

Dear LSC Campus Community:

February is Black History Month, a time for reflection and recognition of the contributions of Black men, women, non-binary, and many gendered people throughout the history of humans. Every Black History Month, which has been celebrated since 1976, has had a theme assigned to highlight various contributions, achievements, and successes. For example, the theme for 2021 was The Black Family: Representation, Identity, and Diversity. In 2022, it was Black Health and Wellness, and in 2023 the theme was Black Resistance. Each theme explores different aspects in areas such as the arts, sciences, humanities, history, literature, sociology, and so much more.

The theme for 2024 is **African Americans and the Arts**.

As a person with degrees in the arts (art education and theatre minor as an undergrad, art education in my master's degree) I have a wonderful wealth of artists who come to mind: in painting and mixed media, Faith Ringgold is high on my list, as is Jean-Michel Basquiat. In photography, the great Gordon Parks. These are just a few of the artists who I admired in my art school days.

More recently, of course Amy Sherald, who you may know as the artist that created the portrait of First Lady Michelle Obama and Kehinde Wiley, who created the portrait of President Barack Obama for the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery.

And let us not forget the contributions in music! I grew up with the Motown sound and had all of the 45s stacked up...oh, yes, I am of that vinyl vintage. I was blessed in my high school days to be exposed to great music close to home: I knew about Prince early on from a classmate who was a year older than me (the years are so important when one is a junior looking up to a senior): Prince's guitarist for many years, Dez Dickerson. And remember Lipps Inc. the band behind Funky Town? That was Cynthia Johnson (a year YOUNGER than me, also a big deal at that age) from the same high school. Let me add that my tastes in music range widely. So, for example, I had the great good fortune to hear Leontyne Price in concert at Northrup Hall (U of M Twin Cities) back in my college days. And Joan Armatrading rocking the place in that same venue a couple years later, as well as the beautiful vocals of Sweet Honey in the Rock or Deidra McCalla at the Riverside on the West Bank.

As a theatre student, I could see every play by volunteering as an usher with the Guthrie, Penumbra, and Mixed Blood venues. I saw August Wilson plays (while he was living in St. Paul!) and many plays directed by the great Lou Bellamy at Penumbra.

These are just a few examples of the success stories of Black artists who come to mind with joy and light and lovely memories. My thoughts also turn to the many artists whose lives were challenged with obstacles and roadblocks due to racism and bigotry. Those who faced daily challenges, and perhaps were never given the opportunity or permission to fully develop their artistic potential. Not because they did not try, but because they were held back unconsciously,

consciously, or deliberately. And sadly, even those who did succeed lived through similar struggles. These inequities continue today, in the arts and in all aspects of American life.

This is in part why we as a campus community must be mindful of our work in Equity 2030: “Equity 2030 is our “moonshot” goal, serving as the organizing principle for all our work, our operational structures, policies and procedures, and for the inclusive, safe, and anti-racist organizational ethos we strive for. It unites our resolve and drives a strong sense of urgency towards achieving the goal” (see <https://www.minnstate.edu/Equity2030/what.html>).

Together, as a campus community, we play a vital role in shaping this transformative journey. Through our collective efforts, we can ensure that Equity 2030 is not just a goal but a reality, fostering an environment where every individual can unleash their full potential.