VOICES Newsletter, v7n2, November 2010

University of Northern Iowa. Center for Multicultural Education.
Leonard Pitts won the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for Commentary as a syndicated columnist based at the Miami Herald. His twice weekly columns routinely inspire Americans and compel them to think about issues such as diversity, race, equality and humanity. He is the author of two novels and has served as a University professor. Mr. Leonard Pitts is the keynote speaker at the 2010 Cedar Valley Conference on Human Rights at Allen College on Thursday, November 18, 2010.

The Center for Multicultural Education will sponsor a reception for Mr. Pitts on Wednesday, November 17, 2010 from 7-9 p.m. at the CME, with a short address by Mr. Pitts. Refreshments will be provided and University Book and Supply will also be present, selling Mr. Pitts’ most recent publication Forward From this Moment, Selected Columns from 1994-2009.
Cultivating Leaders

On November 5, twenty-one students from the University of Northern Iowa gathered at the Center for Multicultural Education to learn how to lead in today’s multicultural world. These students had an opportunity to hear leaders from the UNI and surrounding community, speaking about their personal experiences with leadership. Among these presenters were filmmakers, the Vice President of the Black Hawk branch of the NAACP, a Campus Minister, a Residence Life Coordinator, and UNI students.

During this eight hour retreat, students had an opportunity to expand their cultural perspectives and push themselves intellectually. The retreat offered opportunities to openly discuss their opinions during small break-out sessions and the group as a whole convened together for keynote lectures three times throughout the day. Students learned what it takes to be an effective leader in today’s society and how to get others behind them in their goals.

A highlight of the event was mid-day presenter Mike Ramsdell, filmmaker from Michigan who spoke on his documentary The Anatomy of Hate. The documentary was shown Friday evening to available retreat participants as a kick-off to Saturday’s day-long event. The documentary profiled extremist groups from the United States, ex-terrorist groups from Israel and Palestine and a military base in the middle east; taking a closer look at contributing factors which lead to hate and discrimination across the world.

The overall experience was overwhelmingly positive. One student participant mentioned national students. Another student remarked, “I found myself able and eager to speak out for my opinions and beliefs.”

Participants were asked how they would use these new tools. Some planned to use them in their respective student organizations, while others planned on implementing them in their careers after graduation. Others maintained that they would use them in everyday life. The Multicultural Student Leadership Retreat is an annual event sponsored by the Center for Multicultural Education. For more information on retreats in the future or for suggestions, please contact the CME at 273-2250 or email at cme@uni.edu.

Participants of the Fall 2010 Multicultural Student Leadership Retreat
Does Social Familiarity Make for Justice?

Let me begin an answer to the titular question by telling a story. There once was an interracial, inter-ethnic married couple. Both were working at low paying jobs. The woman was from a Latin American country with parents that were very well off; and the man was from a New England state with parents barely in the lower middle class. The latter’s mother-in-law kept riding him for not being the traditional head-of-the-household and repeatedly castigated her daughter for staying with him. Subsequently, the couple got into a heated argument about their economic state of affairs. At the height of the intense discussion, the wife called her husband the “n” word. Of course the woman loved the man; but when the chips were down, she resorted to dastardly stereotypical slurring. The lesson to be learned from this story is kind of like the old adage: “familiarity breeds contempt.” It is not an exact analogy but the point is that bigotry does not simply dissipate just because one knows somebody who fits into a particular category, including when one is in the throes of romantic love! After all, slave masters knew and frequently befriended some of their human property; however, they did not spare the lash to control their subjects’ behavior.

Learning about another culture and encountering people in that culture are nice gestures, but they do not result substantively in the transformation of the oppressive conditions in which “the other” lives. During a period of white backlash, Martin Luther King Jr. was wont to say that blacks wanted to be white men’s brothers, but not their brothers-in-law. Unfortunately friendships do not, by themselves, affect positive social change without the proactive challenging of structures and processes that oppress the underrepresented and underserved. Friendships alone do not lead to the dismantling of racism and other forms of xenophobia and injustice. Any workshop, program, or initiative that focuses on increasing cultural awareness without addressing the radical transformation of our American society is virtually worthless. Centuries of neglect and moral turpitude cannot be eradicated by touchy-feely exercises or listening to stories of inhumanity or teary eyed confessions or social mea culpas.

The major speakers invited by the CME help the audience to ferret out this kind of nonsense and to negotiate ways to counter structural and systemic inequities. Social familiarity is never a central approach to undoing racism and other issues. Working together to address specific institutional problems is the only true praxis.

Check out Dr. B’s Blog!

Featuring his comments on current events and social issues

http://drmdbwell.blogspot.com

Or

http://mdbwell.wordpress.com

“Voices”

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Native American Heritage Month Recipe

Ingredients

- 3 C. Flour
- 1/4 tsp. Nutmeg
- 1 3/4 C. Cornmeal
- 3 1/3 C. Milk
- 1 tsp. Baking Soda
- 1 C. Molasses

Directions

Sift together the dry ingredients. Combine the milk and molasses. As the liquid ingredients to the dry ingredients and beat until smooth. Pour into a well-greased 2-quart steam mold, cover and place on a rack in a deep kettle that has a close-fitting lid. Pour enough boiling water into the kettle to come about halfway up the mold. Cover the kettle and steam the mold for 3 hours. Remove the mold from the kettle and let stand 20 minutes. Remove the cover and let stand 10 minutes longer. Loosen the edges with spatula; invert onto plate. Let stand until bread unmolds. Serve with lots of butter.


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