Parents have always advised us to eat our vegetables. Not something we always wanted to do but what we needed to do to be healthy. Well, we all need to eat our “social broccoli.” Pulitzer Prize winner and columnist Leonard Pitts Jr., talked about this special vegetable when he was named the 2006 Robert G. McGruder Award Recipient. What was Pitts talking about? He was talking about the need to learn more about people who are different and present balanced coverage of people of color in the media. It is important to recognize that what is presented in the media is not always a true reflection of a particular ethnic group.

Many arguments and much social research have proven that representation of African-Americans could and should be more positive instead of the usual reports of crime and stories of poverty. What it comes down to is an acknowledgment of the importance of diversity and a respect for it. Diversity is about embracing the differences of others and attempting to listen to perspectives that are not our own. It is through this listening that we can begin to learn of our potential and that of others. As you read this issue of UHURU, I hope you recognize and embrace the diversity of content that we present. Read on and Read slow.

“Social broccoli, like actual broccoli, might be difficult to swallow,” Pitts said. “You might not like the taste of this stuff, but it will help you grow.”

Sincerely,

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As she steps on stage, Kaisha Sherrills is overpowered by the mix of thumping bass and poetic lyrics oozing from the speakers on either side of her. The white lights focus on her figure, clad in all black, accented by a string of pearls around her neck.

 Barely five feet tall, Sherrills, a freshman at Kent State University, repositions the microphone so her words can be heard. From behind her red, two-pocket folder, she speaks:

“Peer into my eyes, tell me whom you see...am I someone you know intimately or someone intricately unique? Do you see a 5'5 African Barbie hittin’ switches on all the right curves? Or do you recognize a woman troubled because her body she secretly purged?”

Her small stature is insignificant to the size of her message, a merging of sex, self-respect, confidence and estimation into a prolific confabulation.

In the late 1990s, poetry was trapped in the dark dungeons of jazz clubs or enveloped in the smoke of trendy coffee houses, only to be performed by beret wearing 20-somethings riddled with angst and sarcasm. With the disintegration of the “my-so-called-life generation,” the face and style of the poetic performance has shifted.

As more young people begin to find their voices in oral forms of self-expression, spoken word poetry is sweeping across the country with teenagers and college students, like Sherrills, leading the evolution.

Now, their messages are infused with self-awareness and political consciousness. The berets have been replaced with fitted baseball caps, and in the absence of bongos booms the thumping 808 sounds of hip hop music.

Their poetry has now become a free-for-all forum of self-declaration where they are only hindered by their own imagination, and no subject is too taboo.

In the early 1990s, through the emergence of “poetry slams,” where spoken word artists would square off in cabaret-style duels, spoken word began to gain national precedence.

In the mid-90s, slam poetry became synonymous with the lyrical stylings of hip hop music. “Spoken word has caught on so quickly because of hip hop,” said LaDon Neal, sophomore at Kent State University. “Because of shows like Russell Simmons’ Def Poetry Jam, a lot of people are hip to the spoken word scene.”

| Speaking From the Soul |

Neal has been performing spoken word for about six years.

His confidence to speak comes from seeing hip hop artists, such as Common, Erykah Badu and The Roots, perform spoken word as part of their live concerts.

His inspiration, however, comes from somewhere else. “A lot of my pieces deal with black issues and consciousness,” Neal said. “I come from a low-income area in Cincinnati, so a lot of my pieces deal with the struggles of being black and trying to make it in an oppressive society.”

Neal pulls his black fitted cap down over his eyes as he sits back in the chair carefully selecting his words. After a few seconds he gives a little sample of his lyrical finesse.

“Kids exposed to violence: Hit this, try this. Misfits start shit, like Cincinnati riots. But they just want their equality, but the system won’t buy it. So we just re-up, now lets see who will buy it.”

“Crackhead mothers, deadbeat fathers, juiced up on dope because their souls are bothered. But is
the government really bothered by where the bums come from? No. So they design the system to keep the people from the slums real dumb."

Neal recalls sharpening his poetic prowess at the Lyrical Insurrection, an open mic night held in a small room hidden inside a local Cincinnati bar. The smell of incense was overwhelming in the tenebrous room scarcely littered with candles. It had a nice mellow mood to it. There was a small stage at the front of the room with one microphone waiting for the next artist to attack it.

"I felt really good when I was in the room; like a godly spirit had taken over my whole body," Neal said. "I wanted to make sure I kept that feeling with me no matter where I was."

When Neal came to Kent State University, he found a way to bring his love of poetry to the student body. As the president of Harambee, a student organization that encourages self-expression amongst its constituency, Neal has pushed the genre of spoken word to the forefront on campus.

"Every month, we have Open Mic Nite, where students can come and perform what they've written or just say how they feel on the mic," said Neal. "We keep the mood really positive. It creates a nice vibe. There's no feeling like performing something you've written in front of your peers and getting a lot of positive feedback."

The majority of people that perform are undergraduates, and Neal will admit that it took a while for people to get comfortable opening up on stage.

"At first, it was kind of slow getting started, but now we've picked up a buzz. Both black and white students want to get on the mic."

By writing poetry, students are engaging in a conversation with themselves and the world around them. In an interview with About.com, James Kass, founder of YouthSpeaks—a non-profit literary organization said, "It's a time for students to slow down, take a moment with themselves, try to understand what's up with them. It's a beautiful connection, and one that students seem able to thrive in."

Kass believes in the vocal power of the younger generations. His group serves as one of the largest youth poetry organizations in the country offering many opportunities for people to express their ideas from the paper to stage. Kass' national focus has helped to change the face of spoken word by encouraging students across the nation to find their voice in poetry.

This younger generation of writers has become the pulse of spoken word. They use poetry as a way to claim the voice they struggle to obtain within the larger society.

All students are looking for a place in which they can define themselves and communicate those findings. Poetry gives them that, and, at the same time, connects them to every person who has ever written or spoken poetry throughout history, and the world.

"I feel like I have something to say, and I feel like I have a message to get out. It's interesting to know that my words can affect a lot of people," said Neal.
“What’s the point of having this ability to speak and put words together rhythmically without delivering a message and influencing the society that I’m in?”

The Evolution Revolution

The new renaissance is upon us. Student poets are becoming part of a new cultural vanguard, but one that is open to anyone willing to do the work. Spoken word is opening the floodgates for students to funnel their emotions into creative avenues of self-expression. It crosses boundaries culturally, socially and economically. At the core of it all, it’s the poetry that binds students to each other, and the art form.

“It’s amazing to see students coming together with the absence of race, gender and class,” Neal said.

“We all vibe on the common ground of poetry and it’s the beginning of a beautiful thing.”

“As more young people begin to find their voices in oral forms of self-expression, spoken word poetry is sweeping across the country with teenagers and college students leading the evolution.”

A student reads one of her poetic creations.

Marquis Davis stands at the podium in the Mbari Mbeyo Lecture Hall in Oscar Ritchie Hall as he reads his poem.
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"Every morning you can walk the hallways and some of the classrooms and see the tiles on the floor," said Fran Dorsey, associate professor of Pan-African Studies.

When the renovation of Oscar Ritchie Hall is completed in Fall 2008, students will no longer need to worry about whether the ceiling tiles above them will crash down on their heads.

Instead, students' only worry may be orienting themselves inside the building. According to the renovation plans, Oscar Ritchie will be almost completely different.

A two-story atrium will greet students as they come in the entrance nearest the Art Annex and allow more natural light in, Oscar Ritchie renovation manager Beth Ruffing said. Straight ahead from the atrium will be an art gallery with glass walls designed to take advantage of the natural light from the atrium. To the right will be the student organizations office. Administrative offices and a computer lab will be to the left.

Changes to the second floor will include a ticket office for the theatre near the north entrance, new classrooms, and a lecture hall that will have a section of removable seating. The removable seating will allow for performances and drum circles inside the lecture hall, Ruffing said.

With the big changes to Oscar Ritchie also come less noticeable – but crucial – improvements that will modernize Oscar Ritchie and make it conducive to teaching and learning.
"We will benefit from the most advanced use of materials and technology in all spaces from wireless technology and door locks to light sensors in classrooms and other public spaces," Dorsey said. "All classrooms and seminar rooms will utilize the newest technology for teaching, from white boards to having DVD players and TVs in every classroom along with new furniture."

Some things will remain at Oscar Ritchie, most notably the murals that adorn the walls. The originals, however, cannot be salvaged. They were painted on unsound surfaces, such as drywall. Though the originals can't be transplanted into the new facility, they will be replicated using digital photographs.

"I'd like to see all of the same paintings," freshman political science major Dylan Sellers said. "Previous students left their mark here and I want generations after me to be able to see it."

Four media screens will hang in hallways in Oscar Ritchie, Ruffing said. With these, visitors will be able to watch African television programs via satellite.

Kent State chose Columbus, Ohio-based architecture firm Moody-Nolan for the renovation. Among the university's criteria for architecture firms are experience in the area, previous work with universities and cultural awareness.

"We wanted a firm that could marry architectural experience and cultural knowledge," Ruffing said. Curtis Moody and Howard Nolan founded the firm in 1984 after working together on an MRI laboratory for which they couldn't use iron. Their team developed a material that became the standard in MRI laboratories.

After founding their firm, Moody and Nolan worked to fight the stereotype that Black firms couldn't lead projects.

"It was evident during the 1980s that there were societal misconceptions that prevented minority architects from having a major role in large civic projects," Moody wrote in the firm's portfolio. "At that time, minority architects were employed mostly in supportive roles and rarely in leadership roles. As a result, there were few large minority-owned firms and the minority classification was one given regardless of one's education and abilities."

Since 1984, Moody-Nolan has worked on the Martin Luther King Complex for Cultural and Performing Arts, the Columbus Urban League Headquarters, the Paul Robeson Cultural Center, as well as many buildings at Ohio State.

Like Moody-Nolan, Oscar Ritchie was transformed into what it is today through perseverance. In 1968, members of Black United Students protested recruiters from the Oakland Police Department because of its often violent clashes with the Black Panthers. Some of the protesters were charged with disorderly conduct. BUS staged a walkout and, essentially, boycott of the university. Kent State administrators decided there was not enough evidence to charge the students. The day after they were cleared of all charges, they returned to campus.

Following the walkout, black students were encouraged to voice their needs on campus. Involvement of black students, wrote Milton Wilson in 'Involvement, led to the creation of the Afro-American Studies program, recruitment of black faculty and students, and establishment of a Black Cultural Center. In May 1969, the university approved the creation of the Institute for African American Affairs to promote racial harmony.

Now that they had a program, students and faculty in the Afro-American Studies program needed a place to learn. The opportunity came when the Kent Student Center opened in 1972. Previously, the building that is now Oscar Ritchie was the Student Activities Center. That year, black students and faculty took over vacant space on the first floor. In 1977, the building was rededicated Oscar Ritchie Hall. The department took over the second floor in the 1980s, and the whole building in the 1990s.

Since being rededicated Oscar Ritchie the building has seen minor improvements, such as new carpet, lights, doors and air conditioning units. But both students and faculty said a major overhaul is overdue.

"We are all patiently waiting for the process to begin and anxiously await our return," Dorsey said. "Everyone wants and needs a place to learn and study that is aesthetically pleasing to the eyes."
MORE THAN LOVE

Marisia Styles
To take in and willingly raise another person’s child is an incomparable feat because raising one’s own children is challenging.

According to Adoption.com, a national website that provides an assortment of information on adoption, every year between 120,000 to 130,000 adoptions occur within the United States. Adoption can be a long and expensive process that requires commitment. The process builds families and gives both the adopting family and the adoptee a sense of fulfillment.

Fulfillment does not necessarily come for free. The adoption process can cost between zero and $30,000 plus dollars depending on where and from whom you adopt.

Rachel Anderson, a woman of both African-American and Caucasian descent, adopted a young African-American male and describes the process as “very long and anxiety-producing.”

“It is, of course, worth every minute, but the process is not designed for the impatient or the undecided. We spent about three years working toward adoption,” Anderson said.

For some, the process can be less stressful and time-consuming. Karen Filkins, a Caucasian woman who identifies with her Native-American heritage, adopted an African-American girl from the foster care system and considers the process to be relatively stress-free.

“We took our adoption training to be certified by the state of Ohio, and then we identified our child on the AdoptOhio website. We met our child who moved in within two weeks. Start to finish was less than one year,” Filkins said.

Everyone’s situation will vary depending on the state and agency from which they adopt. Della Marshall, an African-American woman, found the process rather intrusive.

“It required a six-month home study of my finances and living conditions by the agency, as well as a police background check and a psychological assessment to determine my worthiness as a parent,” Marshall said. “Overall, the process was very intrusive into my personal life.”

Marshall’s process took up to a year because her adoption agency, Harambee, was very particular about who would take on the parental responsibilities of the child.

Currently, transracial or transcultural adoption has become an increasingly popular and controversial subject. About 8 percent of all adoptions in the United States are transcultural.

Transracial adoption is when a child of one race or ethnicity is adopted by parents of another race or ethnicity. According to the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse, this usually means that children of color or children from another country are placed with white adoptive parents.

This trend can be well observed among celebrities. For example, Angelina Jolie, a successful actress, adopted three children of different ethnicities. Her son Maddox is Cambodian, her daughter Zahara, is Ethiopian and her other son Pax Thien is Vietnamese. Jolie is of Czech, French Canadian, English, and Iroquois descent.

Controversy exists within the African-American community because many African-Americans feel that children of African-American descent should only be adopted by African-Americans.

“White children are three times more likely to be adopted than African-American children, and the Adoption Institute has compiled information showing that over 60 percent of children waiting to be adopted are African-American or Hispanic.”

In agreement with this position is the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW). Once deeming transracial adoption as “cultural genocide,” the NABSW now holds a new position towards transracial adoption that is more representative of current African-American beliefs.

Documentation from the NABSW website, titled “Preserving Families of African Ancestry” states, “transracial adoption of an African-American child should only be considered after documented evidence of unsuccessful same race placements has been reviewed and supported by appropriate representatives of the African American community.”

Their beliefs in “cultural genocide” were geared toward the bigotry of the foster care system.

“The resolution was not based on racial hatred or bigotry, nor was it an attack on White parents… Our resolution was directed at the child welfare system that has systematically separated Black children from their birth families.”

Ultimately controversy exists because of the inherent discrimination within the adoption system toward not only African-American children, but toward African-Americans who want to adopt.

Anderson adopted because she herself is adopted and knew firsthand how the adoption system worked.

“Although I would have considered any child that was a good match for my family, I really wanted to provide a family to an African-American child because there are so many of us in the foster care system that need permanent placement. Boys are at an increased risk of staying in foster care for years and years,” Anderson said.

White children are three times more likely to be adopted than African-American children, and the Adoption Institute has compiled information showing that more than 60 percent of children waiting to be adopted are African-American or Hispanic.

Even the government got involved with regulating the discriminatory practices of the adoption system. One reason for placing African-American children with parents of a different ethnicity is because minorities are severely overrepresented in orphanages and foster care.

In 1994, Congress passed the Multiethnic Placement Act to ensure minority children placement in safe caring homes. The Act reduced the amount of time children waited to be placed and lessened the amount of discrimination involved with placing children.

Still, of great concern are a child’s cultural identity and the relationship the child will have with individuals who share the same cultural heritage. Jolie is overjoyed with her family and has put forth every effort to ensure her children’s cultural awareness. She has purchased a house for her son Maddox in his native home and travels frequently to expose her children to their cultural ancestry.

Stacey Berkley, an El Salvadoran adoptee to Hungarian and German parents, says her
parents have done a good job at exposing her to her cultural heritage and feels it is essential for children to know their background.

“They [her parents] belong to a parent support group that has programs geared towards children who are adopted.”

It is important to expose children to their ancestral heritage “because more than likely they will feel like they are missing something in their lives. They will question who they are, so it is important to do that,” Berkley said.

Cultural identity is an essential aspect to the development of a child. Anthropological research presented by MSN Encarta designate self-identity as dependent “on culture to such a great extent that immersion in a very different culture—with which a person does not share common ways of life or beliefs—can cause a feeling of confusion and disorientation” or what is commonly known as culture shock.

The African-American community is concerned about the connection African-American children will have with their culture and with other people of similar descent.

Although this is a concern, the placement of a child in any home has proven to be a difficult task. The Child Welfare Information Gateway says that over one-third of Americans have ever considered adopting, but no more than 2 percent of Americans have actually adopted.

While African-American children are the most difficult to place, African-Americans are less likely to partake in the adoption process, essentially leaving African-American children to be adopted by someone of a different ethnicity.

Transracial adoption does not imply that a child will not be raised with a sincere appreciation of his or her cultural heritage while maintaining respect for other cultures.

Anthropologists from MSN Encarta advocate cross-cultural understanding or cultural relativism whereby an individual “can learn to respect beliefs and practices they do not share with another culture.”

As a member of a transracial family, Filkins “supports the adoption of children in loving, caring, stable families no matter who they are.”

She also puts forth efforts to expose her daughter to her African-American heritage as well as other ethnic backgrounds.

“I do believe exposure to one’s cultural background is important. We have family and friends that are diverse and important to our lives,” Filkins said. “We attend culturally diverse events and celebrations [while] sharing cultural and ethnic differences as a family norm.”

Like Filkins, Berkley supports the adoption of children in loving homes and also advocates the development of honest relationships between adopted children and their families.

“If they want to find their birthparents, try to support them. Show that you care by keeping their culture alive in your daily lives. Maybe cook some food from that country and get books and information. Maybe when they are older, or when you think or they feel mature, take them back to their country so they can connect at some level,” Berkley said.

Studies by the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse show that adoption experts have varying opinions on the controversy surrounding transcultural adoption. Some believe that children presented for adoption should always be placed with a family where at least one parent is of the same race or culture as the child.

Arguably, this better enables the child to develop a strong cultural identity, but others feel that ethnicity should not play a major role in the adoption of a child. They feel that placing a child with a loving family that meets the needs of the child is all that should be considered.

Filkins believes “it is a family’s duty to help those around them who need assistance. This includes adopting a child if you have the time, room, money and mostly the love in your heart… it doesn’t matter what color you are, or where you were born; what matters is that if you work hard and love your child(ren), transracial adoption can work.”

Perfection is desirable, but impossible, and if you believe that adoption is for you, do the necessary research.

“We all have warts and blemishes. All a child wants is to know there is someone who has their back and will love them through the storms life throws their way. For so many children waiting to be adopted, they just want to give and be loved in return,” Marshall said.

Anderson says, “I encourage everyone to adopt, there just aren’t enough people adopting right now. Transracial adoption takes a strong support network, but there are many organizations and multicultural families already in Ohio.”

No matter what one’s opinion may be, the purpose of adoption agencies is to place children with caring families who can meet the needs of the child. The Adoption History Project states that despite increased attention by the media, the adoption rate has been steadily declining since 1970.

Available statistics on adoption are all voluntary and predominantly collected by various private institutions and universities. Also, according to the Child Welfare Information Gateway’s web site, the government only obligates foster care systems to collect information concerning adoption, so adequate information is not always readily available or truly representative of the adoption system.

Race and culture are certainly important when adopting, but of more importance are the indiscriminate inadequacies of the adoption system. These shortfalls hinder families from adopting and essentially harm the children in the adoption system.

When considering adoption, Marshall says, “Run for the hills, just kidding! Take the time to research the agency and county. Talk to other adoptive parents. Ask for the truth (good and bad) to make an informed decision. Seek all information about your prospective child, especially their medical history if available… Talk with your spouse, significant other, family and friends to gauge their level of support for your decision. Have a good grasp of your present finances and your financial plan for the future because as they grow, so do the expenses to properly clothe and feed them.”

“While African-American children are the most difficult to place, African-Americans are less likely to partake in the adoption process, essentially leaving African-American children to be adopted by someone of a different ethnicity.”
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THE PASSAGE INTO MOTHERHOOD
A PERSONAL ESSAY BY TARA PRINGLE

I always knew I was going to be a young mom. I just didn’t know I would be this young.

Now, I’m not as young as it may seem – I’m 21, with nine credit hours separating me from my college graduation. However, sometimes I feel as if I just stepped out of “Childhood” and took a brief vacation in “Adulthood,” before turning down an unfamiliar one-way alley called “Motherhood.” Once you are here, there is no turning back.

First trimester

Before I was pregnant, I was involved with everything. For three semesters I had been editor of this very publication you’re holding now, copy editor of another magazine, managing editor of yet another, and staff writer on many publications. I was involved with the National Association of Black Journalists on the Kent campus and the national level. As a college junior, I became associate editor of an online magazine after the editor asked me to take on more responsibility. Between all these activities, it’s amazing I found the time to get pregnant. But I did.

Talk about bad timing. When I found out I was pregnant in March, I had just accepted an internship with the American Society of Magazine Editors – one of the top internship programs in the country. It’s extremely competitive, with 35 magazine interns from around the country descending on New York and Washington, D.C. for a ten-week stay at a national magazine. I had been thrilled to death when I was selected, but now the doubt came.

Could I still do it? Could I spend that much time away from my family, friends, and most importantly, my fiancé? Could I still perform at the internship and have them see me as a regular intern, not “the pregnant one”?

I decided to go to New York and just do it. I didn’t want to have any regrets when the baby came, and I definitely didn’t want to sit at home...
unemployed for the summer, since, ironically, no local internship offers came through.

It was rough in New York for many reasons, the primary reason being that I had a two-hour commute to and from work each day. I'd leave my apartment around 6:30 a.m. and I wouldn't get home until around 7 p.m. Another issue was that I didn't tell my supervisors I was pregnant.

Second trimester

Ten weeks later, I left my internship with a glowing recommendation and a newfound respect for the magazine industry. I was also showing very visibly now, with perfect strangers coming up to me asking me when I was due.

Back in Cleveland, I worried about the upcoming semester, deciding to stay in school and graduate in May as I originally planned, partly because I was so close to graduation and partly because I wanted my daughter to be proud of me for going on.

Once the fall semester started, I immediately felt out of place. I waddled around campus, back aching, belly protruding, huffing and puffing as I struggled to make it up stairs that only last semester would have been a piece of cake. While sitting in class, simple things like a pen falling off the desk would cause me to sigh in frustration. Bending over when you're seven months pregnant isn't an easy task.

While most of my friends were cramming for midterm, I was sitting in a childbirth class, taking notes on the perfect breathing technique. While my friends were hanging out at the bars on Thursday nights, I was curled up in bed with my new best friend, the pregnancy Bible. What to Expect When You're Expecting. When my friends come over to visit me, they ooh and ahh over the baby's room. Last year, we would have been sitting watching episodes of Sex and the City.

Third trimester

My due date came and with no signs of the little one ever coming. I opted to induce labor and my darling daughter was born perfectly healthy on November 20. She was the most beautiful baby I had ever seen, and every nurse I passed in the hall stopped to ooh and ah. "Look at that baby!" they squealed. "She's gorgeous."

We both had to stay in the hospital for a week and we were discharged from the hospital on my birthday. It was without a doubt the best birthday present I've ever received.

On the ride home, I sat in the back seat while my fiancé drove. I watched my daughter sleep, and wondered what kind of mother I was going to be. Would I be overprotective? Would I be a fun mom? Would I have what it takes to raise a smart, confident woman?

If I told you the first few weeks of motherhood were rough, you wouldn't know what I meant unless you experienced it yourself. With round-the-clock feedings, bedtime was reduced to however long I could close my eyes before my daughter was hungry again. I was exhausted, and I wondered when I would ever feel like myself again.

Then it was the issue of the hospital bills. I was feeling overwhelmed when the first bill arrived. The total cost for delivery and our week-long hospital stay? $27,000. Babies are expensive. Thank God I had insurance, which knocked the cost back to under $3,000.

After the holidays, I set about getting ready for the upcoming semester. How was I going to juggle classes and a newborn baby?

Surprisingly, it has been easier than I thought. Sure, I have my days where I don't feel like doing anything but lying in bed all day, but so does the average college student.

I'm proud of myself for not giving up. I am happy to say that I'll be graduating magna cum laude in four years, which is more than I can say for a lot of the childless students I know.

I've learned to embrace this change in my life. I wanted to provide a good example for my daughter for what you can accomplish when you set your mind to it. As I sit here now, I know my daughter is the best thing to happen to me. It hasn't been easy, but I've already changed so much in these few short months and I know more change is sure to come.

"I always knew I was going to be a young mom. I just didn't know I would be this young."

The Department of Pan-African Studies

Our department offers an undergraduate major leading to a Bachelor of Arts degree and a minor in the College of Arts and Sciences. Pan-African Studies includes the study of Africa and the African Diaspora. Our major and minor course sequences are structured to provide an in-depth study of history, language, philosophy, education, literature, art, music, science, sociology, and other subjects as they relate to people of African descent throughout the world. These courses also expose students to theoretical, practical, and domestic and national issues facing African Americans. Majors and minors can choose from five areas of concentration, including a generalist Pan-African Studies emphasis; African Diaspora Studies; Literature, Art, and Culture; Pedagogy; or Theoretical and Applied Research. Students are encouraged to use their intellectual skills to bring about better organization and development within the African American, African, and African Diaspora communities.

Students majoring in any field—economics, education, humanities, social science, and fine and professional arts—are encouraged to consider Pan-African Studies as a minor.

The PAS curriculum includes courses which cover a broad spectrum of the Pan-African experience. Its purpose is to encourage students with basic information and questions which will lead to further research, study, and analysis. The curriculum also seeks to investigate the African connection and/or influence among other ethnic groups, particularly Native Americans and Latin Americans, and the extent to which these may be reciprocal.

Please find below a list of general courses offered in the Department of Pan-African Studies. (For available courses each semester, see General University Catalog and Schedule of Classes for each semester.)

PAN-AFRICAN STUDIES (PAS) for placement and credit in foreign language courses see Arts and Sciences—Foreign Language requirement—placement and credit.
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Tara Pringle
Senior Magazine Journalism major
In the 1950s, America said goodbye to segregation with the passing of Brown v. Board of Education. But at Kent State, it still exists. The students involved with Greek organizations do it all the time and are OK with it.

During his first semester at Kent State, Kirk Price decided he wanted to join a fraternity. After some browsing, he decided on Delta Chi. It seemed like a good group of guys — he enjoyed everyone he met while partying at the house his first few weeks away from home.

Last semester, he became the only black member.

“I never thought of joining a black fraternity,” he says. “I don’t think I would have fit in — I’m not like them in any way.”

Two races, two structures

Since 2001, Beth Gitton has worked in Kent State’s Center for Student Involvement as the assistant director for Greek Affairs. She spends her days working with 23 organizations and two governing boards: the International Fraternity Council and Pan-Hellenic Council. These, she says, make up the “social” Greek organizations.

Although they all focus on different things, Gitton says each Greek group follows the basic principles of being kind to one another, bettering the world around them and becoming the best they can be. One of the ways they achieve these goals is by participating in philanthropies — community service projects for an organization of each group’s choice.

Although she has a direct influence on the organizations she advises, Gitton says she doesn’t communicate with the black Greek organizations — they have their own governing body, the Black Greek Council, to advise them.

Michelle McCall, president of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc., says her sorority, along with the other black Greek groups on campus, promotes the same principles as the social sororities.

Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc. focuses on scholarship, service and sisterly love and strives to display a positive view about today’s women. She and her sisters hold events that directly relate to their objectives — from service projects to speakers, each focuses on the mind, body and spirit.

Meet the Greeks

When Doug Miller was in high school, he never thought he would join a fraternity. But after his first semester at Kent State — the parties and people he met — he kind of “stumbled into it,” he says.

Now, he’s president of Phi Kappa Tau, a social fraternity he says is built off of community service, although its biggest principle is brotherhood.

In Delta Chi, brotherhood is important as well. “There is always someone to help you with school, anything,” Price explains. “(My brothers) are always there to help.”

Similarly, McCall says Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc. chooses members based on quality. The group wants women who do well in school, carry themselves well on campus and are involved in the community. Sisterhood is important, and her sorority will accept any woman who can represent the group’s principles.

A look at Greek makeup

Delta Chi has been at Kent State since 1990. Besides himself, Price says there has been one other member of the fraternity who was black.

Although he’s currently the only one, he says his fraternity doesn’t choose men because of color — it
all depends on whether the guys in the group like you or not.

Miller describes a similar environment in Phi Kappa Tau— all the brothers are white, but anyone can rush.

“We just give bids out to anyone who shows some interest in the first place,” he says. “We have no opposition to any other ethnic group—it’s just never been discussed.”

Despite its lack of racial diversity at Kent State, McCall says other races are also welcome to rush Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc.

“We don’t try to stick with the norm,” she explains. “Women come in all different sizes, shapes and colors. We try to accept people for who they are—not the stereotypes they fit.”

A lack of communication

From philanthropies to socials, Greek organizations are always interacting with one another, but not across racial lines.

Price says Delta Chi never participates with black Greeks for events simply because they don’t know anything about them. He says no one really knows who they are and what they do.

“(Black Greeks) are kind of secluded from all other Greeks on campus,” he says. “I don’t even know what their fraternities are called, and I don’t know what they are about.”

To Gittons, the lack of communication occurs because the organizations are run by different governing bodies, and essentially, because of their differing appearances.

“When you are African-American, you look African-American. I’m always going to be white, and they will always be African-American. It makes sense to me to have different organizations,” she says, adding people join groups because it makes them feel comfortable to be with those who are similar to themselves.

In addition, Miller says the two sets of groups don’t work together because the black Greeks aren’t involved with any of the bigger events the social Greeks hold. The three biggest events the social groups host are Lip Sync, Greek Week and philanthropy projects—something he says the black groups do not do, but could if they wanted.

“I don’t see them representing themselves at any of the events we attend,” he explains.

The division

Price says he never joined a black fraternity because he always felt different from his peers. While attending a Catholic high school, he says he was different from the other black kids because he wasn’t “ghetto.”

“It’s hard to explain,” he says. “I’ve never known that many black people in my life. I was never friends with the black people I went to school with because they all acted different from me. They wore baggy clothes and listened to rap. I hung out with the white people and wore Abercrombie and Hollister.

“It was never about color—it was just who liked me and acted the way I did. It’s still the same way now.”

Gittons disagrees. She says race has everything to do with the separation of the groups because of comfort levels. For example, women join sororities to be with other women of similar interests, just as blacks and whites join Greek organizations because they are comfortable being around people who are like themselves.

Like Gittons, Miller thinks it’s great that students have a variety of choices when choosing a Greek organization.

“Whatever you want to be a part of—be a part of it,” he says. “There shouldn’t be any barriers. What makes you comfortable, you should be a part of.”

Understanding segregation

Although Greeks invite anyone to rush their organizations, the segregation of races has a lot to do with perceptions.

“I’ve never really seen white people who are interested in our organizations,” McCall says. “Maybe it’s how people think about the organizations’ barriers. They see only black members and think it’s only for blacks. It’s the same for white organizations, so students don’t go out and try.”

Tradition also plays a crucial role in why Greek organizations aren’t diverse today.

“When you’re trying to fit a tradition based on who founded you, that’s when I think the racial barriers exist,” she says. “Of course, if you’re in a white sorority, you’re more apt to not let blacks in because you’re looking at tradition, and vice versa—some things are tradition, and you don’t want to leave them behind.”

Non-Greeks also see the division between the groups, yet don’t fully understand why it exists.

Senior psychology major Kristy Soloski says she recognizes the segregation between the groups to be a response to racial differences.
"It’s an unspoken barrier, the group might act like you’re welcome, but deep down inside, it’d be different," she explains. "There’s a cultural difference."

Katie Ramunni, junior communication studies major, says she sees the division, and it’s not only in the Greek organizations.

“Other groups on campus segregate, how much blame can you put on the Greek community? People like to stay together with people like themselves,” she says.

As a result of these perceptions, Gittons says students think the organizations only accept those that fit the dominant racial categories. This is why, throughout the years, both sets of groups consist of students with similar racial backgrounds.

“It creates drawbacks,” she says. “You look different, so you automatically think you’re not welcomed.”
The Student Center Ballroom reverberated with beats of African drums during the 27th annual African Night hosted by the Kent African Student Association on Feb. 22, 2007. Themed “Faces of Africa,” the event also showcased eclectic African attire and served up mouthwatering dishes from the continent.
Pennsylvania-based Kulu Mele Dancers gave riveting performances.

It was a night of fun and color for the young and the old.

KASA members modeled modern African attire.
Kulu Mele Dancers drummed their way to the hearts of many attendees.

UHURU staff writer Foluke Balogun at the event.

Freshman pre-medicine major Ashai Tettevi models a West African garb.

A member of Cincinnati-based Stanley Dancers struts his stuff.
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Dozens of displaced women await relief items at the Otash displaced camp in South Darfur.

Story/Photos by Dan Teng'o

Sticks, plastic bags and burlap sacks were not new to me.

As a child, I made toys using sticks and molded soccer balls out of plastic bags and sacks. It was part of my childhood in Africa.

But in fall 2005, they ceased to be playthings and became the center of my world. A wobbling world in western Sudan, Africa's largest country.

For a year, I shared this world with more than three million people displaced by the Darfur conflict—a complex war pitting government-allied militias known as Janjaweed (an evil man with a gun on horseback) against rebels. It has roiled the region for the past four years.

As this writing, the conflict was still raging. Like Rwanda in 1994, Darfur was becoming shorthand for genocide.

When I got to Nyala, the capital of south Darfur, it hit me hard that the only thing I was prepared for was the weather.

Previous experience of living in or visiting other torrid parts of Africa prepared me to cope with the high temperatures characteristic of the region.

When I arrived in Nyala, the average was 100 F. However, the heat that overwhelmed me, and other
It’s a love story between a son and father, a father who had to be a mother, a mother who had to be a father and anyone who had a dream,” Gardner said. “This is a film about inner peace.”

Don’t ever let anyone tell you that you can’t do something. Not even me.” - Will Smith as Chris Gardner (in “The Pursuit of Happiness”)

This was said during a scene in the movie when Gardner (Smith) was playing basketball with his son. His son told him that he wanted to be a basketball player and his father’s response implied that his dream was not good enough. He quickly retracted his questioning and advised the above. Support was something he always gave his son.

On Feb. 1, 2007, Christopher Gardner spoke at the Kent Stark campus. The auditorium was so packed that the conference center set people up in viewing rooms. His presentation began by showing the trailer for the movie. The crowd applauded as it came to a close and Gardner took the stage.

He began by talking about the importance of the movie and what led to making the film.

“It’s a love story between a son and father, a father who had to be a mother, a mother who had to be a father and anyone who had a dream,” Gardner said. “This is a film about inner peace.”

He was approached by talk show hosts wanting him to make appearances, as well as shows like 20/20. Radio stations and television networks even asked Gardner to be a part of a reality show centered on being homeless. He declined because he did not have to pretend to be homeless to see what it was like, he lived it and it was very real, he said.

With all of the money that came from being a stockbroker, owning his own business and the success of the film, a consistent message in his speech was love for family and self-motivation.

The Red Ferrari

“When I grow up, I want to…” Many people have said this statement. It may end with getting an education or getting a job. This moment resurfaced for Gardner while walking down Wall Street and spotting a red Ferrari. As soon as he saw the man getting out of that car he asked two questions: “What do you do?” and “How do you do that?” This was the beginning of his journey to happiness.

Gardner had always seen stockbrokers parade up and down Wall Street. To him, they always looked so happy. He wanted this happiness for himself and more importantly, he wanted this happiness for his son. So, he applied to the Dean Witter Reynolds training program. Dean Witter was a well known stock brokerage in San Francisco.

It was a very competitive program and the one who made the most calls and the most sales would be asked to work at the firm. Gardner was the first to arrive every day and the last to leave. His co-workers were unaware that he and his son often slept in churches, shelters and even train station bathrooms. While others thought he was a workaholic, it was because he was homeless and some nights he did not have a choice but to sleep under his desk, he said.

Happiness

At the conclusion of the training program, Gardner was asked to stay on at the firm. It was here that he made hundreds upon hundreds of calls a day until he became a registered broker.

Back then, Wall Street was not very diverse. He joined one other black employee at the firm. He said it was not a matter of racism in the workplace, but what he called “placism.” He knew he...
had to work hard considering he did not have a college degree. However, self-motivation and support from his mother in his younger years prepared him for this fight.

“I made a decision at a young age, I wanted to be world class at something,” Gardner said.

He finally did and in 1989, he opened his own brokerage firm, Gardner Rich & Co. in Chicago.

An Example of Self-Motivation

Perseverance is a trait that not many people possess. It requires strength. It is definitely one that Christopher Gardner had to have in order to take care of his son. Life changes and when one thinks that all is well, the unthinkable happens. For Gardner, the life-changing event was when his wife left him and took their son with her.

“All I could think about was my son, and whether or not he knew that I wasn’t there because I did not know where he was and not because I didn’t want to be,” he said.

One unexpected day his wife brought his son to where he was (which was a boarding house at the time). She said, “It’s your turn.” The boarding house did not allow children so they had to find shelter elsewhere which consisted of hotels like the Concord Plaza Hotel which he referred to as the “ghetto on steroids.”

Gardner and his son were always on the move. No place was permanent. Mentally, he had to balance all parts of his life—being a trainee and homelessness, he said.

“The difficult thing for me was the transition in my head everyday,” Gardner said.

His son was so young that he was unaware of the situation. Gardner often made up games and told him to imagine that they were somewhere else. Gardner remembers his son saying:

“We were always going some place and every time I looked up my father was there.” This was all Gardner wanted.

It pained Gardner to think that his son could even consider the possibility that his father left him. Gardner was determined to break the cycle of men who are not there for their children because his own was not there for him, he said. He advised that we all attempt to break at least one cycle in our lifetime.
Demand for water is high among refugees in Darfur, but water sources are few and far between.

Continued from pg. 25

aid workers, had little to do with the weather. It came from the huge humanitarian needs in the displaced camps – the panoply of plastic roofs and stick-and-sack structures that sheltered thousands of war-scarred people driven from their homes across Darfur.

Beneath each plastic roof was a family. Or two. Or more. And needs: food, water, clothing, medical attention and peace.

On my first day in one of the camps, I found three girls seated on the ground, under a plastic-roofed shack, scrawling stick figures singing in subdued tones.

I crouched to listen in. They stopped singing and looked at me with fear in their eyes. One by one, they stood and broke into a run.

I was used to kids who didn’t feel comfortable in the presence of camera-lugging strangers. But these girls were different. They were scared stiff.

In halting Arabic, I asked their friends to call them back. When they returned, I learned that before my intrusion, they had been singing about their former homes and the good things their families lost when their villages were raided by armed militias.

Attacks on their homes had made them leery of intruders and my camera didn’t help matters. Fear had become their way of life.

As I continued working in the camps, I met many other fear-filled children whose hopes for the future had been reduced to songs about the past. They sang about their looted cattle, their razed huts, their murdered parents and grandparents, their lost uncles and aunts.

Amid the atrocities unfolding around them, their childhood was slipping fast. Many had been orphaned by the conflict and others had watched their siblings die of malnutrition or other preventable diseases.

Some had been snatched from the jaws of death by the medical interventions of aid workers. Others, separated from their parents, were taking care of fellow children and hoping their parents were alive wherever they were.

Despondency nibbled away at their childhood. A 2006 poll among humanitarian agencies declared Sudan the world’s most dangerous place for children.

Yet, against all odds, Darfur’s kids constantly sought to break free from the gloom and doom of the camps. Songs and sports helped them to forget the ravages of the war. Others sought therapy in art. A 10-year-old boy once sketched out the horse-riding militias who attacked his village. It was cathartic, he told me. Those kids’ fortitude disarmed me.

Things weren’t easier for their guardians and parents. Food rations were regular but not enough. To receive food, each household had to have a token.

Tokens were issued by aid agencies to all households in the camps. Still, food was never enough, especially for large families.

To supplement relief food, flea markets sprung up in the various camps. Industrious camp dwellers ventured outside the camps to seek menial work or dabble in itinerant trade to make ends meet.
But it wasn’t always safe. Women were raped and men killed by militias lurking around the camps. Students were killed in cross-fires between militias and rebels. Thus, many remained boxed in within the confines of the camps, which were relatively safer.

More than 7,000 African Union peacekeepers patrolled the camps to protect civilians. Sadly, they were too few to offer much protection in the region the size of Texas. Banditry was rife, hostilities were fierce.

I was scared of going to the weekly security briefings for aid workers because each of them was larded with reports of militia attacks on civilians and aid workers. The trend was depressingly familiar: 30 killed two days ago, 18 raped, 50 herds of cattle looted, 12 aid workers attacked.

Against the backdrop of the remorseless war, people were always dying and fleeing their homes no matter what we did as aid workers. The line between hope and hopelessness was tenuous both for aid workers and the war-affected people.

At one point, the camps were swelling at the depressing rate of 3,000 newly displaced people per day. People were arriving on foot, on donkeys and on cargo trucks with gunshot wounds, burns and heavy hearts.

They invariably outstripped all the available humanitarian assistance. On many occasions, thousands of families waited for food, shelter and water for weeks as aid agencies pulled together to meet their needs.

New waves of displaced people hit the camps each passing day. Many are the times when sticks, plastic sheets and sacks ran out, leaving hundreds of families without shelter.

My heart broke with every click of the camera as I took photos of thousands of desperate fellow human beings young and old sprawled on the desolate sandy ground, under searing heat, without any food or privacy for weeks. I had never seen human suffering on such a grand scale.

It was difficult to watch the worst atrocities the human heart could devise. Tears often stung my eyes. My grip on the camera often loosened. My pen and notebook often dropped. I broke down.

My heart still bleeds for Sudan, a country badly in need of lasting peace. Before Darfur, there was the 21-year civil war pitting the country’s Islamic north against the non-Islamic south. It claimed an estimated two million lives and only ended officially in 2005, as the Darfur crisis deepened. Indeed, since independence in 1956, only the period between 1972 and 1983 saw the country at peace with itself.

Throughout my stay in Darfur, the camps expanded precipitously as more people were killed and displaced. The camps haven’t stopped swelling.

All the negotiations and platitudes mouthed off by politicians in various parts of the world have not translated to peace for the average Darfuri hunkering down in the squalid camps.

When I left Darfur last fall, I agreed to serve as an emissary for the camp dwellers. They always told me they would like to return to their homes. But it wasn’t safe for them to go back. Neither is it now. But they still want to return to their homes. They want peace.

They are looking to the rest of the world to help them. Who will heed their call?
RECOGNIZE MY WORLD
PRESSING TOWARD SUCCESS AS A NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENT
Tyra Flowers
Though my childhood was primarily healthy, I thought, quickly made that decision for me. And I, taking my mark, was set to finalize my decision. I was able to determine that what I was doing was for the well-being of the entire family as opposed to just myself. The other was grasping the fact that I may lose my job of five years if my supervisor had not agreed to grant schedule consideration for my classes. Luckily enough, I was able to obtain that agreement. Nevertheless, I was being hit from every angle and would have chosen the option of becoming a full-time student regardless of the outcome. Losing my job was not nearly as important as what I would have lost if I chose not to work toward my degree. Because I continued to be purpose-driven and diligent in the face of opposition, I was able to overcome the obscenity to do what was necessary to obtain a higher education.

Entering my first semester at Kent State was an experience that I will never forget. The campus was a whole new world in a city my traveling shoes had never stumbled upon. And above all I, being new to the community, did not help the situation one tiny bit. As I triumphed through finding my way around, I was bound and determined to stick with it and to carry it through at whatever cost. The first few weeks of class issued a lot of challenges, from finding the buildings and classes to learning how to manage time and make my education a priority. With a maximum of two classes, I found that the curriculum was very demanding and required a lot of study time. With my busy schedule, I soon had to adopt a strategy to make my time work for me. With that in mind, I had to learn to organize my every waking moment and set aside hours for family, study, and leisure respectively.

One of the most valuable lessons and essential skills I have learned is to manage my time by implementing a schedule. It is my belief that this is imperative to the success of anything you do as a college student and beyond. It has especially been an effective tool in helping the activities of my everyday life flow more smoothly. Though schedules and organization are key factors, they do not eliminate one variable, the omnipresence of stress that surrounds our daily lives. However, they do help to minimize the effects and will aid in keeping the beast within us all at bay.

Before classes began, I was confronted with a few major obstacles, one being something that every parent must consider: The inability to be as available to your children as you would like to be. It was difficult to determine how to cope with not being the parent that I had always been. My children, being a little more mature than I

hours out of your schedule and doing something that you’ll enjoy will consistently help to retain your focus on the task at hand. I would recommend finding a positive outlet. Something that is beneficial to your mental and physical health, because it is usually those kinds of activities that help you keep a more positive outlook on what lies ahead.

The largest component of being inspired to continue through college is a faith based deeply upon biblical principles. I believe that I have the ability to become who and what the word of God says that I can become. I embrace the fact that knowledge is, in every essence of the word, power. When this tool is effectively paired with understanding and wisdom, it is then that it is even more effective. My strength comes from that power and is my soul-driving force and what keeps me consistently pushing toward my goal. It is the reason why I continue to break through the barriers of adversity that have been set before the non-traditional student. It is the reason why I continue to trapse through the oppositional muck of life's circumstances. And most importantly, it is the reason why I strive to be the best I can be in every situation that I encounter. I have been given this power that was endowed to me by my creator, and that authority gives me the right to stake a claim in what is rightfully mine: my education.

“Losing my job was not nearly as important as what I would have lost if I chose not to work toward my degree. Because I continued to be purpose-driven and diligent in the face of opposition, I was able to overcome the obscenity to do what was necessary to obtain a higher education.”
PROTECTING YOUR VOTE

Dave Pittman

Uhuru means “freedom” in Kiswahili. It is individual and collective freedom for all oppressed peoples. In the 2004 issue of Uhuru, Tara Pringle elaborated on this in her editorial: “Freedom to choose, freedom to be, freedom to grow.” Using Pringle’s example, our freedom to choose legitimate leaders in the federal government has taken a hit with a recent act of Congress.

The Federal Election Integrity Act of 2006 (FEIA) was approved by the U.S. House on Sept. 20, 2006, and it is now sitting in the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration waiting to be cleared to proceed to the Senate floor. It requires that a valid government-issued photo identification can be presented to local election officials before they let you vote in federal elections. If you forget your ID on election day, the FEIA says you can cast a provisional ballot (those are counted last) and you must present your ID to an election official within 48 hours or they’ll throw your vote away. If you want an absentee ballot, you’ll have to make a copy of your ID and mail it in with the absentee request.

Here’s the kicker: by 2010, you will need to have a photo ID that includes your status as a U.S. citizen. In order to get that on your ID, you need to produce documents to the state, such as your birth certificate, a passport, or naturalization paperwork if you were born outside the U.S. By the way, your Social Security card won’t work — that’s primarily a tax ID number and does not prove citizenship.

The FEIA is being pushed by its supporters to prevent fraudulent voters, like dead or otherwise ineligible individuals, from casting ballots. But instances like these are few and far between. The most significant example of fraudulent voting happened when 1,180 votes by felons, dead and double voters were thrown out in the widely contested 2004 Washington Governor’s race. Those votes would have been enough to reverse the outcome of the election.

In our own backyard, nearly 12,000 people voted illegally in Cuyahoga County in the November 2006 elections. In this case, the election officials said none of the results in those problem precincts were close enough to be affected. This was not due to malicious voters wanting to affect the outcome, but due to inadequate staffing on the part of election officials. These officials were unable to make sure everyone signed in before they cast ballots or direct people to vote in the correct precinct.

More unsettling is the lesser stated reason for this bill. It is an extension of the illegal immigration debate and the ensuing crackdown on immigration from south of the border. This could lead to people with certain physical and linguistic characteristics being challenged at the polls. Sound a little familiar? For example, literacy tests given only to black voters in Alabama in 1965. This isn’t the only problem:

The time and expense involved in getting the necessary documents are gratuitous. How many people do you know that have ready access to their birth certificate? Personally, I don’t. I would have to call my parents and have them mail it to me or make the six-hour round trip drive to their house. I’m fortunate that my parents have it.

What happens if it gets misplaced or destroyed? Where would you go? The hospital? The clerk of course? What if you weren’t born in a hospital? I honestly couldn’t tell you where to go or who to call, and that is exactly the point.

Why should we have to go through all that mess just to be able to vote? It’s been hard enough for those of us that are non-white and non-male to gain and keep that right in the first place. Now they’re going to throw this out there?

Critics of the FEIA are calling this a new poll tax. Not so much in the monetary sense because the FEIA does provide re-imbursement for the cost of the ID card if there is financial hardship (with more paperwork to do). This is a tax because it requires undue effort to gather the documents and be able to vote.

“This bill does nothing to address many of the actual documented problems of election and voter fraud… including the improper purges of voters, distributing false information about when and where to vote, stuffing ballot boxes and tampering with registration forms, most of which are perpetuated by corrupt election officials, not voters,” said Hilary Shorof, director of the Washington Bureau of the NAACP.

What can be done? I would say write your senators and tell them to vote “no” on it, but that honestly won’t work. However, there is hope on the legal end.

In 2004, Arizona voters approved Proposition 200, which required proof of citizenship when registering to vote, regardless of if it was your first time, your address changes or if you just hadn’t voted in a while and needed to re-register. It was challenged by the League of Women Voters, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund and other organizations. Their appeal made it to the Ninth District Court of Appeals.

On Oct. 5, 2006, the appellate court issued an emergency injunction banning the law from taking effect. This is not unprecedented either.

Attempts to limit the vote to only those having a driver’s license and other restrictions within the past 20 years have proved unsuccessful, and my hope is this will be ruled unconstitutional as well.

In the meantime, educate yourself on the issue — don’t just listen to what I’m telling you — and get active in defending our rights and support others who are defending your rights. Recognize your rights.
**NDOTO TUNAITAMBUA?**

Ulipatikana kwa jasho na damu, ili tupate nafasi yetu
Vita vilikuwa virefu na vigumu, na haki zikawazetu
Baada ya muda kutudhululamu, uhuru ulikuwa wetu
Sasa wakati wa swali muhimu, imetimia ndoto yetu?

Uumbaji nazo tumewezesha majina tumeypata
Waliotuwesaza tukawabenza, kauli zao zikarota
Sifa mzuri tunatembeza, na mengi tuliyotafuta
Sasa wakati wa swali muhimu, imetimia ndoto yetu?

Tumepenyeza nyanja zote, ili maisha tuyamudumu
Sasa runaishi bila kitete, anavyofanya majini pandu
Si kama mabu ya matete, yanayotafunwa na wadudu
Sasa wakati wa swali muhimu, imetimia ndoto yetu?

Itasikitisha wengi tukipata sufuri, katika mchezo kwa maisha
Waliotapigana kila adhuhuri, ulimwengu mchafu kuuuidhisa
Majulwawalipanda kutobiri, maslahi yetu wakahakikisha
Sasa wakati wa swali muhimu, imetimia ndoto yetu?

*Kiswahili is widely spoken in East and Central Africa.*

---

**DO WE RECOGNIZE THE DREAM?**

It came by sweat and blood, so we could claim our space
Long and hard were the struggles, so rights were ours
After time discriminated us, freedom became ours
Now time for the important question, has our dream been realized?

Creative heights we have scaled, names we have earned
Their views we have dampened, those who despised us
Fame we now spread, and others that we craved
Now time for the important question, has our dream been realized?

In all fields we have fanned, so life we can manage
Without fear we live, like fish in the water
Unlike wild grass in the wilderness, that is devoured by insects
Now time for the important question, has our dream been realized?

It will disappoint many if we score naught, in this game called life
They who fought for us every afternoon, and mopped a dirty world
Rostrums they climbed to predict, our welfare they ensured
Now time for the important question, has our dream been realized?

Dan Teng’o
Nairobi, Kenya
NEW SKIN

Many days I’ve looked upon your reflection. Looking for some sign, some form of connection. To understand where you’ve been and who you’ve become, a link from the past, a glimpse of the sun.

Though the mystery lies deep in your eyes, through every tear you’ve ever cried, from every smile and goodbye. The years have been kind and you can’t explain why. Something has happened miraculous indeed, something’s been imbedded deep within me.

The person I am looking at is no longer the person I see. It is the person I will become and the person I will be. No longer does my future look dim. Thanks to my new friend and my faith in Him.

He’s given me the courage and the strength to carry on. It’s not about where I’ve been, but about where I’m going. No longer do I have a need to look to the past. The key to my future is on this side of the glass.

Tyra Flowers
Brimfield, OH

FREEDOM FIGHTERS

They are freedom fighters.
Wild with style straight up throwing up fists out of my head
freedom fighters!
Screaming screw conformity, oppression, the hell with one accord!
They are bored
Bored with the subjugation, the spiritless, the fearfulness, the contentedness
I can’t control them
I haven’t gone against their will since they kicked my ass with discontent
For Five plus years they’ve been showing me what real love meant
They are freedom fighters.
Fighting for freedom everyday, getting their way, doing their thing
If you don’t know now you know this head is my station
while I teach this chick some education
Putting me up on some game and Individuality is their aim.
cause They are freedom fighters
Sometimes the untruthness is a bit much for me so I attempt to organize these freedom fighters.
I cut them down to size and sand down those rough edges but they never loose their identity.
They come together like a shield and lay against my mind as they wind into unknown patterns, and never seen designs
They are freedom fighters
Can’t help but to love my freedom fighters
No matter how hard I try to convince they continue to rebel
Never defeated in battle against the clippers, the brush, the scarf or the gel

Latreal Hayden (Serenity)

IF I HAD A BOOK...

With a book...
My mind can span a skyscraper.
I can use my book knowledge to grab mad paper.
I can open my third eye to the world’s reality.
I can open my closed mind with thoughts of poetry.

With a book...
I can enlighten you about your heritage, my race.
If I read, my soul will grow stronger and brighter.
leaving you to wonder if I am better off than you are,
a super-star up in this place.

With a book...
I can make the blind begin to see.
But if you see, will you ever see something as beautiful,
As enlightened, as dramatic as me?

If you had a book...
Would you dabble in reality, tragedy, hypocrisy?...
or become the apothecary of a dry ass fallacy
promoted by delinquent, wannabe, none insightful, radical, boarding on the criminal, hanging Jesus out to dry again new age Pharisees?

If you had a book...
Would you wait to turn each page?
or would my knowledge draw the curtain
as you shuffle, dance a jig, hat in hand across the public opinion stage?

If you had a book...
Would the words be indecipherable?
Written in a language that only Satan could read?
Damaging my innocence, and common sense, with something that goes against my God-sense?
Hell you might just be babbling nonsense.

If we could write a book...
Would it be out of date before the ink dries?
or would it call down the shame of Heaven, and bring down fire from the skies?
Chicken Little would have nothing to shout about, knowing this could never happen in a month of Sundays.

When you write a book...
Leave a little something in the forward for me,
or maybe even some Clift notes, because my eyes aren’t as good as they used to be. I guess books on tape will become my new reality, and the beauty of the printed word something I will never see...again.

John Craddock
Laplanta, MD
H.I.V.
[HID INSIDE THE VEINS]

You can't see it on the surface
It's Hid Inside the Veins
Your bodies steady corroding,
but your face don't show no pain
what once was your pleasure instantly
became your shame.
Regretting bad decisions because the script is all changed.
Life was all bliss.
So what the hell is this?
It started out so innocent
With just a little kiss.
But this turned to that;
You on your back.
The moment felt so gentle.
So You couldn't resist that
But the game left no name.
The game was so plain.
Of course you didn't see it,
Cause it's hid inside your veins

Now three years pass and your face still smiles the same
But of course you didn't see it, because it's hid inside your veins.
And you move on to the next fix
Still playing the same tricks
Ignoring the effects of when stupidity and sex mix.
And it all seems so senseless
You seem so defenseless

But the offense is up,
And they all want to hit it.
Of course you can't resist it.
Now it's your resentment
Passion is now your pain,
And it came with the quickness
Look inside the eyes.
Do they really tell you lies?
Because HIV can't tell you it's inside.
No, it's hid inside your vein.
La Don Neal
Cincinnati, OH

L I G H T O R
M I G H T

Space beyond miles, between deserts,
souls drift Heavenward in war. Soldiers
of theology turn to hell, men of families,
of a God.

My God is all God, be it light or might.
History warns from libraries, past errors
with 20/20 hindsight. Present recycling
dissidence, future children pray commonly.
For all is God, be it light or might.

Earth's collapse, deteriorating cities.
Cloudscollide, taking homes. Rivers
overflow, destroying crops. Fires burn,
repossessing country sides. Nature is God,
be it light or might.

Men don't kill brothers, women-sisters,
soldiers of infection already expel life. Embrace
the neighbor that crosses your path.
Space beyond all else divides. Love is God,
be it light or might.

Wendie Wells Goetz
Newton, NJ

BUTTERFLY
SOULS

A soul lights down
and touches another
butterfly on flower,
both give
both receive
In the universe
countless flowers
touch
and the dew
sings
Theresa Montgomery
Kent, Ohio
THE LAST TIME

Can’t remember the last time I made love,
Not the quick unarmored sex gasping in a
Friday night urgency, tearing off clothes
With tiger-teeth and monkey-hands, no,
making love:

Like a gentle wash cycle of lips on a shoulder
and nape, simple looks of consenting thirst,
gorgeous shape of muscles sifting into one
another glued in a slow, deliberate, delicious
dance. No conspiracy, no ulterior motive, but
to know each and every niche. The highways
his sweat and skin…

Can’t recall the last time, but I know who and
I know how, still remember his heavy eyes his

Searching hands between my legs, hot breath
on my neck, damn—how that made me melt:

His fingers playing on my sides, dissolving into
My August body discovering sensitive spots,
Remembering his Caucasian smoothness his
auburn authority on my kiss and we become
Las Vegas. Bright lights and heat waves.
Hunger no longer, an ache or crutch.

I can’t remember the last time I’ve touched,
But I can still taste his fingers, his eyes…
(Oh how he made me melt)…

Cassidy Decatoria
Las Vegas, NV

UNTITLED

There was a young girl on our journey to the city of stars
She’s never left home or traveled very far
She has a likeness about her, very quiet and polite
She does well in school; teachers say that she’s bright
She has hair that’s red, the color of romance and passion
She dresses very well and has an interest in fashion
But her physical appearance isn’t where we end but where we start
You see she doesn’t think with her head but uses her heart
On the outside she’s perfect but she’s hurting inside
She lets her tears fall after she’s gone to hide
You see she loves a boy whom to her wasn’t true
She cries herself to sleep asking the Lord, “What did I do?”
He tells her, “It’s not what you did but what you didn’t do.
How you forget all things when you look in his eyes, the color of blue.”
She followed every word the boy said, she didn’t think he would lie
He found a new love and she’s now wondering why
Although he broke her heart, when she sees him she’s filled with joy
Then sadness returns as she remembers she carrying his little boy
A boy with no father who will never know his dad
A son without a father figure makes her kind of sad
No catch in the front yard or games of basketball
No long walks in the park or father-son pictures on the wall
But she holds her head up because she knows she’ll prosper above all
And she won’t let some silly little boy let her pride fall
Traveling the road of life an unfortunate ending to happily-ever-after
Her path is filled with stares, tears, taunts, and laughter
She’ll never know fun or love but she’ll always remember pain
God blesses her with a miracle, an angel she will gain
She will never hang out with the girls or get crazy and wild
She has to grow up quickly to become a mother soon to bear her child

Brittany Wagner
Ravenna, OH

*This poem was inspired by the hardships of soon-to-be mothers with the message
that pregnancy can happen to anyone at any time—even the brightest student.
The Trap

The streets is calling, he's balling; his rims keep crawling;
Despite my desperate attempts, I seem to keep falling

The question that plagues me: "What shall I do to keep up with the trends of my crew?"

My friends turn their backs when I can't pull their slack
They cared so much for me that they influenced me to sell crack

I took 'em up on their offer, disregarding my better mind.
It didn't last long though, but while it did, I had done fine

"Oh, you ain't got the money right now? It's cool, you got a good credit line."
A payment plan for crack, definitely, 'cause I was on the grind.

The team, the green, the scene...so mean.
Pardon the cliché, but I was always so fresh and so clean...
Diamonds, fame, gold, and a name

Mr. Ice Cream Man became my theme song and my claim to fame
Being the Mr. Rogers of my neighborhood also lead to my subsequent shame

Yes, shame, embarrassment, and dismissal also play an integral role in the game!

Did I not mention that along with that of the women, my cars, clothes, and lack of employment also attracted the undivided attention of the man?

The boys in blue, pigs, swine, 5-0, the feds, narc,
Hopefully, you get the point, feel me, and understand

What was the delay, was their delivery man perturbed or disturbed?
Because his lack of punctuality got me spread full-eagle on the curb

The Sentence...

Twenty five with an "L", no chance of parole
Don't even fathom the idea of bail

Thanks to our wonderful judicial system,
I'm left here to rot in this cold, lonely, ever-shrinking, moldy, care-neglected cell

It's a never-ending cycle of madness that warrants similar or the same result
Another sad statistic, paralyzed from the future forward, trapped as a youth that will never become an adult

Rakaviour Claiborne
Crystal Springs, MS
EMBRACING OUR VOICE:
STUDENTS SPEAKING OUT AGAINST POLICE BRUTALITY AND INJUSTICE

Chelsea Fuller

People sometimes imply that students are not aware of what is going on in the world and that if we are, we simply do not care. Sometimes, we believe because we are young, we cannot make a difference, that our voices are silenced and that we do not matter in the grand scheme of things. That could not be any farther from the truth. Students not only have a voice, but it is also strong and powerful. We can make a difference when we use our voice in the right way. When we embrace the power of our voices, we become a force to be reckoned with.

Students take stances on many different issues. This semester, students at Kent State University are coming together in the pursuit of justice. The issue is police brutality and students are ready for it to stop. But what can we do to ensure that we are heard? What can we do to ensure that our rights are respected and our needs met?

When you are fighting for a cause, it is wise to look back to the past for inspiration and guidance. It has been said that history is the best teacher because it tends to repeat itself. Police brutality has been going on for many years, and we need to look at how those who came before us handled it and what they did to stop it. It is harder to move forward and influence the future if you do not understand what happened in the past.

When you look back into the past, you cannot talk about police brutality in the black community without mentioning the Black Panther Party. They created Copwatch—a network of citizens that polices the police. Copwatch has become one of the most effective and influential techniques to combat police brutality.

Copwatch began as a network of volunteers who actively monitored and videotaped the police in an attempt to prevent police brutality.
in the poor black neighborhoods. During the 1990s, these networks decreased the number of police brutalization in the black community. Even though the party disbanded in the 1970s, many other groups were motivated to follow in the Panthers’ footsteps.

The Brown Berets started networks to safeguard the Hispanic communities by incorporating the tactics of the Panthers to protect themselves from police misconduct and abuse. Their efforts spread throughout the country and decreased the number of police brutality acts.

The Black Panthers not only felt strongly about protecting their people from brutality, but also, that everyone should be educated about their civil rights. The protection ensured by this knowledge is the greatest weapon we, as students, can posses. Your mind is one of the most powerful weapons because knowledge is very intimidating and no one can take it away from you.

In order to be taken seriously, students have to take certain steps to achieve what we want. We can protest and have rallies. We can also march and have sit-ins. But what good is all of that if we do not know what we are marching for? Educate yourself on every aspect of your cause. Through this education, we can begin down the path of embracing our voice. The first step is to arm yourself with knowledge.

You cannot fight a battle unarmed and expect to win. Let knowledge be your weapon. Arm yourself with an in-depth understanding of what you are fighting for.

Last fall, freshman pre-medicine major Kyle Idahosa and six of his friends were pulled over by the police with no citation. “The police officer told me that my passengers and I resembled a group of men who beat up a boy a couple of blocks down from where we were,” Idahosa said. “I told the officer that it could not possibly be us because five of my passengers were females dressed in skirts and stilettos.”

After the officer allegedly cursed at him, Idahosa and his passengers were positioned face down on the pavement with assault rifles pointed at their heads. “I have never felt so afraid and helpless at the same time,” Idahosa said. “This experience has drastically changed the way that I view police officers.”

When other students hear Idahosa’s story, they usually respond in the same manner: “Wow, they must have really done something suspicous for the police to take those extreme actions, right?” WRONG!

Their only crime was being black at the wrong place and time. This is an example of police brutality; however, more serious action was prevented because Idahosa armed himself with a certain amount of knowledge about his human rights prior to that incident.

He knew he had the right to ask for the officer’s badge number. He also remembered the officer’s license plate number and was in the process of filing a complaint with the Kent City Police at the time of this writing.

The second step is knowing where you stand in society. Whether you are a young black person or a young German, know where you rank in the
American class system. Even though it is not right or fair, it should never be forgotten that we live in a racist society.

Keeping abreast of issues in your community and the world is the third step that will help in your fight. This knowledge helps fight the stereotype that students do not pay attention to real issues. There are injustices and crimes going on everyday all over the world. Learn about them, and how they affect you and your cause. Even if you think an issue is irrelevant, look at it closely and you may be surprised by how wrong you are.

Take into consideration the current state of Africa. At first glance, the similarities between genocide in Darfur and the number of African-Americans dying every day in America from HIV and AIDS are not apparent.

Many people truly believe that these two things have nothing to do with each other. People tend to say things such as, "Those people that are being killed in Darfur are Africans, what does that have to do with me?" Or, "I am not an African and I do not have HIV/AIDS." What is going on in Darfur, as well as the rest of Africa, is a humanitarian crisis.

It's a holocaust that is wiping out an entire culture of people. But what people do not realize is that the people in Darfur that are dying from war and poverty are also dying from HIV/AIDS just like people here in the United States. HIV/AIDS could very well be the beginning of another holocaust.

African-Americans now have the highest infection rate of any race in the country. This disease is killing black people all over the globe. If you are of African descent, those people in Darfur are your people. That makes what is happening to them your problem as well. It is a cycle that connects every thing and every one. That is a great and powerful lesson that needs to be learned and accepted.

Finally, remember to be strong. Do not let anyone shake your beliefs. If you feel strongly about something and know in your heart that what you are fighting for is right, hold on to it. There will always be people "throwing salt in your game" or telling you that you cannot make a difference. There will always be people that do not agree with you and try to halt your ambitions.

Ignore them and be proud of who you are and what you are fighting for. If you feel that police brutality is wrong and that it should be stopped, stand behind it until a change is made.

There is something special about the voice of a student. It is clear and strong, new and un-marked. When you combine a group of students and they rally behind a cause, they become a force that cannot be dismissed. People will have no choice but to stop and think about what they've just heard. And when they finally stop and realize what's going on, they will RECOGNIZE that they just heard something powerful. So do not give up. Be strong and your voice will continue to be heard.
The date was Aug. 28, 1963. Thousands of black minorities, young and old alike, gathered at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington D.C., sick of being second class citizens in their own country. They were demonstrating in support of equal protection of the law for African-Americans. At the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. made his famous speech declaring his vision for a people who had suffered under the cruel hands of oppression and the crowd of thousands gathered in support, ready to run with the vision. Of course there would have been some who were only too happy to listen to a message of revival that would set their hearts on fire. They also could have been a bit skeptical of how and when King’s vision would be fulfilled but happy all the same to be a part of a demonstration against injustice.

The thrust of that great speech was freedom; freedom from oppression and racial division that persisted at the time. Prior to that time, there had been an earlier struggle for liberty from the shackles of slavery. That battle was won with the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed slaves. The black nation has always been involved in one form of battle or another, but victory has always been her song.
Today, almost 44 years after that demonstration where Dr. King revealed his vision for America and her people, African-Americans can say they have had a fairer deal from the system. Issues of racism though still in the subconscious of her people, are no longer real roadblocks to achieving greatness and living out the dream as King envisioned. This is provable by the number of African-Americans, too numerous to mention, taking giant strides in the fields they have carved out for themselves. In politics, entertainment, sports, education, you just name it.

There is an even greater battle currently raging. This time the struggle is not against external forces, but within the black community itself. Battles against violence, drugs, crime, teen pregnancy, moral failure and a lack of vision to reach the great heights that the heroes past envisioned. Chains even greater than those in the time of slavery, now appear to bind the very soul of the black nation. Martin Luther King Jr. dreamed of the day when his children would be judged by the content of their character and not by their skin color, a phrase people are often too quick to quote. These present-day battles raging within the black nation against criminal tendencies, poverty and sub-standard lifestyles may stand as clogs in the wheel of achieving this dream.

Acknowledged or not, today, there is a blanket description of the perpetrators of crime in America, judged by their skin color. The media is full of stories of African-Americans involved in crime, stories of their failures and other negativities. A far cry from what the soul of the black nation should be. The slaves who were ferried away from the shores of Africa many many years ago were the best of the lot, agile, energetic, strong, and dare to say, people of vision and character or else they would certainly not have made it on those ships, which brought them to the farms where they toiled for their masters. They also must have been a people of great hope, hope for a day when they or perhaps their generations unborn would walk free again.

Beyond the programs, lectures, and other activities organized annually in honor of the late Martin Luther King Jr., there is an inner struggle, a struggle for freedom against these negativities that are stereotyping the black race in America. Such celebrations are times to actually reflect on the journey so far.

Freedom from slavery did not come easy. Neither did freedom from racial injustice. People laid down their lives for the liberty which now seems to be taken for granted. Sitting on the bus, at a restaurant or using the same bathroom with a white person were major issues only a few years ago. Today, black kids are born into a liberty that once eluded their forefathers, given the opportunity to pursue success and achieve it, if they so desire.

Were Martin Luther King Jr. alive today, will his message be directed inward to the black nation for its inability to make good use of this liberty? Would he feel disappointed at this generation for failing to live up to the expectation of a hard-working, moral and upright people as they should be? Are the virtues of dignity and discipline, the bedrock of King's struggle, still uppermost in the daily dealings of African-Americans?

King's speech portrayed the black nation as a people who did not believe in mediocrity and a people whose belief in brotherhood was a sine qua non to great achievement. Is the notion of brotherhood gradually becoming a thing of the past among African-Americans today? The present battle can only be won for black people by those who will stand up to fight for change in their communities. A good education however, is a starting point to any liberation. We are in need of dreamers who are willing to pursue the dream and make it a reality. Dreamers who can dare to dream like King did and carry a faith so strong in the face of opposition and obstacles. Dreamers with a drive to succeed in the face of the odds. Dreamers not waiting to win a lottery to make it in life or waiting on luck to define their success.

Congresswoman Stephanie Tubbs-Jones said this much at the Martin Luther King Jr. day celebration at Kent State University when she urged students and indeed all who believe in King's dream, to strive to be the best in whatever they find to do. Jones, who is serving her fifth term in the Congress, representing the 11th District of Ohio, is one African-American who has gone against the odds to leave indelible marks in the sands of time, being the first African-American woman to be elected as a representative from Ohio. She is not stopping here as she declared her resolve to mentor others to follow in her footsteps. She represents a generation which values what it means to be free.

There is much more to celebrate in the black nation that is yet to be discovered. The fulfillment of the dream is in the hands of this generation to recognize where they came from in order to chart a new course to make the dream truly a reality.

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It was cold.

Which wasn't unusual for Ohio in March, but for some reason, this was a different kind of weather. A bone-chilling freeze, masked with a sense of stress and anxiety, covered the entire parking lot.

It was cold. And I was anxious. With each deep breath, I inhaled my crisp, bitter surroundings. I could feel it filling every inch of my lungs, stinging as I exhaled to produce a gray frigid haze that lingered in front of my face.

It was 5 o'clock in the morning and my eyes were bewildered by the masses of people huddling together for warmth.

After about an hour of waiting, the buses arrived. I loaded myself on to Bus C. I took my seat in the back of the bus, turned on my iPod and went to sleep as we started our 24-hour ride to Biloxi, Miss.

I wasn't sure exactly what I was going to experience. All I knew were the stories I had seen on the news but this had to be different. It had been almost six months since Hurricane Katrina so I just knew it couldn't be that bad. It couldn't. Or at least that's what I kept telling myself.

**DAY 1, March 26**

It was about 6 a.m. when we arrived in Pass Christian, Miss.

Professor George Garrison, or Dr. G as we like to call him, had informed our group that Pass Christian was almost completely destroyed by Katrina. Of the approximately 8,000 homes in Pass Christian, all but 500 were destroyed.

As we stepped off the bus, we were counted off by groups of five and assigned to our tents. Mine was tent C5.

I walked into C5, an army-fashion barrack made out of plywood covered by a military green cloth. I claimed my cot and went back outside to explore my new surroundings.

Tent City was a sand-filled area with rows upon rows of green army barracks. The camp was surrounded by lines of three and four big brown Porta Potties on all sides. At the very front of the camp was a black and silver trailer that housed our showers.

Six showers for 400 volunteers.

It was going to be a long week.

From the edge of camp, I could see a body of water off in the distance. It was still early so I decided to take a walk down the street and see just how big of a task lay in front of our group and the masses of others who had yet to come and lend a hand to the Gulf Coast.

After a five-minute walk, I was standing face to face with the choppy grayish blue waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

I stood there reflecting on my current situation.

It was my birthday and I just kept thinking of all the other things the average 20-year-old does for her birthday. Out of everything I could come up with, rebuilding post-Katrina Mississippi was not on the list.

But, I was here.

At this point, it was too late to turn back and I would have to face a few disappointed editors if I didn't return with an exclusive story on the 400 Kent State volunteers who gave up their Spring Break to rebuild Biloxi.

I pondered for a while and returned to camp to catch a quick nap. I'd find my story tomorrow.

**DAY 2, March 27**

That morning, the coordinators of the camp divided the volunteers into groups based on their various skills. Everyone had been asked to fill out a questionnaire as a part of their pre-trip registration packet. Those answers determined which group a person was assigned to.

I worked my way into the roofing crew and hopped aboard the 16-passenger Chevy van heading for Biloxi.

The drive down Highway 90 revealed a lot about the situation in Mississippi. To my right was the Gulf.

To my left, were the beachfront properties. Million-dollar mansions that had been weathered by the wind and rebuilt by FEMA.

I couldn't help but focus on the montage of destruction passing by the tinted window.

Every minute it was something new. Golden arches stripped down to the metal frame. Walmart storefronts so hollow you could see right through it. It was depressing.

As we drove further up the coast, the remnants of casinos and gambling barges began to appear on the horizon. The Hard Rock Cafe. The MGM Grand. All destroyed. The strings on the signature Hard Rock guitar were dangling below its broken neck.

A gambling barge had washed up on shore and landed in what was left of a condominium development across the highway.

The devastation went on forever.
DAY 3, March 28

I woke up that morning and decided to hang back at the camp to talk to a few of the volunteers who had elected to build a shower in Tent City.

A rumor had been circulating that the man who owned our shower trailer was going to take it back because he couldn’t afford to keep providing us with hot water.

These volunteers were working on a project that seemed miniscule to our reason for being there and yet 60 people were hammering away at this ply wood structure.

That’s 60 people who could have been out helping knocking down mold-infested walls or siding someone’s home. I thought the project could’ve been put off until more serious work had been out of the way, but our coordinators didn’t think so.

The shower situation was just the beginning of a bigger problem.

One group of volunteers had been sent to drywall a hole in a women’s walk-in closet. My friend DaMareo remembers walking into her house. A freshly dry walled mansion with high-pitched ceilings and crystal chandeliers.

“It was obvious this woman didn’t need our help. She could’ve afforded to have the work done by professionals. She was just trying to get some free labor,” he said.

Not willing to be used, DaMareo and the rest of his group walked out of the house and started heading back up Highway 90 towards camp. “I wasn’t about to stay there and help this woman fix a hole in her closet when I could be building someone a home,” he said. “That’s not what I came down here for.”

Miles down the road, another group of volunteers was echoing DaMareo’s sentiment.

This group had been sent to clean up a Wal-Mart parking lot. These volunteers were irate and didn’t seem to understand how Wal-Mart, a multibillion dollar corporation, would have to resort to using volunteer work to clean their venues.

But I knew exactly what was going on.

I had read a few articles on the rebuilding effort in the Gulf Coast. One of them had mentioned that many of the commercial chains and casinos were being rebuilt first in an effort to bring commerce to the area.

Some of the articles even mentioned plans to turn the Gulf Coast into a commercial vacation area, making the price of living skyrocket and leaving thousands of people without homes.

It was a corporate game of chess and we were just pawns in the grand scheme of things. Many of us had hoped to come down to Biloxi and make a difference, but how could we accomplish anything when we were cleaning up Wal-Mart or patching holes in a million-dollar mansion?

I, along with the rest of the volunteers, was fed up.

That night, Dr. G gathered all of the African-American volunteers and had a meeting. There were almost 50 of us and we all had the same feeling. We were outraged.

Shanelle, one of my tent-mates, stepped forward and began to express her emotions: “These are our people, Dr. G. How are we helping them when we’re patching holes in closets? I thought we came down here to help the people everyone else had forgotten about. Obviously, I was wrong.”

Garrison seemed just as upset as we were when he told us that there was no centralized focus for our volunteer effort. The relief efforts were so unorganized that the only people who knew how to get in contact with the volunteer groups were the privileged.

The “normal folk,” as Dr. G had put it, were struggling through on their own because they didn’t know how to find us.

That’s when I suggested that maybe we should go and find them.

DAY 4, March 29

We were on our way to East Biloxi. Dr. G had been working with the East Biloxi Coordination Relief Center.

Dr. G’s main contact at the center was Lucille Bennet.

Ms. Lucille was poised and passionate. A dark-skinned woman with neatly curled gray hair and a grandmother’s warmth. She had been helping the people of East Biloxi with their rebuilding efforts for the last three months. She was the backbone of the relief center.
I ventured outside to explore the area.

Up the street were houses upon houses marked with fluorescent orange X's. Some had numbers indicating dead bodies had been found inside.

The roof of one of the houses was completely gone. The front porch of another house was now in its dining room.

The furniture, dishes and clothing were still inside. It was a disastrous picture of a life interrupted.

Across the street was an abandoned plaza with two men sitting outside. I went over to talk to them.

The older gentleman went by the name Camille. He was a Louisiana Creole prize fighter who had moved to Mississippi in his mid-20s. He owned the entire plaza we were standing in front of. Well, at least until the storm came.

Now, he only owned the store he was sitting in front of because he had to sell the rest of the storefronts to get the money for repairs. Inside, the roof and walls were caved in. The gray and white marble floor was covered with pieces of drywall and cement.

The only visible portion was in the entrance way. A custom piece with “Camille” engraved in black on the marble.

This store was his pride and joy. It had been destroyed when the Gulf flooded the area, and now, Camille had spent his entire life savings on the repairs.

“I couldn’t get a loan from the bank because I didn’t file taxes in 2002,” he said. “So now, I’m 85 and don’t have a dime to my name, but at least my kids won’t be paying off my debt when I’m dead.”

It was the same situation for many who lived in this area. The banks weren’t giving out loans due to strict stipulations.

Around the corner, the Main Street Missionary Baptist Church was being rebuilt by the congregation because their flood insurance covered water damage 9 feet and above. The Rev. Kenneth Haynes recalled the church being submerged beneath 8 feet of water and mud. One foot short of the 9-foot stipulation.

Because of rules like this, many people had been trying to fix their own homes.

After seeing the faces of these people and hearing their stories, I knew we had come to the right place.

Over the next two days, more than 30 other volunteers spent their time in East Biloxi trying to rebuild what was left of the forgotten city.

The rest of the volunteers stayed in Pass Christian working on rebuilding their library, the showers and a gazebo.

I found working in Biloxi to be a little more fulfilling.

I could see the looks on the people’s faces. How grateful they were for the youngsters that actually gave a damn.

It gave me a feeling that made the previous exploitation almost null and void.

When we left Biloxi, we had made our mark, but there was still much left to do. Dr. G told us he was organizing another trip in January and this time, he would make sure we would help those who couldn’t help themselves.

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176 Kent Hall (330) 672-2372
In 1969, BUS reorganized itself to become a more dynamic force for our community. Despite these efforts, there was still a lack of unity and support. From the beginning, being a leader in BUS meant that one was a target of misunderstanding and criticism. Now, some 38 years after our founding, things haven’t changed.

On April 25, 1969, an anonymous editorial ran in the Daily Kent Stater that called for the rallied support of Black students across Kent’s campus. The issues cited in this editorial were the same issues we are fighting against today: lack of support for Black programming, lack of unity within the Black community and harsh criticisms from the Black community.

Thirty-eight years later, the issues presented in that editorial are still very relevant. It is a shame that we can turn out for events like the Homecoming Comedy Show and Renaissance Ball and really enjoy ourselves, but when it comes to supporting the political or economic aspects of BUS, most of you are nowhere to be found.

We, as representatives of Black United Students, are reflective of the double-edged sword. We represent a people who love us when we agree with them, hate us when we don’t, criticize us in between time and never stop to ask why we do what we do. Black leadership isn’t always about making the popular decision. It’s about making the right one.

After looking at my experience and the experiences of those before me, I’ve come to the conclusion that most black students want to ride the BUS when it’s to your advantage. But when it comes to helping maintain the BUS, guiding the BUS or driving the BUS, folks are nowhere to be found. I worry that when the BUS is broken down on the side of the road, no one will step up to fix it.

Sasha Parker
BUS President
A Message from the President

Dear Students,

It has been an action- and achievement-packed spring semester, filled with reasons to be proud of your membership in Kent State's student body. Here are just a few recent examples of student excellence in action:

- Visual journalism major David Foster was named Student Photographer of the Year by the Ohio News Photographers Association.
- Jill Kowalski earned two Mid-American Conference Gymnast of the Week awards and went undefeated in MAC all-around competition.
- The pass rate for recent Kent State graduates who took the professional licensure exam for architects ranked among the top 15 nationwide and was on par with graduates of Harvard and MIT.
- Kristin Tassone, a theatre major who is the first woman to complete a minor in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Studies, received the 2007 Akron Women's History Project’s “Woman to Watch” award.
- Textile arts students helped create the beautiful shawl worn by Frances Strickland at her husband’s inauguration as Ohio governor.
- And dozens of Kent State students devoted their winter and spring breaks to rebuilding homes ravaged by Hurricane Katrina.

I applaud these outstanding Kent State ambassadors, and all of you who are working diligently to complete the semester to the best of your abilities. I extend special congratulations and best wishes to those of you who are about to graduate. You can be confident that your Kent State diploma will be a passport to exciting opportunities. I hope you will stay connected to your alma mater through our great Alumni Association, and through the unforgettable faculty and staff members who have been in your corner.

Whether you continue your studies, take a job or internship, or enjoy some R&R, have a great summer.

Lester A. Lefton
President
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