“If I Can Help, Then...”

March 3, 2006

A tribute to Dr. King, Jr.

by Takiyah Nur-Amin © 2006

“...and it’s like he never left us. Dreams become clichés and deferred while love eludes us and freedom can’t be found. But, it’s like he never left us. Reduced to postage stamp memories, moral simplicity and the Capitalist ring of “I Have a Dream” in McDonald’s Commercials, BUT... it’s like he never left us. Kindergarten color cardboard cutouts while civil rights becomes a punch line. But, it’s like he never left us. Like earthly prophets who swing from thought trees in our presence. The pious eat fruit of it while fools ridicule it. But, it’s like he never left us. Like Satunites singing slang hymns in ghetto pulpits, knowing cheap language is sin and it’s like he never left us. Can you hear it? Morning’s melancholy has become tomorrow’s song and like an ancient blues riff we hear: We shall overcome... We shall overcome... We shall overcome... Someday? TODAY! ...and fear tempts us to be still. Stasis is no oasis and motionless-ness breeds ill-in-the psyche. Memories fade, leaving stolen moments as our inheritance, but today...taste it with open mouth and open heart. Run free—the future holds freedom’s melody. We must dance a new dance and sing a new song. And the movement has to carry on because HE never left us. Montgomery was more than a boycott. HE never left us. The march covered more than Washington, DC—HE never left us. The poor people’s campaign ain’t over. HE never left us... THEY tried to take him but, HE never left us... THEY tried to kill him but, HE never left us. Martin is with us. Martin is us.

Giovanni hits NY Times best-seller list

By Jean Elliott

Rosa, written by Virginia Tech’s Nikki Giovanni, rocketed to number three in the NY Times Children’s Book List in early February. Rosa, published by Holt and Company and vibrantly illustrated by Bryan Collier, tells the story of Rosa Parks, a seamstress from Montgomery, Alabama, who refused to give up her seat on a bus. This action sparked protests and ignited the civil rights movement. A University Distinguished Professor in the Department of English, Giovanni’s book has been universally well received by the media, librarians, and parents. Rosa has won the Coretta Scott King award for best illustration and also earned a Caldecott Honor. A copy of the book was presented to the Rev. Jesse Jackson as a memento of his visit to Virginia Tech on Martin Luther King day.

What they’re saying about Rosa

The Time magazine bonus section in December proclaimed, “In light of Park’s death at age 92 in October, this book seems especially timely. But its message of quiet courage is timeless.” The February edition of Parents magazine also applauded the book, saying “In honor of Black history month, be sure to read Rosa to your family. It... is the perfect way to introduce little ones to the late, great civil rights heroine.”

“Purposeful in its telling, this is a handsome and thought-provoking introduction to these watershed acts of civil disobedience,” noted Margaret Bush for the School Library Journal.

Virginia Tech celebrates the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

by Ray Plaza

Sunday, January 15, 2006, marked the first university-wide celebration honoring the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. The university honored the day by not scheduling classes, followed by an unprecedented week-long series of events brought together the university community and the surrounding community. With major speakers, service activities, teach-ins, cultural performances, and the diversity summit, the week had something for everyone.

The traditional honoring of Dr. King by the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity with a memorial service was just the beginning this year.

The Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity (CEOD) convened a university and community group to coordinate and plan the first ever University MLK Celebration. The first planning meeting provided an overview of the history of MLK observations on the campus and around the country and began an extensive brainstorming process. It was decided that the celebration should be a week-long and provide an opportunity for the entire university and local community to come together. The theme that permeated the planning was community and the importance of service.

As the committee was looking for images for the commemorative poster to publicize the event, committee member Bob Leonard suggested local artist Matheus de Oliveira. Upon viewing his portrait of Dr. King, the committee readily agreed it should represent the 2006 event and arranged permission to use the striking image that set the professional and emotive tone for the celebration.

The committee also decided to work with the local schools, as is done in other parts of the country. Superintendent of Schools in Montgomery County, Tiffany Anderson was very supportive of an essay and poster contest. The Montgomery County-Radford City-Floyd County Chapter of the NAACP agreed to fund the savings bond prizes. With only three weeks to prepare entries, there were 150 participants in the poster competition and 16 essays from Montgomery County and one from Henry County. Members of the NAACP and University officials served as judges. The winners recognized at the Community Breakfast were, K – 2nd Grade - Yang Fei, first place, Sophie Thompson, second place, Ellie Stilwell, third place; 3 – 4th Grade - Christopher Long, first place, Catherine Siegel, second place, Alder Bauer, third place; 5th Grade - Joseph McDonald, first place, Kevin Harley, Leyla Kiran, third place; 8th Grade - Ben Brightman, first place, Tylar Culver, second place, Jonathan Overton, third place. Essay winners are Erica Seales, first place, Rachel Cline, first place, Kryside Johnson, second place, and Benjamin Poff, third place.

Two home basketball games during the week provided an opportunity to promote the MLK celebration. The athletic department was interested in seeing if we could find something about Dr. King as an athlete. In a review of the literature, we
MLK Celebration...  
Continued from page 1

discovered an article that highlighted Dr. King’s role as an athlete as he was growing up and the influence that it played.

At the men’s home basketball game against Virginia on Sunday night and the women’s home basketball game against Virginia on Monday night, volunteers from the committee, students from the Presidential Campus Enrichment Grant, and athletic staff from promotions placed a folded flyer on every seat in Cassell Coliseum. The flyer had a copy of the full article on one side, and a full listing of the celebration calendar on the other side. Other activities

Community Breakfast: The committee noticed that a number of celebrations elsewhere include a prayer breakfast. The group changed the name to Community Breakfast to be more inclusive, and planned it as the first event of the MLK holiday. The committee decided that the breakfast should be free this year so that no one would be denied the opportunity to attend. About 300 attended the breakfast, which was our initial limit. (See page 2 for article about he speaker, one of the Greensboro Four.)

Service activities: It was critical that we include some type of service activity. The King Center has a focus on community service with the motto “A Day On, not a Day Off.” A meeting was held with Michele James-Deramo, the director of the Virginia Tech Service-Learning Center about the possibility of developing activities for the celebration. The response was tremendous and Service-Learning became an official partner (See page 4).

Brown bag teach-ins: Lunch hour brown bag teach-ins were modeled after the successful teach-ins conducted by the students in the DROSS Alliance in 2005, which were held on MLK Day as a way to protest the university having classes on that day. The Black Caucus agreed to coordinate this effort and Ed McPherson, president of the Black Caucus, handled the planning programs held Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday from noon until 1 p.m. McPherson focused on “Ending American Apartheid: The Need for a New Majority - a closer look at the Voting Rights Act.” The presentation provided a historical overview of what happened after the Civil War, what led to the first Voting Rights Acts, and the issues facing its current reauthorization battle.

Cark Mack – The students from the Virginia Tech chapter of the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) brought Carl Mack, NSBE executive director, back to the campus. He spoke in Haymarket Theatre to about 150 participants on the legacy of Dr. King, and the relevance of his words to what is happening in America today. Afterwards, students from NSBE and other university officials engaged in a dinner dialogue with Mack on a wide range of issues.

There was also a cultural performance (see page 3), a series of lunchtime speakers at the Multicultural Center, with Kings’ own speeches and writings available for review, international program, a movie/documentary on Dr. King, a poster session on diversity research, and the ninth annual Diversity Summit.

Diversity Summit.

Wednesday’s event, “Welcoming Newcomers,” provided arts and craft materials to make puppets, puzzles, and alphabet books for an early childhood program for refugee and immigrant children. In addition, participants could view a slide show about the Somali Bantu journey to the United States, and learn more about local efforts to welcome newcomer populations. The event generated interest among students in the Hypatia and Galileo Learning Community, and a sorority. Both groups have since taken steps to volunteer at the Maple Grove English as a Second Language Center in Salem.

On Monday, April 24, the English department’s Center for the Study of Rhetoric in Society is sponsoring “Representations of Race and the African American Experience” in collaboration with the America Chicana. The event is produced by the Multicultural Fellows and is published by the Office of Multicultural Affairs. All members of the university community are invited to contribute. Please submit articles to the editorial board at edlink@vt.edu. Back issues are online at www.multicultural.vt.edu/conductor.

About ‘The Conductor’

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A guide for our journey:  
Representations of Race to be explored

By Kelly Belanger

On Monday, April 24, the English department’s Center for the Study of Rhetoric in Society is sponsoring “Representations of Race and the African American Community.” This interactive event is designed to connect members of the campus and surrounding communities through a day-long series of conversations including a lunchtime poster session and opportunities for small group dialogue.

“Our initial goal is to examine the way that race is represented in our personal, academic, and civic lives,” said Kelly Bellanger, director of the center. “By the end of the day, participants will be invited to explore possibilities for campus-community projects and partnerships aimed at improving the climate for racial relations and understanding.”

The program features dialogue between distinguished scholars from across the nation. Keith Gilyard, distinguished professor of English at Penn State specializes in rhetorical aspects of African American expressive culture, and critical race studies. The award-winning author and editor was inducted into the International Literary Hall of Fame for Writers of African Descent in 2002.

Catherine Prendergast, associate professor of writing studies at University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign, focuses on the intertwining histories of literacy and race relations in the United States and is perhaps best known for her groundbreaking article “Race, the Absent Presence in Composition Studies.”

Tracey Patton, assistant professor of communication and journalism at the University of Wyoming, is author of “Hey girl am I more than my hair?” African American women and their struggles with beauty, body image and hair” and “Reflections of a Black woman professor: Racism and sexism in academia.”

Patton’s main interests involve how critical intercultural communication and interracial representation can impact the classroom, education, and the university campus.

These scholars will work with participants to frame the issues that emerge from initial conversations in broader public and scholarly discussions. Breakout sessions will focus on conceptualizing activist research projects that could be pursued collaboratively over the next year.

This free event will take place from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Owens Banquet Hall. Lunch is provided for the first 150 people to sign up online at www.multicultural.vt.edu/csrs. For more information, please contact Kelly Belanger at 231-8485 or erby@email.vt.edu.
-view from the street

on MLK week... 

Compiled by Jean Elliott

A sampling of Diversity Summit participants were asked the following two questions:

What was the highlight of MLK week?

How did it change your perspective?

Nathan Howell - university studies undergraduate student

The Diversity Summit

It confirmed an important issue that repeated in several other programs I participated during the fall semester of 2005: the issue of stereotypes, as well as pre-judging people.

Laurica Yancey - complex director, Residential Programs

Monday night with Rev. Jesse Jackson

First, it changed my perspective on Rev. Jesse Jackson himself. Before Monday night, I did not have a lot of admiration for Rev. Jackson. However, after Monday night, I gained a greater respect for Rev. Jackson as a civil rights leader. His speech enlightened me on a lot of historical perspectives I never considered. But above all, his speech challenged me.

Evelyn Wallington – associate director of Residence Life

Rev. Jesse Jackson’s speech made me realize (again) that one person can make a difference in helping to improve the life of another by simple actions. Don’t wait for the masses to do what you believe in.

Carlos Evia – assistant professor of English

The Diversity Summit

It reinforced my beliefs about diversity and showed me how the CEOD’s [Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity] work is seen outside the commission’s regular meetings.

Joan Mulligan – environmental policy and planning undergraduate

Keynote speaker Rev. Jesse Jackson

This was a new and interesting experience. It was a celebration of Martin Luther King Jr.’s actions. In the past, I’ve felt that MLK day was more about recognizing the tragic fact that this amazing man was murdered, usually brushing over what he’s done for us today. The Rev. Jesse Jackson’s speech made me think about how Dr. King’s actions affect me today, and I’m thankful for it.

Edd Sewell – associate professor of communication

Rev. Jackson

Seeing how college students responded to him and his ideas.

featured speaker: Rev. Jesse Jackson

By Jim Ford, Graduate Student

More than 3,000 diverse, energetic people stood, applauded, and welcomed Reverend Jesse Jackson into Burritt Hall Auditorium. He began, sharing statistics to confirm his belief that Martin Luther King Jr. Day should not commemorate the “I Have a Dream” speech, but continually revisit Dr. King’s underlying message of “The Broken Promise.”

Rev. Jesse Jackson takes questions after his speech. Photo by Roger Link

Jackson reminded us that the promise has yet to be fulfilled; that we still live in a place where “Those who care for the sick, when they get sick, are not allowed to lie in the bed that they made up for someone else every day.” He also stated that Blacks still have a “hard time getting into school and an even harder time getting out” and graduating... in four years, the disadvantaged sometimes get into universities to face tuition “they can’t afford to pay,” and that the “most poor are young, white and female.”

Rev. Jesse Jackson, photo by Rosanna Link

Jackson went on stirring our conscience and calling us to action. He envisioned lines on voting day to match the crowds drawn to Hokie football games. He encouraged involvement now by bringing along voting registration forms and asking audience members to “come on down” and register. His criterion for registering was “where an individual laid his or her head for more than two nights.” His disquieting message asked us to consider how Dr. King, who was so hated when alive, became so cherished as a memory. Dr. King, in his “I Have a Dream” speech, hoped that his “four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” Near the end of his speech, Jackson echoed that emphasis saying, “beyond color and culture is character.”

Was the good Reverend asking me personally to act as a person of good character? Do I somehow share the accountability for whether or not, “one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed?” What would happen if we each acted as if “all are created equal?”

Could Dr. King’s powerful memory become the embodiment of his living legacy and could we all be “Free at last?”

"Beyond color and culture is character."

Don't wait for the masses'
says Franklin McCain

By Jim Ford and Jody Thompson, graduate students

Why do we remember the Greensboro Four? It wasn’t the first time that sit-ins took place. During the 1950’s, there were many sit-ins. Most of them did not take place in the deep south, but in bordering states, such as Oklahoma, Missouri, Illinois, and Tennessee. Since many of the cities in these states had smaller black populations, the sit-ins were not taken seriously as in the deep south.

Freshmen Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair, Joseph McNeil, and David Richmond defied the rule of "colored" not sitting at the lunch counter. The four students sat at the counter all day until the Woolworth’s closed. The next day, 30 students came to the Woolworth’s to sit at the counter. By the end of the week, hundreds of Black students from NC A&T and Bennett College had joined the protest and a handful of white students from neighboring Greensboro College also offered their support. The sit-ins in Greensboro were a catalyst for sit-ins in 40 other cities and two other stores across the country. Students from black colleges and white colleges alike participated in this movement. On July 26, 1960, Woolworth’s desegregated all of its counters because of the efforts of college students.

Many students who participated in the movement were members of grassroot organizations that were already established. When four black students from Agricultural and Technical College decided to sit at a Woolworth’s counter in Greensboro, NC, their actions would set off a chain of events.

Franklin McCain, the guest speaker for the Martin Luther King Jr. Community Breakfast at Virginia Tech, is one of the original four who took part in the Woolworth sit-ins. He was born in Union County, NC, and reared in Washington, D.C. He received his B.S. degree in chemistry and biology from North Carolina A&T State University in 1964. He is married and has three sons. In 1965, he joined the Celanese Corporation in Charlotte, NC as a chemist and is now retired. As a resident of Charlotte, McCain has been on many boards and has worked to bring about some changes in the educational, civic, spiritual, and political life of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area.

Martin Luther King Jr. Day began for me, other members of the Virginia Tech family, and quite a few visitors from the local community in the Commonwealth Ballroom at Squires Student Center, listening to Franklin McCain. McCain revisited his part in initiating courageous sit-in activism that began February 1, 1960 in Greensboro, then delivered a timely, motivational message. He reminded us that we can’t “wait on the masses” to make a difference in the lives we share; that “arm chair” activists accomplish nothing and, most importantly, that it only takes a “dedicated few” to fuel the fires of change. “Never ask permission to start a revolution!” said McCain.

He voiced the doubts and concerns he felt throughout his sustained, day-in, day-out, civil disobedience at the Woolworth store lunch counter from February through July of 1960. Media attention fluctuated, focusing on days when lots of people showed up, noticeably absent when only he and a few friends were there. He wondered what an ancient looking white woman was going to say as she approached him and his friends that first day sitting in at the counter. He awaited the verbal attack; then heard her say, “I’m so proud of you boys. I wish you had done this 10 years ago.”

“Lessons learned?” He said, “Don’t stereotype anyone. You don’t know them.” Finally, he invited us to take a walk through the graveyard, noting dates of birth and death separated by a dash. He pointed out that our lives are not seriously as in the deep south, but in bordering states, such as Oklahoma, Missouri, Illinois, and Tennessee. Since many of the cities in these states had smaller black populations, the sit-ins were not taken seriously as in the deep south.

Don’t wait for the masses to do what you believe in.

"Beyond color and culture is character."

View from the street

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New 2006 Multicultural Fellows

During the fall of 2005 a call was made for the fourth class of Multicultural Fellows. As part of the application process individuals needed to indicate a specific project interest and explain what they could contribute to that particular effort. Eleven new fellows were selected from the group of applications. They join 15 other active fellows who, by intent, represent a broad spectrum of professional expertise and cultural backgrounds. The Fellows serve the University’s diversity efforts by being a responsive body for their perspectives, advisements, and initiatives that promote multiculturalism on campus.

Margaret L. Keeling, assistant professor, CLAHS-Human Development
Recruiting/Admissions Support
I have a strong, enduring personal and research interest in multicultural issues. I believe the Multicultural Fellow role is an effective means for faculty and staff to work across disciplines to enhance the cultural climate at Virginia Tech, fostering diversity and promoting tolerance at every level of the university.

Ed McPherson, director of VT STARS, Learning Technology
P.R.O.A.C.T.
My interest in serving as a multicultural fellow is part of my personal commitment to make Virginia Tech more inclusive and pluralistic. I see multiculturalism as much more than a proxy for issues of race, ethnicity and gender. Within a global network of multicultural concerns, it is useful to think of ‘Diversity’ as an intellectual nexus of ‘culture, language and identity’…as well as the social, political and academic concerns that are measured empirically in terms of race, ethnicity and gender.

Gresilda Tilley-Lubbs, assistant professor, Second Language Education/ESL Teaching and Learning Workshop/Program Presenters
Much of the work I do at Virginia Tech, in the community, and in the schools is related to diversity and multiculturalism, and I would welcome the opportunity to be part of a group that identifies multiculturalism as being important to the Virginia Tech community. I would regard an appointment as a Multicultural Fellow to be a great honor, a means of serving Virginia Tech in a meaningful way.

Elaine Humphrey, associate director, Research and Assessment, Center for Academic Enrichment and Excellence
Diversity Certificate Program
A university has an obligation to its students and to itself to appreciate and celebrate diversity. To do so requires commitment from all community members. While I strive to value and respect diversity in my day-to-day interactions and actions, I would like to also help our institution through this very important association. I also see this opportunity as a way to enhance my understanding and appreciation of diversity so that I can do an even better job of making this a welcoming place for everyone.

Joyce Moser, fiscal technician, Sociology
When the word “diversity” was used, my first thought WAS of “straight or gay.” When “multicultural” was said, my thought WAS “the races.” As a direct result of being in Ben Dixon’s Ethics & Diversity Capstone course, I learned that these two powerful words mean so much more! I believe that most people living in southwest Virginia “hear” the same connotations, and I’d like to educate others to the broader definitions and values of diversity and multiculturalism.

C. Ray Williams Jr., assistant director, MAOP
The Virginia Tech Conductor
For the entirety of my association with higher education, either as student or administrator, I have been involved in the process of diversity. My experiences in minority student recruitment along with student organization advising have provided a view of diversity that extends beyond the “armchair” assumptions about these issues. My personal commitment to understanding cultures encourages me to stay attentive to issues of this nature.

Tonya L. Smith-Jackson, associate professor, Industrial and Systems Engineering
P.R.O.A.C.T.
The Multicultural Fellow Experience is an effective way to gain needed skills to support organizational diversity that I cannot attain through other means. I am very interested in learning how to promote diversity within a large organization, such as Virginia Tech. Interactions and opportunities to learn from others make this opportunity very exciting.

Ross Edmonds, web support specialist, University Libraries
Resource Development for Diversity Website
While being so involved not only gives me the opportunity to voice my opinions but express my concerns, I feel that serving as a Multicultural Fellow is a good next step in my providing valuable input and insight to the University.

Takikyah Nur Amin, adjunct faculty (Dept. of History) and outreach coordinator for the Race & Social Policy Research Institute, Dept. of History/Race & Social Policy Research Institute
I am interested in serving as a Multicultural Fellow in order to support the university’s work toward creating an inclusive, sensitive and diverse community. Additionally, I desire the chance to work with other faculty members in concentrated efforts toward reaching these goals.

Shelli Fowler, director, Graduate Education Development Institute
Workshop/Program Presenters
It is very important that institutions of higher education engage their students, staff, faculty, and administrators in the complexities of 21st-century multiculturalism. I think it is great that Virginia Tech has a structure already in place that supports efforts that work toward systemic change within our institution (as well as I, imagine, the local communities). I would like to become an active participant and share in the efforts to make Virginia Tech a welcoming and inclusive community.

‘Open the Window' a cultural performance

by Jim Ford, graduate assistant

“Enrichment Through the Arts,” lead by Ann Kilkelly, enhanced the Third Annual Mid-Atlantic Conference on the Scholarship of Diversity. Kilkelly, professor of theater arts and women’s studies, casts a wide artistic net that encompasses inclusion and diversity as a lively, creative process. The wonderfully diverse talents of Elise Witt and Mick Kinney from Georgia and Carlton and Maurice Turner from Mississippi joined local artist.

All during the week of January 30th these visiting artists, along with Kilkelly and her crew, “rocked the boat” on campus. It was a solid, deliberate rocking motion that exemplified how fresh perspectives and generative ideas come to life in conferences and classrooms, during informal conversations, in story telling roundtables, and both formal and informal performances.

The Lyric Theater in Blacksburg was filled with harmonic voices entering, surrounding, and slowly enticing the audience to become part of the singing. The audience never disengaged from that initial connection and interaction.

The next day at the conference some of the same artists led a round table discussion about community based arts and how these artists had become an extended family celebrating one another’s gifts. Turner and others talked about the “Alternate ROOTS” organization (www.alternaterroots.org) that turns 30 years old this year and its work with communities through the arts. Witt talked about the arts and especially, “music as a medium of experience for learning.” And, Kilkelly reminded us in closing that, “The arts are not an end in themselves, but the means to an end.” “When the arts collaborate with, versus perform for,” they act as a catalyst that lights the candle of community.

Footnotes with Kilkelly