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The Challenge Of Change

**Kimberly Flint-Hamilton, Senior Editor
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2011 has been a year of surprises. Some have been good, some bad, and some ... just interesting. The BCTS, however, has been a resilient organization since its inception, and thus far we have weathered the storms.

On the international front, among the worst of the news for 2011 took place in Japan. Along with the rest of the world, we watched as Japan's earthquake and tsunami claimed thousands of lives on March 11, and we prayed for the Japanese people and for the world as the subsequent meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant unfolded. The worst disaster since Chernobyl (1986), its aftereffects will continue to be felt for decades.

In our own nation, 2011 brought numerous attempts to disenfranchise voters, just in time for the 2012 presidential primary season. More than 20 states have passed legislation restricting voting access to a variety of peoples, including the elderly, people with disabilities, low income workers, and, of course, non-whites in general. These restrictions include: "eliminating election-day registration, restricting third-party voter registration activities, reducing the number of days for early voting and most commonly, requiring photo ID for in-

person voting. But the result is always the same: creating unjust obstacles to voting.”¹

And, even though waning unemployment statistics seem hopeful on the surface, the news isn't so great for African Americans. After hovering frighteningly close to double-digit unemployment rates since the recession of 2008, the November 2011 national data showed a drop to 8.6%. Yet, while more Whites are finding jobs in this difficult economy, the African American unemployment rate, at 16.7%, is at its highest point since 1984. Many economists try to explain away the huge disparity by citing the age of the black workforce which is younger than the white, the fact that blacks overall are not as well educated as whites, and the geographical location of most blacks, who live in areas that have been hit harder by the recession. But discrimination in the labor market still must play a role in these shocking facts, according to Algernon Austin, director of the Race, Ethnicity, and Economy program at the Economic Policy Institute. Black men have been hit the hardest, with 19.1% unemployed.²

The sagging economy continues to plague BCTS membership and we all have been affected. Those with stable tenured or tenure-track appointments have seen multiple

¹ Mary Moreno, “Restrictive Voting Laws Threaten to Disenfranchise Millions,” *Huff Post Latino Politics*, December 27, 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/voto-latino/restrictive-voting-laws-t_b_1120878.html (accessed December 27, 2011).

² Annalyn Censky, “Black Unemployment: Highest in 27 Years,” *CNN Money*, September 2, 2011, http://money.cnn.com/2011/09/02/news/economy/black_unemployment_rate/index.htm (accessed December 20, 2011).

years without pay increases, yet the cost of living continues to rise. Some of us have even suffered double digit pay cuts. Our contingent faculty members have had trouble negotiating the renewal of their contracts. This has understandably resulted in anxiety and lower morale.

Despite the economic impact on our livelihoods, however, technology continues to shape the way we work and socialize. At this year's Annual Meeting a surprising number of members carried iPads, Kindle and Nook readers, and tiny notebook computers. Many more of us have begun using Powerpoint software to present our papers – what just two years ago was a rarity is now becoming the norm. More of us are teaching online courses. We have begun using Skype, the internet audio/video conferencing software, to conduct our business, and have launched a mentoring program for our junior faculty colleagues via this wonderful resource.

The year 2011 brought good news and honors to the BCTS membership. Our elders in particular were honored. To name just a few that we the editors are aware of, Sr. Jamie Phelps, O.P., after a long and fruitful tenure as Director of the Institute for Black Catholic Studies, has decided to take a well-deserved break. She is now on sabbatical from the Institute. While she has resigned as Director of the IBCS, she looks forward to returning to the IBCS faculty in coming summers. Additionally, this past February Sr. Jamie received a special invitation from the U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican, Dr. Miguel H. Diaz, to speak in Rome on Black Catholic Culture. Fr. Cyprian Davis, O.S.B., has retired from his position as full

professor of Saint Meinrad Archabbey, and was honored with the title *Professor Emeritus*. He continues to teach one course per semester. And Diana Hayes, also honored as *Professor Emerita*, has retired from Georgetown University. And it wasn't just the elders who earned honors this year. BCTS Secretary Sr. Dr. Shawnee Marie Daniels-Sykes, S.S.N.D. was presented with the Vatican II Award for Distinguished Service in Society by Milwaukee Archbishop Jerome Listecky.

The BCTS Oral History Project is gaining momentum. This year, with support from a generous grant from Stetson University, we were able to interview three of our elders – Sr. Dr. Jamie Phelps, O.P., Fr. Dr. Charles Payne, O.F.M, and Fr. Dr. Thaddeus Posey, O.F.M. Cap, resulting in nearly ten hours of taped interviews and a presentation of the highlights of the Phelps and Payne interviews during the Annual Meeting. We struggle to transcribe this veritable goldmine of information, and gain new appreciation of the lives and experiences of those who have come before us. We learn from them what it means to embrace our strengths despite our struggles. And we grow as well in our knowledge of the technologies and methodologies of Oral History. Learning from our elders helps us develop a deeper understanding of ourselves and our institutions – the spirit of *sankofa* unveils profound new meanings for us.

This year's *Journal* features three fascinating and important papers. Bryan Massingale revisits the connection between Black and Catholic, taking us all down a road that will no doubt uncover some uncomfortable truths. Jon Nilson analyzes the conviction of James Baldwin that racism is rooted in a fear of death, and presents Terror Management

Theory in support of that conviction. And LaReine-Marie Mosely presents us with a *sankofa* ethic – a way of living that embraces the values that have brought us this far.

As we prepare to put 2011 to bed and open our hearts to 2012, may we strive to honor our vocation, to: “speak out of Black Catholic experience and culture, [and] also to speak of the contemporary reality of Black Catholic existence. We undertake this task not merely for self-interest or self-satisfaction, but for the sake of the integrity and credibility of Catholic faith and witness.”³

³ Bryan Massingale, “Cyprian Davis and the Black Catholic Intellectual Vocation,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 28[1] (2010): 65-82, esp. p. 76.

