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Diversity Center

C. Charles Jackson
Campus Center
Phone: 507-933-7449
gustavus.edu/diversity

Virgil Jones

Director
vjones@gustavus.edu

Laura Shilling

Administrative Assistant
lshillin@gustavus.edu

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at the center

with Philip Bryant

The Land Where Blues was Born?



Philip Bryant
Professor of English

Two events of note took place this January Term while I taught History of the Blues: the first was some of the coldest temperatures registered in Minnesota during January. The second and more important was the inauguration of Barack Obama, as the 44th president of the United States. Most people quite correctly thought about this momentous historic event in terms of the Civil Rights struggle and the late Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King's *I Have A Dream* speech, which he gave at the Lincoln Memorial located across the National Mall from, but well within sight of, the Capitol steps where Obama was sworn into office. Our often troubled and stormy history took on a rare and hopeful symmetry this January, as a result of Dr. King's speech of 45 years ago and Barack Obama now becoming our president. As I shivered on my way to teach my History of the Blues class on Inauguration Day, I was warmed by the thought of this symmetry and having lived through a large portion of this recent history myself, fully appreciating the great significance of having it somehow miraculously occur in my own lifetime.

As I was teaching that day about the history of the Mississippi Delta Blues and Robert Johnson in particular, I was thinking about the historical symmetry of music born directly out of the experiences of rank oppression and great hardships of a people who went on to create the music that would be called *The Blues*. This music, which is so rooted in the very depths of that Southern darkness it came from, has gone on to become one of the essential weight-bearing pillars that all extant American music and culture rests upon. Without the Blues there would be no jazz, rock, R&B, country and western, soul, hip-hop, rap, gospel, Broadway musicals, alternative, progressive, or folk music. What a truly profound gift these mostly poor, indigent, and set-upon people in the Delta and elsewhere in the South gave to this country and thus to the whole world. They didn't consciously set out to create a music that would profoundly impact culture and identity as it has surely done. These Delta folks were just singing and playing music that powerfully spoke to and about their own lives and who they thought they really were as human beings, in the most *human* of terms. In the process created "classic" works of art in the same vein as that of lyric and epic poetry of Greek and Roman antiquity.

And thus in the freezing January cold of Minnesota we appreciate and celebrate their great achievement, trying to understand and finally come to grips with the symmetry of our own true American identity and its indelible connection to its often troubled and tragic history. As it was seen from the Lincoln Memorial to the steps of the Capitol on a clear cold day in January, we too can try to see that same hopeful symmetry and connection from the highest vantage point on this hill the College now stands on clear down to the Mississippi Delta where the Blues was born. ■

diversity center newsletter

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 4 : FEBRUARY 2009

HIGHER Ground

14th Annual Building Bridges Conference

by Alli Linn and Rita Stevermer -2009 Co-Chairs

Building Bridges is a student-initiated, student-led diversity conference dedicated to addressing today's pressing social and global issues. We work to increase awareness and action through inspirational speakers supplemented by interactive workshops and action steps. This year's conference, "Liberation through Education," will focus on educational inequality in the U.S. and abroad and the important influence an education has on an individual's future.

On behalf of the Building Bridges Committee, we cordially invite you to the 14th annual Building Bridges conference on March 14, 2009.

For more information, check out gustavus.edu/diversity/buildingbridges

Building Bridges Conference Schedule

- 9:00 p.m. Registration
- 10:00 p.m. Welcoming Address and Keynote Speakers
- 12:30 p.m. Lunch (on your own)
- 2:00 p.m. Workshops
- 3:00 p.m. Workshops
- 4:00 p.m. Workshops
- 5:00 p.m. Action Piece

Housing Selection Process

by Erin Berreth

Choosing a place to live can be stressful. To help you out, we have compiled information about the process you will go through in choosing your housing selection for next year. Below you will find a brief summary of the step-by-step instructions that you should be aware of throughout Spring Semester. While this may answer the immediate "hows," please be sure to read through the complete information and instructions on our website: <http://gustavus.edu/reslife/HousingSelection/>.

On February 9, your housing priority number will be posted and your profile updated. WebAdvisor will allow you to double-check the information that Datatel has for you. If you believe it is incorrect, please come to the Residential Life Office during walk-in hours to discuss this with either Erin or Charlie. It is your responsibility to validate your "Housing Profile" and come to Residential Life if you believe there are errors.

Please visit the *Important Dates Page* of the housing selection website. This page identifies the *Range of Days* to apply for specific types of housing. During the *Range of Days* that you apply, (remember, this is not a first-come, first-serve based process) one member of your group must go to the website to enter your group's preferences any time during the range of days. Failure to enter your group's preferences during the designated *Range of Days* will result in you NOT participating in this particular process. NO extensions will be given. The WebAdvisor screens explain the process steps. You will need the following information to complete the process:

- Your WebAdvisor user name and password.
- ID numbers for each member of your group.
- Listing of individual units in which you would like to live. You are asked to rank in order 12 of these.
- Listing of buildings in which you would prefer to live in the event you do not receive any of your individual units.

Roughly five to seven days after the closing of the website, following the *Range of Days*, each group member will receive an e-mail indicating the room to which you were assigned. Please remember, if questions or concerns arise at any point in the process, you are welcome to stop into the Residential Life Office during walk-in hours every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 3:00 to 4:30 p.m., throughout Spring Semester.

Good Luck!!! ■

Marlinda Sherbert *student profile*



“Gustavus has prepared me for the “real world” and, inspired by the Diversity Center, I will continue to help people.”

My name is Marlinda Sherbert and I am a senior theatre and history double major. As I undertake my last spring semester, I think back on all the great experiences I have had. I have done a little of everything here at Gustavus: Gustavus Cheer, theatre, dance, and even choir. Being involved has broadened my perspective and experiences.

The Diversity Center has been a major factor in creating a comfortable learning environment that enabled me to have accomplished so much during my four years. I have participated in the Pan African Student Organization, “I Am . . . We Are,” and Diversity Leadership Council, and I am a member of Zeta Chi Phi Multicultural Sorority, Incorporated. The Diversity Center has not only provided the support for me to participate in these organizations but has also given me a voice in the Gustavus community. As I think back to my first year, the Diversity Center has helped me to attain my dreams and goals. The support of the staff, for all students, has helped me speak out for social justice.

I have had many good and bad experiences here at Gustavus, from participating in protests to helping plan the Kwanzaa celebration during my freshmen and sophomore years. I am glad I have grown as a person from these memorable experiences. Gustavus has prepared me for the “real world” and, inspired by the Diversity Center, I will continue to help people. Next fall, I plan to attend law school in a hot climate because my love for Gustavus has not changed my dislike for the cold! I hope to dabble in sports/entertainment law and become an advocate for juveniles and sick children.

I have a lot of things that I would like to leave you with, but I think President Barack Obama sums up what I have been trying to do all my life and during my time here at Gustavus: “Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.” So as a great Gustavus cheerleader would say, “Go Gusties!!!” ■

“Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.”

— President Barack Obama

Diversity Center Calendar

February 13

The 2nd Annual Spoken Word

February 19-21 | 8-10:30 p.m.

The Other Shore

February 22 | 2-4:30 p.m.

The Other Shore

February 26 | 7-8 p.m.

Professor Patrice Rankine speaks on "Black Athena"

March 4 | 6:30-9 p.m. | Alumni Hall

African Night

March 14

Building Bridges Conference

College Calendar

February 9-28

Minnesota Campus Energy Challenge

February 12 | 7-9 p.m.

Physician/Activist Ashis Brahma to Speak About Darfur

February 14 | 6:30-10 p.m.

The Echo's Big Band Music

February 15 | 7:30-9 p.m.

"Contemplative Mind in Society"

February 16 | 7:30-8:30 p.m.

"Quantum Mechanics and the Dalai Lama"

February 26 | 5-7:30 p.m.

Gustavus Study Abroad Returnees: "Pizza and Pictures"

March 2 | 7:30-8:30 p.m.

John Kendall Lecture Series

March 4 | 7:30-9 p.m.

West Point's Jazz Knights in Concert

World Watch and **Cultural Connections** are brought to you by Crossroads. Through their shared interest in world cultures, languages, and contemporary global issues, members work to develop a broader understanding of the world in which they live and contribute to the education of the College community as a whole. Think Globally, Act Locally—The Crossroads Program.

World Watch

Mexico: Violence continues —

Violent deaths were as common in Mexico as in Iraq in 2008. Almost 6,000 people were shot, decapitated, or otherwise "disappeared" and over 700 kidnapped in the escalating battle between drug traffickers. In its last days in office, the Bush administration came to the drastic conclusion that Mexico may soon become a failed state.

Italy (Rome): Immigrant attacked —

Italian police have arrested three young men for allegedly beating and setting on fire an Indian immigrant in a town near Rome. The attack has sparked outrage in Italy and fueled a debate on its attitude toward immigrants.

Zimbabwe (Africa): Inflation runs rampant —

Zimbabwe is revaluing its dollar again, removing twelve zeros from the currency with immediate effect. The country is in the grip of world-record hyperinflation. Only last month, a Z\$100 trillion note was introduced (worth about \$30) and the government moved to allow people to use foreign currencies alongside Zimbabwe's dollar.

Middle East: Push for peace —

French President Sarkozy was meeting Monday with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and the prime minister of Qatar in an attempt to forge a lasting halt to violence after Israel's recent offensive in the Gaza Strip. President Barack Obama's new Mideast envoy, George Mitchell, was meeting with Sarkozy's chief of staff and French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner.

Cultural Connection

Feb. 9 – Tu B'Shevat (Arbor Day – Jewish):

This day celebrates Judaism's root in the Natural world.

Feb. 9-15 – Random Acts of Kindness Week (International):

Established in 1995, the movement inspires people to share kindness with one another as they discover the power these acts have to effect positive change as relationships are created and community connections nourished.

Feb. 23 – Shivatri (Hindu):

Commemorates the Hindu deity Lord Shiva's performance of the Tandav, the cosmic dance of creation and destruction. Includes a 24-hour fast and pilgrimage to major shrines to worship.