

How Black Voices of Dignity came into being:

This exhibit was a way of honoring the Martin Luther King Holiday on behalf of Webster United Church of Christ. For years, I have had the honor of creating a special event in Dr. King's honor. In the past, I have done a variety of events: A dramatic play acting out some key events of the Civil Rights movement, and I have invited various guests from the community: Gospel Choirs, drummers, hoofers, solo artists, storytellers and many more. Our own Webster choir did a compilation of songs during the worship service, explaining the history and importance of singing certain songs during the Civil Rights movement. There was even a reenactment of the Rosa Parks bus scene, portrayed through the eyes of an 81-year-old woman. Webster youth presented themselves as human statues, who would randomly come alive to dramatically recount the autobiographies of historic African American icons. These are just a few of the activities done as a way of honoring a man who believed in equal rights for all.



As a minority in an all-white church, being a part of my religious community is very important to me but having my voice be heard is equally important. Being involved in MLK events and other community activism is just one way I could accomplish that.

How the public reacted:

The reaction has been overwhelmingly positive, first, from the Dexter community itself, then from members of my own congregation. Some visitors were visibly moved and expressed those feelings to me, while others mentioned that some of the displays brought back memories, saying that they could remember where they were when certain events happened. All expressed gratitude for the exhibit itself.

Where the exhibit was invited next:

The first exhibit was at the **Ypsilanti Branch District Library**. I spoke to the director of the library who was intrigued by the idea of the exhibit, saw the exhibit online, then requested to see the display in person. She visited Webster church in January 2022. After viewing the display, her immediate response: “**I want the entire exhibit**”. The exhibit was on display from April 1st through April 30th, 2022, at the Ypsilanti Branch Library, located in Ypsilanti, Mi.

The second time the exhibit was shown was at the **Whittier-Branch Library**. My exhibit was accepted once again for an entire month, June 1-June 30, 2022. It received positive reviews and responses from the local community. I was then asked to bring back the exhibit for another showing for the entire month of March. This time an Open House was included, inviting the public on March 25, 2023, so that further discussion could be had about the creation, and the importance of this exhibit.



In May 2022, I received an invitation from the **University of Michigan** on behalf of the Diversity and Equity Committee to bring my exhibit to the University. After further discussion over a Zoom meeting, I immediately agreed to having my exhibit at the University. Unfortunately, I experienced the passing of my mother and two brothers, and shortly after, I had major surgery. Because of the great impact these events had on me, I decided at the time that I just could not handle a major commitment. The committee agreed to postpone the event to a later date. In April 2023, I contacted the committee, and the event was scheduled for July 11th and 12th, 2023 at the **Institute for Social Research**. I was interviewed by CTN of Ann Arbor during the exhibit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H9K9FEU6M6Q>

A portion of my exhibit was displayed at the **Ann Arbor Public Library** for a month in September 2024 and will be displayed at the **Belleville Public Library** in March 2026. The next full installation of the entire exhibit will be held at the **First Congregational Church in Kalamazoo** in celebration of Juneteenth from June 18th to June 21st, 2026.



Who is Edda Williams?

I am a proud African American woman, wife and mother who for the past 30 years has been a member of Webster United Church of Christ. **It has been important to me to have a voice in addition to being an active worker. I found that as an African American, who has faced numerous acts of discrimination myself, it was important to speak out, and at the very least bring forth some of the social issues**

This exhibit was an opportunity for me to not only pay tribute and honor a maligned group of people who have for so long endured and survived hatred, racial stereotypes, and social injustices but it was also important to me to show a visual account of the many varied achievements and accomplishments of African Americans with an artistic walk-through depicting both past and current events. The displays include art, photos, African carvings, historic memorabilia and 3D recreations.

Our country has been enriched by the contributions of African Americans. The sweat, tears and blood of our forefathers has helped to build this country, therefore our history should not be erased, forgotten, or pushed aside. This exhibit is a way of bringing to the forefront some of the current struggles and numerous social injustices that black Americans face daily. It validates the African American experience by evoking emotions.

My hope is that through the experience of viewing and reflecting on this exhibit you will not only be more open but also become a catalyst for change. Today with great pride, we recognize, honor and celebrate the many faceted and distinguished: “*Black Voices of Dignity*”.

If you would like to request an installation of this exhibit, please contact Edda Williams. (eddawilliams68@gmail.com)