

A moment of pride: Spectrum celebrates LGBTQ+ history with a lecture and documentary

By Ashley Williams

MONTEVALLO, Ala. — “We are strongest when we are together, yet it can be seen we are on our own. But we are not alone. Let it be known that homosexuals are not cowards,” Damian McCrickard said.

On Feb. 25, 2025, Spectrum hosted an educational event in Farmer Hall, from 5 to 7 p.m. The organization’s vice president, McCrickard, started the event by giving a lecture about queer people who have made history.

McCrickard’s currently a freshman history major at the University of Montevallo. He’s involved in community organizing along with collecting queer history within the community.

“To be a part of Spectrum is a big deal to me because I love something like this exists for people to feel like they have a safe space, even in light of all the bills that have been passed and the anti-LGBTQ+ legislation that’s been moving through,” McCrickard said.

There are anti-DEI and anti-LGBTQ+ bills being passed across the nation. According to Spectrum’s Director of Outreach Miguel Arreola, Spectrum had to make changes to its constitution because of Alabama’s Senate Bill 129, or SB129. The bill is prohibiting state agencies, K-12 schools and colleges from having DEI offices and programs.

“We had to take a lot of wording from it, mostly like ‘LGBTQ,’ ‘diversity,’ ‘inclusion,’ all that kind of stuff in order for us to be a legal club in the state’s eyes because if we kept it in, we would not be able to get school funding, which is technically funding from the state,” Arreola explained.

Not to mention, Spectrum can’t spend any money on events that are seen as inclusive and use certain words like ‘pride’ or any other DEI-related words.

“This is only the beginning of the consistent attack on the LGBTQ+ and minority communities. I think we’re all kind of in agreement here that this is not really the way to go. Queer people aren’t going to be eradicated from the earth. We’re still gonna be around,” Miguel said.

According to Spectrum Treasurer Meagan Nelson, SB129 took effect in August 2024, and the reason the club remained unchanged earlier this year was because it had already received approval for funding.

As director of outreach, it’s Miguel’s job to reach out to outside sources to receive funding. Just recently, Spectrum was blocked from using any SGA funding for an upcoming event. So, he had to get an outside source to help them fund it.

“It has been extremely frustrating. Montevallo SGA has reached out to us and talked about how this is not their personal beliefs and how damaging it can be. But we’re more focused on keeping our club and also our community together safe and comfortable,” Meagan said.

At the event, Damian gave a lecture on Willem Arondeus, a freedom fighter in the Dutch Resistance during World War II.

Same-sex relationships in the Netherlands were legal until the Nazis took over in 1940. They soon criminalized homosexuality.

Arondeus and other members of the Dutch Resistance blew up the civil registry office in Amsterdam because the office included the information of many Dutch Jews. Nazis would have been able to identify them, potentially persecuting or arresting them.

No one was caught on the night of the attack. However, there was an unknown traitor among them and Arondeus was arrested. On July 1, 1943, Arondeus along with 13 other people involved in the resistance were executed by a firing squad.

Arondeus was also a writer and an artist. Damian presented images of artwork created by Arondeus, from paintings, tapestries, designed poetry books, posters and calendars.

Afterward, he played a video about Arondeus and his friend Frieda Belinfante, who also identified as queer. They helped many Dutch Jews by forging documentation papers and identity cards.

Arondeus and other Dutch Resistance fighters who bombed the office were awarded The Resistance Memorial Cross. He also has been declared as “Righteous Among the Nations,” an honor given to non-Jewish people who have put themselves at risk to protect Jewish people during the Nazi regime.

“I chose to talk about Willem Arondeus today because of recent political events, the stripping of the personhood of our transgender brothers and sisters, for the sterilization of our club and organization in order to dodge the repercussions of right-wing extremist ideologies,” Damian said.

Miguel Arreola soon played “On the People’s Beach,” a documentary by Amanda Crist. The documentary was selected by Spectrum’s President Lena Rios.

“It was important to find a documentary that was created by someone queer, about the queer community, for the queer community. Amanda Crist is not only a friend, but a wonderful fountain of knowledge, telling about her time in New York. I am so glad we got to share this little piece of queer history from miles and miles away,” Lena said.

“On the People’s Beach” is about Jacob Riis Park located in Queens, New York, known for having a historically queer beach. The park’s past, present and future are explored, seeing the perspective of both older and younger people who went to the beach.

In the documentary, there are drone shots of the beach, videos and images of people who were there in the past and there today. Some elderly queer people have shared their experiences on the beach, where some were harassed by homophobic people.

The seaside park remains as an inclusive place for the LGBTQ+ community, standing in unity and solidarity against hatred.

“As an educator, I have seen a lack of queer history available to us. It can be very intimidating searching for queer history. That’s why it’s important that we put on events like these. We have queer scholars available to us, and first-hand sources,” Lena said.

To her, today’s age is reminiscent of Ray Bradbury’s “Fahrenheit 451,” where there’s a lot of misinformation, miseducation and a large erasure and censorship going on.

“We are constantly under the threat of our history being completely erased or changed significantly. Having these channels of information keeps our history relevant and brought to the forefront of our push of recognition,” Lena said.

When it comes down to the social and political climate influencing the shape of the future of LGBTQ+ rights, Damian believes it is influential because it’s fearmongering.

“It is a lot of preying on people’s lack of understanding and lack of empathy for things that are ‘other’ than them, and I feel like that is where the biggest danger comes in,” Damian said. He believes being bold, being proud and unafraid are ways to address these current issues.

Spectrum’s officers say allies should use their voice by voting, speaking to their leaders and being out there with the LGBTQ+ community as well as advocating for education and empathy.

“There is a huge threat on our community more than ever. We have had so many milestones in the past years, but they are slowly being stripped away. Never stop using your voice. It may seem like nothing is coming from it but together we are resilient. As much as there is fear going around, there is also so much love, hope, and joy! Never forget that!” Lena said.

According to Spectrum’s Secretary A.C. O’Flinn, anybody can join the club. “It’s more of a word-of-mouth thing, so just letting people know that we are here and that this is a safe place for anybody,” she said.

To Spectrum's President Lena Rios, queer people should remind others of their resilient existence and that queer education leads to acceptance, opening the doors to jobs or having the comfort to live without fear.

Rios says it's her final semester before she graduates and she wants to spread joy and hope during this dark time. Lena also says Spectrum has strengthened its community by providing a safe place through channels like Discord, where students can connect with each other.

Spectrum welcomes anybody who wants to join, regardless of their gender identities and sexuality, and wants to educate the public about LGBTQ+ history and the achievements and resilience of queer people during difficult times.

The educational event concluded with a round of Jackbox games, including "Quiplash 3" and "The Devil and the Details."

"We are still here. We might've had to change the shape of our constitution, but we're not changing who we are, what we do, and what we advocate for. So long as there are queer people on this campus, there will be a community," Damian McCrickard said.