

THE VILLAGE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE AFRICAN
& AFRICAN STUDIES ALUMNI COMMUNITY

FEBRUARY 2009

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A MESSAGE FROM SCOTT

Dear Alumni and Friends,

The Department of African American & African Studies touches both heart and mind with its innovative approaches to research and community Outreach.

An ongoing commitment to excellence continues to be among the Department's core values, which speaks volumes about why I became the Department's Outreach Coordinator. The Department's philosophy of giving back to the community is very much a part of our "Village" values.

AA&AS graduates like you often describe their educational experience as transformational and life changing. With the solid, caring support of faculty and staff, graduates leave

the University feeling empowered with critical thinking skills and the ability to create and lead change in the world.

It is our hope that what you learned in AA&AS continues to serve you well. We're always eager to hear about your successes, so please take the time to share them with us and inspire other, too.

I hope you enjoy this month's issue of *The VILLAGE* and be sure to check out the Departments new Outreach website at:

www.afroam.umn.edu/outreach

Scott Redd
Community Outreach Coordinator

FUTURE SCHOLARS PROGRAM TO KICK OFF THIS MARCH

Future Scholars is a mentorship program that gives 9th - 11th grade African American & African students from St. Paul Arlington High School the opportunity to partner with a University of Minnesota student. Students will explore the steps needed to attend and graduate from college.

Future Scholars is a program, we believe, that will help African American & African stu-

dents prepare for the academic and social challenges of student life at the University of Minnesota.

The program is designed for University students to meet with Arlington High School students an hour a week. Students in the program will research educational issues that affect the African American/African community and work together to provide recommendations that address

these issues. Student's findings will be presented to St. Paul Mayor Coleman and his educational Roundtable, faculty, staff, and Community Advisory Council of AA&AS, St. Paul Public Schools, and the public early June.



COURSE SPOTLIGHT AFRO 8202 INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF RACE

Race has little reality in the biological sense, yet its power to influence our lives and our self-understanding is enormous. This course explores the shifting and contested meanings of race, from the European 'Age of Conquest' onward. The course also contains a significant sociological analysis of the 'racial' notion. Starting from the proposition that race is not a stable or fixed category of social thought and being, our primary task will be to ascertain how Western ideas and sociological practice about race have changed, and why these changes have occurred. In this course Professor Brewer

explore the large social processes and discourses developing and shaping the concept of race, particularly how various groups, e.g., native peoples of the Americas, Africans, and Europeans became racialized via enslavement, trade, colonialism and capitalism. Professor Brewer explore, as well, the various justifications (religious, legal, philosophical, 'scientific') for notions of racial inferiority and racial superiority. Students will spend time analyzing how what it means to be 'white' has been historically contingent on being non-Black or Indian, we will also explore the subjectivities of racialized and oppressed

peoples, especially their critiques of racism and domination.



"What it means to be 'white' has been historically contingent on being non-Black or Indian."

NOMMO AFRICAN AMERICAN AUTHOR SERIES

On February 5th Professor Alexs Pate hosted the fifth annual NOMMO African American Authors Series. The event featured author John Edgar Wideman. Wideman is the author of more than 18 books of fiction and nonfiction. He was the first writer to win the PEN/Faulkner Award twice, in 1984 for *Sent for You Yesterday* and in 1990 for *Philadelphia Fire*. His memoir, *Brothers and Keepers* received a National Book Critics Circle nomination, and his memoir

Fatheralong was a finalist for the National Book Award. In addition, he won the Rea Award for the Short Story, the Lannan Foundation Fellowship for Fiction, and the MacArthur grant. Wideman's articles on Malcolm X, Spike Lee, Denzel Washington, Michael Jordan, Eminem, Thelonious Monk, and others have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Vogue*, *Esquire*, *Emerge*, and the *New York Times Magazine*.

The series sponsors includes The Givens Founda

tion for African American Literature and The Friends of the University of Minnesota Libraries. For more than 20 years The Givens Foundation has been the only organization in the Twin Cities exclusively dedicated to advancing and celebrating black literature and writers. While The Friends of the University of Minnesota Libraries is a vibrant group that combines advocacy for the University Libraries with strong outreach programs that celebrate a love of books,

Authors, knowledge, and curiosity.



STUDENT PROFILE

The following is an excerpt from the Star Tribune by Ernest Comer III, an AA&AS minor.

Dictionary.com defines a gang as, "A group of youngsters or adolescents who associate closely, often exclusively, for social reasons, esp. such a group engaging in delinquent behavior". or "a group of persons associated for some criminal or other antisocial purpose".

Conversations with gang members will draw out definitions that contrast in many ways to those found in print and online dictionaries. In conversations with a couple of gang members I was told that "A gang is a group of people who 'bang' different colors. They most likely have each others' back, hustle, and keep each others' pockets fat. They just protect each other regardless of what the case may be by fighting or even killing others".

According to one member "The main reason why most people join them is because usually that's all they got and they end up calling them family". This comment reminded me of a scene in the film *Redemption* which documents the life of "Tookie" Williams who founded the infamous CRIP gang. In the scene Tookie was left with his father. The father gave Tookie a couple of dollars and told him he'd be back soon. The father walked out and never returned. After a night's rest Tookie left the motel where he'd been dropped off to his father and met with

some other young people and started his gang.

It appears that the young people that live in environments where gangs exist in the Twin Cities and live among those gangs don't see them as the threat that those who have more of an object view see them. Even when asking a non-member if they thought gangs were bad for a community the response I got was "It depends on what kind of gang". So are gangs an issue in Twin Cities communities or are they just a reality. To my knowledge different gangs serve different purposes. Different groups of people focus on different things. They for the most part seem to focus on making money for the gang. Whether it be through selling drugs or robbing, stealing, etc. I find that the problem with gangs is that they feed off the community for the growth and development of the gang. These gangs suffer from what theorists in Communication Studies call Group Think. There is a lack of innovation in the context of ways to make money that don't hinder the community and an abundance/surplus of ideas on ways to take advantage of the community.

To resolve the issue of Group Think in these gangs would be to resolve the issue of gangs draining the life and resources out of the community.

More about Ernest Comer III

Ernest Comer III is the president of PRISM at the University of Minnesota and a senior at the University of Minnesota. He's working toward a Bachelor of Arts degree, with a major in Communication Studies and a minor in African and African American Studies. He is developing a state chapter of the Stop the Violence movement. Ernest has been an adolescent mentor in the Pediatrics Department at the U and has hosted local television and radio shows to showcase young talent.



Ernest Comer III, African American & African Studies minor.

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT JOHN S. WRIGHT

Specialties

- African literature
- American and Afro-American literature
- Black Arts Movement
- Black authors
- feminist criticism
- folklore
- folklore and oral tradition
- Givens Collection of African American Literature
- Harlem Renaissance
- intellectual history and popular culture
- Langston Hughes
- literature and popular culture oral traditions

Educational Background

- B.E.E.: Electrical Engineering,
- M.A.: English and American Literature
- Ph.D.: American Studies, University of Minnesota

Publications

- *Intellectual Life, [African American]*. Wright, John Samuel, 1995.
- *Alain Locke*. Wright, John Samuel, 1995.
- *The New Negro Poet and the Nachal Man: Sterling Brown's Folk Odyssey*. Wright, John Samuel, Spring 1989.
- *To the Battle Royal: Ralph Ellison and the Quest for Black Leadership in Postwar America*. Wright, John Samuel, 1989.
- *The Conscious Hero and the Rights of Man*. Wright, John Samuel, 1988.

- *Shadowing Ralph Ellison*. Wright, John Samuel, University Press of Mississippi, Author, 2006. [Link](#)
- "Out of the Fog: the Black Renaissance in Retrospect." *The Guthrie Program Magazine*, (Summer 1995).
- "A Photoplate for the Padre." *Callaloo: A Journal of African-American and African Arts and Letters* 13.4 (Fall 1990).
- "A Scintillating Send-Off for Falling Stars: The Black Renaissance Reconsidered." Catalog essay for *A Stronger Soul Within A Finer Frame*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Art Museum, 1990.
- "Sterling Brown's Folk Odyssey." In *American Literature Culture, and Ideology*. Ed. B. Voloshin. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

Creative Activities

- Co-curator, "A Stronger Soul Within A Finer Frame" nationally touring art exhibit

Professional Activities

- Givens Scholar, Givens Collection of African American Literature, University of Minnesota

Awards

- College of Liberal Arts Scholars of the College, University of Minnesota, 1987
- Morse/Amoco Alumni Teaching Award, University of Minnesota, 1999

Courses Taught

- EngL 5130 - Readings in American Minority Literature
- EngL 8300 - Seminar in American Minority Literature
- EngL 8590 - The Harlem Renaissance



UPCOMING EVENTS

Creating Jobs, Protecting the Environment, Strengthening Communities

2/17/2009 Tuesday

From 6:30 pm–8:00 pm

Location:

American Indian Center, Mpls

Sponsor: HIRE Minnesota

Cost: Free

HIRE Minnesota aims to unite a variety of community voices in a campaign to grow our economy and produce thousands of jobs for low-income people and people of color in Minnesota. Come to this town hall meeting to learn about this exciting campaign and the opportunities to strengthening our communities.

Free food and entertainment

Applied Research Center Conference Call on Race and Jobs

2/17/2009 Thursday

3:00PM

Contact: Tammy Johnson, (510) 338-4921 or email tjohnson@arc.org

The Applied Research Center is hosting biweekly conference calls on issues related to racial justice in early 2009. Justice advocates who dial in will track the first 100 days of the Obama administration and shape plans to influence policy affecting racial justice.

Coffee Hour Presentation

2/18/2009 Wednesday

2:30 pm–4:00 pm

Location: Geneva H. Southall Library

Cost: Free

Senior Noah Sims will present "Who Were the Zanj?" Noah will examine a community of Africans who overthrew labor intensive slavery in 9th Century Southern Iraq.

Keynote Lecture: Diversity in Higher Education

2/19/2009 Thursday

From 1:30 pm –3:00 pm

Location: 2520 Moos Tower

Contact: Michael Underwood under039@umn.edu

Interested in learning more about what is being done to promote diversity at the University of Minnesota. Attend this keynote lecture featuring Senior Vice President for System Academic Administration, Dr. Robert Jones.

The "Look of Freedom: Embodiment and the Nature and Meaning of Black Religion: A lecture by Anthony Pinn

2/20/2009 Friday

3:30 pm–5:30 pm

Location:
Nicholson Hall
Room 155
Mpls Campus

Contact: (612) 625-5353

Cost: free

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA - TC

267 19th Avenue South
808 Social Sciences Building

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E-mail: red0002@umn.edu

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

Success doesn't come to you...you go to it.

Marva Collins,

The Department of African American & African Studies plays an important role in the University's rich liberal arts tradition. The department's beginnings in the Morrill Hall takeover of 1969 by students demanding change demonstrate that the academy—and society—often move forward by challenging traditional boundaries and practices.

Today, the department offers students opportunities to explore American cultural diversity and the wide diversity of the African continent. An undergraduate major in African American & African Studies provides students with a systematic and comprehensive understanding of the cultural and historical experiences of African American & African peoples from a multidisciplinary perspective including history, political science, sociology, psychology, literature, music, and art. Courses and faculty are drawn from the department as well as from other units of the University.