Black Angels share their untold story

By Brianna Wallen
News Editor

A moment of reflection and recognition took place at the Lyman Center, honoring the legacy of those who fought the tuberculosis epidemic in the 1920s.

In continuation of their speaker series, the School of Nursing hosted The Black Angels: The Untold Story of Nurses Who Helped Cure Tuberculosis, on Nov. 20.

Michele Vancour, the executive director of healthcare programs at the university, highlighted the sacrifice the Black Angels made while being written out of history.

"The Black Angels operated within a system that undervalued them because of their race and gender, yet they triumphed through," Vancour said. "They faced immense challenges in navigating the racial and institutional barriers that sought to diminish their voices."

Maria Smilios, author of "The Black Angels: The Untold Story of Nurses Who Helped Cure Tuberculosis," brought to life the untold story of heroism and perseverance of the brave Black women who played a vital role in combating the tuberculosis epidemic in New York City in 1929.

Virginia Allen, one of the last living Black Angels, also graced the stage to share her story of caring for marginalized tuberculosis patients and saving countless lives.

It was a time to bridge generations and inspire the new generation to continue the fight for public health.

Following the event, audience members had the opportunity to meet Allen and Smilios and have their books signed.



PHOTO | CARLY RUSSELL

Virginia Allen, one of the Black Angels, answers students' questions on the Lyman Center stage on Nov. 20.



Dr. Katherine Tucker, assistant professor at the univeristy, and author Maria Smilios engage in live dialogue.

Interim President Dwayne Smith opened the event with a speech commending students pursuing nursing and the university's impressive medical achievements and efforts.

"The school is dedicated to increasing awareness of nursing and broader health issues by partnering with the community and promoting diversity," Smith said. "The story of the Black Angels should inspire us all."

The discussion between Smilios and Allen was moderated by Dr. Katherine Tucker, an assistant professor at the university.

The inspiring dialogue allowed students, staff and community members to reflect on ways the past shapes healthcare today and recognize the resilience and heroism of those brave nurses.

Smilios read pages of her book as she summarized the way Black nurses assumed responsibility over the victims of tuberculosis. While many nurses fled their jobs in fear of being infected, Allen kept tending to patients despite putting her health at risk.

"Good thing I was young because anyone working in tuberculosis should not have been working and being out there those many hours. But because I was fortunate, I never got ill," Allen said.

Smilios said that she turned the marginalization of nurses and patients into the heartbeat of the book.

"It really was about who lives and who dies based on the ZIP code in which you live," Smilios said.

There were also parallels between the tuberculosis epidemic and the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It struck me at that moment that nothing had changed," Smilios said. "It was also the idea to try and racialize the virus by calling it a quote 'Asian disease,' and tuberculosis was a disease of the poor."

Allen, who is an original member of the National Council of Negro Women's Staten Island section, said that she hopes that readers learn key moments of history from the book.

"The history of women and the Black race is hidden. We don't talk about our history." Allen said. "I'm hoping that the book will open the eyes of readers to understand our history better.

The event was tied together with a surprise award ceremony for both powerful women.

Allen and Smilios stood proudly as they were honored by the university with an inaugural award that recognized their contributions to healthcare, racial injustice, historical record and storytelling.

See photos on page 5.

Students learn to cope with Harris' loss in the election

By Brianna Wallen
News Editor

Election Day, a time where many celebrated their candidate taking office, left those on the opposing side feeling a sense of dread and disappointment.

"I just wanted to lay in bed all day and contemplate the news," healthcare studies major Nyasia Pitts, a sophomore, said, reflecting the frustration many students feel toward the 2024 election results.

This is the reality for many students at the university as they grapple with Vice President Kamala Harris losing the election to former President Donald Trump.

Students had the opportunity to cast their ballots by Nov. 5; for many, it was their first time voting.

"To know that she lost, it felt like my vote didn't matter," Pitts said. "All that educating and encouraging people to vote felt like it all went to waste."

The feelings of disappointment from some students at the university are in sync with young people nationwide, as the vice president has stolen the hearts of Generation Z.

According to a national poll conducted by the Institute of Politics at Harvard Kennedy School in the Fall, young Americans were favoring Harris in the 2024 presidential election.

However, after the election, there was a shift in support from Gen Z.

Democratic candidates have received about 60% of support from young voters since the 2008 presidential election, according to NPR.

Early exit polls reveal that Harris fell short of this trend by only securing 54% of support from voters under 30.

Following the election, Harris voters were left in the dark. Many students began to question the direction of the nation and the future of policies that directly impact their lives.

Interdisciplinary studies major Sarah Akomeah, a senior, said that when she saw all the states turn red on her TV screen, her heart dropped.

"When he won, I was like 'Wow, this is really happening,'" Akomeah said. "I am kind of scared because I don't know what the future holds."

Pitts, who said that she is anxious about what Trump has in store for the nation, echoed the fear that many of her peers felt.

"I'm worried about a lot of things. My right as a woman and woman of color," Pitts said.

Akomeah also fears Trump's proposed plans that target her body and education along with other marginalized groups.

"I am concerned about what he is going to do about abortion," Akomeah said. "I recently heard that, and I heard he's trying to defund the Department of Education and wants to take away transgender rights."

Music major Darren Ditzel, a junior, said that he is pushing for women's reproductive rights.

"I think there's a lot of old white men making decisions for women's bodies, and I don't think it should be that way," Ditzel said.

Although many students are coming to terms with Harris' loss, they are not surprised by the election's outcome.

Ditzel said that it became apparent to him that voters were overlooking Trump's character when his Hispanic mother cast her vote for him.

"I was surprised she did because of all of the rhetoric on getting illegals out of the country and hatred toward Latinos and Latinx," Ditzel said. "This made me believe that people are focusing on the fact that he is a businessman."

On the flip side, Akomeah said that race and identity had a pivotal role in Harris losing the election.

"I think that some people don't want to see a woman lead this country, let alone a Black woman," Akomeah said.

With many feeling disheartened and anxious about the future, Pitts encourages her fellow students to remain hopeful.

"I trust that Harris isn't going to just give up," Pitts said. "Just trust that Harris and Walz have our backs."



PHOTO | BRIANNA WALLEN

Interdisciplinary studies major Sarah Akomeah, a senior, in the Adanti Student Center on Nov. 11.



Music major Darran Ditzel, a junior, in the Adanti Student Center on Nov. 11.