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VOICES



An Occasional Newsletter of the Center for Multicultural Education at the University of Northern Iowa

Vol. 5

no. 1

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to our Web version of the Voices newsletter from the Center for Multicultural Education (CME)! I hope that you enjoy the new format, and I invite you to share your constructive comments and feedback. One of the main purposes of the newsletter since its inception is to report on past events that the CME has sponsored, presenting what had transpired and whatever lessons could be extrapolated from them. Another goal, of course, is to publicize upcoming multicultural programs and activities that will take place not only on campus, but also in the surrounding communities.

In this issue, we highlight the visit of three individuals who spoke in the multipurpose room of the CME. Our keynote speaker for Diversity Week, which usually begins the Monday following Labor Day, was Tim Wise. Wise is an international figure regarding anti-racist advocacy and white privilege. Early in October, Dr. Kimberly Acquaviva visited UNI. Acquaviva is Assistant Research Professor in the Department of Nursing Education at the George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences. One of her areas of research is how health professionals, in particular, and most of us, in general, perceive and/or care for the elderly; she gives special attention to end-of-life issues with respect to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals. Later in October, another special guest was Paula Crisostomo. Back in 1968, Crisostomo helped lead Chicano student protests against the public education system in East Los Angeles. Her role in the demonstrations is featured in the HBO movie Walkout.

A hallmark of the CME is the celebration of U.S. racial and ethnic minority “heritage months”: Hispanic Heritage Month (September 15-October 15); Native American Heritage Month (November); Black History Month (February); and Asian American Awareness Month, which is frequently honored across the country in May, but since the Spring semester ends early in that month and April is jam packed with stuff, the CME has historically recognized the cultures of Asian Americans in tandem with Women’s History Month in March. Because these categories of people are still underrepresented in American society, the CME remains vigilant in lifting up not only their contributions and achievements, but also their socioeconomic and political circumstances—historically and contemporaneously.

In addition, this newsletter will feature student reflections on CME programming and suggestions for future

speakers, performers, workshops, and social events. The CME has a consultative group known as the Multicultural Student Advisory Board (MSAB). This organization is comprised of leaders of diverse student groups, and it serves both to assist the CME in responding to student needs and desires and to share what is happening event-wise among students. I foresee this online communication being a vehicle for the dissemination of news of interest to the student body and members of other campus entities.

Welcome to the Voices newsletter! I hope it will, indeed, become a voice for the voiceless and a home for those without a media home.

RACE & PRIVILEGE

A number of individuals have graced the stage of the Center for Multicultural Education this century for a variety of reasons related to developing cross-cultural awareness and intercultural communication, particularly with regards to race and ethnicity. We have had a series of guests who have spoken on the subject of white privilege, which has popular currency in the arena of race relations. Some of the prominent figures have been: Paul Kivel, author of *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice* and, most recently, *You Call This a Democracy? Who Benefits, Who Pays & Who Really Decides*; Jennifer Holladay, who directs *Tolerance.org* of the Southern Poverty Law Center; Dr. Robert Jensen, Professor of Journalism, University of Texas at Austin and author of *Citizens of the Empire* and *The Heart of Whiteness*; and Bob Zellner, a white field organizer for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee during the 1960s.

All of these national figures, on separate occasions, urged me to extend an invitation to Tim Wise to come to the UNI campus. They stated that his presence is required for any institution of higher learning, if it is serious about recognizing privilege, dismantling racism, and developing a cultural climate that is just, equitable, and enriching for all, and



that successfully works to recruit and retain students of color. They all maintained Wise is the foremost white antiracist activist, author, and advocate in this country and, possibly, in the world. With strong recommendations volunteered my way, I immediately set as a goal for the CME to bring Wise to UNI.

For those unaware of who Wise is or unable to attend either one of his lectures, and for those of you who might need your memories jogged, permit me this opportunity to share a little bit about Wise's background. From Nashville, Tennessee, Wise earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Tulane University in New Orleans. While there, he joined others in the anti-apartheid movement, which won him the international spotlight and, ultimately, praise from none other than Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. While in New Orleans, where he lived for ten years, Wise fought against the political candidacy of David Duke as an associate director of the Louisiana Coalition Against Racism and Nazism.

Wise is the author of *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*, from Soft Skull Press, and *Affirmative Action: Racial Preference in Black and White*, from Routledge. He has contributed essays to fifteen books, and is featured in *White Men Challenging Racism: Thirty-Five Personal Stories*, from Duke University Press. Wise will have two new books out in early 2007: *Disasters, Natural and Otherwise: Racism, Classism and Hurricane Katrina*, and a collection of essays, *Speaking Treason Fluently: Anti-Racist Reflections from an Angry White Male*. His writings have appeared in dozens of popular, professional and scholarly journals, and he has been a featured guest on hundreds of radio and television programs, worldwide. He appears regularly on the ESPN program, "Quite Frankly, with Stephen A. Smith," to discuss racial issues in the world of sports.

As the keynote speaker for Diversity Week, Wise graced us with two presentations: "Disasters, Natural and Otherwise: Race, Class, and Hurricane Katrina" and "Race is Not a Card: Challenging Racism, Privilege, and White Denial in America." Around the lunch hour, on September 14, Wise elucidated the social dynamics of race and class that systematically neglected the plight of the poor prior to the storm and that ignored the pitiable cries of those most adversely affected in ways that were flagrantly dehumanizing. In the evening, he spoke about the reality of white privilege, citing examples from the displacement of indigenous peoples and Mexicans from the land to Jim Crow segregation and the erecting of a fence to deny access to the United States for those seeking release from the manacles of poverty—a condition our country has played a major role in creating. He claimed that whites were the beneficiaries of affirmative action since this country's inception. Wise concluded his speech by enjoining the standing-room-only audience vigorously to oppose racism and privilege in proactive ways and to challenge anyone who

claims racism no longer exists with the abundance of evidence at their disposal, including facts and instances he himself had conveyed.

Both lectures were followed by a question-and-answer period in which Wise continued to engage the audience in his characteristically forthright and ostensibly insolent manner. The audience loved him as demonstrated by their enthusiastic applause. Prior to the day of these addresses, two discussion sessions were held to flesh out Wise's perspectives. Dr. Harry Brod, Professor of Philosophy and Religion, and Dr. Frad Besthorn, Associate Professor of Social Work, helped to facilitate dialogue on white privilege and religion and racism, respectively.

Needless to say, Kivel, Holladay, Jensen, and Zellner were right! Tim Wise did, indeed, captivate all who were in attendance and is undoubtedly the most articulate and substantive expositor of antiracism in the public square today. The CME will use the digital recording of his presentations as well as other surefire materials to respond to Wise's charge to confront racism, classism, and privilege at every turn.

"I had one advantage while watching Tim Wise: I was not surprised and defensive about what he was saying. I had already studied white privilege in a few sociology courses at UNI, so I expected most of what he discussed. He did, however, have a few stories that I had never heard and would never have imagined. For example, he spoke about Columbine and how things might have been a little different if were not for the privilege that exists in that town. I had never even considered how white privilege might play a factor in a situation like that. I think the most important thing that Wise did was show that white privilege is not a good thing for white people.

I have discussed white privilege in classes before, and I can say that I think people are much less defensive when listening to Wise than they are with most speakers. He does not try to make it seem as though he is better than other white people; he speaks about how he feels white privilege has gotten him where he is today. I think this is an important way of getting people, who might otherwise be offended by his words, to listen before they speak. This is not always the case, as Wise has been met by a lot of resistance, but I think he gets a better response than most speakers on this topic. More importantly, he does not blame individuals. He says he believes that most people are good, but white privilege is part of our social structure. Most of us are not deliberately contributing to this problem, but it is still happening."

-Carly Nelson

GAY AND GRAY

Dr. Kimberly Acquaviva is the Assistant Research Professor at The George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences in Washington D.C.. Her presentation, on October 4th, explored GBLT aging and the issues pertinent to GBLT seniors.

For gay, bisexual, lesbian and transgender (GBLT)

seniors, aging can be fraught with unique challenges. After a lifetime of being told they are not "normal" by family members, faith communities, and societal institutions, GBLT seniors may be understandably hesitant to seek "mainstream" services. They may be reluctant to disclose their sexual orientation to service providers when and if they do seek out services, out of fear of homophobia and discrimination. Society does not acknowledge the losses experienced by heterosexual seniors, thus further compounding the invisibility and pain of GBLT seniors.

CONTINUING THE STRUGGLE FOR QUALITY IN EDUCATION

The struggle for equal rights in America has often been advanced through the courageous actions of ordinary individuals. Paula Crisostomo is one such person.

Paula gave a keynote speech on October 5 at the Center for Multicultural Education. There she discussed issues with racism and her fight for equal education among the Mexican-American community.

Paula stepped into the spotlight of the Chicano struggle for equality and the fight against racism. Appalled at the deplorable quality of the education she was receiving, Paula led the largest high school student protest in this country's history. In early March, 1968, Chicano students from five East Los Angeles high schools walked out of their classes as a direct protest against the sub-standard quality of their education. Not only was it the first time Chicano students walked out, but it was also the first major mass protest against racism ever undertaken by Mexican-Americans. It was a watershed in the struggle for equal rights. By the time the historic "blow-outs" were over, a week and a half later, more than 20,000 students had participated in East Los Angeles and in sympathy walkouts at other high schools across the city.



This story has been made into an HBO movie, *Walkout*, which premiered in March of 2006. Directed by Edward James Olmos and starring Alexa Vega as Paula, the movie tells the story of a piece of history that has become a seminal point in the struggle for educational equity in the Chicano community. It is told through Paula's voice and experience. *Walkout* is Paula's courage and leadership in this historic event has been documented in numerous books and she is featured in the PBS documentary *Chicano!*: *Taking Back the Schools*.

Today, Paula Crisostomo is the Director of Government & Community Relations for Occidental College in Los Angeles. She provides leadership and direction for the college's community outreach strategies, including neighborhood relations, local and federally sponsored services programs in education and local and state government relations.

NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

At the turn of the century an effort was made to gain recognition of the numerous contributions made by the Native American Community to the development and expansion of the United States. Over the years, that effort has progressed into an entire month of recognition. This is what we have come to know as Native American Heritage Month. The Center for Multicultural Education will be hosting and sponsoring several events throughout the month of November to celebrate Native American Heritage Month.

VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS: BILL MILLER

It was great to have Bill Miller visit the UNI campus as a guest of the CME! A Mohican Indian from Northern Wisconsin, Miller is able to reflect on ordinary human experiences in a profound way. More importantly, perhaps, is his ability to demonstrate how insensitivity towards American Indians remains prevalent in our society. He is gifted at highlighting cultural ignorance in a genial fashion and evoking expressions of desire to discover and walk down paths towards genuine reconciliation. Consequently, Miller conducted a workshop entitled "On the Red Road to Reconciliation." He emphasized that it is not enough to feel sorrow or remorse for our adverse historical legacy with respect to Native Americans; what we must do is seek to repair the seemingly impassable breach between Native American and Western traditions by learning about the indigenous peoples, their multifarious lifestyles, customs, values, and worldviews.

In his workshop, Miller engaged the audience in a remarkably personal odyssey that revealed his experience with domestic violence. His sincerity and passion elicited strong emotions not only from the participants, but also from Miller himself. Many women in the audience were particularly affected by the pathos in his words, and they were moved to share some of their own experiences with male chauvinism and white privilege. Very empathetic to their storytelling, Miller constructively used their experiences as well as his own to a spiritual climax and conclusion that was instructive and nothing short of riveting.

If the noon-hour workshop would have been the only thing that Miller did while here at UNI, his visit would have been tremendously worthwhile. However, he was able to take the audience to even higher heights through his musical performance in the Davis Hall of the Gallagher-Bluedorn Performing Arts Center that evening. Miller's lilting voice and folksy guitar-picking captivated the



audience as he played and sang steadily for nearly an hour and a half without any fanfare.

Even more scintillating than his poetic strumming on the strings was his soulful and lyrical blowing of a variety of flutes. It was no wonder that he had received a Grammy Award in 2005 for Cedar Dream Songs in the category of Best Native American Music Album, for the instrumental CD showcased his extraordinary talent for injecting a range of feeling in his compositions.

Sometimes, Miller dialogued with the audience about how he got his start playing with teen rock bands after receiving his first guitar at the age of twelve. In addition, he reminisced over his growing attraction for folk music and bluegrass as well as his decision to take up the flute, which he has characterized as “a faith instrument, a spirit instrument.” While attending the Layton School of Art and Design in Milwaukee, Miller had the pleasure of attending a Pete Seeger concert—inspiring him eventually to move to Nashville, Tennessee to ply his craft as a singer/songwriter. And the rest, as they say, is history.

The candor evinced by Miller was astonishing and quite admirable. His conversation about encounters with racism in his musical career and about the violence that is often expressed in love relationships was nothing short of eloquent. It comes, therefore, as no surprise that Miller is an accomplished painter—having shown and sold his artwork in venues across the country. In addition to his CD's, there were copies of his drawings on hand for purchase.

Miller does not plan to rest on his laurels. He is an ardent environmentalist and a pursuer of social justice. Despite his frankness, Miller is an advocate of peace. He seeks to make the world a more livable, sustainable, and equitable place both now and in the future. He charges everyone with the task of joining him in this sacred obligation. The following verse captures Miller's exhortation

very well, and it is thus fitting to conclude with it.

*We build a new tomorrow, we draw the pattern clear,
We make our plans with wisdom, for God is always here.
Our thinking makes our future, our actions pave the way;
We build a new tomorrow, on plans we make today!*

CORETTA: A KING WHO WAS A QUEEN

Martin Luther King, Jr., is the most salient historical figure in my mental sky. Apart from my embracement of the Christian faith, the life and legacy of Dr. King helped to shape my moral landscape and to convince me of the importance of advocating for and seeking to redress the plight of the indigent. During my adolescent years, inaugurated by the assassinations of King and Senator Robert F. Kennedy, I became obsessively enamored of King's social thought and nonviolent direct action. I simply adored the tenor and cadence of his public speaking voice, and I positioned him at the top of my intellectual mentors.

Voraciously, I read anything I could get my hands

on about King. I counted myself a King scholar well before I graduated from high school, and I could converse in substantive ways about King with others—regardless of their social status. What interested me most in my consumption of materials on King were the pieces by those who were closest to him. So you can imagine how ecstatic I was when I came across a



Reader's Digest condensed version of the book, My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr., by his wife, Coretta Scott King. How else, I thought, could I get a genuine sense of the man without absorbing the words of Coretta, who shared the most private and intimate moments with him? The insights she shared about the wisdom, emotions, humility, sincerity, and humor of the man were indescribably precious for me. However, something else occurred in my pursuit of the soul of Dr. King: I encountered an equally determined and visionary character in the person of Coretta herself!

This woman had dedicated her entire life to buttressing and bolstering the private Martin so that he

could be the very public and preeminent civil rights leader, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Often, she surrendered her personal wants and pleasures as a woman and a mother to satisfy her husband's needs and obligations. She sacrificed a musical career and her own community involvement in order to undergird his principal role in the burgeoning progressive movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Her book was first published in 1969, just a year after the murder of Dr. King. She sought to share with the world her understanding of and appreciation for her husband—particularly



before others might take the opportunity to discredit his profundity as many attempted to do as he spoke out increasingly vehemently

against the escalating participation of the United States in the Vietnam War and as he tried to bring together the poor of a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds to challenge the inertia of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty.

As the Moving Finger of history wrote away from the 1960s, Coretta did not wane in her commitment to promoting King's enduring legacy. She gave her voice and support to a number of causes to improve the life chances of black people and other folks of color in a country still plagued by bigotry and structural racism. While many tried to dishonor Dr. King by citing a litany of personal foibles—plagiarism in his dissertation, sermons, and public addresses, sexual liaisons allegedly captured on audiotapes of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and periodic bouts of depression—Coretta insisted on advancing the nobility, peacemaking, and love that formed the core of M. L. King, Jr.'s personality and disposition.

It is no small wonder why Coretta was revered by so many over the years, and why, when she died shortly after the twentieth anniversary of the first official celebration of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday, in January 2006, thousands gathered in Atlanta to mourn her death and in Lithonia, Georgia, to help eulogize her. She was an outstanding woman who had remarkable grace and aplomb. Her espousal of Dr. King's vision of the beloved community and her dedication to enlightening others on the power of nonviolence were inimitable. She was the founder of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Nonviolent Social Change and throughout her life she aspired to reach young people to encourage them to become involved in the struggle to alleviate their nation and the world of poverty, racism, militarism, and violence. Anyone who encountered her could not help but be mesmerized by her cool compo-

sure, her self-assurance, and her abiding faith.

Without sounding too trite, I think it would be apropos to say that Dr. King owed a lot to Coretta—not only for raising the children while he was frequently away from home, but also for her political astuteness and spiritual resolve. Many do not know, for example, that Coretta came out against U.S. involvement in Vietnam before Martin did. She was a critical persuasive force in his decision to make that famous speech against the war at the Riverside Church on April 4, 1967, exactly a year before he was killed. One can just imagine the powerful influence Coretta's abhorrence of injustice and intolerance of the dehumanizing effects of discrimination must have had on her husband's moral compass. It seems we all owe a debt of gratitude to this unflappable crusader of peace. She is, indeed, this nation's Queen!

UPCOMING EVENTS

On the Thursday and Friday before and the Tuesday after the King Holiday, the Center for Multicultural Education will be having a film series on Martin Luther King, Jr. Please check out the CME website for the times of these showings. Also, there will be a panel discussion on Dr. King's meaning for the 21st century in the Lang Hall Auditorium on Tuesday, January 16, 2007, from 8:00 to 9:30 p.m.

Feel free to visit our website for more information on upcoming events.

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Our mission is to provide programs and activities of a culturally diverse nature to the campus and wider communities.