Race, Class and the Katrina Crisis

“Give me your tired, your poor; your huddled masses yearning to be free...” These famous words, written by Emma Lazarus and engraved on the Statue of Liberty, are supposed to represent the United States’ commitment to being a country not only for the “haves,” but also the “have nots.” Floating corpses, thousands of sick in wheelchairs, helicopters, makeshift boats, displaced families, and a rising death toll are not, however, the typical images of the United States of America in the national and global popular media.

Our lives will forever be profoundly affected by the fallout of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, both of which have made it virtually impossible for us to look away from our failure to deal adequately with racism, classism, poverty, and other categories of discrimination. These categories are not typically considered in most negotiations about college recruitment and retention efforts. Many of these factors, however, have shaped the lives of this nation’s underclass who go virtually unnoticed, and are usually absent in institutions of higher education.

It is important at this moment of national crisis to problematize the notion of social contracts between higher education and the larger society. We must consider whether or not our efforts to respond to such crises are grounded in public good or market-driven, what does this say about the much vaulted commitment of higher education to the public good, realized these days through the increasingly popular movement toward “civic engagement” programs on campuses? Is civic engagement really about serving the public good, or is it a market-driven public relations ploy? Many colleges, including Macalester, have been giving much time, attention and resources to civic engagement which, unexamined, can produce the kind of response to crises that mirror that of the makeshift construction of the 17th Street levee in New Orleans.

By Joi Lewis

Xpressions!

For a second year, Xpressions keeps the tradition of providing an opportunity for the members of the Macalester community to showcase their artistic talent and to stimulate engagement and appreciation of different art forms. We are excited to invite you to become part of the diverse Xpressions events this year, ranging from the Open Mic on November 12th to the Belly Dancing workshop on March 10th. Also, each month the welcoming space of the Lealtad-Suzuki Center is proud to present a new art exhibit. The photography work of Mandi Masden ’08 was the first to enlighten the space in October of this year. Below, the artist gives a personal insight to her work and creative process.

“On October 7th, a couple of my closest friends and I congregated on the first floor of Kagin Commons. The first Xpressions exhibit of the year had been put up and we all came to see the display. Amidst much preparation, my friends were very anxious to see what the cause of all my work had been. I was just nervous.

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Tapas Navigates Through the Film “Crash”

Have you ever gone to see a really intense movie and then had no one with whom to talk about it? With October’s Tapas event, we tried to solve that problem. This past May 2005, Hollywood’s Paul Haggis (director of *Million Dollar Baby*) produced an identity-packed film entitled *Crash*. Set in Los Angeles, the film follows the lives of several people and how they collide. The drama exposes the complexities of racial conflict in the United States showing that no one is safe from the battle zones of intolerance and prejudice.

*Crash* illuminates the gray area between black and white, the confusion mixed within victim and aggressor. The solution to the plotline? There is no solution.

With that said, emotional reactions to the film were strong. Hearing from the sixteen students and three staff members present at the October 10 “Tapas for Self-Awareness: Tapas Navigates through the film *Crash*” in the Cultural House, reactions ranged from angry and mad to ambivalent and discombobulated. People were both frustrated and encouraged by the film.

“Where are the Asians and Native peoples? Is the role of the Asian to be comic relief? Why isn’t Ludacris’s character better redeemed in the end? I felt violated when Officer Ryan was molesting Thandie Newton’s character. What is meant that the viewer was assigning incorrect racial and ethnic identities to the characters? This film really shows the ugly side of humans. Was the film realistic? Hollywood tries to entertain; would the public have related this movie to their own lives?” These were just some of the sentiments evoked from the conversation.

Sophomore Impressions on a First Year Pluralistic and Unifying Experience

It was two summers ago, the summer before my first year, that I got a letter from the DML inviting new students to apply for a particular program. The information blurb described a special experience, only for first years, which would involve being part of a safe space that would allow us to explore our multiple identities in a global context. I sent off my application and I soon learned that I would be part of a 30-something group of people that would generally be referred to as “P&U.”

Fast-forward a year and a couple months, and I am still attending P&U (or, Pluralism and Unity) group meetings as an alum. Since its beginning years back in 2000, P&U has seen many yearly improvements. One such improvement this year has been to invite four alums from the previous year (Hector Pascual Alvarez, Josefine Beck-Friis, Tinbete Ermyas, and myself) to work as student facilitators in smaller group meetings. I believe this is one good way to have greater student-to-student discussions on hard conversations that need to be had on issues of race and identity.

There are traditions that continue to mark the P&U experience at Macalester College. P&U students will get their group t-shirts with Gandhi’s quote “be the change you want to see in the world.” Circles, talking sticks, dyads, one word, and Joi Lewis’ timer are already very familiar to the first years. P&U students continue to benefit from plays shown at the Penumbra Theater like the one viewed by students in mid-September titled, “Grandchildren of the Buffalo Soldiers,” pertaining to the experience of a Black Native American man coming to terms with his mixed race identity on his reservation. I myself will never forget seeing “Slippery When Wet” last year, a play about a Black and Asian American couple trying to break down racial stereotypes and attempting to find love for each other. This play helped me start the discussion on the complexities surrounding race and sexuality.

Having these conversations around locally catered food is an important part of the experience. What better way to form friendships than over a plate of warm rice and mock duck. However, it is of course the connections made and the many lengthy debates that we had that make this program worthwhile.
First Dean for the Study of Race and Ethnicity

Several years after beginning an exhaustive nationwide search for the college’s first Dean for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, Macalester has appointed Dr. Jane Rhodes to the position. Hailing from the University of California-San Diego’s Department of Ethnic Studies, Rhodes brings a unique amount of experience and energy to affirming Macalester’s commitment to multiculturalism, beginning her tenure by working to promote the role of multiculturalism in the campus community.

Since beginning at Macalester in September, Rhodes has concentrated on this goal by helping to organize February’s Seventh Annual American Studies Conference, organizing a speaker’s series for the American Studies Department, and considering the department’s curriculum and its role in Macalester’s multiculturalism requirement. The future of the American Studies department is among Rhodes’ central priorities; she has expressed her commitment to helping the department grow through the addition of new courses and faculty.

“...Rhodes brings a unique amount of experience and energy to affirming Macalester’s commitment to multiculturalism...”

Rhodes has also been busy anticipating her future courses. In the spring of 2006, she will teach AMST 101: Exploration of Race and Racism, which is designed to provide students with a background in American Studies. She will also teach an upper division course which will survey the role of the media in ethnic minority communities, one of her areas of specialization. This course will feature an element of community engagement, in which students will explore communities of color within the Twin Cities as an approach to understanding the relationships of race and media.

Civic engagement is one of many ways in which Rhodes wishes to heighten student consciousness of multiculturalism. She is deeply committed to enhancing the diversity of both Macalester’s student body and faculty, and anticipates working with the college’s administration in pursuit of these goals.

Rhodes’ diverse disciplinary background (she received her Ph.D. and M.A. in mass communication, and earned her B.A. in biology and psychology) will likely be an asset to the American Studies Department, which is rooted in interdisciplinary approaches to the study of race and ethnicity. Her research interests include African-American culture and history, and race and mass media.

Schools and Prisons: A New American Studies Course

The Macalester American Studies Department is proud to announce the creation of a new course which will begin in spring 2006. Professor Karin Aguilar-San Juan developed the framework for and will teach the course, which is entitled “Schools and Prisons: A Junior Semester Civic-Engagement Experience.” The class will be limited to sixteen students and as the title suggests, will be designed for juniors (though open to sophomores and seniors with the permission of the instructor.) The main requirement for the class is previous exposure to American Studies material.

The focus of the class is the connection between minorities, the public school system, and the criminal justice system in the United States, with a particular emphasis on the Twin Cities. As Professor Joy James of Brown noted in her keynote address at the African American Studies conference in 2005, there is a “close-mesh between the slavery system and the prison system.” For example, over half of Black men in their 30’s who have dropped out of school have criminal records. This is evidence of a sort of “schools-to-prisons pipeline.” During that talk last year, one man stood up and suggested that the conversation be continued “where it really matters, in North Minneapolis!” That is exactly what the new course will do.

The course will take the frameworks and theories of race and racism taught in the American Studies department and move the classroom to the streets. This will give the students a chance to apply and to see applied what they have learned in class. There will be several core components of the class, including a discussion-based segment, readings of importance, visits to “community events” in the cities, face-to-face contact with “Community Mentors,” and frequent trips around the cities allowing the students to see firsthand what they hear and read about.

It is Professor Aguilar-San Juan’s hope that the course will “help students see the scope of the problem, which is that schools become pipelines to prisons, and to see that they are part of the solution.”
Soup & Substance: Food for Thoughts

Do you ever think about soup on a cool, breezy fall day? Or on a blizzard, icy-cold day? How about on snow-melting spring afternoons? Do you ever feel like you’re missing substance in your system? Substance in your daily goals toward activism? Substance in your life?

Well then, perhaps you might consider attending Soup & Substance! Soup & Substance is a monthly lunch series program hosted by the Lealtad-Suzuki Center that takes place in the basement of Kagin the first Thursday of each month. One of the goals of Soup & Substance is to create dialogue across differences through the medium of food. The soup is catered in from different places in the local community each month, and the Macalester community is invited to come engage in a dialogue with student panelists who usually talk about their experiences relating to the specific topic of that month.

This year’s theme focuses on sexuality in the various communities that we all live in. The theme each month is focused around the heritage months. In October, the title for Soup & Substance was “Uncovering the Taboo: Sexuality in the Latina/o and Latin American Communities.” Our panelists, Carmen Phillips ’08, Anwar Paz ’07, and Ricardo Guzman ’08, shared their knowledge and experiences of sexuality in their respective communities. Seventy-two participants engaged in this conversation while consuming deliciously warm soup!

So, if you want some good substance in your busy, papers/exams-stricken life, COME to our next event and engage in a conversation.

This month’s event on November 3rd featured a discussion about Sexuality in Native American & Indigenous Communities.

Host Family Program

Three Years... It has been three years since the Alumni of Color and Friends Host Family Program for students of color/multiracial students started.

The Alumni of Color and Friends Host Family Program is a wonderful opportunity for first-year students and returning students to connect with the greater community outside the college, build life-long relationships, and spend valuable moments with host families and other students in the program. These moments help students with their transition to college and simply give them a feeling of a home away from home.

Melvin Collins ’75, one of our wonderful hosts, says: “I have truly enjoyed being a part of the host family program for the past three years. The students I have hosted have been a delight. It has provided a great opportunity to keep abreast of what is going on at Macalester from a student’s perspective and the networking with other host families has been enlightening. I feel not only that I am able to give something to a student, but I gain as well as I have learned something unique from each of the students I have hosted.”

This year, the program has 27 students, 19 new applicants and 8 returning students. Students and families were paired based on interests and/or specific preferences. This year, we have hosts that graciously offered to have more than one student. Thank you, families!

In order for families to get a better sense of the program and its expectations and for students to meet their host families, the Department of Multicultural Life and the Alumni Office organized an information session for hosts on September 21st, followed by an informal “getting to know you” dinner that both students and families attended. The event took place at the Cultural House, which has a historical legacy as a safe space for domestic students of color, multiracial students, and allies, symbolizing the connection for people of color at Macalester and in the Twin Cities. Having the dinner in this space contributed to a festive and “homey” ambiance.

“I feel not only that I am able to give something to a student, but I gain as well as I have learned something unique from each of the students I have hosted.”

By Atifa Benwhahoud

Kickoff event for the Host Family Program
Unity. It’s a concept that is hard for many to envision happening anywhere outside of childhood fables and far-reaching dreams. And this is understandable; after all, it’s not often that we see unity between different people and concepts in the world we live in today. Up until this year, this same framework of disunity could have been applied to the relationship between Macalester College and multiculturalism. But thanks to the Department of Multicultural life, unity is not that far out of reach.

As of this year, the Department has taken leadership of the Cultural House and is using it as a tool to connect multiculturalism to the greater Macalester community. The Department hopes to do this through a series of programs and events at the Cultural House centered on bringing up issues of multiculturalism in a safe environment to have tough conversations. Some of the programs that take place in the Cultural House are the Tapas series, the Collective meetings, Hollaback Café, Fresh Fridays, the Poetry Slam, and In the Kitchen With. All of these programs, in some way, help spread multiculturalism and its ideals to the greater community.

Along with spearheading the programmatic aspect of the house, the Department of Multicultural Life manages the people that get to live in and share the space. This year, 10 students working for the Department (either as Emerging Scholars Mentors, Cultural House Staff, or Lealtad-Suzuki Center Assistants) are living in the residential rooms of the Cultural House.

The Cultural House space provides a physical space for the idea of multiculturalism to gain a more tangible status on the Macalester campus, creating a sense of unity that wasn’t there before. And that is all fine and dandy, but what about the unity between the Department student staff who do things in different areas throughout the year? Well, that unification process took some time.

Last spring, all the DML staff workers were notified of their positions within the department. We then had a spring training that included getting-to-know-you exercises, meetings with our individual area bosses, and introductions to the duties to each of our jobs. This training process, however, wasn’t over in the spring. When the end of summer reached its conclusion and school was about to begin again, DML students and staff came back to Macalester one week early to reconnect with one another and further the training that we had the preceding spring.

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Tapas ...continued

The Tapas Series was created to be a forum for students to talk informally in a structured way. A monthly event sponsored by the Lealtad-Suzuki Center, Tapas aims at highlighting aspects of identity and culture that may not necessarily be seen in a public sphere on campus. This goal is evident in the themes for the future Tapas Series events. November 7 related to Native American Heritage Month. Entitled “History Revisited: Tapas and Myths about Columbus,” the discussion focused around both the myths students are taught about Columbus as well as the concept of history and who gets to write history. We tackled issues of whose history is written and from what lens.

Following along with the Tapas Series mission, December 5 looks to be a fantastic Tapas. Drawing on contributions from the Macalester community, December’s theme is “Tapas for Celebrations: Exploring Global New Year’s Celebrations.” Students will be learning and sharing about different New Year celebrations that do not occur on January 1.

As always, Tapas are prepared fresh for each discussion and the topics are ripe for discussion. Be sure to join us for Tapas in the C-House!

“...the Department has taken leadership of the Cultural House and is using it as a tool to connect multiculturalism to the greater Macalester community.”

Tapas’ Student Facilitators with other student attendees
Our social contract seems to be only able to handle social ills that do not raise fundamental questions about the way our society is constructed around issue of race, class and poverty. It appears not only that the 17th Street levee, but also US higher education’s social contract was never really designed to encompass the poor, particularly those of color. It is my sincere hope that these are the kinds of issues that will be addressed in the new Institute for Global Studies and Citizenship. If not, we will truly be missing the mark.

This is a sad state of affairs, given the pretensions of our institutions of higher education to be the sites where fundamental social problems are addressed. US higher education has historically been a hot bed of debate around contentious issues facing our country and the world. It has been on our campuses that public debate and battle about such issues as the Vietnam War, Civil Rights, and Apartheid have been fought. Those times were perceptibly more intense than is the period after Hurricane Katrina. Those times were filled with fundamental critique, not just charity. This may seem to be because there were larger risks to the public good involved in issues like the Vietnam War. But is there not a greater risk to the public good before us now? Where are the protests and sit-ins on our campuses about the present day war zone so many endure in the US everyday, that were simply exposed to the world through the disaster of Hurricane Katrina?

This article addresses higher education’s role of providing education that improves the quality of life for the public good. It suggests that the social contract between higher education and the public should include elimination of racism, classism and poverty in the world, with the United States as an entry point, through closing the gap between the haves and have nots. Higher education has a responsibility through providing scholarship and access to, as well as civic engagement with, the citizenry of the globe. Higher education institutions should be expected to provide academic and social commentary on the ways in which government creates - and fails to create - policies and practices that will benefit its poorest citizens. Higher education is one of the few entities protected by academic freedom. Given the latitude that academic freedom gives it, higher education’s responsibility can take various forms: student enrollment, research, employment, contracts, facilities and libraries, etc.

Yet, the commitment to markets and marketing seems to be trumping the kind of social contract described above. As is evident in the growing influence of such things as US News and World Report list of elite colleges, market imperatives have caused a significant decline in institutions’ ability to maintain distinctive identities and commitments to work that may not have an immediate benefit within its primary markets. Ultimately this results in the erosion of social contracts between society and higher education.

A revolutionary act in which institutions are actually being accountable to non-market driven values is needed. Institutions must be encouraged to be mission-centered places of public purpose where people are moved toward intellectual vitality and engaged citizenship in a world that includes multiple cultures, ideologies and needs. The social contract should prompt examination of higher education’s role. Response and reaction has taken precedence over leadership and a more proactive approach. The social contract should move institutions to respond in greater, more profound ways, beyond charity.

The Katrina crisis has revealed a contradiction already long present in U.S. society, one that exposes the ivory tower of the academy that has us fenced off from our nation’s poor while we write books about them as the government passes legislation that profoundly affects their lives. The water gushed through the levees not only onto the cities in the Gulf Coast, but also into our social consciousness. The storm revealed much more than the flood waters and disposible debris, instead it washed away the protective wall that shielded us from our country’s past sins. Long before the clean-up efforts began, we were reminded of our country’s forgotten citizens. The most heart-wrenching fact of this present day crisis is the fact that it has happened before. What the storm should bring back to public consciousness is the 1927 Mississippi River flood. In his provocative book, Rising Tide, John Barry recounts the fate of the 1927 “refugees” who in many cases were eager to leave their horrific life as sharecroppers. Their situation is significantly different from that of the current day evacuees, who seem horrified that they may never be able to return home. In 1927, the country was in the middle of the Great Migration of southern blacks to northern industrial cities. Their fates were similar to those of the Katrina evacuees during the holding...
Don Quijote de la Mancha and Kijotadas...

“In a village in la Mancha...”, or somewhere in the cold plains of Minnesota – the place, after all, is irrelevant – the Knight of the Sad Image rides to put an end to injustice. His faithful squire Sancho follows closely under the expectant view of a crowd of college students. That is how the story of Don Quijote, one of the most influential characters in world literature, was enacted last spring at Intermedia Arts and the Center for Independent artists by a multi-racial group of Macalester students.

To celebrate the 400th anniversary of the first edition of El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha (1605) by the Spanish author Miguel Cervantes, I was commissioned by the Hispanic Studies Department to create and direct a dramatic adaptation of Cervantes' immortal novel. This project would be the culmination of the work carried out in the language labs in which the novel was explored by the students through dramatic improvisation, painting, creative writing, etc., and would serve as an introduction to the events taking place later in the year, such as the discussion series on Don Quijote organized by Professor Miñana and the International Round-table, dealing with the global legacy of Don Quijote.

My personal links with this piece of literature are deep and significant. I come originally from Cervantes' hometown, Alcalá de Henares, and the vast heritage of the book has accompanied me throughout my life. My personal connection with the text and the Hispanic Studies Department enthusiastic determination to share with the Macalester community such an important part of the Spanish cultural legacy merged together, and that’s how Kijotadas came into being. With the invaluable support of Professors Blanco and Miñana I started to create a fresh adaptation of Cervantes’s novel in order to introduce the story and the myth to a student audience largely unfamiliar with the text. Kijotadas approaches the classical text with the intention of re-discovering the words and deeds of the immortal characters in Cervantes's masterpiece. I wanted to produce an entertaining, political and modern adaptation that challenged the audience’s assumptions about justice and freedom in the global context of the 21st century.

To adapt the entire “Quijote” into a realistic dramatic product is, nevertheless, a challenge that I personally consider impossible to carry out. However, it is possible to capture the essence of this capital work, to reduce the story to its bare bones and express it onstage through the words and actions of its immortal characters. With this in mind I designed a storyline that could connect all the events in the journey of Don Quijote and Sancho. The context of the 17th century becomes blurred with modern references, contemporary characters and post-apocalyptic, Matrix-like landscapes of performance, in order to emphasize the relevance and validity of the story for an audience at the beginning of the 21st century. Consequently, the play is riddled with subtle social commentary and blunt political critique, achieved through satire and juxtaposition. For instance, human rights violations by the US government are highlighted in the scene with the prisoners, when pictures from Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib are projected.

“I wanted to produce an entertaining, political and modern adaptation that challenged the audience’s assumptions about justice and freedom in the global context of the 21st century.”

The disturbing issue of sexual tourism and sexual abuse was brought up, too. The US invasion and occupation of Iraq were also criticized when Sancho becomes governor of Fallujah – instead of the island Barataria, as in the original – and through subtle symbolism; when Don Quijote asks about his library – which has been burned by the priest and the barber, who in our version resembled the pope and Fidel Castro respectively. His niece responds that a magician riding a giant eagle came into the library, destroying everything and leaving behind a cloud of red and blue smoke. The reference to the eagle, the colors of the US flag and the destruction of books – the destruction of culture after all – acts as a figurative image used to condemn the looting of the national library and museum in Baghdad. In a similar way, Don Quijote’s enemies assume contemporary personas such as the wizard Prinuchet, the witch Conduleezaera and the giant Sharon.

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Disability Awareness at Macalester

For the second year in a row, Macalester hosted a series of events during the month of October that served to focus our attention on issues related to disability. Organized by students Cassie Hartblay ’06, Kate Patton ’06, Will Clarke ’07, and Professors Joan Ostrove and Cindy Wu, the events were intended to increase awareness of disability as an often unrecognized form of diversity in the classroom, the arts, and sports. Here are the highlights of our events:

• Throughout the month, the work and personal narrative of artist Ronald Eugene Cat Meow Christopherson was exhibited in the Campus Center. Christopherson works at the Interact Center for the Visual and Performing Arts in Minneapolis, a center designed for artists with disabilities.

• On October 11th, French professor Tammy Berberi (University of Minnesota – Morris) gave a talk entitled “Worlds Apart: Disability in the Foreign Language Classroom.” The lecture, at which Macalester language professors and lab instructors were well-represented, raised important ideas about how to make language instruction – and all teaching – inclusive. Professor Berberi pointed out the myriad of ways in which representations of people (as teachers, as students, in textbooks, etc.) assume a “normal” body.

Finally, we hosted a return engagement by Josh Blue. As he did last year, Blue – a nationally renowned comedian, Paralympics soccer player, and artist with cerebral palsy – presented an hour of witty and gritty stand-up comedy, a gig based largely on the absurdity of people’s common misconceptions of disability.

This was a great series of events, and we thank the Program Board for their support and sponsorship. If you attended any of the events and have reactions to them, or want to talk to any of us more about the programming or potential future programming, don’t hesitate to be in touch with any of us!

My very first photo exhibit, entitled ‘A Silhouette’s Soliloquy’ ran during the month of October in the Lealtad Suzuki Center. The 16 pictures displayed were all taken during the spring and summer months of 2005. Each of them is the result of my aimless wanderings in random directions with a digital camera, a fairly good eye, an affinity for visual contrasts, and a large number of Metro-transit bus tickets. Each photo subject is, at most, a five minute bus ride from Macalester on either the 21 or the 63 bus routes. Because of the entire array of black and white photos, I was asked by a couple of people what my editing technique was. The truth is that I don’t really edit - I tinker. The term ‘editing’ carries with it the assumption that I have the slightest idea of what I’m doing. I don’t. What I do know is that when I ‘tinker,’ I like to play with colors, with ideas and perceptions of light and dark, and how they contrast and compliment each other. I openly admit that I am not in any way trained in the art of photography, nor do I have any special insight into ‘the soul of humanity’ or ‘the condition of human perception.’ I simply see what I see and enjoy finding beauty in everyday things, radiance in otherwise dark conditions. It is something in which I take great pleasure. And I hope those of you that saw the exhibit did too.”
The most fascinating "wake up call" of all in these passages [the story of Hagar and the Akedah, or the binding of Isaac] is that we are not the only children of Abraham, and not the only ones to follow the call of God or Adonai or Allah. This most central and holy text, the Torah, tarries and wanders away from its central mission of telling the story of the "Jews", albeit briefly, to tell the tale of the father of another nation. Growing up, I was always fascinated with the connection between Judaism and Islam. I was specifically interested in the biblical stories that linked two faiths; the casting out of Hagar and the rivalry between Jacob and Esau.

Many of you might know that Tuesday, October 4th, was the beginning of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. What has been deemed by many as "God's October surprise" is not just an interesting coincidence, but it is an opportunity to learn, share, and grow. During this time of reflection, we can take stories like the one read today and understand how it has shaped both Islam and Judaism and how it continues to play a key role in connecting these two faiths back to Abraham as their common father.

Because of this unprecedented confluence of events, religious organizations have joined forces across the United States to do something meaningful. [Time has been set aside] from sunrise to sunset on October 13 – which for Muslims is one of the Ramadan fast days and for Jews is the fast day of Yom Kippur – as a nationwide fast for Reflection, Repentance, Reconciliation and Renewal. An organization known as the "Tent of Abraham, Hagar, and Sarah" is calling on those who fast on October 13 to dedicate their prayers and their intention to serve the God of Abraham Who calls on us to seek peace, feed the poor, heal the earth, and then later to take visible steps in the world to heed God's call.

Here at Macalester, in an environment that celebrates diversity of all kinds and encourages discussion, we hope that the next month of Ramadan and Tishrei brings all of those "r" words: Reflection, Repentance, Reconciliation and Renewal.

May you be inscribed for a good year.

L’ shana tova.

By Mashal Saif ’06

Amazing opportunities, many of which we do not avail. However, sometimes God intervenes with a little divine tinkering and a strategic arranging of dates and months, He makes it such that it is impossible for us not to avail the opportunity that lies right in front of us. Thus, although the MJO and MSA had often talked about collaborating, such talks had never materialized into an event or series of events of the scale we had envisioned. That is until ‘God’s October Surprise’ came along.

“God’s October Surprise” is what we have chosen to call this year’s perfect overlapping of Ramadan (the Muslim holy month), and Tishrei (the period of the Jewish holy days). Such an overlap occurs only once in thirty-three years. We were blessed enough not only to witness this overlap but also to have the opportunity to do a series of events around it, giving the MSA-MJO collaboration an impetus that it had always been waiting for. So far, during this holy period of overlap, Muslim and Jewish students have walked down to the river together, partaken in food together, shared aspects of their faith with each other, and educated each other with regard to how each group practices their religion. They have even broken their fasts together and have invited each
The idea of creating a student-led organization with a focus on professional and leadership development arose from my own fellowship with the Institute for International Public Policy (IIPP). Over the summer while in Washington, D.C., I met students from Georgetown University, Morehouse College, and Wellesley College who all were members of professional student organizations at their schools, and whose affiliations had enabled them to create networks well beyond their college campuses. That was when I began to realize how much we lacked such a resource at Macalester College, especially when our alumni range from leaders like Kofi at the UN to Doug Johnson with the Center for Victims of Torture.

The initiative, hence, was to begin discussions with students and staff to see how we could implement such a student-led organization. After talking with the CDC, Max Center, Lealtad-Suzuki Center, IC, and Internship Office, it became clear that the resources were there, but that students were simply not taking advantage of these opportunities until the very last minute. From conversations with students, it also sounded like students were definitely interested but didn’t know how or when to start.

So, the Macalester Young Professional Association (MYPA) began to take shape in September with a core of student leaders ready to take on the challenge of developing professional skills while retaining their commitments to social change and community. With a first meeting attended by over fifteen students, ranging from first-years to seniors, students began to share their interests, hopes, and expectations of the group. From questions like, “I want to know how to negotiate salaries and benefits” to “I want to know how people have gotten to the UN” to “I want to learn about careers dealing with social justice,” members’ suggestions shaped the agenda of this academic year’s planning.

Moving beyond logistics, we are now ready to begin our development and training to ensure that no matter where we end up, we have each other a network of alumni to help us in our professional journey. The first brown bag on October 12th brought together MYPA students and other students to a discussion with Doug Johnson from the Center for Victims of Torture and Melvin Collins ’75 from Inroads, who discussed the issue of Leadership for the Common Good. If you couldn’t attend the event but are interested in the ethos of MYPA, email mypa@mac and sign up to be on the list.

Remember, change starts today with us. What matters is where this change will go, and how we can play a role in deciding that fate.

Macalester Young Professional Association (MYPA)

Coming Together

other to their worship services. As the month ended, the collaborative events that we did and the feelings of mutual respect and understanding that were shared during this time between students of the two faiths have surpassed my expectations.

God’s October Surprise has afforded the Muslim and Jewish students a chance to get to know each other better, to learn from each other, to better understand each other’s faiths and practices and the similarities that exist between them and most of all to appreciate each other and the bond that we all share as people of faith.

As a senior at Macalester, I often think of the opportunities that I have missed out on while at Mac and how I shall graduate without having taken advantage of all that Mac had to offer. Thankfully, due to ‘God’s October Surprise’, helping to organize and participate in a series of MSA-MJO collaboration events can now be crossed off that list.
In order to emphasize the current aspect of the production we worked with the aesthetic vision of the performance, trying to go beyond merely having modern costumes. Thus, we played with the popular mythologies and ‘mythographies’ of the last quarter of century and transformed, through projections, Don Quijote’s imagined dragons into the tanks of Tiananmen Square, oil perforation towers, bulldozers and the like. The books burned by the priest and the barber were what I consider the modern incarnations of chivalry books; Harry Potter, the Lord of the Rings and Kill Bill along with others were given to the fire among the laughs of the audience. Putting the show together was a challenging and exhilarating process that involved a very committed group of highly creative people. With the extraordinary help of Professor Blanco we got financial and material support from the Lealtad-Suzuki Center, Campus Programs, Student Government, the Theatre and Dance Department, Adelante! and the Latin American Studies Program. Greatly inspired by Peter Brook’s multicultural work, I had very clear that I wanted to work with a racially and culturally diverse cast. In a creative process of the nature of theatre the different experiences and sensibilities that people from different cultures bring to the characters and to the ensemble have an invaluable importance. Thus, Don Quijote was embodied by an Argentinean, which helped to enhance Don Quijote’s Spanish character and to bring up the issue of racism when a skinhead confronts Don Quijote and calls him ‘Sudaca de mierda’ – a very strong racial slur in Spanish. Chicano, Peruvian, Indian and White actors, Black and Latino designers, were all part of the multicultural team. Our decision to present our work at Intermedia Arts, a multidisciplinary arts center that serves as a public forum for underprivileged social groups, and at the Center for Independent Artist, located in a Chicano primary school, was in accordance with our desire to promote dialogue across difference. The level of commitment requested from the actors was huge but all of them were willing to meet the challenge. Daily rehearsals lasted for seven weeks in which we explored the text and the characters in experimental ways that were later reflected on the performance style. The play was warmly received by the Macalester and also the local community. Tickets were sold out for three of the four performances and we got an excellent review in a local Latino newspaper. A great number of people approached me after the show was over with questions about my particular interpretations of Cervantes’s novel on what became a delightful exchange of opinions, perceptions and ideas. As an international student from Spain, I was very happy and grateful for having the opportunity to share such an important part of my cultural identity. The excitement and expectation the play was received with, the encouragement and support from so many people, the lessons we learned on the process, the fun and the laughs, the delight of creating a living work of art… all these are the best memories from this project.

US colleges and universities don’t seem to be outraged at the government, or at least are not visibly showing it in any meaningful way. We have some of the greatest human capital inside the walls of the academy of any institution in society. Our responsibility should be to solve these kinds of social injustices. It appears that the most innovative and useful response we have had thus far is to offer continued education to college students throughout the Gulf Coast who have been affected, and to double our charitable efforts through various clothing and food drives.

But in this moment, we need outrage and critique as well as charity.
Community Through Unity... continued

This time, however, the training was different. We participated in poetry workshops, shared our summer experiences, learned stress relief and time management, how to deal with tough situations, and how to facilitate tough conversations. The main goal of this training was to connect the staff and students to one another to ensure that the year in which the Department is infusing multiculturalism throughout the campus will run smoothly. Some of these activities even happened in the Cultural House as a way to guarantee that the space get introduced into the DML ‘family’ and morphed into a space that is rooted in the ideas of multiculturalism.

All in all, the experience thus far has been superb. The Cultural House this year, more than ever before, has been made into a space where multiculturalism and its ideals can relish without question.

And though the same can’t be said for the rest of the world, I am happy to say, at least in terms of the Cultural House, the Department of Multicultural Life, and Macalester, that unity is here to stay.

By Tinbete Ermyas ’08
Fall Events of the Department of Multicultural Life

November 1-30: Xpressions: Native American Jewelry Exhibit
November 3: “Soup & Substance: Sexuality in Native American/Indigenous Communities”
November 7: “Tapas: History Revisited—Myths About Columbus”
November 10: Taking Care of Business: Getting Your Assets Together (Focus on Financial Aid)
November 12: “Xpressions: Open Mic Poetry with Mac Soup”
November 17: Taking Care of Business: Getting Your Assets Together (Focus on Debt Management)
November 19: “Host Family Program Pot Luck”
November 29: “In the Kitchen with Afifa, Moroccan Cuisine”
December 1: “Soup & Substance: Sexuality in Communities of Faith”
December 5: “Tapas for Celebrations: Exploring Global New Year’s Celebrations”

Please send submissions for the next edition of The Mosaic to benson@macalester.edu

2005-2006 Pluralism and Unity
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