Respond to Violence: Social Activism- #R2V4Act

By Donnica Gordon
Associate Editor

On, Wednesday, Mar. 1, Governors State University hosted the 4th installment of its Respond to Violence (R2V), multimedia initiative. Created by Associate Professor of Communications, Yvette Brown, this year’s R2V theme was “Social Activism” based upon the “Social Change Model of Leadership Development”.

The program, expertly hosted by Sean Smith, was filmed in front of a live-studio audience, and consisted of two parts. Part 1 was the Social Activism portion featuring a panel of four engaging presenters who delivered “Ted Talk” styled presentations focused upon various ways in which students can proactively and effectively participate in social activism.

Each talk was richly packed with sage wisdom and practical advice designed to engage students around the idea of leadership from the inside – out: first changing themselves, then their communities, and then the world.

The first speaker was Guest Lecturer, Dr. John P. Dugan, Assoc. Professor of Higher Education from Loyola University, and a co-founder of the “Social Change Model for Leadership” whose talk centered on social and community activism as leadership. Dugan’s main message was that leadership and social activism are synonymous – that the most pressing social, political, and scientific issues we face are all rooted in social issues that are manifested and best addressed through social activism.

Dugan then set out to define the positive and negative connotations of the word, “leadership”. He traced his trajectory of his initial understanding and rejection of “leadership” as a top-down, authoritarian construct, and ultimate embrace of the notion of social activism-based “leadership” as found in the social change model of leadership development based in engagement. Dugan shared the three premises central to the model:

1.) Anyone can be a leader with the proper development
2.) Leadership is collective action – about the relationships we form, and how we leverage them for social change; and
3.) Situates social justice as inherent to and embedded in the deepest parts of how we understand ourselves.

Next, Dr. Shea Dunham, GSU Associate Professor of Psychology & Counseling spoke about leadership and self-care. Dr. Dunham touched upon Individual Self-Care coping strategies as students prepare to be leaders and activists. Her main message was that self-care and self-awareness are essential practices for being effective as a leader and activist committed to being a social change agent. Dunham shared an acronym for CARE that encapsulates the principles of self-care and self-awareness:

Coping
Assessing Needs
Reassessing Your Needs
Living Every day at your best

Next up was Mychael Varnarsdale, a GSU Communications Studies graduate student, student leader and activist who spoke on the importance of modeling the way for one’s peers as an act of leadership. Varnarsdale acknowledged the difficulties students face as they strive to better themselves in the midst of standing up for their community. After sharing his own life’s challenges, Varnarsdale encouraged students to persevere through life’s obstacles reminding them “it’s not about how you start, but how you finish.”

Last, but not least, Dr. Phyllis West, GSU Social Work Professor, social advocate, and global activist spoke on activism on a global level. Dr. West gave a phenomenally moving presentation on her personal experience as a Peace Corps volunteer in Sierra Leone, a member of GSU’s Global Health Brigade, and the life-transforming experience that global service and activism provides for students. West urged all students to catch the virus of service – a contagious Spirit that represents “mad love for humanity” allowing us to express ourselves locally and globally through service and action on behalf of others.

Part two of the program consisted of a 30-minute Q & A with the student audience where the presenters answered questions on how to become effective social activists and leaders.

Presenters: Mychael Varnarsdale, Dr. Phyllis West, Sean Smith (Host), Yvette Brown (Creator and Producer), Dr. Shea Dunham and Dr. John P. Dugan.

Photo by Donnica Gordon.
Hidden Figures is a inspiring movie that tells the story of three real-life American heroes and space pioneers who helped advanced the progress of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), helped change the course of American space exploration, and were the minds behind one of the most important and pivotal achievements in US space history: successfully launching astronaut John Glenn into orbit in 1962. Until the launch of Glenn, the US was trailing Russia in the “Space Race”. The leadership and chief scientists at NASA were at a loss as to how to turn things around. Nothing they tried worked. The US was at great risk of loosing its position as a global leader in space exploration. Everyone around the world was watching.

Enter Katherine G. Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson: three brilliant African-American women who were working in NASA’s segregated “Colored Computers” pool. Ms. Katherine Johnson, born in 1918, was a mathematician, physicist, and space scientist whose ability to conduct complex mathematical analysis and orbital equations by hand was literally second to none. Ms. Johnson continued to work at NASA until 1986 (at age 68), combining her mathematical skills with electronic computing to help enable the success of the Apollo Moon landing program as well as the beginning of the Space Shuttle program among many other advancements. Ms. Dorothy Vaughan, born in 1918, was also a respected mathematician and computer-programming pioneer who initially headed the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics’ (NACA – NASA’s predecessor) segregated West Area Computing Unit operated by black women. Vaughan moved on to become NASA’s first black supervisor, and one of its few female supervisors.

When NACA transitioned to NASA, and segregated facilities were abolished, Vaughan, Johnson, Jackson, and many other computers of color trained by Vaughan, joined the new Analysis and Computation Division where Vaughan became an expert and leader in FORTRAN computer programming among a racially and gender-integrated group on the frontier of electronic computing at NASA. Ms. Mary Jackson, born in 1921, was a mathematician and aeronautical engineer who became NASA’s first black female engineer in an era when female engineers of any ethnicity were a rarity. After working as an engineer at NASA for nearly 20 years, Jackson became frustrated at the firmly entrenched glass ceiling that would not allow her to rise into management-level grades. Ms. Jackson finally took a demotion to fill an open management position as Langley’s Federal Women’s Program Manager. In this position, she tirelessly worked to champion the hiring and promotion of the next generation of all female mathematicians, engineers, and scientists at NASA, regardless of ethnicity.

The stories of these women are remarkable on many levels, the least of which involve the many racial and gender based obstacles they encountered and overcame in servitude to their country and humanity. On top of the institutionalized barriers of racism and sexism, these women were also wives, mothers, and devoted community servants. It is not a stretch to say without these trail-blazing women, NASA, and American space travel would not be where it is today.

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Hidden Figures No More

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On Tuesday, February 28, 2017, nearly 100 years after Katherine G. Johnson, the sole surviving member of these three remarkable trio of pioneers was born, President Trump signed two bills that will support the advancement of women in STEM-based careers and entrepreneurship, especially as it pertains to space exploration and improvement of the human condition.

According to President Trump, H.R. 255, known as the Promoting Women in Entrepreneurship Act, “enables the National Science Foundation to support women inventors, researchers, and scientists in bringing their discoveries to the business world, championing science and entrepreneurship, and creating new ways to improve people’s lives.”

Additionally, H.R. 321, known as the INSPIRE Women Act, “ensures that the existing NASA programs recruit women to STEM-related jobs and aerospace careers” which according to Trump, will involve women in the execution of NASA programming in significant ways.

The White House reports that only 1 in 4 women with STEM degrees is currently working in the field. These bills particularly endeavor to help women with STEM-related degrees to be able to secure “STEM jobs that can support their families, as well as to gain leadership roles in the STEM industry.

Women like Johnson, Vaughan, and Jackson sat markers, and paved the way for all women to master science, technology, engineering, and math and to make significant contributions to American STEM-based advancement.

Ms. Katherine Johnson was born on August 26, which happens to be Women’s Equality Day. And this month, we are also celebrating National Women’s History Month. As we salute the achievements of these remarkable women, let’s also seize the day and unfolding opportunities to continue to encourage, educate, and equip all women and girls with STEM-based knowledge and skills to advance our communities, our nation, and the world.

The university joined in with over a million readers to celebrate dynamic and compelling literary works by African American authors. Through the efforts of the Black Caucus of NCTE, or the National Council for Teachers of English, literacy was promoted and became a significant part of the campus’ Black History Month celebration.

Readers from all over Chicagoland communities, including campus faculty and students, came out to share some profound literary works by African American authors. Literature read included narratives, speeches, and songs.

Afterwards, Dr. Rashidah Muhammad, organizer of the read-in, stated that Dr. Jerrie Cobb Scott, the founder of the African American Read-in had passed away, just last week. Dr. Muhammad then shared a short life history of Dr. Scott and asked for the audience to stand and thank her for her contributions.

The first participant was Flannery Marak, Dr. Marak’s daughter, who read “This is Love” by Common. Next, Dr. Marak read a poem by Langston Hughes. A line of readers began to form as we read from the university including Provost Dr. Deborah Bordelon, Dr. Harris, Dr. Ellen Walsh, Dr. David Golland, and more.

Students, staff, and additional faculty from various colleges in the university began to join the line to read. A variety of people from the university and the larger GSU community brought their families and friends to participate in the read-in.

Many children and young adults participated by contributing poetry and spoken word. There were also a few authors who graciously performed their original work for the audience. The audience was touched when two sisters performed. Na’iah Shahid the younger sister performed, “The Ballad of Birmingham” by Dudley Randall. The older sister, Zarifah Shahid, performed, “Still I Rise” by Maya Angelou. Both of them received standing ovations.

This moving event was sponsored by the CAS, English Department, Student Life, and the Black Caucus of NCTE. Dr. Muhammad was the residing faculty member who hosted the stirring event. The read-in generated a large turnout.

Dr. Muhammad stated next year, the time may have to be extended to accommodate the huge amount of participants.

The 28th Annual National African American Read-In

By Danielle Terry
Contributing Writer and Brenda Torres
Editor-in-Chief

On Monday, Feb. 27, GSU hosted the 28th annual and National African American Read-in. The university joined in with over a million readers to celebrate dynamic and compelling literary works by African American authors. Through the efforts of the Black Caucus of NCTE, or the National Council for Teachers of English, literacy was promoted and became a significant part of the campus’ Black History Month celebration.

Readers from all over Chicagoland communities, including

Club Spotlight

GSU Program Council

By Melanie Fitch
Staff Reporter

This week’s Spotlight is shining on the GSU Program Council. The GSU Program Council (GSUPC) is comprised of a dedicated group of students who work in collaboration with Student Life to create campus programs and events for the GSU student body.

GSUPC represents the student voice in the creation of student-centered programs and events. They also promote campus involvement, and celebrate student diversity through timely and meaningful programs. Through the programming process, students also develop valuable leadership skills that enrich their abilities to successfully enter the workplace.

Program Council logo. Photo courtesy of Jaguar Connection.

This group’s members get plenty of practice planning a variety of social and educational activities on campus such as Open Mic Night, Valentine’s Day programming, and March Madness programs. Working with GSU Program Council is an avenue for students to have a say in what happens on campus while developing organizational and planning skills.

In addition to gaining event planning experience, Program Council participants are also able to network with GSU faculty and staff through their programming and planning activities. This allows council members to develop professional networking skills as well as social or professional connections which may provide opportunities and open doors in the future.

The GSUPC is open to all interested students. They meet weekly on Tuesdays from 3:30 – 4:30pm in Room B2200.

The African American Read-In at GSU. Photo by Brenda Torres.

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The African American Read-In at GSU. Photo by Brenda Torres.
Devan Kohn, GSU Communications, Film, and Media Major. Photo courtesy of Mr. Kohn

What’s in a Name?

By Dana Solatka
Staff Reporter

The topic of “fake news” is everywhere. Our president goes on and on about it. Googlepulls up 174 million search results in sixtenths of a second. Some news stations propagate it while others band against it. But what exactly is “fake news”?

“Fake news is not a new phenomenon,” said GSU librarian Josh Sopiarz. “This is something we’re seeing a lot of and hearing a lot of right now.” He continued, “There is fake news which are things sort of made up out of nowhere and I also think that there is real news. What’s most troubling is that there are people in positions of power who are saying that things are fake news that are ostensibly not fake just because they don’t agree with it or they are unhappy with it.”

Sopiarz gave a more solid definition of fake news, “A fake news story, to me, is something that is whole-cloth invented or even if it took a kernel of truth and embellished it to the point where it’s no longer a fact—that’s fake.” He elaborated on how people usually “didn’t see a lot of [fake news]. It was kinda hidden away in the fringes.”

“It’s really dangerous to call real news ‘fake news’ when fake news exists and people may not even know to determine what’s real and what’s fake”, Sopiarz continued.

When asked about the difference between fake news and incorrect or misinformed news, Sopiarz said, “Everyone has a worldview. People are very eager to see that worldview confirmed.”

He elaborated on the impact, “For a lot of folks, they see people on television saying something that validates [their worldview]. That gives it weight. For a long time people have used the free press to get their information. There has always been press on the side that has been a little bit more yellow. But that was always perceived as what it was.”

Elaborating on how fake news came into existence, Sopiarz said, “Things have a conservative or liberal bend, but in general people working for these news outlets are beholden to certain ethics that they learned in journalism school. So I think one of the big problems is you have people who are just creating things and just putting them on the internet.”

He continued talking about confirmation bias, “They might seem just true in a way just enough to confirm your worldview and people kind of run with it. I think my definition of ‘fake news’ differs from what the current administration’s definition of fake news is. I think the big problem is there’s been a big effort in this country in the last probably 20 years or more to sort of discredit the mainstream media. We’ve heard it called the ‘mainstream media’ and I don’t believe this’ and people would look for alternative news sources on the internet or on radio and people would find confirmation bias and sort of run with it.”

When asked about how to challenge or confirm news sources, Sopiarz said, “It’s always a good idea to think critically and approach anything you encounter critically.” He continued, “Whether it be the New York Times or wherever it’s from.”

Sopiarz suggests checking if other news outlets are saying the same thing (if they do it’s likely a credible source) noting that papers and well established news outlets are safe to assume as credible; asking a librarian; and staying away from search engines like Google (use the library search database).

Campus

Spring Break Trip to India

By Hannah Carroll
Contributing Writer

The College of Business (COB) will be traveling to India during the GSU Spring Break.

Led by faculty member, Dr. Ushvala Rajadhyaksha and advisor, Karen Williams, twelve students will be exploring the cities of Delhi, Agra, and Mumbai to enrich their studies and sense of culture.

Once in India, the group will be studying at NMIMS Business School and also get to check out Nimap Infotech, where they will further their business education and learn about India’s IT and gaming industries.

Don’t be fooled though, this trip is not solely educational, there will certainly be some fun too!

The group will be experiencing the Holi Festival (Color Festival), a celebration for the arrival of spring, where people flood the streets with color and joy.

Old city sight-seeing in Delhi, various tours of temples and temples including the Shiva, and even a sunset viewing of the Taj Mahal are among other activities to be enjoyed by the group.

Wish our students and staff safe travels and be sure to stay up to date with The Phoenix for a follow-up on the trip with student testimonials and pictures!
A Presentation on the African Presence in Mexico

By Brenda Torres
Editor-in-Chief

The Association of Latin American Students sponsored a presentation of the African Presence in Mexico. Eric Garcia gave the presentation. Garcia is from the National Museum of Mexican Art, located in the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago.

Garcia asked the audience if they had ever heard of the African Presence in Mexico? A few raised their hands and Garcia began the presentation.

"When we think of the Mexican identity, often people think of the indigenous of the Americas mixing with the Spanish Europeans. Not many people consider or often think about this third root. The other part of the equation, which is the African identity, the African side that is part of the equation of the Mexican identity," stated Garcia.

Garcia also mentioned that the African identity within the Mexican identity, is sometimes lost, forgotten or erased.

First, Garcia went further than Mexico for the African presence. He explained the presence of Africans in Spain. In 711 AD, the Moorish Islamic, what is present day Morocco, invaded the Iberian Peninsula, which is present day parts of Spain and Portugal. After the invasion, they ruled 700 years and the empire was called Al-Andalus.

According to Garcia, the Al-Andalus Empire had the best universities, with scholars studying astronomy, architecture and various art while the rest of Europe were still in the middle ages.

Garcia then spoke on the marriage of Isabella and Ferdinand, which he stated was very important as their marriage enabled them to conquer the Iberian Peninsula in the name of Catholicism, know as the Reconquista.

Next, Garcia laid out how Columbus stumbled upon, and subsequently conquered the Americas. He brought some of the cultural legacy gleaned from the Moorish rule of the Iberian Peninsula. Garcia explained subsequently, that many words in the Spanish language come from the Arabic language.

Following, Garcia asked the audience if they knew of any African explorers of the Americas? Nobody knew of any, so he introduced the audience to Estevanico. He was an African slave, that was put on an expedition to make a colony in what is now present day Florida, but it was unsuccessful. Therefore, the explorer’s head was knocked off to Hispaniola, but they were hit by storms and routed to the present day southwest United States.

There were only four survivors and among them were Estevanico and Cabeza de Vaca, a well known Spanish explorer. They were lost for eight years until found in 1536 by Spanish scouts.

Garcia shared that there are different tales of what Estevanico did for the Spanish. Since Estevanico was lost in the southwest and northern parts of Mexico, the Spanish wanted him to find the Seven Cities of Gold. They did not find the Seven Cities of Gold and Estevanico was killed during one of their expeditions.

Next, Garcia discussed the further conquering of the Americas entailing on Hernan Cortes, who conquered the Aztec empire, taking it over by 1521.

The Spanish brought many communicable diseases over with them such as smallpox that consequently killed the majority of the indigenous people. Garcia continued to explain that in order for Spanish to have laborers, they brought people from Africa and enslaved them. Garcia stated that it is estimated that Brazil alone brought over 4 million African slaves.

Garcia then spoke about the slave revolt that was led by Gaspar Yanga. He was an escaped slave who led one of the first successful slave revolts in the Americas. Yanga established a community in the area of present day Veracruz, Mexico. Yanga and his community came to a truce with the Spanish army. They were allowed to have their own town called San Lorenzo de los Negros, which translates St. Lawrence of the Blacks. The city changed its name to Yanga in later times.

Garcia then spoke about the independence of Mexico which occurred in 1821. He explained that Jose Maria Morales, a general of the war, he was of African descent.

Vicente Guerrero, another general during the War for Independence, was also of African decent, and later became the second president of Mexico. "Who would have ever thought that two of the most important figures in Mexican History are of African descent? Not many people say this, not many people know about this," stated Garcia.

Garcia also stated that Guerrero went on to establish the abolishment of slavery in Mexico in 1821, but it did not go into effect until 1826.

Garcia then fast-forwarded to more modern times to when Mexico served as a sanctuary country during the Jim Crow Laws. Mexico was a sanctuary for Langston Hughes and Elizabeth Catlett.

The National Museum of Mexican Art, in 2006, made the exhibition dedicated to the African Presence within Mexico that traveled nationally in the US, and also traveled to Mexico.

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Photo courtesy of the National Museum of Mexican Art.

Image promoting the African Presence in Mexico.
Art

Obsession+Improvisation+Collaboration

By Victoria Strole
Contributing Writer

An exhibition exploring the connections between the creation of jazz music and studio art making practices will be showing at the GSU Visual Arts Gallery March 1—31, 2017 as part of the Southland Arts, Municipalities, and Business Alliance (S.A.M.B.A.) “Let Them Eat Jazz” inaugural festival.

The opening reception is Friday, March 10 from 5 – 7 p.m. This event is free and open to the public. In expression of the S.A.M.B.A. festival’s jazz theme, Jeff Stevenson, Director of the GSU Visual Arts Gallery, has sought out Chicago area artists that, like jazz, demonstrate obsession, improvisation, and collaboration to participate in the current exhibition. Exhibiting artists are Michael Paxton for his obsessive mark making; Victoria Eleanor Bradford and her dance improvisation; married artist collaborators Dutes Miller and Stan Shellabarger; and GSU Alumni Jan Meister collaborating with Jaime Foster.

Paxton, a professor from Columbia College, creates large-scale paintings on raw, unstretched canvases that are anxious and aggressive. When you see them, you’ll likely agree that the purge of emotions he lays on each canvas is palatable. He has created all the never-before-seen works that will be on display in the Visual Arts Gallery within the last three months. Paxton says it’s all based on reflections from the book “Soul Mountain.”

This genuinely coincides with his artist statement that his search for truth started by searching the edges but is now turned inward to search the center.

Victoria Bradford is a trained painter and sculpture who has found her voice in performance art. She considers her dance performances to straddle painting and sculpture, using her body to create lines in space. Her story of being a struggling artist is wonderfully honest and admirably tenacious. Pushing herself to practice and share everyday, she works to create micro-dances seeking new movement and intervention in ongoing recitations of neighborhood dances, which are documented with an iPhone. Documentation of these dances will be on display in still photo format and video for the exhibition. Check out her website to find out about all her wild ideas on dance! victoriaeleanebradford.com

Here are Victoria’s instructions for creating your own neighborhood dance!

Dutes Miller and Stan Shellabarger are a dynamic couple who collaborate on a myriad of projects from performance, to photography, sculpture and cut paper. They are taking on the task of documenting the rhythm of human relations, from “common human interactions to queer relationships.” They have an ongoing performance piece known as “The Pink Tube” that has been performed internationally and locally including at the Museum of Contemporary Arts in Chicago. The performance is a meditation on the ideas of what connects them while simultaneously separating them. Overall, their work effectuates a sweetly intimate, and playfully odd vibe with a great sense of humor.

Collaborators, Janice Meister and Jaime Foster are bringing 2-D work that is small in size, but equipped with a strong visual punch. It’s dynamic and colorful, with very thought-provoking titles. All of the works have a nature theme that look like a moment of creation has been frozen in time. Meister and Foster deliver a distinctly feminine treatment of the nature theme that is eternally inspiring.

Library Archive Feature

This Week in GSU History: Women’s Week 1972

The Phoenix will begin to publish clips from student newspapers in the GSU Library Archives.

By Matthew DiGrispino
Library Intern

The 1970s were a time in which the feminist movement was seeking greater equality for all women in the United States. It so happens that GSU’s old newspaper, The Innovator, talks about celebrating “Women’s Week” the week of May 8-13, 1972.

These events included discussions with GSU professors who were experienced with women rights. Some of the discussions were “Women As Agents of Change In Society”, “Women’s Rights and The Law”, and “Women and Their Bodies”.

Other events included analyzing images of women in art and media, watching films about women, and a “Coffeehouse” with entertainment. I find this to be amazing as women are often forgotten people within our human history who need to be remembered and honored more.

This Week in GSU History: Women’s Week 1972

Screenshot of The Innovator from 1972, Volume 1 Issue 2, celebrating Women’s Week. Photo courtesy of the GSU Library Archives
Karaoke Night at GSU is a night of fun & discovery of talents.
Join Program Council’s production of Karaoke and unwind every 1st Tuesday.
Even if you are a novice singer or performer, come out and enjoy the relaxing ambiance.
Engbretson Hall    6:00-7:30pm
March 7th & April 4th

5 Days of Giveaways for socially active Jaguars!
To qualify Like, Share or Retweet a Student Life social media post.
March 6 -10, 2017
First person each day receives free Student Life swag!
(must show post to SL staff)

Facebook @GSU4StudentLife
Twitter @GSUStudentLife
Instagram GSU.StudentLife
Models, Entertainers and Volunteers Needed
for the
Multicultural Fashion Show on April 10th, 2017
Information session is on March 7th, 2017 at 3pm in room A2110.

The International Culture Organization (ICO) is hosting their annual
signature event, which is The Multicultural Fashion Show!
The Show will take place in the CPA Lobby from 2:00 – 4:00 p.m.
ICO is looking for models/entertainers who would love to represent
their country or another country!

If you would like to participate, please attend the information session
or email Brenda Rock @ brock@student.govst.edu.