love discussed interracial relationships, black love in media and the state of black love in America. The large panel was a mix of undergraduate and graduate students, staff and faculty, and included Emmanuel Lapoterie, Cameron Van Buren, Shenika McDonald, Danielle Samuels, Jameel Daniels, Anthony Bolden, Lorraine Polite and Angie Powels, and was moderated by Battle and Johnson.

“Black Like Me: A Comedic Story Slam Event” occurred in the Howard Performing Arts Center Lobby where students and faculty shared five-minute comedic stories centered around amusing experiences in their lives.

Black History Month events at Andrews concluded on February 27 with a viewing of “The Wiz” and featured a flashback costume competition where attendees came dressed representing their favorite decade in black history.

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