

Black History Month Art Show at Ursuline Academy

By Grace Jean '26

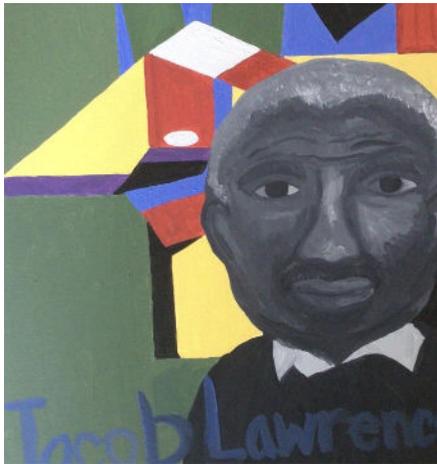
The celebration of Black History Month began in 1926 and is credited to Dr. Carter G. Woodson, who believed in black nationalism. Despite his parents being illiterate, as they were formerly slaves, he is a notable historian and author of black Americans. When he was excluded from attending American Historical Association conferences, he recognized their lack of interest in Black history and took matters into his own hands. He founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life in History in 1915 and the *Journal of Negro History* in 1916. With this, he proposed the idea of Negro History Week in 1926 to be observed during the second week of February because of Abraham Lincoln's and Frederick Douglass's birthdays, who are both important figures in African American progress. Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, which freed slaves in lands under Confederate control, and Frederick Douglass was an African American abolitionist, writer, and leader of the Civil Rights Movement. It is important to note the former is why Black History is celebrated in February, not because it is the shortest month of the year. Unfortunately, Dr. Carter G. died in 1950, before Negro History Week was expanded by President Gerald Ford to become Black History Month in 1976. President General Ford himself proclaimed that Black History Month is intended to "honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of Black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history."

This is fulfilled at Ursuline with the annual collaboration of the Racial Justice Club (RJC) and the National Art Honors Society (NAHS). As a sophomore, I have been a part of RJC since the 8th grade because it caters to my long-standing interests in proper representation and social justice. The club is currently led by President Ekene Okoye '24 and Vice President Sophia Harper '24. Inspired by their predecessors, who focused on portraying black joy through art, Ekene, and Sophia have continued their legacy these past two years by establishing an Ursuline Academy Black History Month Tradition.

In their first year as leaders, Ekene and Sophia focused on Essential Black Women in History to empower us as the Black women of Ursuline. This year's theme is African Americans and the Arts, aligning with the Association for the Study of African American Life and History's theme. I find this to be intriguing, as art is expressed through many forms, including, but not limited to: physical art, literature, and music. Ekene and Sophia share, "Our goal for this annual project is to celebrate the accomplishments and contributions black/African American people have brought to all parts of society (arts, music, science, literature, activism, etc.) and to engage and educate our student body."

National Art Honors Society (NAHS) is led by senior Co-Presidents Kelly Folwell, Charlotte Ramsay, and Cailin Kelly; Secretary Simone Connolly; and Social Media Managers Rachel Otis and Colleen Ganley. NAHS has an application process, which includes taking an art course (hence the talent!). Kelly notes that the collaboration is special because “it allows not only the Ursuline community to learn more about influential African American figures but also the students creating the portraits.”

Maeve Fetter is a current junior who joined NAHS as a sophomore because of her early love of art, similar to Jacob Lawrence’s early interest in art which we were assigned to study. Growing up in Harlem, the hotspot of culture, Lawrence’s early interest in art led him to become a social realist painter. He valued depicting the lives of people of color and historical moments that were previously overlooked. As Maeve reflects on a project she and I embarked on together, she notes that “We chose to take inspiration from Lawrence’s painting *Games - Sleight of Hand* by imitating the color and unique style that he is characterized by, as seen in the background of our depiction of Jacob Lawrence”. Just as we are highlighting Jacob Lawrence during Black History Month, we want to highlight African Americans’ accomplishments in every industry and profession, inspiring our entire community to be like them while we also honor and celebrate them.





More information on the artist
and his work is available
at the following website:
<http://www.lwds.com>

"I read and love to read
books, and in my mind
I'm always out there
reading."
- James Baldwin

JAMES BALDWIN 

AUGUST 2, 1924 - DECEMBER 1, 1987

James Baldwin was a prominent African American writer, philosopher, and social critic. He is best known for his essays, novels, and autobiographies, which explored the complexities of race, class, and identity in America. Baldwin's work has had a profound impact on the civil rights movement and the broader American cultural landscape. His insights into the human condition and the struggle for equality continue to resonate with readers and scholars alike.