

GRIOT NEWSLETTER



From the Director



Welcome to the Fall 99 Issue of the GRIOT newsletter. In this issue, you will find information on the kick-off activities of the African-American Cultural Program's Thirty year commemoration. Can you believe it? It has been thirty years since the inception of the African American Cultural Program! It seems like only yesterday that I was a student here struggling to find my way. To be honest, I really cannot remember the exact day that the Afro-American Cultural Center opened its doors. I remember using the house a little when it first opened, but I did not connect with the "Center" until a year later. I do remember being very glad that there was finally a place that I could feel at home. This "home

away from home" theme was one of the major unwritten tenets of the Center. Officially, the Center had two main objectives. The first, to encourage within black students of the university a sense of pride and dignity based on their rightful cultural heritage, and to assist them in acquiring a growing cultural awareness contributive to the advancement and freedom of black people everywhere. Secondly, to create within the university a quantity of valuable information about and talent related to the black experience so that the university and community of Champaign-Urbana could be afforded an objective and accurate interpretation of that experience through the performing arts, classes, seminars, and other

appropriate media. There were a number of people responsible for the initiation of the Afro-American Cultural Program. Although there is some written information about who they were, the history of the Afro-American Cultural Program and its origin is largely oral. As with any oral history, people often remember issues and events in vastly different ways. One of our objectives this year is to compile, using written and oral means, a history of the Afro-American Cultural Program from the viewpoint of community members, former students, and former administrators. In the meantime, below is a thumbnail sketch of the beginnings of the Afro-American Cultural Center.

The History

On February 14, 1969, a group of black students submitted a list of 16 demands to U of I Chancellor Jack Peltason, calling for an end to institutional racism. One of the demands called for the

immediate establishment of a black cultural center large enough to serve the needs of all black people. On February 18th of that year, the U-C Senate Council recommended that a temporary center be established and placed under

the supervision of the Special Educational Opportunities Program, directed by Clarence Shelley. Shortly afterward, on February 27, 1969 the Faculty-Student Commission on Afro-American Life and Culture was established. From that

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On Campus

- *Ewezo and Buddy Core
Karaoke Night/
Chicken Social
Fri. Nov. 12th
7p.m. FAR-MPR*
- *Ma'at Evening of Thanks
Tue. Nov. 16
7:30 p.m. Clark Hall*
- *IUB Comedy Show
Sat. Dec 4 7 p.m.
Foellinger Auditorium*
- *IUB Real World Event
Thu. Dec 9*
- *Buddy Core Graduate
Student Forum, Nov. 30
Advance Enrollment
Seminar*
- *Ebony Umoja
General Assembly
Thursdays, 8 p.m.
Movie Nights
Socials
Discussions*

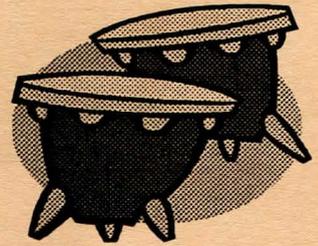
From the Director cont. - History of the AACP

Commission, the Afro-American Studies Commission was established. The commission had three components: Community Service, Research (Afro Studies), and Cultural. The three units were to operate independently, while under the supervision of the Commission.

The Cultural Program began with student workshops in the following areas: African Dance, Drama, Manhood-Womanhood, Black Expressive Writing, Poetry,

Lectures and the Yambo newsletter. The Yambo eventually merged with another publication named Drums. Drums was a community based magazine which was incorporated into the Afro-American Cultural Program.

Out of Drums emanated the GRIOT newsletter. It is under this name that we publish today. The purpose of the GRIOT is to be a voice of black expressive writing as well as a source of news and issues related to the experiences of African Americans on the



What you can expect.....

In this issue, you will find further information on the kick-off activities of the African American Cultural Program's thirtieth year commemoration. There are also brief updates on the happenings in the residence halls and around campus. Finally, we continue the tradition of Black expressive writing. Special thanks to this year's GRIOT staff:

TaRon Barnes
Aisha Guest Cornelius
Charles Domercant
Betty Fleurimont

"Out of Drums emanated the GRIOT newsletter. It is under this name that we publish today"

Chern Hale
A. Nicholle Hampton
Starlet Jenkins,

They will continue to provide a focus on creative writing and poetry. Any student wishing to get involved with the GRIOT should contact Aisha Guest Cornelius. The GRIOT staff meets weekly at the AACP house every Thursday evening at 6:00 p.m.

Thirtieth Anniversary Kick-Off Week

On October 6, 1999 The African American Cultural Program and the Afro-American Studies and

Research Directors opened the 30th commemoration kick-off with a panel discussion entitled "Looking Back Looking Ahead Part I". Diane Pinderhughes and Nathaniel Banks both gave presentations on the history of their respective

programs. On Saturday October 9, Looking Back Looking Ahead part II" was conducted. Presenters included former Director Tony Zamora, and past workshop coordinators Mickey Davidson of OMNIMOV, Deborah Banks of the Black Chorus, and Greg Carr of Theater 263.

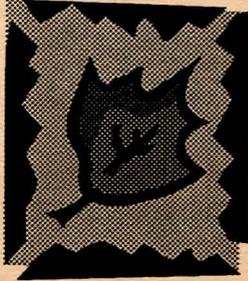


1969- 1999
Looking Back,
Looking Ahead

All presenters spoke of their positive experiences while at the AACP and encouraged students to continue valuing and using the AACP for self expression and to promote the Black experience.

From the President

Autumn is once again upon us as we are reminded that time is not linear; it is cyclical. Fall is a season of transformation or metamorphosis, death in order to be reborn. It is also the season of reflection as the year is winding down to an end. One is prompted to reflect on the events of the past year and appreciate the knowledge and growth that comes from



experience. The most profound and yet elusive knowledge you can acquire: self-knowledge. According to Jim Lewis, "for the human psyche, growth proceeds through the assimilation of unconscious contents into the conscious mind". Reflection is the processing of experience: what is the lesson learned here? How can I benefit from this experience? How can I ensure more beneficial

experiences? How can I never repeat this painful experience again? What does this mean for my future? My family? My love life? My spirituality?

These collective concepts of Fall/Autumn Cycles, Transformations, Metamorphoses, Death/Life and Reflection are included in the following passages of poetry and prose. Join us as we attempt to glimpse Samadhi (the bliss that follows enlightenment)

Aisha Guest Corenelius



The Beginning of the End

Once my lover, now my friend,
understanding where love begins.

Explanation and excuses intertwined,
especially to the wisest woman,
love is b.l.i.n.d.

The feeling of comfortably
being uncomfortable once and when
settled in.

Fighting for the label,
the illusion of a dream.
Reality is the pleasurable
slap in between.

Once my lover, now my friend,
realizing where lust ends.



A. Nicholle Hampton

THE CROSSING

He stood at the river's edge with outstretched arms, making sure that the map he brought along was leading him in the right direction. The rising mists on the far bank of the river made it difficult to see very far. The only assurance that he was on the right path came with the sight of a small raft tied to a nearby tree. The raft was extremely small and made mostly of wood, but in certain places old bones had been used to repair previous damage or rotted pieces. A makeshift wooden paddle lay next to the trunk of the tree that the raft was tied to, and had various religious symbols carved into it. The crucifix, ankh, and crescent moon and star were recognizable; however, there were many others that he had never seen before.

A heavy iron chain was used to secure the raft to the trunk of the tree. On the tree itself were carved the names and initials of the countless number of people who had crossed the river before him. He stopped to read off some of the names—some were of people he knew or had heard of—but the vast majority were written in an old, forgotten language that he could not understand. He then took out his pocketknife and began to carve his own initials. After he had finished the choir of leaves from the surrounding trees gathered breath from the passing wind and reminded him that time was growing short. The shadows he had managed to elude for quite some time now were quickly gaining. It would not be too long before they would manage to clutch him in their grasp and prevent his crossing.

Surveying the small raft, he decided that it would be best if he left some things behind. The weight of the iron chain would make it harder to row across, and to remove it would mean that there would be no other way across for the others that were sure to follow. So at the river's edge he decided to empty his pockets of leftover dreams and expectations, being careful to keep only one or two of the more important and less cumbersome ones. He removed several packages of seeds from the bag he carried around his shoulder and sprinkled them on the ground around him. Next, he tore out a blank page from a heavy book containing the names of all the people he had ever known. After copying a few of the more important ones onto the loose leaf of paper, he carefully set the book afloat, leaving the swift currents of the river to claim it. At the bottom of the bag he found only remnants of innocence and was surprised that he could not find more. Then the realization came that most lay buried in the chilled November earth of years past, like a priceless, buried treasure. He put what little he had left back into his bag. Finally, he began to brush off the black and brown prickly things that had accumulated and managed to cling to him throughout his journey to the river's edge. After spending more time than he would have liked removing these, he decided to just settle on keeping the remaining few. The shadows will be here soon, he thought. Already he could hear their low and incessant whisperings begin to surround him on all sides while the paralysis from the extreme cold generated by their presence began to set in. So with one last sentimental gaze down the long and difficult path he had used to arrive, he climbed upon the old, small raft and began the crossing towards the other side.

By

Charles Domercrant



Poetry and Prose cont.

Testing

It's been quite some time
since I've attempted to step out on a limb
to test my freedom...
to stand out
on a ledge of some grand edifice,
pushing my toes over
the edge
just to see
if gravity
can be defied
and
I wonder
how quickly I'd fall
OR
if some slight
but mighty
wind would
wind me
embrace me
uplift me
to soar
on false hopes
and pipe dreams
of probably so's and
it seemed
as if I knew
for sure...
exactly where
this choice would lead
Knowing
I have no wings
to wade through warm currents
that meet cold fronts.
Here. I stand...
Almost touching the sky
but not
contemplating the direction from whence I've come
Where else can I go



from the top of this great mountain?
the only
direction
seems
to
be
down

Yet!

If I chanced to grab a bolt of lightning...
I'd build me a staircase into the clouds
resting on downy beds and feathery chariots
that wheelessly pass through the sky.

I'd pick a place to sit...in the middle...to gaze over the
earth and see
how far
d
o
w
n
really is...

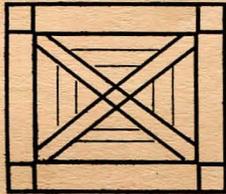
I'm simply
testing my options
But what
options do I have?

Chern Hale

African American Cultural Program

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MFAMMADAN
"A Strong House "



Poetry cont.

Is This Rose Just as Sweet

You may think that it is beautiful
A single rose in full bloom
Given as a gift of friendship
But all I see is death and gloom
To put it in water
So that it can be displayed again
Is as meaningless as
A chasing of the wind

The rose brings as much joy
As a barren womb
It is as content as fire with consumption
Or an empty tomb
For neither know satisfaction
The ability to say enough
Paradoxical in happiness
As a wife unloved



You will see what I mean
When it's petals start to drop and wither

And it's sweet garden smell
Becomes pungent and bitter
You will see
What an eyesore it will become
Then you will forsake it
And toss it out unloved

Oblivious as you were to its struggle
To pull in from phantom roots
Nourishment
The only thing left of function:
The thorns, whose prick still brings
Bereavement

As long lived as a snowflake in June
As hopeful as winter solstice for a long summer's day
Sweet as a kiss from a lying lover
Fruitful as the soil where spoiled seeds lay

Aisha Guest Cornelius