

Focus on Faculty

Where is the Love?

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In early October of this year, Professor Phyllis Jeffers headed south to Athens, GA and Orlando, FL to talk about Hip Hop at the National Association for the Study of African American History and Life National Conference.

In Georgia, she served as a guest lecturer at the University of Georgia Athens, where she spoke to students enrolled in a course titled, “Hip Hop and The History of Black Intellectual Thought,” taught by Duboisian (W.E.B.) scholar and education historian, Dr. Derrick Alridge.

During her hour-long lecture, she asked the students to consider the black radical feminist work of June Jordan and the writings of bell hooks, author of many works on black feminism as well as *Teaching to Transgress*, a pedagogical classic based on the thinking of Brazilian education pioneer Paulo Friere.

Jeffers, relying on Jordan and hooks, asserts that love is an action in which those involved choose to affirm one another’s spiritual (emotional and intellectual) growth. According to Jeffers, this love is rooted in self-love as well as efforts to create a life-affirming society for the collective.

On Friday, October 4, Jeffers and Alridge served as co-presenters on a panel organized by Alridge – Hip Hop as a Social Movement. In this context, Jeffers addressed a diverse audience of hip hop and civil rights generation African American cultural critics, historians, and educators. The panel proved to be a lively exchange between the panelists, which included Jeffers, Alridge, and Dr. James Stewart, historian and author of numerous articles on the political value of soul music and rhythm and blues.

When asked how these presentations relate to her work at MC, where she teaches English 102, a course in composition and argument, as well as English 101, an expository writing course, and English 135 – African American Literature, she smiles broadly and laughs out loud. “Well, obviously hip hop has permeated every aspect of our society. Our students listen to it. Some of them live it. Some of them don’t like it per se, but they are a part of a generation of young people who can’t escape its influence. Hip Hop is the most recent iteration of black cultural expression to go mainstream – like rock and roll! I don’t see how I could be effective as a teacher if I didn’t have some knowledge of the hip hop culture, its music and its other forms of expression.”

Jeffers goes on to explain that critique is necessary; however, she insists that blatant disdain and dismissal of the genre is problematic because as Yvonne Bynoe states in her essay “How Ya’ Like Me Now?:



Phyllis Jeffers as photographed by Emanuel Waters

(See Love, page 3)

Hands-on in Sociology

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I've been a college instructor for about three decades. I started as a teaching assistant at American University where my first teaching assignment was a course on Contemporary Sociological Theory—the irony being that I had never taken a course in contemporary theory in my entire life! Since I had once taught archery at a summer camp without ever having shot one arrow, I was undaunted. I think this is the proper attitude to have when approaching new and old courses as a “seasoned” but still enthusiastic teacher. We can always learn new tricks and periodically revitalize discarded techniques when a new situation calls for action.

Currently I am teaching two Introduction to Sociology classes at Montgomery College (Rockville Campus) and four courses at a local university. I do a wide variety of different activities with my six classes but would like to focus on the research methodology assignment that I do (and have done for years) with Introduction to Sociology at Montgomery College.

Not long ago, amidst the fear of the sniper attacks, I was walking from group to group within my classroom in the Humanities Building. The room was buzzing with lively and enthusiastic talk and the feeling of temporary security was a welcome relief. My students were working on research methodology projects, which are group activities where students get to do either a simple survey, observational research project or controlled experiments. The process (and I have specific steps and requirements) is the most important part of this assignment. Students have a lot of leeway in regard to what they choose to do, though I act as an ethics committee of one. Individuals' rights and safety are factors that must always be considered. Consequently when a group wanted to do an observational project on behavior at gas stations during the sniper time, I vetoed that but suggested a survey instead. A survey could be given indoors by way of a questionnaire and could tap information about whether the respondents had

changed their behavior during the sniper attacks. One group from each of my classes did surveys on this topic; both groups found interesting differences between males and females in reported behavior.

Given the need to keep students active but out of harm's way, I added another type of research this semester, which



Photograph by Juan Sevillano

is content analysis. This allowed one enthusiastic group to safely watch sampled episodes of the Simpsons in order to evaluate the shows for violence. The group watched episodes from three different time periods; they created a sheet to systematize their observations; they decided on their dependent and independent variables; they systematized their data and reported it along with their interpretations of the data and an analysis of how they could improve their research if they had more time and money (a grant). This group wanted to see if the number of violent acts in the episodes had increased or decreased over time and they were also interested in whether a researcher's gender or perspective as a Simpson's fan or non-fan had an effect on how she interpreted violence in the programs.

Groups always get to present their research which the whole class enjoys. We all ask questions and make comments and suggestions. Over the years I have been amazed at the creativity that has come from these projects. Students usually end up with a much better understanding of what social scientific research is all about and for many it introduces them to a technique that can be used in business (market research) or for any employment as a policy tool or as a human service barometer.

Though lecture material is still essential in my classes, I find that hands-on activities are usually well received. Hands-on work is one technique that also helps foster self-esteem and self-confidence though the learning process. ❖

(Love, from page 1)

Rap and Hip Hop Come of Age¹,” “Hip Hop is simply a metaphor for our lives. If our elders give up on Hip Hop, then they’ve given up on us” (98). Linking Bynoe’s comment to her teaching philosophy, Jeffers asserts that educators can’t teach students (hip hoppers, anarchists, or second language learners, etc.) who they have given up on, who they seem in the worst-case scenario to despise.

Jeffers hopes that her colleagues and her students will recognize that Hip Hop cannot be reduced to the songs and videos in heavy rotation on commercial radio or on MTV and BET. Instead, she encourages us to see it as part of the

African American literary tradition of self-expression by acknowledging artists such as Mos Def, Public Enemy, Common, Erykah Badu, Jill Scott, and Michael Franti, all of whom Jeffers insists carry on the important work of writers like James Baldwin and Gwendolyn Brooks because they insist on producing works that are life-affirming as required by the evaluative question, where is the love. ❖

¹ Bynoe, Yvonne. “How Ya’ Like Me Now?: Rap and Hip Hop Come of Age *Race and Resistance: African Americans in the 21st Century*. Herb Boyd, Editor. Cambridge: South End Press, 2002. 89-99.



From the Director of the CTL



As teachers we are innovators of new ideas and techniques. We seek ways to communicate effectively with our students so that learning flourishes. No matter what approach we try, success is measured by how well communication occurs.

Different ways to communicate with students are explored in this issue. Phyllis Jeffers explains how she uses Hip Hop expression to connect with her students. Charlotte Twombly employs creative “hands on” activities to help students understand social scientific research. Rose Sachs addresses the need to include disability studies as an area of study.

We look forward to working with you again during the January Professional Week. We at the CTL wish you the very best in the holiday season and in the new year. You’ve earned this respite. ❖

--Helen Youth

Professional Week Offerings

New Faculty Lunch and Orientation

Thur., Jan. 16, Lunch, 12:00-1:00 p.m., 009 HU, Orientation, 1:00-4:00 p.m., 010 HU, Rockville

Learning Community Development Retreat

Tue., Jan. 21, 8:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m., 105 SN, Takoma Park, Marcia Bronstein, Facilitator

Fostering a Respectful Learning Environment (Rockville Council and CTL presentation)

Tue., Jan. 21, 1:00-3:30 p.m., 136 TC, Rockville

Service Learning Benefits to Students, presented by Gail Robinson, Coordinator of SL from the American Association of Community Colleges

Wed., Jan. 22, 12:00-3:00 p.m., 222-224 GITE, Rockville

Collegewide Faculty Showcase

Thur., Jan. 23, 1:45-3:00 p.m., Theater Arts, Rockville

CTL Rubric Workshop for Nursing Faculty

Fri., Jan. 24, 9:00-11:00 a.m., 122 NP, Takoma Park

Part-time Faculty Bootcamp

Sat, Jan. 25, 9:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m., 136 TC, Rockville

Guidelines for Contributions to

Focus on Faculty

The deadline for submission of articles for the next issue of *Focus on Faculty* is January 31, 2003. Please submit typed, double-spaced, copies of your articles of no more than 650 words by e-mail to esiegel@mc.cc.md.us.

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Disability Studies: Seeds of Change

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Knowledge and understanding are the seeds of change and the tools of empowerment. So far educators have been sorely remiss by excluding the history and shared experience of individuals with disabilities as an area of study. This omission is significant academically because it diminishes the breadth and depth

of education, and functionally because it perpetuates the inferior status of individuals with disabilities.

Over the past twenty-five years, Disability Support Services at Montgomery College has been at the forefront in providing services to students with disabilities. The College Access Program was among the first to address the academic and psychosocial needs of post-secondary students with learning disabilities. In 1986, four years before the passage of the American with Disabilities Act, Montgomery College established the first comprehensive Assistive Technology Laboratory in the area. Adding the perspective of Disability Studies to the existing model of

program architecture and accommodation provides an opportunity to further eliminate barriers that shape the lives of persons with disabilities.

Disability Studies distinguishes between the demands of an impairment and the effects of disability within a social, political, and economic context. Because consciousness raising is a critical first step to all social and political change, it is important to include disability as a social construct in any course that examines the experience of discrete groups within the broader society, that surveys history, and/or that explores the ways in which image is developed and portrayed.

I would like to work collaboratively with faculty by providing information, resources, and/or teaching modules that will facilitate the inclusion of disability as a minority model, along with race, class, ethnicity, and gender, into the curriculum. Please feel free to contact me. For a more detailed discussion on integrating Disability Studies into existing curriculum. Please refer to the DSS Faculty/Staff Guide at <http://mc.cc.md.us/Department/disspvc/>. ❖



Ghana Pottery Video on Exhibit

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On November 14 I gave a slide and video presentation entitled, "Continuity and Innovation: Pottery Manufacture Among the Coastal Akan" at the African Art Museum of Maryland, in Columbia. This lecture was part of a series of presentations sponsored by the Maryland Humanities Council. Monies from this grant supported the production of a video from an ethnoarcheological project on pottery manufacture comparing how different Fante potters in coastal communities of Ghana, West Africa use both Fante *and* Asante-styled pottery techniques (Figure 1).

Through the fieldwork and research I found evidence of a historical connection between the Fante people in Elmina and the Asante culture (north of Elmina). In addition, the cultural material suggests strong evidence of intermarriage in contemporary Fante communities where Ewe techniques were used to produce vessels for sale in the local markets. This evidence of a shared culture in pottery communities is an area worth further exploration.

Look for the video at a new exhibit on Ghana at The African Art Museum of Maryland in January. Copies of the video are available by contacting Tara L. Tetrault at ttetraul@mc.cc.md.us. ❖



Figure 1: Asante influenced carinated cooking pot