

**Centennial Honors College
Thomas E. Helm Undergraduate Research Day 2024**

ABSTRACT

Major: Sociology

Poster

Faculty Mentor(s): Beate Wilson

**African Americans and the Arts: Bringing Black Arts to the Front Stage
Collages for the Creative Self-Expression of Black Campus Members at WIU**

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In 2024, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) announced that Black History Month would emphasize the role of art in the lives of African Americans. As a means of celebrating and encouraging an understanding of this theme, students enrolled in a class on contemporary social problems at WIU were tasked with conducting interviews on art with Black campus members. These formal discussions were then made into collages featuring the art and faces of interviewees. Students conducted short interviews with African American campus members, whether they were faculty, staff, or peers. Interviewees were asked: 1. How they personally use art as a means of historical preservation and empowerment and 2. What their personal art conveys to the general public about the experience of being Black in the United States. One-liners and images collected during the interviews were assembled into group collages. Interviewees' definition of art proved to be highly fluid. Subjects discussed their relationship with traditional art alongside their praxis as educators, activists, bakers, and hairstylists. Students fostered an inclusive learning experience in recognizing how the subjective experience of race and racism are linked to overarching social attitudes. The activity enabled students to understand how empowerment manifests in the daily lives of African American artists, along with how their art is used to elevate both individuals and the community they belong to. In embracing the diversity of experience and identity of fellow campus members, student commitment to WIU's values of academic excellence, educational opportunity, personal growth, and social responsibility was emphasized.