

OFFICE OF MINORITY STUDENT AFFAIRS

CHRONICLE

WOMEN
IN MUSIC
FESTIVAL



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OMSA CHRONICLE MISSION

To provide students with timely information about opportunities and events that support the mission of OMSA; to serve as a forum for students to present ideas, issues and solutions to problems and or issues that exist in our community; to act as an on-going communication resource for students, faculty and staff alike.

Editor's Corner

Welcome to our final edition of the OMSA Chronicle for the 2011-12 academic year. This issue is filled with campus events that showcase the wide range of interests and opportunities open to students at the University of Rochester. This issue highlights the on-going success of our students and their willingness to embrace learning by trying new experiences outside the realm of their personal comfort zones. As you are aware, collegiate life is about immersing one's self into a variety of new experiences, creating new opportunities to develop, and remaining open and flexible in order to think new thoughts and acquire new skills. For example, in this edition of the Chronicle, read about a new initiative that speaks to the aforementioned focus on creating new opportunities, while at the same time enhancing our commitment to diversity--Douglas Leadership House (DLH). Perhaps now is indeed the time to think about stretching yourself by studying abroad, searching for the right internship experience, participating in community service, attending a lecture on a topic not related to class, or attending a meeting and/or program sponsored by a group outside your own racial/ethnic identity group. The U of R provides a great number of unique opportunities to augment classroom learning--but often it may mean thinking differently from the past and expanding your reach to include new experiences.

As always, we look forward to your feedback and hope that you find the content of the Chronicle both interesting and thought-provoking.

Meliora!
Norman Burnett

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Congratulations: To two of our student editors: Charlene Cooper and Iliana Garica on their graduation. Thank you for all you have done for the Chronicle. We will miss you. And good luck in your professional futures.

Special Thanks To:
Chinedu Okafor for doing the cover work of the Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 editions.

Image Links

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RESPECT MY STEP: BSU's 9TH ANNUAL STEP SHOW

ANTOINETTE ENA JOHNSON '13
Student Editor

The walls echoed with the force of dozens of feet hitting the ground in unison, shaking the seats and demanding that you respect their step. This year the 9th Annual Black Students' Union (BSU) Step Show brought together high school teams from the city of Rochester and college step teams from the Upstate region to compete for cash prizes and a year's worth of bragging rights at Strong Auditorium on February 4, 2012. The step show is an opportunity for the University and the Rochester community to come together in celebration of the traditional African American dance form.

This is an arena dominated by high school teams because they not only bring serious competition, but an enthusiastic audience and quite a bit of swag. Two young girls from John Walton Spencer School No. 16 opened the show, giving the DJ a run for his money, as they gave the audience a taste of what was to come - strength and harmony intertwined with synchronization.

This year, the Flawless Females, Lady Eliminators and Wilson Pearls were among the best, bringing creativity and power to the stage. Each group brought a unique act to the stage, from the Flawless Females intricate dance breaks and the Red Sea of jeans to the marionette Lady Eliminators' who made use of their small numbers and extra space. One team even dabbled with dubstep music and used the deep base to carry the stomps across the auditorium.

The Wilson Pearls however, stole the show with their Jungle theme- including a caged man- and high heels that made their platoon of girls that much louder. In perfect unison they stepped with the seriousness of a military regiment, regardless of the pearls lost or the hula skirts shredded, they marched on to victory- taking home the \$400 prize.

The college division consisted solely of the University of Buffalo's UB Step Team whose step rendition of Queen Latifah's 1996, "Set it off," and they did just that. Complete with the cast, the costumes, and rhythmic steps of cat and mouse once again took the dance form to a

new level and UB was awarded with the \$1,000 honor.

BSU spent months preparing for one of their biggest events during the spring semester. President and senior, Melika Butcher, along with 15 other members and volunteers began planning in early October, contacting schools and more importantly Verizon, who sponsored the event.

They called in the professionals when deciding their hosts as DJ Wavvy, Sharese King, UR senior and Vice President of BSU, and Cainaan Webb, UR senior and member of UR Hip Hop, were chosen for their ability to carry the crowd when called upon. "Follow me on Twitter" was DJ Wavvy's catch phrase and it worked, people in the audience sent in their comments and he would announce the audience's pick at different points in the show.

URs own Xclusive Step Team performed "Who Can Step Better than the Rest?" during half-time, going through dance styles from different time periods and recreating them through step. Sophomore Kayla Roberston, a member of Xclusive since Fall '11, spoke about the preparation that goes into creating a full piece, the team had practice every night since the semester started. Indulgence Dance Team also performed, tailoring their choreography for the step show and focusing on a creative and visual performance. Barra Madden, a freshman and member of the team, was once a Wilson Pearl and brought "the same energy" to Indulgence as she created the step routine for the team. Senior and captain of Indulgence, Ian Feurtado, felt as though they could bring a "nice change from the seriousness of step" by giving the crowds "Ooo and Ahh" moments. The audience was very familiar with the faces of the team, which created plenty of positive support and a roar of cheers.

The BSU Step Show was once again a success, old and young, performers and spectators alike came together to pay homage to African American heritage and strengthen the unity and diversity at the University of Rochester and the greater Rochester area.



AN EXCLUSIVE ON XCLUSIVE

OLUFEMI J. WATSON '13
STUDENT EDITOR

It's a kaleidoscope of sound and movement when I walk into practice late one Saturday afternoon, about two weeks ago. "So Femi's performing for us too?" says Co-Captain Alexis Goolsby. Performing for the team is something every member must do for coming into practice late, not because any of us suffer stage fright, but because stepping is all about timing and precision, and if one person is late, everyone is late. I run to join the current formation and to make sure everyone is ready. Alexis calls out, "Xclusive Step!" which is followed by a single stomp of solidarity from the team, meaning we are ready, which is followed by what sounds like a drum line.

Wait....we have a step team, since when?

In the city of Rochester, stepping is rather popular, most of the junior and senior high schools have step teams, some of which perform at the University's annual step show in January, which is hosted by the Black Students' Union, along with other Step Teams from around the state. The prevalence of stepping in this city itself is one of the reasons that the University's step team, Xclusive, was founded in Spring of 2006. The team originally consisted of 10 members, most of whom had stepped before in high school.

To get a little history on the step team, I spoke to one of the 10 original members of the team, Kyvaughn Henry, class of 2009 and current Masters of Public Health candidate at the Medical Center. Henry says she would credit the idea of starting the step team to Octavia Brooks, also of the class of 2009. "UofR has always had tons of dance teams, but one thing was missing--Stepping! Being in a City where stepping is so prevalent, it was only right the UR joined the wave" says Henry. A majority of the team consisted of people who had stepped before and wanted to continue or who had always wanted to try. In the case of Kyvaughn she was a member of the University's dance team Indulgence, but decided she would give the step team a try.

Much like the team's current reincarnation the original team auditioned and earned a spot to perform at University of Rochester's homecoming weekend, Meliora Weekend. Rochester Revue, is a huge opportunity for any of the University's performing groups and just as before the team is very excited. Sadly, the first time around the team died out rather quickly.

Bringing it back

Alexis Goolsby, one of Xclusive's two co-captains, decided to bring back the step team. In the Fall of 2009 during her Freshman year, Alexis met the captain, who was a senior and talked to her about joining the team. In the Spring of 2010, the idea finally came full circle and the team was back again. Alexis utilized her previous experiences as a stepper and cheerleader to lead the team.

Alexis says she is happy she brought the team back looking at how well things are going. "I was very hesitant because of the time commitment and I was not sure if I could actually lead a team or if there was enough people that was interested. But looking at it now, I am very happy that I did decide to bring the team back because I have met so many new people and have grown with a lot of my peers, while we struggle with a new up and coming team."

Xclusive's other co-captain Janise Carmichael, shares the same excitement about bringing the team back and explained her involvement with its reincarnation. "I became a part of Xclusive during the time that it was coming back simply because I had never stepped and I wanted to. The team was a different art form that many people did not acknowledge or learn about until the Black Students' Union annual step show. I thought it was fantastic that the step team was being rebuilt and remained a part of the team because I thought it offered something that the campus needed. Furthermore, I decided to be a part of the Xclusive comeback because I think it is cool to be the person to help something develop and watch it take off and become greater."

This year Xclusive has had many performances including: the Rochester Revue, the Fall Drag Show, and the Black Student Union's 9th annual Step Show. The team looks to continue growing, performing and enjoying a long successful career on the University of Rochester and beyond.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY WITH THE DOUGLASS LEADERSHIP HOUSE

CHARLENE COOPER '12
STUDENT EDITOR

Seven hopeful student groups applied for houses on the Fraternity Quad at the University of Rochester this semester. Upon careful review of their proposals, Residential Life just recently offered three groups, the Douglass Leadership House (DLH), Drama House, and Sigma Phi Epsilon Fraternity, residence on the Quad. The Douglass Leadership House stands out from the others, being that it is neither a fraternity house, nor a house that has already been on the Quad, as the other two houses are.

The idea of the Douglass Leadership House emerged from the Women of Color Circle, which is a group composed of students, professors, and staff with the goal of empowering and serving as an open forum for women of color at the University.

The focus of DLH is to build and nurture a group of leaders of color within the campus community. The house will provide the students the chance to acquire and enhance their leadership skills through the use of four project areas including, the Douglass Project for Leadership, the MLK project for conflict resolution, the Ella Baker Project for community engagement, and the Zora Neale Hurston project on diversity through the arts. Students hope that the house will help promote diversity on campus and encourage a more welcoming feeling to all on the Fraternity Quad.

The Douglass Leadership House has been progressing quickly, as it has already chosen its executive board and most of its future residents. Amber-Danielle

Baldie, a freshman and the upcoming President of DLH remarks, "I think the house will give people a better outlook on diversity and will help them own who they are".

Makia Green, a sophomore and a future resident of the Douglass Leadership House hopes to be able to enhance her leadership skills by setting a direct example for the underclassmen she will be living with. "As a rising junior, there are lots of underclassmen who will be living in the house so it gives me the opportunity to be a leader for them", says Green.

The Douglass Leadership House has received a mix of reactions from the student body. In response to negative reactions to the house, Sharese King, a senior and one of the students who helped spearhead the proposal for the house remarks, "I think the reactions are a result of not understanding the house's intent. Our intent was to attain a visible safe space for students of color on the quad." King further mentions, "I feel as if the negative responses lend more support to why students need this house".

Melika Butcher, a senior and another one of the students who helped spearhead this endeavor, hopes that when she returns as an alumna that she comes back to a more diverse campus community and that Douglass Leadership House is still around. Butcher remarks, "I hope that the house is not something we can lose, but something that is permanent at the U of R."

3RD ANNUAL DIVERSITY CONFERENCE: CHANGE THE CONVERSATION

ANTOINETTE ENA JOHNSON '13
STUDENT EDITOR

"Our challenge here is for all to feel welcome," said Joel Seligman as he introduced keynote speaker Claude Steele, Dean of the School of Education at Stanford University, "We are committed to diversity." The only way to realize this goal to reach a "critical mass" where there are enough members of the same identity within a situation so they don't feel the contingencies as individuals. Seligman described instances of "insular minorities" and believed the only way to reduce these occurrences was to encourage diversity in all aspects of the university and increase awareness.

WHISTLING VIVALDI AND OTHER CLUES TO HOW STEREOTYPES AFFECT US

"It helps us understand life in a diverse society, at the level of individual experience, what kinds of experience do we have in part because we live in a diverse society and also it helps to understand some of the group differences" said Steele, recalling his 25 years of psychology research at the University of Michigan, hopefully it will give a "Greater appreciation of the effects that context has on our behaviors."

Steele gives an example of how females underperformed in stressful situations due to the negative connotations associated with their groups: men and women of the same capability were told they were taking a difficult physics exam, women underperformed because the stress of trying to overcome stereotype distracted them from doing well on the test- they have extra worries. "You have to care about an identity for it to affect you," said Steele, those identities that are visible to others are internalized, members most affected by an identity are the most confident and they have the highest expectations, the most invested.

By paying special attention to reducing the contingencies of minority groups, attention to cues from other members within the community, pushing for critical mass, and ensuring the leadership values diversity the conversation can be changed. Once a student's view is positive, they can relax, suddenly the work isn't so bad, they get better grades and the positive reinforcement continues the cycle of success.

BEYONCÉ CAN'T BE BLACK, SHE'S HOT!

The title alone had enough shock value to compel many to join in talks with Ronke Lattimore Tapp, Ph.D. and Assistant Professor of Multiculturalism at UR, on the common incidents of insensitive, uniformed and offensive comments and interactions in the classroom and workplace. She identified the lack of interaction and socialization between different groups as the source of these comments and behaviors and challenged us to evaluate our own behavior as we approach the conversation and our responses.

"If you want to commit to diversity you have to be ready for discomfort," said Tapp, "it makes a difference to say something." Responses can vary depending on the dynamics between the two people involved- calling a "time-out," calling attention to, asking for clarification, humor or sarcasm, and education were the best methods for easing tensions and promoting diversity during these incidents. These allow the responder time to recover from the shock of insensitivity and address what the person said, without attacking who they are so both parties can reach a better understanding of the situation without becoming defensive or creating more tension.

What would you do in this situation: A professor asks students to provide feedback on an English course and an African American student asked why there weren't any Black authors included in the listings. Another student in the class responded with, "It's not our fault black people don't write books." The professor ignored the statement and continued class. Most people who hear this example were extremely offended and horrified at both the statement and the response; the first student was left without an answer and the second went uncorrected.

"Often we don't know how to respond, but it helps to start the conversation," said Tapp. "I respond more easily now, I don't feel like I need all the answers to make a response." Even after researching the best responses to these incidents, she is still shocked and depending on how personal the comment was Tapp admits it can still be painful. However, it's become easier to say "Whoa!!!! Wait a minute!" and use the moment to work through the situation and leave both parties with a better understanding of diversity.



BLAIR WIMBUSH: AN EXEMPLAR TO ALL

SADE RICHARDSON '15
CONTRIBUTING WRITER



On Wednesday, March 28, 2012, 1977 Political Science graduate of the University of Rochester, Blair Wimbush, Vice President of Real Estate at Norfolk Sothorn and newly appointed Corporate Sustainability Chair (the first and only executive level railroad sustainability officer in the country), graced the University with his presence and held a talk with students courtesy of the Gwen. M. Greene Career and Internship Center and Engineers for a Sustainable World. His humility, approachability and charismatic nature was noticed from the time he entered the room and took time to talk and eat with students before starting his talk.

When he was ready to start the discussion, Wimbush sat next to the students and conducted a question and answer discussion. He made sure to be detailed and kept us engaged by making jokes and telling his own personal life stories. For example, when asked what led to him becoming the Corporate Sustainability Chair of his company, Wimbush told a

story of one of the board members approaching him and saying congratulations. He was puzzled by this and when his CEO saw the conversation taking place, his CEO came over, tapped him on his shoulder and told him about his new position.

Wimbush also talked about his company's sustainability efforts. For example, he said that the company, collaborated with the University of Pennsylvania and other companies to design an all battery powered locomotive and they recently received a patent for it. He also spoke about the different initiatives they are looking into like algae powered fuels and the use of wind turbines and solar power for waste treatment in some facilities. His company has a facility where they can build locomotives and recycle them.

Many of the students found the talk to be inspirational and informative. Ellen Sadri, a member of the class of 2013 and a Chemical Engineering major, said "I really enjoyed the talk. It was great to get an inside view of what a company is doing to be more sustainable". Wimbush is an inspiration to us all. He has worn many hats over the years as board member of several organizations, such as President of the Virginia Commission on Women and Minorities in the Legal Profession; President of the Virginia Law Foundation; Board membership on the President of the Roanoke Museum of Fine Arts; and Chairman of the Board of the Virginia Symphony Orchestra, just to name a few. He is a great example of how determination and a solid education can take you far.



A RAISIN IN THE SUN: Culturally Significant

CHARLENE COOPER '12
STUDENT EDITOR

A few weeks ago in one of my English classes, my Professor asked the class what we think the hardest topic for people to talk about publically is. In a room full of fairly aware, college educated students, not one of us answered correctly, that race was the hardest topic. It is so commonplace for us to want to put away race relations because of the discomfort that is attached to it.

In late February Michelle Gordon, assistant professor at the University of Southern California, lectured on Lorraine Hansberry's "A Raisin in the Sun", and additionally came to talk about the experiences and degradation of domestic workers in the United States. In discussing the play, she highlighted how the original screen play of "A Raisin in the Sun" showed very little of Walter Lee, the head of household in the play, at his job as a chauffeur and even fewer scenes of his wife Lena at her job as a house keeper. Gordon remarked that "cutting these scenes really cut out the significant view point of the African American perspective".

Gordon's lecture certainly made me even more sensitive to how racial issues tend to be skimmed over in the media, even in productions such as this one, which have so much potential to address these issues through an artistic platform. While viewing "A Raisin in the Sun" at the Geva Theater, I could visually see some of the points Michelle Gordon spoke on. For example, there are very little scenes within the play that include caucasian characters and their interaction with the Youngers, the African American family in which the play is based on. Perhaps scenes such as this are omitted because of the possible discomfort that they could bring upon audiences. Gordon spoke

on this when she explored the idea of the way in which our society makes it a point to make and keep those in comfort, comfortable. The idea further manifests within the play when Karl Linder, a representative from the predominantly caucasian community the Youngers hope to move to, visits their home offering them a monetary compensation if they agree to not move into his neighborhood. This effort to keep out the unwanted is a blatant attempt at keeping those in comfort, comfortable.

The most provocative, racially geared, and perhaps most discomforting of the scenes is placed last in the play and is the shortest of the scenes. It consists of a black racial slur spray painted on the Youngers new home in this predominantly caucasian neighborhood. With Gordon's ideas in mind, it is hard for one to not question why this scene was not only so short, but also placed in the end. Perhaps this was another attempt at preserving comfort in exchange for adequately addressing the issue of race.

As demonstrated in the play, oftentimes when we attempt to confront issues of race, we never seem to truly confront these issues, but instead tend to border such problems and then put them back in the closet where we are comfortable with them being.

Although "A Raisin in the Sun" is performed by actors, nothing about the concepts presented in the play are falsified or nonexistent. They are based upon our realities in the past and the present. Perhaps we need to learn to become comfortable with being uncomfortable and this might be a step towards our willingness to confront our discomfort with acknowledging and addressing the topic of race.

A RAISIN IN THE SUN: CAST DISCUSSION

“A Raisin in the Sun” was written by Lorraine Hansberry, and is the story of an African-American family, the Youngers, living on the South Side of Chicago in the mid 1940’s - early 1950’s. Many productions of this play have been produced, most recently director Robert O’Hara has picked up the baton to put on a production of the play for the Geva Theatre in Rochester, NY.

On Friday February 24th, the University was given a treat in the Hawkins-Carlson room of Rush Rhees library, a discussion with the cast. Cast members Jessica Frances Duke and Brian D. Coats, who portray Beneatha Younger and Bobo respectively came to discuss the play with a small audience of students, faculty, staff and members of the general public.

Duke and Coats made the audience very comfortable and they were so genuine and forthcoming it felt like a conversation at a reunion between old friends.

The Stars

Jessica Frances Dukes attended Frostburg State University in Frostburg, Maryland where she received her undergraduate degree in Theatre and Mass Communications. Dukes later received her graduate degree in Fine Arts and Acting. “A Raisin in the Sun” is not Duke’s first time working with director Robert O’Hara, she has worked with O’Hara on at least three other productions.

Dukes said “I knew that I finally found my family” when she joined the cast. She comes from a long line of artists, the women in her family all had a craft, visual artist, dancers, jewelry makers, painters, but they never got to do what they loved professionally. “They inspire me to be able to do this [acting] professionally.”

Brian D. Coats received his degree from the University of North Carolina School of the Arts in 1993. In his twenty year career, Coats has had the opportunity to do film, television and theater. Theatre, Coats says is, “the ultimate” and that he “...will never leave the theatre.” Coats said that he is very excited to be a part of this particular production, because “I knew it would be one like no one had ever seen.” Coats finds his inspiration from his fellow actors and the experience he shares with them.

The Play

A Raisin in the Sun is a period piece and the actors did admit it was hard to go back sixty years and step into roles and personas that are not typical of people in this day and age. Dukes expressed that in being Beneatha, “it was normal to go to the place, but to think about this [who Beneatha was] being new in this time made it hard.”

Coats’ says that this production of “A Raisin in the

OLUFEMI J. WATSON ‘13
STUDENT EDITOR

Sun”, will be different from any others that have been seen. According to Coats, “Every other production is the tidy version” and that this production will “examine the dirt.”

Getting into Character

Although, the actors had to step back into the past in order to understand their characters, they did explain that this did not stop them from bringing their own voices to their characters. Coats and Dukes both express that in doing this, their director Robert O’Hara is a massive influence. According to Coats, “He says the right things at the right time.” He also expresses that as a an actor “Yes, I came with my own experiences and all actors come in having done their homework examining their relationship to relate to.” Dukes says of O’Hara that “he tries to bring yourself out of you” which Dukes admitted proved to be a challenge because she feels that she is “already so much Beneatha.” Dukes said in order to relate to her character she just pulled from her own personal experiences.

Night after Night

One audience member asked the actors a question that I think everyone as actors wonders: How do you relive it again? How do they relive it again, night after night, in a production where every night it is the same stage, set, co-stars, lines? This is how the audience sees it, but not how the actors see it.

Coats says that “things are slightly different each night, and I like that because as an actor it makes it feel like its happening for the first time.” Coats also says that he prays in between scenes and before taking the stage. While Dukes says that “Everyone has to handle it in their own way. You have to release.”

Relevance: Tying the Past & Present

The cast feels, as do many in the literary and African-American community that this play is still relevant today, 60 years after it was written. Dukes tells us that what director Robert O’Hara wants is for “the 2012 audience to be affected the same way the 1955 audience was affected.”

“A Raisin in the Sun” speaks of the struggles, the dreams and the pride of a people, not only in a generation, but across many generations and time period in American history. “The fact that it is still so relevant, it transcends time, that’s how you know it’s a great piece” says Coats.

A RAISIN IN THE SUN: THE PLAY

As the audience filed into the Geva Theater they found themselves in the Younger family apartment with Ruth, played by Daphne Gaines, as she made last minute preparations in the kitchen. The amazingly detailed and historically accurate set designed by Clint Ramos used a fraction of Geva’s stage capacity and created an intimate space between the actors and the audience.

Robert O’Hara’s “Raisin in the Sun” was a new take on the 50-year-old show about the 20th century African American experience by adding a new character without cutting any of Lorraine Hansberry’s original words, recasting certain sections with a different vibe and extending the beginning and end for a more powerful message. The show’s gripping message was only made possible through the actor’s commitment to the powerful emotions needed to portray the attitudes of the time.

“Raisin” tells the story of the struggling Younger’s family living on the south side of Chicago in 1955 matriarch Lena, Linda Gravett, is due to receive a \$10,000 insurance check from her husband and each family member has their own idea on how it should be spent. Her daughter, Beneatha, expects a portion to save it for medical school and her daughter-in-law Ruth wants Lena to do something for herself. Her son Walter Lee, wants to use the money to invest in a liquor store because he believes owning a business is the only way he can lift his family out of poverty and give them a better life. Much of the play is focused on family clashes surrounding how to spend the money while discussing the dynamics of several relationships, racial interactions, class differences, gender roles, and culture shifts within their community.



ANTOINETTE ENA JOHNSON ‘13
STUDENT EDITOR

The character Beneatha, played by Jessica Frances Duke, adds a new angle as she pulls in the rising African-American intellectual with an interest in her connection with African history. In a defining scene she wears traditional African apparel and her drunken brother, Walter Lee, changes the atmosphere by becoming the mighty African warrior of his ancestors and draws

the audience into an intense visualization of the historical struggle of a people. Beneatha’s youth portrays the complex struggle against cultural stereotypes of her time as well as providing comic relief and balance to the intensity of the show.

Walter Lee, the father, brother, husband, and son is played by Bowman Wright and his emotional intensity when portraying rage, despair, and joy is so genuine and believable that all watching could understand and relate to his situation. His intensity remained consistent throughout the two hour and forty minute show leaving little room to amplify during Act II, however it worked to draw a



kind compassion from the audience and build a sense of hope in the space. The character of Walter Lee has been played by many high profile actors at the Geva in the past, including Samuel L. Jackson in the 80s, and expectations were high, yet Wright managed to captivate crowds and fill the great shoes left before him.

QUINLAN’S EXPLORATIONS IN CHINA: THE LITTLE THINGS

QUINLAN MITCHELL ‘13
STUDENT EDITOR

Spending a semester studying abroad in China was the best experience of my life. It was also one of the hardest. Living for four months in a country where just about everyone is Han Chinese (although Chinese does have 56 officially recognized ethnic groups) can be a crash course in feeling out of place.

The funny thing about study abroad is that it doesn’t hit you until maybe two weeks in. At least it didn’t for me. That was the time it took for me to realize that, oh crap, I wasn’t just on vacation and I wasn’t just a tourist. I was going to be living here for the next four months.

At the beginning of the program we traveled...and traveled...and traveled all around what seemed to be every part of China’s Yunnan province. Crowning the trip with an arduous hike up a mountain overlooking China’s “Tiger-leaping gorge”. An experience I consider one of my life’s greatest (and most dangerous) achievements. Then after freezing in a Tibetan village for about three nights it was time to head home.

It would seem that climbing mountains and sleeping in freezing cold villages would be enough to shock my system and kick start the culture shock that the study abroad office so ominously warns about during pre-departure orientation. But it’s not all those big, amazing events that really shock you or shape you. It’s the little things.



Study abroad, for me, has been made up of little things; little pieces of culture and language and philosophy that have clung to me like lint on an old shirt. Things you unconsciously bring back to the states.

My homestay was a bittersweet experience that I would never take back in a million years. When trying to communicate with the strangers you’re now living with in a language you only have shaky grasp on in a culture where you hand wash soiled underwear because it’s too “clean” to be put in the “dirty” washing machine, you stop taking for granted the small daily practices that collectively create a culture and a national identity. They’re all the little things.

Even a little thing like giving a gift can be complicated in a different country. For instance, when my homestay family refused to accept my gift of a high quality kind of tea leaf that I gave to them on one of my first nights at the house (they felt it was too expensive). Although it’s still not a fond memory for me, I can understand a little better what the gift may have meant to them. In China a gift isn’t a gift, a no-strings-attached expression of goodwill. A gift is a commitment to a relationship, a promise of one good turn deserving another. They just weren’t ready to enter into that kind of commitment with someone they had just met.

It’s the little things too, like treating someone to drink or eat (a handy Chinese phrase pronounced [ching kuh]) as a way of showing hospitality and friend-

ship that make a deep impression on you. When you’re willing to go up to the restaurant register and buy a drink as a pretense to secretly pay the bill for you and a friend (you have to be smart if you want to beat a Chinese person to the bill), it’s sufficient to say China may be rubbing off on you.

And it’s the little things (much like the things that make you fall in love with a person), the idiosyncrasies and quirks that characterize a place and make it a home. Things like firecrackers on spring festival being set off all night like flowers on a dark pond. Like beautiful gardens filled with people dancing, doing tai qi, playing chess, and just enjoying the transient communities that are characteristic of Beijing.

The things like a sizable meal less than two American dollars, the elderly Chinese who always sound like they’re arguing with someone, the stray cats that you see someone taking time to feed every night, fresh-baked egg tarts, squeezing onto a packed Beijing bus, the Chinese greeting “have you eaten”, getting lost in Beijing, climbing a trail filled with sheer drop-offs to the highest point of the great wall of China and looking around at the top of a world you’ve only read about in textbooks and being hit with the overwhelming sense that you accomplished something great both now, and just by getting through the odds and ends of everyday in this country. It’s the little things that make study abroad great, and it’s the little things that change you.



STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS: FOR COLORED GIRLS

LAKIESHA HOLIFIELD ‘14
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Sometimes the smallest spark of an idea can turn into a fire, and For Colored Girls started as just that. When the dynamic friends Makia Green (’14) and Erica Williams (’14) ran across a copy of the renowned book “For Colored Girls Who Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf.” The girls wanted to host a reading of the poems—perhaps just a small group of friends in a lounge—but after telling a few of their advisers and peers they thought that perhaps they should host a larger audience. Dean Burnett in the Office of Minority Student Affairs suggested the duo take their idea and make it into a full-fledged production. After that there was no stopping them, they were determined to bring For Colored Girls to the University of Rochester campus.

With the help and encouragement from their friend, and suitemate Kathy Edouard (’14) the girls hosted a general interest meeting for acting and/or producing the play in late December of 2011. This is where the girls completed their production team adding Asia Ingram (’14) and Kim Campbell (’14) as choreographers and LaKiesha Holyfield (’14) as an assistant director. After many emails over winter break the production team met in January to hold auditions for the show; where they filled all of the positions for the cast, and this is where the real work began.

Rehearsals were set up; there were 2-4 per week, either “Rainbow Rehearsals”—which consisted of the whole cast—or one-on-one work with Makia or LaKiesha. These rehearsals were a time of productivity and personal growth. The cast was extremely diverse especially with the variation of performance talents of the entirety of the cast (as follows) Justine Robinson (’14), Christine Wright (’15), Amber Baldie (’15), Makia Green (’14), Melanie Brown (’12), Zeleyka Fowler (’14), and Ellie Law (’14). The production team brought all of the girls in specifically to give them a chance to challenge themselves by stepping into roles out of their comfort zone. After many rehearsals the advancements were showing up in the acting and readings that were being held.

Working on this production was different from anything any of the team or actors had ever worked on. Even those that had been involved with theatre or poetry this play was particularly special. The play is unique because it is a choreopoem, meaning it is poetry that is set to movement.

“For Colored Girls Who Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf” premiered on Friday April 13 at Drama House to a sold out audience. The performance moved the crowd and yielded many laughs, tears, and words of praise. Upon completion there were many hugs and tears. The girls had taken their idea and created a family and a fanbase around it. Though the process and play is over, For Colored Girls will not end with it, the fire has been ignited.

WHAT WAS THE BIGGEST OBSTACLE YOU ALL OVERCAME?

The biggest obstacle that we overcame (and there were many) was the lack of belief in For Colored Girls as a group. Though administration wanted us to do this project there was a general implication of us not being able to put it on; additionally, some students had lack of confidence in us. We were a group of girls independent of any established group on campus. We had no money, no venue, and no implicit prior experience of planning an event of this caliber. Truthfully the odds were against us. However, we volleyed for support. We wrote letters and essays to receive grants. We showed people that we were driven to bring For Colored Girls to this campus. The more we believed in ourselves and established our mission as professionals the more support we received. Thus making our largest obstacle our largest accomplishment!

What about including men?

During our general interest meeting we had a bit of interest from men. The production team wanted to include them in the process however it would have made

the experience a different form.

In For Colored Girls the poems pertain to a plethora of issues pertaining to women—from the loss of virginity to abortion. Especially during initial rehearsals it was difficult to breach these topics just amongst us women. While men would have brought a different perspective to our discussion it would have also taken the focus off of women: how we feel about, think, approach, and describe these tough topics. We were aiming specifically to empower, unite and unearth women and thought it was better to create a production team and cast reflecting that objective.

Defining the role of color

We were asked many times whether we will include women who are not of color? It was a decision of the production team that had to be made before casting. At the moment we all agreed that for this project to be inclusive of all women it would not be fair to cast based on race. To have a production whose mission is to teach about the experiences and culture of people of color, lift stigmas placed on topics pertaining to women, and to give a voice to the voiceless it would be counter-intuitive to say that any woman could not

participate based on the color of their skin.

How do you think this project encompasses respect?

The simplest answer is that this project teaches respect for women; going deeper though it is a respect for the power of women. The cast and the production team are a direct example that all a girl needs is a dream, with some encouragement and some good friends there is no limit to what she can do.

Final thoughts

We are just a group of determined young ladies that believed in a mission and production so much so that we ensured the message would be delivered to campus. We are proof that the tiniest sparks of ideas can grow into a wildfire—and that with drive and belief that anything is possible. Not to mention we ooze girl power!

This year’s 12th annual Martin Luther King Jr. Commemorative Address took place on Friday, January 27th. The address was given by Dr. Michael Eric Dyson. Dr. Dyson is author, radio show, and MSNBC political analyst from Detroit, Michigan who is not afraid to say what is on his mind. In his books he has covered historical African-American figures such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, he has also written about hip hop music and some of its prominent artist such as Tupac Shakur and Nas.

Fire Side chat with Dr. Dyson

A few hours prior to his address he met with a few members of the University’s students, faculty and staff in the Welles Brown Room of Rush Rhees Library to have an intimate conversation. The discussion included topics like the relationship between the things Dr. King did in his lifetime and the election of the nation’s current and 44th President Barack Obama. Dr. Dyson stated that “without Dr. King and Jesse Jackson, running twice, Barack Obama would not be President.” Dr. Dyson also said that he believes if Dr. King were still alive, he would believe that even though Obama is President, “one man cannot change the minds of all.”

“The nation had to mature and catch up to realize being president is not only a white boys club,” Dr. Dyson did also bring up the point that just because a black man is president doesn’t mean racism doesn’t exist, because that would be like saying if Hilary Clinton were president that sexism would no longer exist.

When speaking of Dr. King, Dr. Dyson says “we seem to freeze him in 1963.” Dr. King was about uniting America as a whole regardless of color. “We’ve reduced his complex thinking to moments we can easily absorb,” according to Dr. Dyson. At the end of our intimate time with Dr. Dyson he left us with a reminder that in this world, it is the young people who “have often instigated change.”

The Key Note Address

At 6PM that evening in Strong Auditorium, people from the University and the Rochester community filled the auditorium. Just before the address, I spoke to University President, Joel Seligman, who said that, “This is going to be really special.” President Seligman also stated that “the 1965 Civil Rights act transformed American politics and Dr. King was the iconic figure.” President Seligman as was the crowd was very excited to hear what Dr. Dyson would have to say.

According to Dean Burnett, “The Martin Luther King Jr. Commemorative Address started in 2001 by a group of students” who wanted to recognize Dr. King and his contributions to American history. Dean Burnett also told me that for him April 4th, 1968, is still a day that causes shivers for him.

It was time for Dr. Dyson to give his speech, but just before that, University of Rochester sophomore Alisa Jimenez was given the prestigious honor of introducing Dr. Dyson to the audience.

What April 4th, 1968 means for America

“What he did in his time on earth is only an indication of what he would do if he were still alive,” says Dr. Dyson. Dr. King realized, as did many that “America’s ideals contradicted its practices.” Dr. King understood that there would be much bigger challenges to come after 1965. Dr. Dyson also reminds us that

“He ain’t always been accepted as he is now,” speaking of King.

Dr. Dyson discussed all the people in America that King and his legacy has made possible. Dyson said, although Dr. King would have been proud to see Barack Obama as the President, “Prophets always got problems with Presidents.” America needs to realize that Dr. King was a “prophet” and Obama is the President. Obama cannot say the things that King would have said, because he is not the President of black America, he is the President for all of America, all 50 states, regardless of race, color, or creed.

Dr. Dyson also spoke of how Dr. King’s legacy led the way for hip hop music. “Hip-hop tells the truth,” said Dr. Dyson. He discusses hip hop artists such as Kanye West, Rakim, and Notorious B.I.G. and how the legacy that Dr. King left behind made it possible for these artist to exist. Dr. Dyson says that “Kanye is part of a tradition,” one in which the truth is spoken through music.

Dr. Dyson’s address was incredible; it was like getting a history lesson, being at a comedy show and concert all in one. He left no stone unturned in expressing himself and connecting to his audience. He went between the three different personas in his speech so fluidly, you almost didn’t notice when it happened. The crowd was with him, there was a connection that Dyson made, that I don’t think many could make during a speech, in which he really knew his audience and they really understood each other.

AFRICAN-AMERICAN DIASPORA
IN LATIN AMERICA

ILIANA GARICA ‘12
STUDENY EDITOR

As an undergrad at Spellman College in Atlanta, post-doctoral fellow Takkara Brunson majored in Comparative Women’s Studies with a minor in Spanish. The college required students to take a year-long course called “African Diaspora in the World.” It was this course that sparked her interest in African descent outside of the U.S. and Africa. Ms. Brunson wanted to explore the way Cubans identified with their heritage and studied abroad in Cuba. It is different than in the U.S. where African Americans identify as black first. Brunson wrote her senior thesis on Cuban women in the post-revolution era; nothing had been done prior to 1959. Her PhD was in Latin American history. She was just finishing her dissertation project when she applied to the University of Rochester. It was important to her to be able to expand her dissertation into a book manuscript and be around scholars exploring different aspects of the African American Diaspora, making the Frederick Douglass Institute for African and African American Studies at U of R a perfect fit. As a post-doc fellow, Brunson has been teaching a class called “The History of the African American Diaspora in Latin America.”

Her nine-month post-doc contract ends in May after which she will begin as an Assistant Professor at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland. The one thing she hopes that people will take away from her research here at U of R, it’s that they understand Afro-Cuban women have their own history that is a part of Cuban national history. She hopes her audience will think about the diverse experiences that women of African descent have. There is limited discussion in U.S. academia about women of African descent in Latin America. Focus is more on African American, African, and Anglophone Caribbean women in the contemporary sense and not so much on their history.

Takkara Brunson offers the following regarding her research, which she presented at a lunchtime seminar on Wednesday, February 22, 2012 called “Remnants of Slavery on the Eve of Independence: Afro-Cuban Women Define Freedom, 1886-1900”:

In Cuba, slave emancipation coincided with

the movement for independence against Spain. On the morning of October 10, 1868, sugar planter Carlos Manuel de Céspedes gathered his slaves. “You are as free as I am,” he declared. He addressed them as “citizens” and invited them to “conquer liberty and independence for Cuba.” Many of the newly freed individuals went with him, initiating a ten-year war against the colonial government. Some 16,000 slaves—among them, women who carried flags, smuggled bullets into the countryside, and served as nurses—would also join the insurgent forces and gain their freedom. When the war ended in 1878, Cuba remained a colony, but its political structure, as well as the institution of slavery, had been fundamentally altered.

Because the Cuban independence movement (1868-1898) and slave abolition occurred during the same period, Afro-Cubans understood that their liberation was tied as much to national sovereignty as it was labor and financial independence. Ms. Brunson’s paper investigates women’s understandings of freedom during the post-emancipation era (1886-1900). It traces their responses to emancipation in an emerging nation marked by patriarchal understandings of racial classlessness.

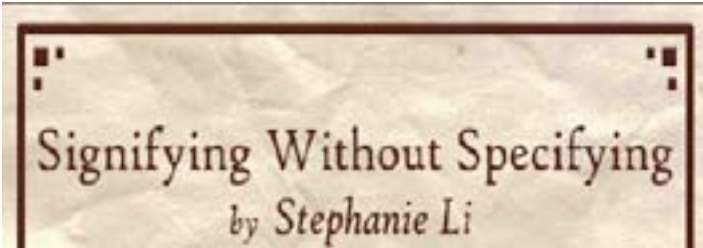
Central to this narrative are women such as Mari-ana Grajales Cuello and María Cabrales, who accompanied their sons and husbands into the battlefields during the initial war and later into exile. The paper also considers how elite, literate Afro-Cuban women responded to racist discourses that sought to marginalize women of African descent by claiming that they were morally and intellectually inferior. While previous scholars have highlighted women’s experiences with labor, family life, and intellectual discourse, Brunson is interested in how their activities, magazine articles, and letters illustrate the development of Afro-Cuban women’s political consciousness as modern citizens. Thus, by considering themes that include racial equality, the expansion of women’s rights, and national development, she seeks to clarify the ways in which Afro-Cuban women helped define nation formation.

RACE FREE, RACE SPECIFIC: A TALK

PROFESSOR STEPHANIE LI

“He cannot talk about his Presidency in the experience of being a black man”

-Professor Stephanie Li



As a part of the events for Black History Month this year, Professor Stephanie Li gave a talk on Racism in the Age of Obama. Professor Li led an open discussion on the topic which stemmed from her book, “Signifying Without Specifying: Racial Discourse in the Age of Obama.”

Professor Li said, “My interest in this topic began with Obama’s presidential campaign in 2008. I was fascinated by the way he was able to reference race often without directly mentioning it. As the first black nominee from a major party, he had to walk a very fine line in gathering support from a wide range of constituencies and his political rhetoric was key to his success”

The question: “Do we need race specifiers to understand people?” was brought up during the discussion. Li pointed out that President Obama “speaks on two registers black and white without bringing up race.”

The rhetoric that President Obama used during his 2008 election allowed him the chance to be President, but now four years later the same form of rhetoric is being used by the Republicans negatively against him. Obama constantly has to walk a fine line between the black community and himself. “The country,” says Professor Li, “is not ready for a Black President who is willing to be open about being black.”

According to Professor Li, “Race is more unsettled than it is anchored in anything real.” The realization needs to be made that, Obama is not the black nation’s President, he is the President of the United States of America. He is a compromiser not a radical.

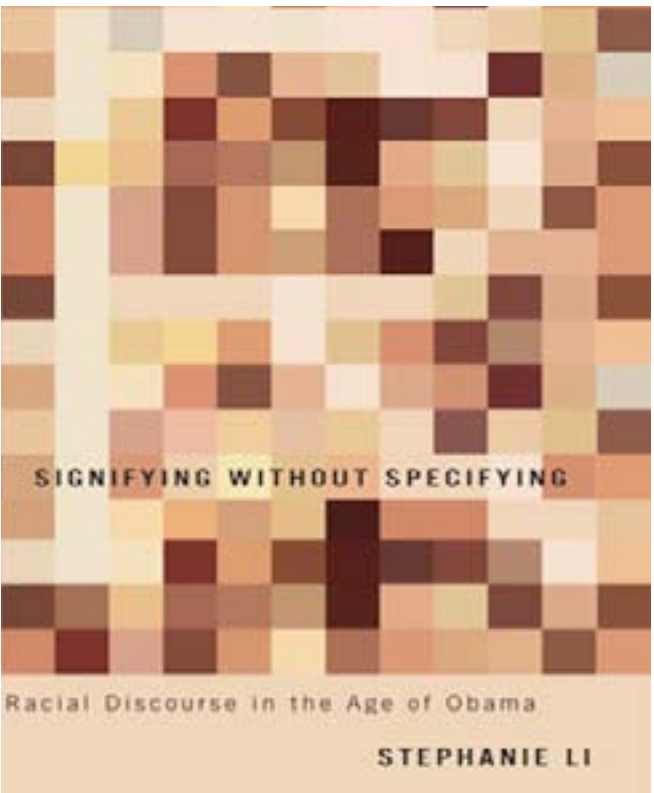
OLUFEMI J. WATSON ‘13
STUDENT EDITOR

Questions Anyone?

One person at the lecture asked “could recognition of cultural diversity have a place in political discourse.” Professor Li’s response to the question was “I think that is far off.” Also stating that President Obama “...already understands the language of the establishment.”

“Has America introduced a gray area in American politics?” asked one audience member. To this Professor Li responded, “If Mitt Romney were President, it would only be because Obama has been President.”

In the end Professor Li said that President Obama’s blackness in no way interferes with his politics. Republicans see America converging to one thing, skin color is not a fear, but cultural differences in the White House could change this country drastically in the next 20 years.



AFRICAN IDENTITIES

ANTOINETTE ENA JOHNSON ‘13
STUDENT EDITOR

The crowd forming in the Hawkins Carlson room in Rush Rhees library on February 22, 2012 to hear Kwame Anthony Appiah speak on “African Identities”. The Professor of Philosophy at Princeton University explored the social and historical constructs involved in molding identity within the African context; Appiah also invited the audience to participate in the discussion for the enrichment of all present.

Professor Kwame Anthony Appiah was born in London to Enid Margaret Appiah, an English art historian, and Joe Emmanuel Appiah, a lawyer and Politician from an Asante region in Ghana. He grew up in Kumasi, Ghana before going off to Cambridge where he earned a Ph.D. in Philosophy. His studies in African identity have led him to biologists, sociologists, and other disciplines in his search for the formation of “Africanism.”

To properly talk about African identities, Appiah outlined several points addressing the issue of identity itself: terms on which a label is applied, who counts as a member of the group, and how people respond to an individual as a member of said group. The many criteria involved in constructing an identity make it a complex process that requires people to have background knowledge or preconceived ideas of an individual’s social-cultural background.

“Identity is a project not a given,” Appiah said, “You have to decide what to do with it, you have to accept some things and abandon others.” Identity is a constantly shifting perception of oneself and how others see them, depending on its connotation the group may decide not to acknowledge certain aspects of their history. It travels and changes when the individual moves through different cultures and must redefine their identity with each encounter.

“My being Russian is me being interested and engaged in Russian culture,” said Maya Dukmasova, a take five scholar in Philosophy and Religion and president of the Undergraduate Philosophy Council. The discussion had addressed the unconscious decisions we make each time we must re-evaluate our identities, Dukmasova phrased it as a “constant constructive effort.”

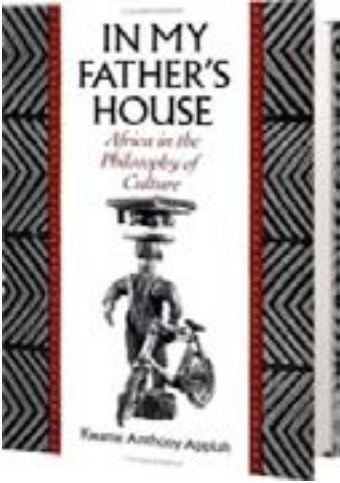
Appiah stressed the impact that Europe had on forming the African identity in relation to how Africans thought of themselves. Before Europe colonized Africa, the people did not think of themselves as “African” but rather as Asante or Hutu with many different cultures. The new imposed boundaries and the racial integration shaped new identities that were unique to each region.

African identity was created in response to European imperialism. “If that history didn’t happen, would there be an African identity?” asked Moka Lantum, Founder and Chief Curator of The Baobab Cultural Center, “Should the others define me rather than me define myself?” Lantum came because the issue of African identity was fascinating to him as an African immigrant, Appiah created an appetite for his search for an answer. He believes the Africa identity was shaped to contrast the Africa and European experience during the Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, and post-colonial Africa. Having traveled around to different parts of Africa, seeing the varied traditions and rituals,

Lantum feels there is enough culture to shape an African identity within itself.

“Other people affect how you think about yourself, but it’s a dialectical thing,” said Appiah, “you can’t impose a slave mentality on someone- Frederick Douglas.” People constantly make up new identities all the time: goth, punk, gay; they are discovering there are different ways of thinking about identities and they are them out. Most people like to think they can shape their own identities, using personal experience and cultural tradition to choose what they are willing to associate with.

Professor Kwame Anthony Appiah was widely receive at the University of Rochester, hosting several other events throughout the week. He has also published several books including Thinking it Through and In my Fathers House.



STATEMENT OF COMMUNAL PRINCIPLES 2012-2013

RESPONSIBILITY

FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY ARE TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN. TO UPHOLD THIS KIND OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ACTION IN THE PUBLIC ARENA, EACH PERSON HAS THE RESPONSIBILITY TO OWN HIS OR HER IDEAS AND ACTIONS AS WELL AS EXPRESS THEM IN WAYS THAT DO NOT LIMIT OR THREATEN OTHERS' FREEDOM TO LEARN, TEACH AND WORK. THIS MEANS THAT IDEAS AND ACTIONS ARE NEITHER ANONYMOUS NOR ISOLATED. TO ACT OR EXPRESS ONE'S IDEAS OPENLY AND IN A RESPONSIBLE MANNER ENHANCES THE LEARNING AND GROWTH OF ALL. ON THE OTHER HAND, TO ACT OR EXPRESS ONE'S IDEAS IN AN IRRESPONSIBLE MANNER IMPINGES ON OTHER'S RIGHTS AND FREEDOM TO LEARN AND GROW.

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RESPONSIBILITY

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