

## **Exhibit gives voice to Black Thursday demonstrations**

**by Natalie Johnson - Wednesday, November 12, 2008**

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/1462/exhibit-gives-voice-to-black-thursday-demonstrations/>

The Black Thursday Remembered exhibit opening Friday, Nov. 21, at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh will include plenty of historic dates, facts and documents.

But it's the real-life stories gleaned from hundreds of hours of interviews with former UW Oshkosh students, faculty and community members about the dramatic 1968 student demonstrations that will give "voice" to those turbulent days.

"Oral histories mine the lived experience of people from all walks of life," said exhibit co-curator and historian Stephen Kercher, who managed the project that interviewed more than 100 people about the demonstrations and their aftermath.

Racial tension on campus had been running high on campus for months prior to the protest on Nov. 21, 1968, which led to mass arrests and the expulsion of 94 students.

Piecing together a full account of the events has been a lesson in patience. Since the project's start in February 2007, Kercher and his team have searched across the country for people who not only witnessed the events four decades ago, but also were willing to share their thoughts in taped interviews that ranged from 45 minutes to four hours.

While a typical interview for a newspaper story involves asking a targeted set of questions about a specific topic, an oral history takes into account the subject's entire life.

"This technique really highlights the experience of everyday people," Kercher explained.

To date, 33 of the 94 individuals have been interviewed, including some who went on to achieve great success in their lives and others whose educational plans ended that day.

Besides the students, those interviewed also included University faculty and staff, law enforcement officials and community members.

Retired history professor Virginia Crane offered her thoughts from the perspective of a witness to the events as well as a faculty member who helped students and their parents deal with the aftermath.

As a historian, she had advocated for more than a decade for the University develop an oral history project for Black Thursday.

"There is nothing like the first-hand accounts of an historic event," Crane said. "We need those recollections and perspectives of the students involved on the record."

She added that the demonstrations in Oshkosh reflected the turmoil of political unrest occurring on campuses across the nation in 1968.

“What happened here on this campus gives a sense on a small scale of the racial division occurring all across the country,” agreed Kercher.

Crane will serve as a panelist at a public program previewing the exhibit at 7 p.m., Thursday, Nov. 20, at the Grand Opera House, 100 High Ave., Oshkosh. The exhibit will be on display Nov. 21 to Feb. 9 at the Gail Floether Steinhilber Art Gallery in Reeve Memorial Union, 748 Algoma Blvd.

- [Click here to hear an excerpt from the testimony of Henry Brown, who was one of the 94 students expelled on Black Thursday.](#)

**Related story:**

- [Read transcript from Black Thursday chat](#)