10-2011

VOICES Newsletter, v8n1, October 2011

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By Tabatha Cruz

As we experience the festivities of Columbus Day, let us reflect on the true meaning of this day. When I grew up in Puerto Rico, my parents always shared their personal feelings about Columbus Day with me. It isn’t something we celebrate as Latinos, but yet the government says it should be considered a national holiday. History is very important to know—but mainly learning about the other side of the story. When the Center for Multicultural Education decided to host Mr. Felipe Luciano as a guest speaker for its Hispanic Heritage Month celebration, it definitely left an impression with students and community members.

During his visit, Felipe was very impressed with how beautiful the state of Iowa was. "You have trees!" he enthusiastically shared with a student. Felipe was joining us from my home state of New York (the Bronx specifically, where he—and I—grew up). I imagine that a city full of skyscrapers gives no room to view trees.

His lecture was titled “Black/Latino Unity: The Missing Link.” There are some individuals who believe that these two populations should work together and build community as they share many of the same social issues and concerns. However, individuals from each group may not see it as so. In order to understand the commonalities between our cultures, one must look to the history of our nations to observe the patterns of behavior and what has been passed down from one generation to the next.

Felipe gave highlights about the Spaniard’s conquering and colonizing the lands in Latin America, as well as other Europeans colonizing the New World. In this discussion, he mentioned the horrors that the Spaniards put upon the Native Americans (from the Caribbean and South America) in the name of Christianity. He made references about studying in college of Christopher Columbus and his relationship with the Spaniards. He said it would make physically him sick to learn of the injustices and torture the Spaniards put his ancestors through as he read more literature.

This triggered memories of sitting in my Historia de Puerto Rico class as a teenager as well as conversations with my father about “Columbus was a jerk.” As children we celebrate Columbus Day to honor the discovery of the Americas. As an adult, we end up learning the flipside of the story—that we honor the man, who brought disease and horror to my ancestors—and ultimately, the extermination of an entire population and culture.

Felipe shared personal experiences and family stories about growing up in New York. Among his major points he talked about his mother’s disciplinary methods, his junior prom, and his daughter. He explained how the Spanish colonization had influenced Latino culture in the past, and how some aspects of it are still existent in present-day. For example, he explained that when he was disciplined as a child, his mother, who was a devout

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Voices Newsletter
By Camelia Rubalcada

Being the Dean of a College is a very demanding occupation. It was not easy to meet with the Dean because he is very busy, but I managed to fit myself into his schedule. As a matter of fact, in the middle of our interview, Dr. Watson had to leave. However, he was very sensitive to the fact that he had to cut the meeting short, so we arranged to meet at a later time that day. This illustrates how important it is to him to build a connection with students. In this interview, I sought to give individuals the opportunity to learn more about Dean Watson personally.

1. What is your idea of perfect happiness?
My idea of perfect happiness is lounging off the beaches of Mexico. Puerto Vallarta is my perfect place to visit. I enjoy reading and relaxing next to the ocean because it reminds me of home in South Carolina.

2. What is your greatest fear?
My greatest fear is losing my mental capacity. Alzheimer’s scares me because I use my intellect and thinking to make a living. The thought of losing my cognitive capacity is scary.

3. Which living person do you most admire?
Maya Angelou, because of the story of her life, I Know Why The Cage Bird Sings, tells about how she overcame adversity. She is such a strong African American woman who talks about the legacy of our people through her poetry and I really admire that about her.

4. What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?
The trait I dislike about myself is that I sometimes get distracted by the details. I prefer you give me the overview and you give me the impact—that is what I have time for. I am more about the actions as opposed to the anticipation.

5. What is the trait you most deplore in others?
I don’t like people who are mean-spirited or narrow-minded.

6. Which words or phrases do you most overuse?
Intentional, aspirational

7. What is your greatest regret?
I didn’t have children.

8. What do you consider your greatest achievement?
My greatest achievement was that I was a successful and effective elementary classroom teacher.

9. What do you most value in your friends?
Loyalty

10. What is your motto?
I don’t have a motto, but I really love this quote: “always seeking a renaissance of wonder.” This is something I read in an article and loved it because it focused on an idea that you don’t foreclose on yourself. You are always malleable and can adjust to open and new opportunities.

11. Who are your favorite writers?
Flannery O’Connor, James Baldwin, and Mildred Taylor.

12. What is your favorite Mexican food?
My favorite Mexican food is chili relleno.

13. What do you love most about the Hispanic culture?
Their history and their perseverance.

14. Have you ever traveled to a Latin American country?
Yes, parts of Mexico.

15. What is the one word that describes you?
Relentless

I want to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Watson for making time to meet with me and for sharing who he is.

“My greatest achievement was that I was a successful and effective elementary classroom teacher.”

Dean Dwight Watson.
By Kailee Becker

This semester’s Cedar Valley Community Book Club focuses on K-12 education in the United States. The featured book is, *The Flat World and Education: How America's Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future*, by Linda Darling-Hammond. Dr. Darling-Hammond uses an analytical approach to discuss America’s failing education system. She believes we need strong professional practice, supporting teachers, effective school systems, and sufficient resources in order to succeed.

According to Darling-Hammond, some obstacles students face include poverty, low-quality curricula, dysfunctional learning environments, and few social supports along with many others. She also expresses her concerns on how minority students’ education is and has been unequal and underrepresented. Although I knew our education system was failing, I didn’t know to what extent. This book discussion, consisting of faculty, staff, and community members, has opened my eyes to see the current crisis we are facing in a more diverse sense. The variety of backgrounds people bring to the book club discussion sessions shows me there is more to education than the system in which I matured; from a one-room school house to a public school in Waterloo, each person’s educational background differs in one way or another but the crisis remains—America’s education system is deteriorating.

The lead discussion facilitators for the fall series are Dr. Beverly Smith, Dr. Dwight Watson, and Rev. Abraham Funchess. Meeting times are 9:00 a.m. at University Book & Supply, in Cedar Falls and 6:30 p.m. at Jubilee UMC Resource Center, in Waterloo. The community book club meets every other Tuesday through November. The next meeting will take place on Tuesday, October 18, 2011 and will cover chapters five and six. Reading the book is not a requirement to attend as Dr. Blackwell supplies a one page summary of each chapter. All are encouraged to join neighbors from throughout the Cedar Valley to come and gain knowledge on our broken education system.

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Christian, had some unruly disciplinary methods. When he shared stories about having to kneel down on rice facing the wall, or having to smell the leather from the belt his mother was going to hit him with, Felipe explained it was part of the sadistic nature of the Spanish imposition and thus reflected in the Latino culture and attitudes.

Felipe also talked about his experiences and love for other ethnicities and cultural groups, such as the Irish, Italian, Jewish, and Muslim cultures. He encouraged students to actively participate in other people’s traditions and customs, like attending a mosque for prayer service. I believe that this type of involvement is one of the most beneficial ways in learning about people.

At the end of the lecture, Felipe encouraged UNI students to become unified, to support one another, and to promote diversity awareness. He also told the audience that we needed to read about our history. Knowing what our past is will help us to make progress in the future. Everyone has a story, and it should be shared with others—this is one way to achieve understanding.

Reading about history, but mainly observing life through different cultural lenses, will help us to come together as people and become better individuals, too.
CME Multicultural Student Leadership Retreat

By Mukulika Vashistha

Center for Multicultural Education organized a Student Leadership Retreat on Saturday, September 17th. It was a whole day event with all sorts of different events and lectures with a mission to lead students from “Vision to Action”. Tabatha Cruz, the Program Coordinator, and Kailee Becker, the Graduate Assistant, were the ice-breakers. They started and coordinated everything very nicely. We witnessed eight different speakers who gave us an insight over different cultures and also being a student from a different cultural background how we can try and understand them and behave accordingly. They also focused on importance of leadership quality, self-awareness, and group work. The entire event was divided into two sessions. I happen to attend all the lectures of session-I.

With Mark Grey’s topic being “Leadership in times of Transition,” he talked about the cultural diversity in the society and how it affects the people. Just being intelligent is not enough if someone is working in culturally diverse environment instead respect and knowledge towards that culture is also important.

Ashley Minshall made her session, “Teamwork doesn’t seem Work,” the most interactive. There were no lectures or PowerPoint presentations instead she made us all do two different drills in which we needed to work as a group, interact with each other, welcome ideas from every group member, and be quick and attentive. I liked her session the most because it practically explained us all the importance of working together as a part of a group.

For Colice Sander’s topic, “Oh no you didn’t...Like totally: Communication on a College Campus,” she discussed about the ways, being a student, one should interact with each other on-campus. She also discussed that being a culturally diverse university how different students have different accents and with that cultural block how can we approach others – “Don’t Wait, Just Approach Them”.

With Akela McDonald’s topic, “The Art of Self Awareness,” she explained about how emotional intelligence helps an individual to control their frustrations and mood swings. Also our self-awareness helps us building good relationships with people because now we respond differently with different people under different situations.

Christina Peverill inspired us all by talking about being a creative entrepreneur and online marketing of products and its benefits with her topic, “Leadership 2.0.” She helped students by guiding them to different sources which can be helpful for them if they ever want to launch their own website and also how they can advertise it.

The most important and the most inspiring part of that day was the “Leadership Pledge” which we all took along with Dr. Blackwell. The motive of this Leadership retreat and the pledge is to “Create an Impact, Challenge our Perspectives, and Cultivate Leaders within us”. It was fun when so many different students got together under the same roof. We got a chance to know each other, work together as a team, learnt about cultural diversity and how it can be handled and even played chess (during break hours). It was all together a great learning experience.
The integrity of social facts

By Dr. Michael D. Blackwell

We live in a society in which assessment and the collection of data drive the interpretation of reality. Somehow we believe that such information is sacrosanct. Let’s take the economy for example. Since the days of the end of Reconstruction in 1877, to be exact, there has been a disparity in income based on race. That means, for one hundred thirty-four years, African Americans have lagged behind White Americans as wage earners as well as recipients of welfare and other kinds of subsidies. As a matter of fact, “they” have been disproportionately represented in a negative way among all of life’s indices. These are, simply put, the facts of the case, but what do these facts tell us?

These facts do not tell us anything about race, for race is not an existential reality, but rather merely a social construct. Consequently, any interpretation of these factors should not go beyond demographic identification. Hence, they do not reveal any physiological or personality traits, because such labeling supports a theological, genetic, and anthropological fallacy: that Black people fulfill a set of innate biological and dispositional characteristics in a categorical way. Because race reflects nothing that is real, the belief in the intrinsic inferiority of a certain “people” does not stand. So, where does this leave us?

It leaves us with a problem, for any measure of human decency cannot fathom the continued underdevelopment of a contrived group of people for so long. No formulas equating a group of people as lazy, unproductive, and antinomian reprobates should be allowed to endure while others enjoy unspeakable privileges at the former’s expense. The denial of fundamental principles of civil and human rights in a so-called democratic republic is unconscionable.

As people sit in at Wall Street and other places across the country, let them remember to advocate for those who have been allowed to languish on the margins of society by their fellow citizens’ indifference. Perhaps, by doing so, we will all be able to improve our analytical and critical-thinking skills by finally entering into a reality that mirrors truth, not mere data.

Upcoming Lectures

Marian Wright Edelman
“The Future of Our Children in a Post-9/11 World”
Friday, October 14, 2011
1:00 p.m.
Lang Hall Auditorium

Stephen L. Carter
“The Violence of Peace”
Tuesday, October 18, 2011
7:00 p.m.
Lang Hall Auditorium

Louisa Thomas
“Peaceful Resolution of International Conflict”
Wednesday, November 10, 2011
7:00 p.m.
CME
The CME is looking for students to contribute to the Voices Newsletter. Blurb about what’s going on in the community or on campus! Please email Kailee Becker, kaileeb@uni.edu, or Camelia Rubalcada, rubalcac@uni.edu, with inquiries.