THE FACULTY SPEAKS

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Headliners

Dr. Earl Wright, II,
Chair of Sociology. Elected President of the Association of Social and Behavioral Scientists

I was recently elected president of the ASBS. The March 2010 conference in Charlotte, North Carolina is a celebration of the 75th anniversary of the founding of the organization and is exemplified in my theme as program chairperson, “Embracing the Past, Impacting the Future.” At this Diamond Jubilee celebration, I directly challenge conference participants to “embrace this moment, embrace this opportunity to (re)commit to the mission and purpose of this organization. It is only through the strict adherence to and understanding of the founding principles of this organization will we understand our point of departure from the many professional organizations in existence and the true reason why this beloved organization holds such a special place in the hearts and minds of its attendees and the nation.”

My tenure as president runs during the 2010-2011 academic year. I strongly encourage and anticipate all faculty participation during my presidential year that concludes at the March 2011 conference in Jackson, Mississippi. Additionally, faculty support will be solicited in March 2012 when the annual meeting will be held in Houston, Texas and hosted by Texas Southern University.

Earl Wright II
Chairperson, Department of Sociology
President-Elect
Association of Social and Behavioral Scientists

On The Table

Becoming the Change We Seek:
Infusing the Personal and Theoretical in Academic Research

In 2006, I hit the “pause” button on my thirteen-year academic career to accept an opportunity to live, work, and travel with my family overseas from 2006-2008. While many considered my choice to leave an increasingly difficult-to-secure, cushy, well-supported, tenure-track position at a major urban research university in my hometown risky (okay, many considered it downright crazy!), I privately knew that

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Town and Gown
Faculty Giving as a Measure of Faculty Achievement

Facing a threatened five percent cut in salary and scholarships, faculty now has a chance to demonstrate faith in the work it has done at Texas Southern University. Mrs. John Williams, Associate Director of Development and Annual Giving since November, 2009, explains that the percentage of faculty donating to the Annual Fund will demonstrate faculty investment in the worth of the education it has provided to alumni and current students of TSU.

Spearheading a faculty/staff committee to organize the 2010 Annual Fund Drive, Mrs. Williams states, “We are encouraging faculty to demonstrate that they believe in their work and wish to support the future of their investment.”

The percentage of participating faculty, Mrs. Williams explains, can “influence external giving.” If Mrs. Williams’ office can re-establish contact with past donors and attract new donors by stating that the Annual Fund is supported by one hundred percent of TSU’s faculty, this level of confidence draws external investors. And, it turns out, attracting external and alumni donors is a crucial part of the University’s ability to survive and, more importantly, thrive.

State and federal monies are only intended to assist the University, Mrs. Williams explains. The University is expected to support itself, as well, through philanthropic donations. With philanthropic support, Mrs. Williams points out, federal and state funding cuts will have less impact in such areas as salary, scholarships, and departmental initiatives.

Besides these enticing reasons for faculty to donate once each year or automatically each month through payroll deduction, Mrs. Williams has even more compelling reason for faculty to invest in the education it provides at TSU. Donating to the University allows participating faculty members to direct funds to the scholarships, colleges, schools, and activities they wish to support. The attractively redesigned donation card allows the donor to credit his or her gift to general scholarships, to a particular college or school, to athletics, to the President’s Leadership Scholarship Fund, or to the University’s greatest need.

Perhaps faculty might wish to consider such positive and directed payroll deduction as one aspect of its own proactive movement against payroll reduction.

Alexis Brooks de Vita

TSU History
TSU Debate Team’s Legacy of Excellence

The University Debate Team continues to uphold the legacy of excellence that that has been developed over a period of sixty years. The team has just returned from participation in the Fiesta Swing Tournament held in Cheyenne, Wyoming where, in competition with sixteen other schools, the team ranked 1st, winning six 1st place awards and six 2nd place awards, and the overall Tournament Championship Sweepstakes 1st place. This performance followed a similar performance last semester where the debate team emerged as 1st place winners at the Boilermaker Tournament at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana. The team has garnered more than 120 trophies this semester to add to the thousands on display at the Thomas F. Freeman Center for Forensic Excellence.

The TSU Debate Team is open to all undergraduate students without regard to previous experience or training. Interested students are invited to consult the coach at their earliest convenience in the Education building Rm. 112.

The team is currently in preparation for the 20th International Forensic Tournament to be held in Berlin, Germany. The team will also present an evening of entertainment, featuring award-winning presentations, at the Mickey Leland-Barbara Jordan School of Public Affairs building Rm. B114 on Thursday March 11, 2010. The public is cordially invited.

Dr. Thomas F. Freeman
Ms. Anya Willoughby, Debate Team Member

Book Review
Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936-1943
http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html

The Library of Congress has made available on the Internet one of its most foresighted, anxiously anticipated collections: the voluminous enslavement narratives of emancipated survivors still alive two generations after the end of the Civil War. For those scholars and casual readers who have spent decades collecting these memoirs in scattered hardcopy fragments, as selected and published by other researchers for their own interests, the availability of the entire collection is one of the miracles of the technological age.

Interviewed during the grueling last years of the Great Depression, these widely varying first-person accounts of individuals’ enslavement memories enrich historical, cultural, and social research in ways probably never foreseen when this white-collar employment project was put into action. First, there is the obvious psychological disincentive inherent in the United States government’s deployment of European-American college graduates on mission to interview formerly enslaved African Americans with whom they had absolutely no previous personal acquaintance. These interviews about the systematic denial of not only African Americans’ human rights but also their very right to claim to be human beings took place during the hey-
Updates from the Senate

From the Committee on Transportation and Parking

The Committee on Transportation and Parking discussed the change in parking policy Wednesday, Feb 24. My presentation of faculty concerns was sympathetically received. Mr. Ed Davis, Director of Parking explained how that policy came to be spelled out and implemented (details not especially pertinent here); he said all further assignments to reserved spaces have been suspended pending further consideration because of all the uproar. Staff people have their parking concerns as well, understandably.

The urgent matter I want to communicate is that President Rudley and Chief Byars will have another meeting soon (perhaps early to mid-March) to reconsider criteria for assigning reserved parking spaces. The recommendations that I offered include different, even potentially competing criteria for prioritizing eligibility for reserved spaces. For instance, we could recommend seniority as a priority, or we could recommend functional criteria, such as who needs reserved parking: those who keep regular 9-5 hours weekdays, those who have trouble walking far whether or not they officially qualify as handicapped. The criteria are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but I would not want to have to say, without more general faculty review, which approach most faculty would prefer if a point came at which one criterion had to be favored over the other. But we don’t have much time to consult the general faculty, the committee was not willing to recommend postponing that meeting between the President and the Security Chief. Any suggestions?

Mr. Davis told me that parking cards could easily be reconfigured to allow any faculty with parking stickers into reserved areas after 5 p.m. and on weekends, once a decision has been made, I would firmly recommend that change, since after 5 there is usually plenty of space and therefore little competition.

Our next scheduled meeting occurs in two weeks 3/10.

Thorpe Butler, Faculty Senator, English
TSU Faculty Senate/Assembly

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day of the lynch era that enforced America’s de jure segregation. One may validly wonder if the federal government did not actually want the formerly enslaved to open up and disclose what they had experienced.

At least one narrative candidly records the highly articulate words of an African American man who is very protective of his freedman’s status and who drives his mistrusted would-be interviewer off of his front porch. Again and again, even some of the most hospitable interviewees seem to reach a point at which they interrupt their reminiscences to state that there are certain facts they simply refuse to relate. Lamentably, too many dangerous secrets were, evidently, unnecessarily sent with these survivors to their graves.

Yet, despite the United States’ government’s extraordinary demonstration of socio-historical insensitivity inherent in its choice of interviewees, the accounts that were successfully recorded are rich with unimaginably detailed information. There is the Mississippi man who rode with his former enslaver’s Ku Klux Klan unit to keep his fellow African Americans in fear of exercising their briefly granted equal rights. There is the Texas woman who remembers her mother running through the woods with her to escape enslavement, shot at by her former owner, after emancipation was declared. There are the Alabama field workers who remember the night the meteor shower made everyone afraid that some great Apocalypse had begun.

For educators, the availability of these volumes presents an opportunity to break through the simplistic stereotypes that have ever since any serious understanding of African American historical, literary, or social-psychological study. Are students insisting that those enslaved in the house had an easier life than those enslaved in the fields? If Linda Brent and Mary Prince have not helped to challenge this word-of-mouth modern myth, then perhaps the memories of the girl whose arm was ironed until the flesh fell off the bone, or the girl whose face was crushed under her mistress’s rocking chair, or the child whose mother was strapped to a barrel and whipped naked in the parlors can help challenge these simplistic, anti-historical notions. Are students insisting that African American people with lighter complexions suffered less than those with darker complexions? If Harriet Wilson and Hannah Crafts have not sufficiently challenged these fallacies, then perhaps Delia Garlic’s account of the Mordacia men, who kept their enslaved daughters and sisters separate from the others, saving them aside for their own and their friends’ sexual usage and recycling the babies thus conceived back into the incestuous family brothel, can help generate open-minded and objective analysis.

As an educator, prepare to be fascinated by students’ discoveries of contradictions: the Native American/European American woman who was given to enslavers when her mother abandoned her and who was thus raised in enslavement, calling herself a “nigger” in her narrative though she had not one African ancestor. Or the sincere accounts of how much better one ate when enslaved than when unemployed as a freed person, in contrast with the reminiscence of children gathered about a hog trough scooping up slops with shells used as spoons, their owner laughing that the copious flies in the mixture would serve to make them “fat.” Particularly observant students point out such thought-provokers as that many of the formerly enslaved call the people who bought and sold them “speculators” or “owners,” while twenty-first century students and academics will often voluntarily, obsequiously (and anachronistically) call these investors in human captives “Masters.” The potential for students to experience challenging engagement with such first-source material is profound.

This unprecedented opportunity for unfunded scholars to access the wealth of information collected in the Library of Congress, thanks to the Federal Writers’ Project, promises that vigorous, thorough, and well-informed objective scholarly discussion about the world’s most extreme form of enslavement, America’s chattel enslavement of those of African descent, can at last begin to take place among all interested researchers.

Alexis Brooks de Vita
EDITOR'S CHOICE
A Student Honors Her Professor Mentor

This was written in memoriam for Professor Maurice Hope-Thompson.

I am much better in theory... in writing.

He was best in real.

He inspired me. I'm sorry he had to go... or when he had to go. It just wasn't in my time. Not as if I had considered a specific timeline for him. I just figured he, like everyone (especially those dynamic ones) would last forever - or for as long as I last.

He was a professor who encouraged excellence. Not in a bourgeois sense. But he charged anyone, namely TSU students, in such a way that if they were to study, to even try... they should give their best. "Why not give your best?" And he wasn't preachy. He was sly in his activism. But it was obvious he was pro-student. He laughed well at good jokes - those by students as well as his own.

He charged: "Give your best. Your best is excellent." I feel he was questioning, "Are you really trying? Really taking advantage of your opportunities?"

Then there was the charge of balanced thinking or a thoughtful perspective. Again, not preachy about this, either. He appreciated any opinion and discourse, but challenged participants to look at a topic or receive a headline with a wide lens. "Use a wide angle to analyze what issues encompass, especially social issues. Know the topic. If you don't know the topic, imagine the other possibilities."

With his life, he demonstrated the possibilities. He shared his story with his students and demonstrated the possibilities.

I'm so saddened. He was so on point. I really valued our intellectual exchanges and pop culture commentary. He supported the student organization "GenderMatters" and helped promote an event for us. He appreciated our attempt to cultivate the intellectual on campus. Again, not in an uppity manner. He just knew the value. I hope he knew how appreciated and effective he was. He held his position with such esteem, and it reflected his esteem for our community. Our community returned the favor. I don't really believe in "earning" respect, but I think he proved it's possible.

So professors currently in the physical realm, don't forget your students are listening, absorbing. All of them - us. Don't discount any of us. Remind us of our possibility to be great, to be excellent. You are in a position to impact. Just be patient, and be yourself.

Krystal Austin, Student

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such a significant move, gaining firsthand, compelling lived experience within a foreign country and culture; would bring clarity and passion to my Intercultural Communication research agenda. I had recently returned to the U.S. from living near Guangzhou, China for almost two years when I became a faculty member at TSU in August 2008. As one outcome of living as an African American woman with my African American husband and children in China, my current research foci have crystallized along two lines:

1. To explore and increase understanding about the interpersonal and intercultural experiences of African Americans overseas.

W.E.B. DuBois moved to Ghana. James Baldwin and Josephine Baker moved to Paris. Various African American writers, entertainers, and intellectuals have travelled, and at times, have relocated to countries outside of the U.S. Despite the well documented impact on and contributions of African American writers and celebrities to countries outside the U.S., and despite increased global market integration, which is expected to dramatically increase the number of Americans projected to work in overseas locations during the 21st century, little of the everyday communicative, interpersonal, and/or cross-cultural experiences of African American expatriates is understood. While anecdotal data indicates that the experiences of African Americans living abroad qualitatively differs from those of White Americans, there is a substantial lack of scholarship that investigates the ways in which national and cultural identities are expressed by Black Americans living overseas. Future research needs to focus on contemporary cross cultural encounters and experiences of African Americans living in various countries in an attempt to highlight potential opportunities and challenges that African Americans seeking to live in countries outside of the U.S. may face.

2. To explore and increase understanding of interpersonal relationships involving African Americans and Asian Americans

Despite increased awareness of the significance of co-cultural perspectives

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within increasingly multicultural societies such as that of the U.S., a substantial lack of scholarship investigates cross-cultural interactions among and between Americans of Asian and African cultural backgrounds within the communication field. Asian and African Americans are often both regarded as marginalized groups in U.S. history. Yet, while both groups have some shared experiences relating to racism, marginalized media representations, and stereotypes in America, anecdotal data indicates that both groups tend to focus their fight for inclusion and access on White Americans while making too few efforts to strengthen relations with members of other co-cultural groups. In order to advance intercultural competence within multicultural societies, the proposed research contends that more effective cross-cultural relations across co-cultural groups is needed.

While a few scholars have actively engaged ways in which “Asian-Americans disrupt the Black-White binary” (Deborah Wong, 2002), cross-cultural conversations that address the challenges and opportunities in strengthening African American – Asian American cross cultural relations are long overdue. Since the 1992 Los Angeles Riots, calls to “go beyond Black and White” were made from a range of cultural grounds on various ends of the political spectrum. Largely, the calls have been unanswered by members within the academic community. Difficult conversations are needed. During and since the early 1990s, African Americans have been charged with anti-Asian American racism and targeted violence against members within various Asian and Asian American communities. Asian Americans, on the other hand, have been accused of racism and generating wealth from African American neighborhoods without contributing back. Difficult conversations are needed to explore and examine tensions and stereotypes that weaken connections between the communities. Furthermore, many important topics for many members within these communities get ignored - particularly those relating to Asian American/African American social distance on many university campuses, Asian American/African American dating among heterosexual and same sex couples, and disparities in health communication messages targeting the two communities. How do Asian and African Americans negotiate social relations in the context of the polarizing stereotypes that often paint the groups as extreme opposites (e.g., quiet vs. loud, aggressive versus docile) of the other? This research seeks to begin important conversations about the reality of Black-Asian relations in U.S. work, academic, political, and social contexts that are needed to fill an important gap within intercultural communication research. Can stronger linkages across communities of color generate innovative thinking about ethnicity as a whole? This line of research is interested in beginning new conversations and strengthening bridges beyond the binary.

I am excited about participating in research methodologies that incorporate personal experiences as springboards for exploring the complexity of cross cultural interactions. As a faculty member at TSU, I am encouraged and hopeful about developing a strong research program - a research program that will reap rewards for TSU faculty, staff, and students, as well as the larger society.

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