

Black History and Black Studies at Ohio State
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In 1970, Black Ohio State journalism students agreed that the school paper, *The Lantern*, wasn't representing important Black issues of the time. This epiphany birthed a student newspaper by and for Black students: *Our Choking Times*.

The paper released its debut issue in February of 1970 and continued until the mid-1990s, but its influence waned with its demise.

Our Choking Times may no longer be a part of Ohio State, but the Black student magazine *BLACK X BOLD*, created in 2018, is the modern voice of marginalized students on campus, carrying on the legacy of Black history on campus.

Now it's Black History Month of 2025, and a rich history of Black empowerment and scholarship has been developed, honored and continued at Ohio State by its Black community.

Ohio State was founded in 1870, only five years after slavery was abolished. By 1889, the university accepted its first Black student.

It was in the 1960s and '70s, the years of protest against the Vietnam War and segregation, that brought significant change and new resources to Ohio State.

Dr. Judson Jeffries, an Ohio State professor of African American and African Studies and political scientist, said "Ohio State University has a long, proud, distinguished and robust history of student activism, especially students of color, a long history."

With that activism, such as the 1968 protest against housing segregation that led to 34 Black students' arrests, Black Studies (now called African American and African Studies) became an academic department at Ohio State in 1969.

Jeffries said the emergence of Black Studies at Ohio State was a crucial step for the university.

"I can't think of any African American and African Studies department or Black Studies program that has had a greater impact on the city in which their school is located as we have had on the city of Columbus," said Jeffries.

Then came *Our Choking Times* in 1970, which reported on all the issues and protests of the era, as well as art like cartoons and poetry. The paper also followed the development of the Black Studies department.

The first chairperson of the department, Dr. Charles Ross, only lasted until June of 1971, when he was fired for his role in protests in Columbus.

However, this didn't stop Black Studies from evolving. The second chair of the department, Dr. William E. Nelson Jr., opened The African American and African Studies Community Extension Center in 1972.

The Community Extension Center is a resource for Black students to this day. Both Jeffries and Dr. Simone Drake, the Vice Chair of African American and African Studies, and Distinguished Professor at Ohio State, have worked as director for the center.

Drake said, "I think the extension center is a significant piece in the university that really fulfills the mission of what land grant universities are supposed to be."

Drake said that another resource to come from the emergence of Black Studies at Ohio State was the Hale Black Cultural Center, which was once its own separate building when it was established in 1989.

"It, just like the department, came out of protest, but it was a partnership between community members and faculty and staff at the university," said Drake.

The center honors Dr. Frank Hale Jr., another iconic Ohio State faculty member recognized for uplifting students of color at the university.

In 2025, Black culture at Ohio State is still strong. Keep up with the most recent publications by the *BLACK X BOLD* magazine, and with events hosted by the Black Students Association.

Jeffries and Drake agree that it is essential for Black voices to be lifted and supported, as the fight for equality isn't over. They believe the culture at Ohio State can foster change.

Jeffries said, "I find it impressive the degree to which your generation is willing to stand up and have your voices heard."

