VOICES Newsletter, December 2011

University of Northern Iowa. Center for Multicultural Education.

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Over the past couple of years, we have had the opportunity to bring to campus authors of books selected for our club discussion sessions. Last year, we had a community read: the book had captured a lot of attention in the past year, namely, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander. Alexander visited the Cedar Valley in late March, and she spoke both on campus and in a local church on the northeast side of Waterloo. We do not have the funds to bring all the authors of book club picks to this area, for that endeavor would be quite expensive! However, it is possible to entertain choosing a couple of them to invite for in-depth conversation.

This fall has been truly exceptional! We were able to hear from and interface with three very interesting authors.

First, we were feted with the presence of Dr. Marian Wright Edelman. Needless to say, this ingenious individual is the founding president of the Children's Defense Fund, which is an advocacy agency for infant, prepubescent, and adolescent persons based in Washington, D.C. Edelman is the author of several books, and she has dedicated her adult life to lobbying for policies that would guarantee young folks “a healthy start, head start, a fair start, a safe start and a moral start in life and successful passage into adulthood with the help of caring families and communities” (from CDF’s website). She spoke about “The Future of Our Children in a Post-9/11 World.”

Second, just a few days later, we were fortunate to have a longtime professor at Yale Law School, Stephen L. Carter, on our premises. Carter recently penned, *The Violence of Peace: America’s Wars in the Age of Obama.* In 2008, candidate Barack Obama ran virtually as a peacemaker, Carter argues; however, in the presidency, Obama has had to face tougher decisions with fewer options—compelling (or coercing) him not only to match his predecessor’s resort to warfare steadfastly, but also to engage in violent alternatives a tad more extensively. Carter did not seem to suggest or anticipate a world without war; rather, he urged his listeners to understand the challenge of not using military might when it is more difficult to utilize diplomatic resources to stave off devastating violence. Carter’s erudite presentation and clear message was quite thought-provoking.

Third, only chronologically, but not of lesser value, was the panel discussion centered around pacifism and the just war theory with the keynote address given by Louisa Thomas, great-granddaughter of six-time, socialist presidential contender, Norman Thomas, and author of *Conscience: Two Soldiers, Two Pacifists, One Family—a Test of Will and Faith in World War I.* This assembly was a nice segue from Carter’s somewhat grim analysis and the erroneous usage of international justice. Thomas revealed her propensity towards the just war, albeit her great-grandpa and great uncle were staunch pacifists. She approached the subject deliberately and circumspectly, and she gave kudos to the noble peacemaking efforts of those vehemently opposed to warfare.

Next semester, the Center for Multicultural Education will continue affording the opportunity to confer with interesting scholars and public figures whose works have generated wide appeal. Upon our return after winter break, we shall be graced with the author of *The End of Anger: A New Generation’s Take on Race and Rage.* Ellis Cose is an esteemed journalist and writer who has written on blacks, class, and rage. He comes to the University of Northern Iowa to pay tribute to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and to prognosticate what we might be going through regarding race relations in the twenty-first century. It will be interesting to compare what he says to the conditions surrounding the civil and human rights work during King’s time in the mid-to-late 1960’s. Later on that week, the CME book club will meet to discuss on Troy Jackson’s...
I believe we go through life with many different fears. Last year, I was diagnosed with cancer and all of a sudden I began to think about my own life and the fears associated with cancer. The possibility of failing as a president at a university can sometimes be fearful because if I make the wrong decision it could affect many individuals. The responsibility given to me as president is significant.

What is your greatest fear?

My greatest fear is at the personal level. I would have to say, having a great spouse and daughter. My daughter is such a delight to be around and hopefully our parenting had some impact on that. I think having come from a single parent poor family, and having taken advantage of the opportunity to a public education is what I consider as being successful. Going to college and receiving an education is something I am very proud of and hopefully I can help pass that on to thousands of students here at UNI.

What do you like to do in your free time when you are not working?

My wife and I have a place by Lake Michigan and, when I am not working, I like to go there and walk along the lake. No one knows me there and that is very important. When I do get a chance to take some time off, I like to spend it with my grandkids. Furthermore, I like to read books when I am not working. A good friend of mine, Ric Jurgens, who is the CEO of Hyvee, once told me, “You have to read 12 books a year that are outside of your discipline.” It was excellent advice.

What do you consider your greatest achievement?

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What is your greatest regret?

At the personal level, I would have to say I don’t feel there is much I regret. Throughout my life I have not had too many major regrets. Not being able to spend more time with my daughter and her family (including our three grandchildren) and my 96-year old mother, because of where we live and where they live, does create some regrets. However, when my daughter was younger she lost part of her hearing and I kept thinking to myself “Did I do everything possible to avoid the problem?” and “Did we get the right medical treatment?” My daughter turned out to be very successful receiving her Master’s degree in engineering and, more importantly, being a great mom and wife, but this is one of my regrets.

What is your idea of perfect bliss?

My idea of perfect bliss involves other people and good friends on a Saturday afternoon just talking about life with no agenda. I think perfect bliss would include the social aspect and intellectual aspect but mainly just relaxing; maybe a glass of wine too. In addition, spending time with my grandkids because they don’t care who I am—they just see me as their grandpa.

What is your greatest fear?

I believe we go through life with many different fears. Last year, I was diagnosed with cancer and all of a sudden I began to think about my own life and the fears associated with cancer. The possibility of failing as a president at a university can sometimes be fearful because if I make the wrong decision it could affect many individuals. The responsibility given to me as president is significant.

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Is there a moment in your life when you look back and say “Wow that was embarrassing?” If so, what does it entail?
CONTINUED FROM PAGE TWO...

I probably had lots of those moments in high school and I have had a number of embarrassing moments since, mostly created by me. There were times when I thought to myself, "Why did I say that it was dumb?" or, "That was not funny it was actually pretty stupid."

• What is the wildest thing you did in college?

A lot of kids, including myself, that go to college experience the freedom that could not be exercised in high school. Clearly, I had moments in college where I attended all night parties that got somewhat wild at times.

• What is your favorite movie?

The ones that come to mind are: In the Heat of the Night, The Graduate, Shawshank Redemption, Monty Python, and The Holy Grail.

• What were you like as a child?

Well, my grandparents and my mother raised me and I came from a very strict German family. I was very well behaved and disciplined. In high school I played sports, such as basketball, because I was tall—not necessarily athletic. These were the type of things that were expected growing up in Indiana. I was always pretty good in school, particularly after the 4th grade. My elementary principal and teacher, Mr. Giroud told me that I was underachieving both in academics and athletics and that helped me become a very good student. In addition to playing basketball, I was also the class president—but that leadership opportunity came from being a basketball player, not having strong leadership skills.

• Do you have a bucket list? If so, what is on it?

I have been fortunate to have been able to travel across this country and internationally. Of course, there are many places that I have not been and would love to see. My wife and I share some common things on our bucket lists. Going to Africa and spending time on a Safari and visiting the Hoover Dam are two of them. One on my list, but not on hers, is seeing the Dodgers play in Dodger Stadium. Moreover, my own bucket list consists of seeing my grand kids grow up and spending more time with them. I should note—skydiving is not one of the items on my bucket list.

• What do you like most about Christmas?

Spending time with family, relaxing with family, and reflecting upon what is important in life are what I like most about Christmas. I was never big on gift giving because, as a child I did not get many Christmas gifts. Christmas is a time to relax and reflect. I do not get stressed out like many individuals, I relax; traditions are relaxing. It is things like putting up a tree, having the same routine, being with family, and the spirituality of Christmas time are what I value about Christmas.

• During the holidays, do you go on vacation or stay home?

It varies. If my daughter does not come here, then we go to St. Louis or Indianapolis to visit my mother.

• Are you surrounded by extended family or close family during the holidays?

During the holiday I am surrounded by close family. I am very fortunate to have my mother who is 96 spend it with us too.

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**Becoming King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Making of a National Leader.**

Towards the end of the spring semester, we will have the chance to visit with television commentator and columnist for The Rolling Stone, Tourné. Recently, he penned Who’s Afraid of Post-Blackness?: What It Means to be Black Now. It is interesting how these two speakers that frame our lineup for the spring, both discuss newest trends in identity politics. Nestled between these two bookends, if you will, is a memoir by former Secretary of State, Dr. Condoleezza Rice (February 14), erin Khue Ninh’s Ingratitude: The Debt-Bound Daughter in Asian American Literature (March 22), and Robert Lee’s Multicultural American Literature: Comparative Black, Native, Latino/a, and Asian American Fictions. These three books constitute the core of the remaining text in this school years book club offerings.

In addition, two more important cultural critics will bless us with their expertise before the end of this fiscal period. Like Alexander’s The New Jim Crow, the author of the most recent community read, The Flat World and Education: How Americas Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future, namely Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond will be appearing on February 16 in a video conference on public school systems as one of the foremost education analysts in the nation. It is both our pleasure and privilege to entertain such a figure!

Finally, we are expecting a great turnout for our last contribution to this year’s series called, “Reaching for Higher Ground: Community After 9/11.” Prof. Marjorie Cohn edited the book The United States and Torture: Interrogation, Incarceration, and Abuse. She will be on campus March 1, 2012.

The staff of the CME and I hope to see you at these many and diverse events. For more information, check out our website at www.uni.edu/cme.
President of UNI’s Black Student Union

By Mukulika Vashisthsha

In order to know more about Diversity On-Campus, I am interviewing people from different ethnic student organizations. Also, it helps me know more about them and the way they operate. Darvel Givens, co-president of Black Student Union (BSU), started his occupancy as co-president and member of BSU in Fall 2011. While interviewing him I came across many interesting facts about BSU which I was not aware of. Being a part of a big family at UNI, it is our responsibility to know about other “family members.” This interview is a small initiative to gain further knowledge on culture.

BSU has established history at UNI. Their oldest constitution was written in 1988. The majority of BSU members are from Iowa but they also have members from other neighboring states like Minnesota, Indiana, Illinois, etc. With an active membership of 60 members and more than 120 members on Facebook, BSU is doing great work towards achieving their goals:

- Increasing African-American involvement on campus.
- Creating Tradition.
- Setting the precedence of success for African-Americans at UNI.
- Increasing retention rates of members.
- Increasing membership enrollment rates.

BSU is trying to work towards a mission of Advancing African American culture on UNI’s campus through programming, educating, and representing black people with prestige.

In one word, Mr. Givens described BSU as progress because he feels that through their mission, BSU is trying to improve the reputation of black people by educating members about their heritage and culture and they are making great progress in the process.

BSU’s visions to keep black students within the UNI community, can be described as F.I.R.S.T.

F- Fellowship among themselves and with others outside the org.
I- Improvement within themselves as an organization on this campus
R- Rejoice and celebrate their unique culture on this campus
S- Spokesperson for their needs and interests on this campus
T- Teacher for themselves and those who are not familiar with their culture

During their general body meeting which happen every other Wednesday, they always start with BSU affirmation (written by the Co-President). They plan for executive committees, take volunteers for upcoming events, talk about opportunities on-campus, encourage multicultural students to get involved with different organizations, and in the end they open up the floor for any suggestions, opinions, and changes from members.

BSU is involved in both on-campus and off-campus activities. Mostly for off-campus service projects they encourage their members to sign-up for “UNI Volunteer Tuesday” programs. On-campus, BSU participated in Pride Cry, collected money and donated it to a Breast Cancer Organization in Waterloo, participated in a Breast Cancer walk, organized Open Mic Night, were a part of the Multicultural Resource Fair, and they had a lecture by UNI Provost about a team building activity at the end of November.

For the up-coming months, BSU is planning to send their members to the National BSU Conference in Illinois, they have tentative plan to call different lecturers for the month of February, and most importantly BSU is going to launch their Website by the start of next semester.

Mr. Givens feels that “more hands make light work” so he expects above average commitment from SIAC executive members, advisors, and BSU committee members. He also believes that being in a University with around 92% Caucasian students, to voice one’s opinion, one should participate and be a member of different organizations and offices such as, the Student Involvement Activities Center (SIAC), Connection Alumni To Students (CAT), the Campus Activities Board (CAB), etc. (other than staying in small multicultural organizations).

Minority students need to be present on the organizing bodies so they keep their requirements in mind while planning the agenda. “We cannot complain from outside but have to be inside”. If we are paying tuition then it is our right to know how and where these organizations are spending our money.

Members of the BSU Board:

→ Co-President: DeAngelo Hall
→ Co-President: Darvel Givens
→ Vice-President: Delaine Murphy
→ Secretary: Dylana Bowen
→ Treasurer: Megan Middleton
→ Advisor: Jennifer Bell
→ Advisor: Pierre Mvuyekure
La Mission Movie Review

By Tabatha Cruz

In the month of October, the CME hosted a Movie Night showing the film “La Mission” featuring Benjamin Bratt. This film tells a story of the relationship between a father and son, and the challenges they encounter when secrets come to surface.

Che (who is played by Benjamin Bratt) is a recovering alcoholic, and an ex-convict. His son Jesse, is about to graduate from high school and has his eyes set on college. Che and Jesse share a close-knit relationship, as they live in the barrio of San Francisco’s Mission District. They both share a passion for refurbishing cars, which the film does a great job of introducing the low rider culture to the audience. The relationship turns south when one night Che discovers that Jesse is gay. Throughout the film, we observe how difficult the coming out process is for many GLBTQ people of color.

Our participants held a discussion following the film regarding tradition, family, prejudice, culture, and violence. Latino/Hispanic culture is very rooted in traditional gender roles; therefore, many communities are patriarchal. The image of masculinity is based on the man being the provider and protector. The minute a man shows any ounce of “emotion”, he is immediately chastised by his peers as being “feminine”. The masculine image Che has of his son is dissolved when Jesse admits that he is in a relationship with another man.

Family relationships were a vital subject in the film. When Che kicks Jesse out of his home after coming out, Jesse’s uncle and aunt take him in. In addition, Jesse’s best friend serves as a vital support system to him throughout his separation from his father and bullying in the neighborhood. To many people of color of any ethnic background, family is at the core of one’s value system. In many instances, when GLBTQ people “come out of the closet” there is an immense fear of losing family and often times—that is the most important support system of all. In “La Mission”, extended family was of a great resource to Jesse.

Another aspect discussed was the fact that Jesse was engaging in an interracial relationship. It was mentioned that perhaps one of Che’s biggest concerns was that Jesse’s boyfriend was from an affluent, Caucasian family. There might have been some resentment from Che’s behalf that he wasn’t able to provide for his son, in a financial and materialistic perspective, as did the family of Jesse’s boyfriend. Because Jesse was going to be the first from his family to move on to college, it could be said the Che didn’t want Jesse to lose sight of his roots. Cultural pride (ethnic, nationality, social-economic) is very important amongst the Latino/Hispanic community. Jesse was moving on to bigger and better things in life, and Che could have felt excluded from the picture.

One of the most important aspects of the film was violence against GLBTQ persons. After a climactic fist fight between father and son (when Jesse admits to his father that he is gay), other neighbors pass judgment on Jesse’s coming out. Others verbally criticized Jesse using derogatory terms on a regular basis in the film. Che’s house was attacked with graffiti by Jesse’s peers with more GLBTQ derogatory terms. The plot reaches another explosive moment when Jesse is shot in the chest, as him and his boyfriend were out for a walk in the neighborhood. Violence was a constant in the film, as it is in real life.

The film “La Mission” does a great job of showcasing cultural blends with symbolism. Director Peter Bratt used great imagery and art in the film to enhance many focal points of the plot. The following are examples of the uses of imagery in the film: Che’s neighbor Lena, has several traditional Hindu symbols on the front door of her apartment—her character is force of peace and harmony in the plot; When Jesse is going through internal conflicts on deciding whether to keep his identity hidden, he realizes what is happening to his split identity (demonstrated through the use of a shattered mirror); A neighbor is carrying a large crucifix through the neighborhood in front of Che’s house (which we can assume is to begin a scene about sacrifices one has to make in life).

In conclusion, the film is a great piece of artwork to start the dialogue on current issues affecting GLBTQ people of color. For someone to fit in two minority categories at one time can be overwhelming. Prejudice may affect these individuals in unimaginable ways. Unfortunately, we still live in a very judgmental society, and it takes people like film director Peter Bratt to start those difficult conversations and to break the stereotypes we have of others.
The CME would like to thank all who participated in the December Voices Newsletter competition on diversity. The question asked was: “Do you think there is a lack of diversity among staff in campus offices? Would you keep it as it is or change it? Explain why.”

What follows are excerpts of the two winners. Space does not allow us to publish the articles in entirety. Consequently, we settled on the following excerpts to give a sense of focus the two winners displayed.

By Jerica Crawford

I do think there is a lack of diversity among staff in most offices. However, I do not limit my definition of diversity to one that focuses solely on race. My definition of diversity deals with acknowledging and not criticizing or condemning individual differences. These differences could include race, ethnicity, gender, background, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, and so on. In giving my definition of diversity, I am challenging others to think of it in a different way, with a focus not only on race.

However, because I think in this case there is a focus on race, I will stick to that. I think it is rare that you see African Americans, Caucasians, Hispanic and Latino Americans and many others all working in the same departments. In most of the offices I’ve been to, I’ve seen predominantly Caucasians in the same department or majority of African Americans in another department. I think it really depends on what department it is. For example, I could understand why the CME would want to diversify their staff, but at the same time, UNI is a university that states “diversity matters”, so that should be a focus in every office. After all, UNI’s mission is to create and maintain an inclusive educational environment.

By Gloria Sumpter

One must realize that minority students in college are struggling with stereotypes themselves and need the extra support from the entire university. This means from the recruiting team, the orientation faculty, dorm attendants, professors, to staff members should have some form of diversity. So, having a diverse staff is one of the ways students know the university is serious about what they claim. Some will think because a person is a minority they will get the job (whether qualified or not) if we begin to hire more minorities, well, minorities can also think that because they are not white they will not get the job (even though they are qualified), when all they see are whites in staff positions.

In conclusion, this is a challenging task for universities across the nation I suppose who want diversity but cannot find the just solution. I was asked in a multicultural class if I was a boss and an African American came in with limited qualifications, would I hire her and I said I would. My justification, I felt I would be the only one to give her the time to gain the necessary qualifications, because I knew what it was like. Similarly, this could play out within all ethnic groups, and the challenge for UNI is to know this and challenge those hiring to help those who may not look or think as they, but know the minority, whether student or civilian would bring another perspective to the workplace.

The CME is looking for students to contribute to the Voices Newsletter. Contact the CME for more information!
Upcoming Events

Lecture: Ellis Cose/A Tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.  
*The End of Anger: A New Generation’s Take on Race and Rage*  
Monday, January 16, 2012  
7:00 p.m.  
Lang Hall Auditorium  
*A discussion on The End of Anger will take place at 3:30 p.m. Monday at the CME*

CME Book Club: *Becoming King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the making of a National Leader* by Troy Jackson  
Thursday, February 19, 2012  
3:30-5:00 p.m.  
CME

CME Book Club: *No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington* by Condoleezza Rice  
Tuesday, February 14, 2012  
3:30 p.m.  
CME

Video Conference/Lecture by Linda Darling-Hammond  
*The Flat World and Education: How America’s Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future*  
Thursday, February 16, 2012  
3:30 p.m.  
Location TBD

Preacher Moss: End of Racism Comedy Tour  
Monday, February 20, 2012  
7:00 p.m.  
Lang Hall Auditorium

**Friday Fun Nights at the CME**  
Friday, January 27, 2012 (Poetry Slam)  
6:00-8:00 p.m.  
Friday, February 24, 2012 (Movie Night)  
6:00-8:00 p.m.

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February Newsletter Competition  

Does it matter what type of relationship you’re in when celebrating Valentine’s Day?

*Articles due by January 30, 2012. Email to Kailee Becker, kaileeb@uni.edu, or Camelia Rubalcaba, rubalcac@uni.edu. Please visit the CME website for more information.*
Trivia:

Find the number of times the term “holiday” was used throughout the December Newsletter! First one to answer correctly wins a snickers bar!

*Keep an eye out for more trivia and competitions to come!

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Our Mission
We foster success in racial and ethnic minority students, contribute to the cultural competence of all students, and promote an appreciation of diversity in the University Community.

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Jerica Crawford

Competition:
Who said this: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere?”
First one to answer correctly wins a snickers bar!

We are also on Facebook and Twitter!