

- NINA MOINI:** This weekend is a first for Minnesota's literary scene. The inaugural Midwest Black Book Fair will bring Black authors and booksellers to North Minneapolis Saturday afternoon. There will be food for sale and books, of course, as well as workshops and panels. Joining me to talk more about it is the person now behind this event, Teresa Hardaway. She's the owner also of Black Garnet Books in Saint Paul. Welcome to Minnesota Now, Teresa.
- TERRESA HARDAWAY:** Hi. Thank you so much for having me.
- NINA MOINI:** Yeah, I'm really excited to have you here. This is going to be really exciting. You told MPR News previously that you got the idea for this event from a monthly meeting of the National Black Bookstore Coalition. So can you tell me more about what led you to organize this book fair?
- TERRESA HARDAWAY:** Yeah. So I typically organize really large-scale events like gathering community, building relationships. That's really something that I've really tried to perfect over the years of my organizing career. So planning something around the Black literature space, now that I'm a bookstore owner, just totally made sense.
- And I just was having conversations with folks who are already in this space and was like, hey, would you all be interested in coming together for something a little bit more formal, something that people understood the purpose of why they would be attending something like this?
- And the folks that I was around at the time, which was the owner of Strive Bookstore, Mary, and the owner of Babycake's Book Stack, and the owner of In Black Ink, they were all very interested. And as soon as I said, OK, I think we should do something in August, they were like, OK, here's who you need to talk to. And so they introduced me to a ton of other people who are doing really great, amazing work in the literary space in intersection with Blackness. And it just all spun from there.
- NINA MOINI:** Wow, so it must have spun up pretty quickly because-- or maybe I should ask, how long did it take you to go from that initial conversation to here we are, it's happening this weekend?
- TERRESA HARDAWAY:** Yeah, I would say that initial conversation was probably five months ago.
- NINA MOINI:** Wow.
- TERRESA HARDAWAY:** And then I really started to hone down in organizing, putting out a call for authors and vendors and stuff probably three months ago. So it has really been a truncated timeline. I'm hoping that in the future I have a bit more time. But it was just like, this was just my idea. And I'm like, let's just see what happens. And it's happening really well.
- NINA MOINI:** Yeah, I was going to say that I think that probably speaks to how much support there is for it. Have you felt that?

TERRESA HARDAWAY: Yeah, when I first started the event, I was just thinking to myself something has to happen. We have to do something. And then having over 90 authors reach out and say, I want to have my book at this book fair, or I want to table this book fair, to me just spoke to the need, the necessity of having a space dedicated to Black stories and connecting those Black stories with community, connecting Black retailers with communities so that folks know who we are, where we are, and that we're here to stay.

NINA MOINI: You mentioned that you're an organizer, but I think that you're also a visual artist. You're the owner of the social justice design studio Blackbird Revolt and associate professor of graphic design at the U of M. So I'm interested how you went from of this other world, this graphic, this picture world, to this word "book," literary world. Have they always, books, been a part of your life?

TERRESA HARDAWAY: That is such an interesting-- a very good question because everything that I do really begins to intersect at the concept of Black liberation and abolition. And as an educator, I'm an author myself, and so I know how hard it is to get into the publishing industry. I know how hard it is to finish a book, 60,000, 70,000 words. I know the difficulty of that.

And so for me, being a graphic designer is just taking stories and making them visual, having people be able to consume what it is that we are trying to tell or be able to create movement-centered propaganda that speaks in a visual way so that anyone of any reading level would be able to engage with the work that we're doing.

So for me, then getting ownership of this bookstore, I really just played into the intersection that I already know and am. I'm an educator. I'm a designer. And so you know the branding for the event looks really amazing because I did it.

So, again, visually using language and icons and imagery to evoke the sense of what we're trying to do, which is uplift Black August, uplift Black stories and narratives. So for me, it all works together. I saw an article saying she likes to keep busy, and it's like, I do, but I don't think it's super heavy because they all intersect.

If there's something happening at the bookstore, I'm really able to engage my team at Blackbird Revolt to be able to support that, and vice versa, along with the university or any other organizations that I'm a part of.

NINA MOINI: So you mentioned Black August, and earlier-- I don't want to skip over it-- you talked about the importance of Black revolutionaries. So will you talk about how-- why it was so important for you to connect those events-- this event to that kind of history and where this stems from?

TERRESA HARDAWAY: Yeah. So we already know about Independent Bookstore Day, which happens in April. And so when I was thinking, conceptualizing this event, I'm like, OK, I want to have something that isn't just like a reflection of like Black History, because that's its own month to. Let's try and uplift something that maybe may be less known in our broader communities.

And so Black August being a month-long commemoration of freedom fighters and prison abolition, all of the folks who have done a lot of on-the-ground grassroots efforts to make sure that Black people are sustained, that we get reparations, that we are essentially fighting for our rights still, I think it was really important to have something that also commemorates those stories happen in this month.

We also have Black-- there's Black Business Week, Black Business Month happening in August. It just kind of all aligned. And I will say, this is where the Black Bookstore Coalition really helped in framing what day or month I was trying to have the event in because they were already sort of planning some national recognition of Black bookstores in August.

NINA MOINI: So who are some of the authors, publishers, booksellers in the mess-- in the Midwest, excuse me, who you really want to highlight through this event?

TERRESA Oh, I want to highlight everybody.

HARDAWAY:

[LAUGHTER]

But I definitely want to highlight the folks who was really on the ground with me at the beginning of this, who I approached. So, again, Babycake's Book Stack, Griot Arts out of Rochester, In Black Ink, Mind's Eye Comics, which, again, I just learned about very recently, a Black-owned comic book store. Some organizations being the more than a single story, the Givens Collection, the Hennepin County Library.

All of these folks really sit on these advisory team and helped connect me with all kinds of folks that I knew I should have been connected with. I also had really extensive conversations with the lead for the Minnesota Black Authors Expo because I was like, I don't want to repeat that, but I do want to support that. And so how do I do that?

And again, I just speak to the beauty of our community to be able to reach out and connect me with all of these folks who are already doing really amazing stuff in this space. And just coming together, it's really going to be an eventful time.

NINA MOINI: So as of last week, 800 tickets have been reserved. So I'm curious in our final minute here, where are you now? If people are listening and they're like, I would love to attend, are there spots still available?

TERRESA Yeah, so it has almost doubled since last week, yeah.

HARDAWAY:

NINA MOINI: Like 1,600 tickets?

TERRESA Yeah, last time I checked, we had like 1,450 tickets acquired. I just increased the free tickets to an additional 200
HARDAWAY: because I just want folks to be able to register, although we might need to do some navigation around, like, OK, move to these other spaces to space things out.

But there's a ton of stuff happening outside too. So I don't imagine that folks are going to be just standing in line. There's going to be a DJ outside. There's going to be food trucks outside. There's going to be just kids' activities, things to do. So I don't imagine it being a big long wait. However, we do have a lot of people registered.

And so, unfortunately, there are no swag bag tickets left. A lot of folks are in our comment section asking about that. But we do have some free tickets. And if anyone doesn't pick up their swag bags at 2:00 PM, they are going to be released to the public. So if you are still there and folks haven't picked up their bags, which I'm sure there will be folks who haven't picked up a bag, you can-- your chance is for that 2 o'clock release time.

NINA MOINI: OK, fantastic. And they can look for it next year, I'm sure. So Terresa Hardaway--

TERRESA Absolutely.

HARDAWAY:

NINA MOINI: --is the owner of Black Garnet Books in Saint Paul and the creator of the Midwest Black Book Fair, which is happening this Saturday for the first time.