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Asia Rogers '25 Explores Emotions of Black Women Through Literature

BY JEFFERY WOODARD | OCTOBER 10, 2024

NEWS



BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — English-writing major Asia Rogers '25 dedicated her research as a 2024 Illinois Wesleyan Eckley Scholar to investigating, humanizing, affirming and expanding the spectrum of emotional phenomena available to Black women in literature and real life.

Rogers' project is titled "What You Still Mad At?" with the goal of identifying negative emotions in Black women and examining the nuances behind those emotions to incorporate them into some of her own work.

"On a more personal level," Rogers said, "my goal was to tackle the culture of shame and misconceptions surrounding Black women expressing anger, sorrow and bitterness, and provide a new narrative. More than anything, this project is also meant to be a form of immortalizing the ordinary Black women around me that I see live complex lives that are tragic, beautiful, unique, comedic and eventful."

After compiling a list of books, shows, movies and songs that centered around the experiences of Black women, including works of Toni Morrison, June Jordan, Dolores Kendrick and more, Rogers began to dig deeper.

In the second phase of her research, she conducted interviews with a variety of Black women from all walks of life where she asked about their relationships and experiences.

"Much like the characters in the literature I encountered over the summer, my interview participants also tended to attribute pieces of their identity to their lively and complex familial, romantic and platonic relationships," said Rogers.

Rogers said an unexpected piece of her project came as she learned the process of interviewing and creating consent documents for her participants.

"Although I knew I would be dealing with sensitive information, and therefore needed to proceed with honor and caution, I did not anticipate clarity being a big part of that caution," she said.

That meant making sure that participants fully understood what they were agreeing to, and what would become of the information they shared with Rogers in the interviews.

"After undergoing review from the Institutional Review Board, I was much more familiar with how to create an informed experience for research participants," she said.

During her research, Rogers worked with Isaac Funk Endowed Professor of English Joanne Diaz.

"Professor Diaz met with me twice every week to discuss my progress in my research as well as my writing," Rogers said. "During these meetings, we would review my poems, discuss my thoughts on the works I was studying and prepare materials for other endeavors like the IRB approval process I had to undergo."

Beyond the Eckley Fellowship, Rogers plans to continue the manuscript she created over the summer, for publishing and grad school opportunities as well as research honors at Illinois Wesleyan.

"My interest in the subject, I will confidently say, is a life-long commitment," Rogers said.

Rogers has intentions of taking a gap year after graduation to rest and determine which post-grad journey she'll pursue first.

"I'd like to travel, participate in writing workshops and take up new hobbies. I'm also a studio art minor, so I hope to find a print shop where I can continue printmaking," she said.

By gaining research and interviewing skills, Rogers said this fellowship has made her college experience more "fruitful."

"If I hadn't been an Eckley Scholar this summer, I wouldn't be as skilled as I am now in independently identifying an area of interest, devising a plan of action to explore it, and carrying out a flexible research plan that is an independent product of its origin of interest," said Rogers.

"This experience has been nothing short of transformative. I'd just like to give thanks to all of the fantastic people who lent me their time this summer and of course, the Eckley Committee for choosing to invest in my research."