

Odyssey Oracle

Created for and by the students of the UW-Madison Odyssey Project

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Being Hmong

By Nou Yang

My grandparents were from China and so was my dad, but this doesn't make us Chinese. We may have two percent Chinese ancestry in our body, but we speak a different language and have different beliefs. We also dress differently and eat different food.

The Hmong language is even harder to learn than English just because of how it is said and the way it is spelled. I have tried to learn more about my culture, but being born in the United States, I have a hard time finding out about it because of my surroundings.

My parents told me that when they used to live in Thailand, all they ate was plain food with no seasoning. People at that

time didn't care as long as there was food to eat [in the refugee camps]. It was mostly plain boiled chicken, steamed rice, and pepper—and sometimes not even chicken but just pepper and rice. This is how they ate in Thailand when the land was full of water and farmers couldn't grow food.

Hmong people really don't have a type of food

We Asians, African Americans, and Latinos should stand together...

We should work together to demand equality and respect.



unique to them. Most Laotian, Thai, and Hmong food is alike. One of my most favorite dishes is fried noodles and red curry soup.

One thing that I have experienced about myself is going out in public and being treated with racism. When I went to the park one day with my brothers, sister, and my mom, my mother felt tired from work and wanted to sit down. As soon as she sat down, a white lady came up to us and said, 'Hey, you Chinese people and colored and non-American people, get off that bench and go back where you belong!' How does that make me feel? I was then 10 years old, and now I'm 20.

One time here in Madison I was called a Chinese and made fun of by 16-year-old Latino and African-American boys. I mean, they should be ashamed of themselves! Their parents should have taught them to respect others because we are one. We Asians,

African Americans, and Latinos should stand together, not in front of each other, because we all get treated the same. We should work together to demand equality and respect.

To Be Hmong Is to Be Free By Tou Song Vang, Odyssey Class of 2006

Hmong is an ethnic group that came from China. There are a couple of different kinds of Hmong groups, including Hmong white, green, and black. My grandma and parents told me that two of the differences are the outfits they wear for the Hmong New Year and the way they speak (in the same way that southerners in America speak differently than northerners).

Other Asian groups usually call Hmong "Meo" or "Miao" but I don't really know why. The word "Hmong" means "freeman"; the Hmong never

Throughout Hmong history, they were always in wars and ended up getting pushed out of their homeland.

really had any type of government, and they liked to roam freely. Nowadays Hmong are spread throughout the world, which only took four or five decades, due to the Vietnam War. Throughout Hmong history, they were always in wars and ended up getting pushed out of their homeland.

It started when the Chinese came in and stole the Hmong's land, then forced the Hmong out. Some Hmong fled southwest of China, and some fled all the way to Southeast Asia.

Later came the French War with the Hmong, and then the Japanese War, and finally The Secret War, which the Hmong fought in Laos. They never really wanted war or started a war for more land or money. I think all they really wanted was to be left alone and live their lives as "free men."



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Musician Spotlight: *George Gershwin (1898-1937)*

“Summertime,” “My Man’s Gone Now,” and “It Ain’t Necessarily So” are just a few of the many songs made famous by composer George Gershwin. Before his untimely death, Gershwin generated controversy by breaking new ground in music and on the stage.

George Gershwin was born in 1898 in Brooklyn, New York, to Russian Jewish immigrant parents. As a teenager he began writing songs. He dreamed of combining the techniques of the great orchestral composers with the wide appeal of popular songwriters.

In the 1920s and 1930s Gershwin achieved fame through musical comedies such as *Lady, Be Good* (1924) and *Funny Face* (1927), with its hit song “I Got Rhythm.” His 1931 hit *Of Thee I Sing* (1931) parodied presidential elections and became the first musical comedy honored with a Pulitzer Prize. The words of most of George Gershwin’s famous songs were written by his brother, Ira Gershwin.

George Gershwin also achieved fame with his concert hall music, particularly with *Rhapsody in Blue*, written for piano and jazz band. Gershwin was one of the first white composers to combine classical music with blues and jazzlike effects. Often he performed his own piano music and conducted his own orchestral compositions.

In 1935 Gershwin wrote the most popular opera ever written by an American composer: the “folk opera”

Porgy and Bess. *Porgy and Bess* tells the story of a disabled black man named Porgy living in poverty in Charleston, South Carolina and trying to keep Bess, the love of his life, from the advances of a pimp named Crown and a drug dealer named Sportin’ Life.

From the beginning, *Porgy and Bess* ran into controversy. Gershwin had attempted to use vernacular dialect and to capture the violence and poverty of black life in South Carolina, but many argued that the show perpetuated racist stereotypes. When the show was filmed, Harry Belafonte refused to play Porgy, so Sidney Poitier took the role with dubbed-in singing, a decision Poitier later regretted.

Other artists disagreed with the charges of racism, calling George Gershwin “the Abraham Lincoln of music” for his groundbreaking efforts to showcase the talents of black musicians and actors. Because the Gershwins specified that no white performers could play black roles, many black artists launched their professional careers through this show at a time when they could not get parts in mainstream musicals or operas. Maya Angelou, who worked as a dancer in a European touring production of *Porgy and Bess* in 1952-1953, felt a mixture of discomfort with the show and delight in her fellow performers: “Over the next year, I found myself more touched by the tale and more impressed by the singers who told it.”

Two years after *Porgy and Bess*, George Gershwin died

suddenly of a brain tumor at the age of 38.

In the decades following Gershwin’s death, singers such as Ella Fitzgerald, John Coltrane, Frank Sinatra, Billie Holiday, Miles Davis, Judy Garland, and Nina Simone created their own versions of Gershwin’s songs.

In the 1920s George Gershwin countered critics who attacked him for writing “music of the streets”: “I felt the rhythms of American life, and I expressed them as best I could. . . . Jazz is the voice of the American soul. . . . Don’t condemn jazz on the say-so of any old fogey. Avoid musical snobbery. Think for yourself.”

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TWO FIGHTERS FOR CHANGE

Odyssey students compared and contrasted Malcolm X's "Ballot or the Bullet" speech (1964) and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech (1963).

Self-Defense and Spirituality By Brian Benford

Although both speeches were written and recited before I was five, to this day I live by both men's sentiments. Some people might think that these two viewpoints are exclusive of each other. I have always felt that both men had great merit and were connected by the desperate conditions facing black people at their time.

When I was growing up, my father was a police detective with the City of Milwaukee and a former combat veteran. He was conditioned to respond to violence with a higher measure of violence. This was his way of ensuring the outcome he wanted. We grew up studying martial arts, boxing, and marksmanship

to hone our self-defense skills. My father felt as if a war between the races was inevitable. In preparation, he instilled in us our right to survive and to reach our full potential without fear from others. My father subscribed to many of Minister Shabazz's teachings.

While all this was going on, I was also a dutiful Catholic boy who happened to have one of the most outspoken priests in the country. Father James Groppi was at the front of the Civil Rights movement in Milwaukee. In school, we studied the teachings of King from kindergarten to Dr. King's tragic death. Father Groppi would preach a doctrine that put non-violent practices in a divine light. He would cite personal examples of restraint in his struggle to bring about change. In Dr. King's actions, we saw

parallels with the preaching of Jesus. At a young age I have ample opportunity to reflect on the teachings of both King and Shabazz as I formulated my own beliefs.

When I read both writings, I was cognizant that both viewpoints are a direct response to the horrible injustices that still exist. Both men were firm in their resolve and found necessity in their actions. In my attempt to rectify my beliefs, I draw on both my spirituality and the most primal condition to not allow anyone to do harm to me or to those I love. I think both men were right and that their teachings can offer guidance even in the times we live in.

The Dreamer and the Prince By E. Oroki Rice

Martin has often been called the *Dreamer*; Ossie Davis named Malcolm *Our Black Shining Prince*. Both men were respected ministers and established leaders of their people. Many people would say that they were "like oil and water." How different they seemed to be. Yet they had the same goal. They wanted to end exploitation, discrimination, and racism. Both had been deeply influenced by their fathers, especially by their religion and their attitudes toward whites. . . .

Today both men are



regarded by many as martyrs who died for their people in the fight for equality, a fight that has not stopped even today. They never formally joined together, but they left behind a mutual legacy that reminds each of us of our personal responsibility to make this world a better place than we found it. Although they differed greatly on their philosophies of the means by which to try to obtain their goal, they shared a common struggle. It was the pain that lay so deep within their souls that drove them to speak out to a country, a world whose ears were not ready to listen and whose minds could not stretch to comprehend their radical and strange messages. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X were leaders in their time but destined to be legends forever.



Hitting the Road **By Molinda Henry**

Malcolm and Martin are driving down the same road but in different lanes of the highway. Malcolm's oratorical technique drives the reader to organize for immediate action. You want to do something now! Martin evokes one to think first, then act. The strong similarity is that both men call the readers to action. The difference is in the speed in which you hit the asphalt.

Conversation on a Cloud: An Imaginary Letter from Malcolm to Martin **By Derrick Washington**

You know, Martin, since I'm the oldest by four years I think it's time we had a little talk. I'm still not sure if we're not two sides of the same coin sent to pay for the same piece of candy. The timeline almost balances itself out, with you on one end and me on the other. Let's start in 1947, the year you were ordained minister. Ironically that was the same year I was transferred to Concord Reformatory for 15 months. The very next year you graduated from Morehouse College, and I was introduced to the Nation of Islam teaching of Elijah Mohammed

by brother Reginald. See, while you graduated from an institution, so did I. . . .

I think 1963 was the biggest year in both our lives because thanks to me your march on Washington was so accepted. In that one year, Elijah Muhammad and I were really into it. I was on radio stations in Washington D.C. all the time. . . . I even attended the march as an observer. I say now as I said then, "I can't understand why Negroes should become so excited about a demonstration run by white people in front of a statue of a president who has been dead for a hundred years and who didn't like us when he was alive."

1964 was a high point for the both of us. They gave you the Nobel Peace Prize because they wanted Negroes to go in your direction, but you deserved it in retrospect. I, on the other hand, got a prize of my own: truth. I traveled to Mecca, and for the first time I realized that it wasn't a black problem but a human one. It wasn't a self-proclaimed chosen race of people that were evil, it was certain people of a race that chose to be evil, and every race does it. . . .

While we didn't always see eye to eye on methods to solve the problems, I always had a deep affection for you and felt that you had a great ability to put your finger on the existence and root of the problem. You were an eloquent spokesman for your point of view, and no one can honestly doubt that you had a great concern for the problems we face as a race.

Emily Dickinson and Alternative Sanctuaries

Odyssey students responded to an Emily Dickinson poem about ways to worship.

Here is the poem and a few student responses:

Some keep the Sabbath going to Church—

I keep it, staying at Home—

With a Bobolink for a Chorister—

And an Orchard, for a Dome—

Some keep the Sabbath in Surplice—

I just wear my Wings—

And instead of tolling the Bell, for Church,

Our little Sexton—sings.

God preaches, a noted Clergyman—

And the sermon is never long, So instead of getting to Heaven, at last—

I'm going, all along.

higher power does not have to be confined to a church or synagogue. The signature of a higher being is seen in so many places. His/her voice, song, and presence can be experienced wherever we can find peace. **(Corinthians Reece)**

You don't have to physically go to a church to receive praises or blessings. There are no rules for praying or time limits for praising. You can stay at home, outside, or at someone else's home, five minutes or five hours. It's all the same as long as you believe. **(Stanley Sallay)**

This poem says that we are allowed to celebrate our spirituality in forms other than church. I can really relate to this writing because I've always felt closer to God in nature. It also tells me that we live in heaven now. **(Brian Benford)**

You can turn any surrounding into a church. **(Sonia Spencer)**

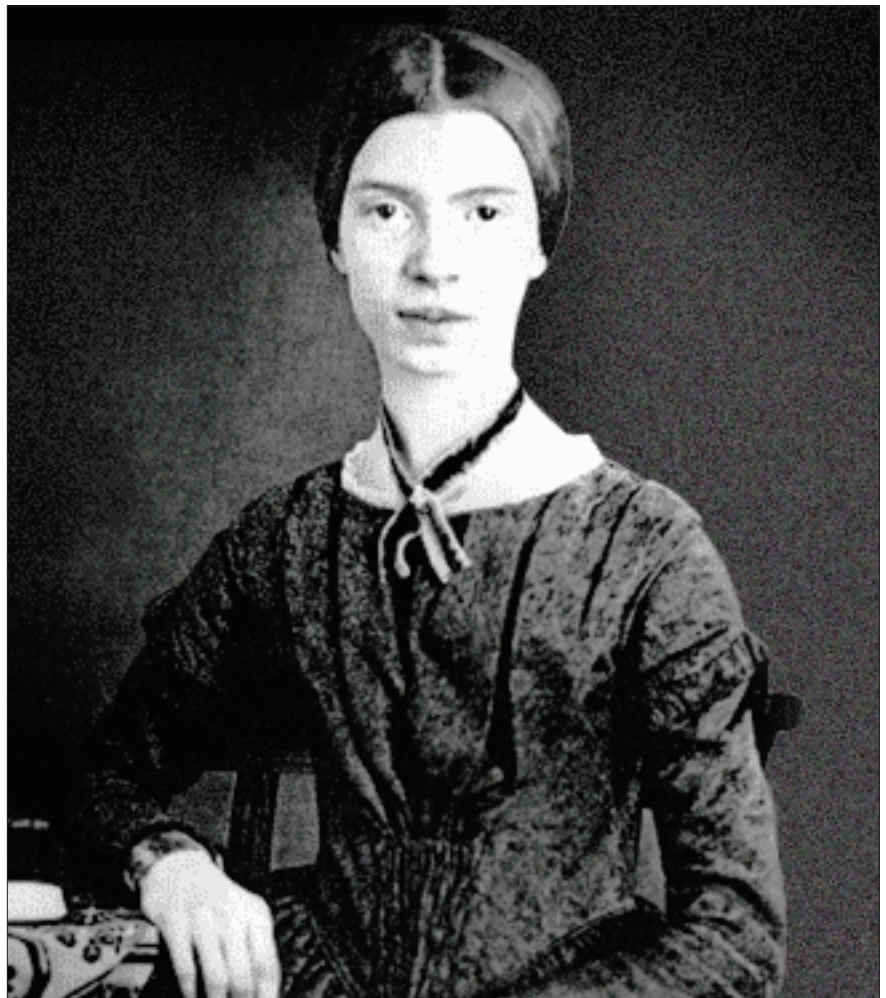
She is an angel who is already with God and doesn't have to go through all of the earthly things before seeing God and Heaven; she is already there. **(Yasmin Horton)**

Responses:

In this poem Emily Dickinson simply states you can get the Word, the Song, simply in your own backyard. I for the last week have served God in the same way, at home, with my stereo as my choir, Channel BET as the preacher. My home to me is a sanctuary. My grandchild was my sexton, singing away. I must admit worship service at home was great. **(Roslyn Phillips)**

Emily Dickinson is saying that we can find our sanctuaries or places of peace anywhere on earth, at all times. We do not need to wait until Sunday to be holy and one with God. . . . **(Cameron Daniels)**

A relationship with a



Jean Feraca Brings Liberia to Madison

By Mary Wells

For those of you who didn't know, Jean Feraca is very active outside of our Odyssey class. Jean is an international traveler and also the host and executive producer of Wisconsin Public Radio's international news and global cultural affairs program called "Here on Earth, Radio without Borders." I have never had an interest in listening to public radio, but now I listen most every day to catch Jean's program. I have been delightfully surprised and intellectually stimulated listening to Jean and her guests. Jean's radio show has a dedicated listener base locally and from all across the country, with calls coming in from as far away as Australia!

While absorbing all this new information, I heard the Wisconsin Public Radio website mentioned (www.wpr.org). I found a few extra minutes one day and stumbled onto information that on February 21, the UW's African Studies Program was hosting a brownbag lunch "Re-birthing a New Nation: Liberian Woman Take Charge" showcasing Jean's recent trip to Liberia.

I trekked up Observatory Drive and made my way to UW's Ingraham Hall. Once inside, I was greeted warmly by Jean, who was excited to share her experience. What a nice surprise to find African coffee on the back table as a welcoming touch! About forty people filed in. Jean recognized Florence Chenoweth, a graduate of the UW who has worked directly with the current President of Liberia,

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, as a cabinet member. Ms. Chenoweth had just come from a U.N. meeting in



Washington D.C. with Liberian finance ministers. President Sirleaf was in attendance and made a direct appeal for debt relief for Liberia, to which the U.S. responded favorably, agreeing to 100% debt relief, and Germany followed suit. With this news, the group applauded with jubilation.

When Jean started "Here on Earth," one of her goals was to counter the negative messages that we have stereotypically heard about Africa - stories of corruption, civil war, AIDS, and mayhem. At one point, Ms. Swanee Hunt was a guest on Jean's radio show to talk about her memoir *Half-Life of a Zealot*. During the radio show, Ms. Hunt personally invited Jean to be a part of her December 2006 delegation to Liberia, and of course Jean jumped at the chance! Swanee served as Ambassador to Austria in the Clinton administration. She is the daughter of one of the wealthiest men in the world, oil magnate Howard Hunt.

Ms. Hunt inherited a fortune which she uses primarily to empower women in post-conflict zones of the world.

Jean heard many amazing stories in Liberia. One woman, a village elder named Mama Sieh, made a lasting impression. During the war Mama Sieh taught the women in her village how to grow food so they would not have to trade sex for food when the soldiers came through the village. Now that the war is over, she is helping women to become entrepreneurial, teaching them business skills in three areas - selling smoked fish, making tie dye, and constructing cinder blocks for building their own houses.

These amazing women of Liberia are working to rebuild their nation after fourteen years of civil war. When peace negotiations broke down, they locked the men in the room and refused to release them until they signed a peace accord. After that, they mobilized to get rural women across the country to register to vote and were primarily responsible for getting Ellen Johnson Sirleaf elected into office, making her the first woman president of any African nation. These women are truly feeling their power.

I would definitely give Jean's presentation a TWO THUMBS UP! Try to catch Jean's article in an upcoming *Isthmus*. I guarantee you will feel as if you were right there in Liberia with Jean.

Odyssey Editorials

I feel cheated!

By Mary Wells

Mary Wells' editorial was broadcast four times on WORT on March 7, 2007 and is now available through their audio archives at www.wort-fm.org.

I feel cheated!! After 48 years, I've just recently been introduced to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s *Letter from Birmingham Jail* as a current student of the UW-Madison Odyssey Project. As a product of the Madison Metropolitan School District, I should have encountered this inspiring essay about justice much sooner. It could have changed the course of my life, as Dr. King's message changed the course of this country.

African-American parents in Madison took for granted the fact that their children would be taught ALL of America's history when in fact we learned very little about our own ancestors' contributions. Has enough changed today?

Dr. King spoke about the "degenerating sense of 'nobodiness'" that many African



Americans felt in the United States before the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. One way to make sure our current African-American students feel an inspiring sense of 'somebodiness' is by making sure that *Letter from Birmingham Jail* is required reading in the school system here in Madison.

It is not enough just to play a 30-second clip of the "I Have a Dream" speech. It is not enough to pull out for Black History Month a poster of Rosa Parks in the front of the bus. Parents, ask your children's teachers how many full works by African Americans are on their required reading lists. To quote Dr. King: "We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressor." Demand that your children not be cheated, as I was, out of the words of Martin Luther King, Jr.!

Don't confuse immigrants and terrorists

By Sandra Ramirez

Many Salvadorian soldiers are getting killed in a war that is not theirs.

Many families already have lost the ones they love in 12 years of a civil war in El Salvador (1980-1992),

and some of the same families have lost a loved one in Iraq. This is the case of a Salvadorian mother I know who lost her husband in the civil war of El Salvador and last December lost her son in Iraq.

I emigrated from El Salvador three years ago. I'm a Salvadorian who does not agree with the war in Iraq. I don't agree with taking Salvadorian soldiers there. I was born and grew up in times of war, and I know how painful it is when you're told, "Your dad got killed."

President George Bush and Elias Saca, the Salvadorian president, have an agreement taking Salvadorian soldiers to Iraq. President Saca, in his speech to his nation, says that having troops in Iraq is good for El Salvador because that way the friendship between El Salvador and the U.S.A. is going to keep strong. He says this friendship if good for Salvadorians because of the immigration issue.

President Bush recently said that increased security is to guarantee National Security. But building a wall is not going to guarantee National Security against terrorism because terrorists look for other ways to enter the country. And no one has been caught crossing the desert of Arizona with bottles of shampoo for making explosives. The suspected terrorists have been caught at the London Airport.

Immigration doesn't have anything to do with National Security. Immigrants aren't terrorists or narcotics traffickers. The majority of people come to the U.S.A. to work hard, looking



for a better life. Sometimes people come here for safety because in their own countries their lives are in great danger.

We are not terrorists. We are hard-working people, and we pay taxes, too. We contribute to the economy of this country.

Walk on By **By E. Oroki Rice**

*If you see me walking down the
street
and I start to cry each time we
meet
Walk on by.*

It's hard to ignore them.
They ride buses from one end
of town to another all day long.
You'll find them in public

libraries, prompting an ordinance posted that bans bad odors, carrying too many bags, sleeping and *excessive staring*. Something tells me this ordinance was created to shelter and comfort *regular* people.

I live at Porchlight, a transitional housing facility for people like me who are homeless. Homelessness has forced me to look deeper into the eyes of my homeless brothers and sisters. I have to believe that not one of them said to themselves



in childhood, "When I grow up I'm gonna be a homeless person." I know I didn't. Most of us had dreams of a different life than the scorching fire we were asked to walk through. Some of us came out more reduced to ashes than others.

So the next time you encounter one of us, look us in the eye. Look past the stench. Look past the six giant garbage bags that we board the bus with. Look past the blank stares pasted on our faces as we rock from side to side in the bus shelter. Look past the smile we offer freely as we dance to our own beat on State Street with hope that you can *spare a little change*.

If you can't look us in the eye, please *walk on by*.

A Letter to Oroki Rice from Earl Shorris, Clemente Course Founder:

Your essay "Walk on By" was a good one, clear and with feeling. Although I am an old writer, I do not always accomplish as much in a short essay.

It may interest you to know that the Clemente Course (that's what we call the Odyssey Course in most places) has known from the very first class we had in 1995 that homeless people are among the best prospective students of the humanities. A homeless man who came to our course the first year has proved to be one of the brightest people who ever came to the course. He went on to college, earned a degree in philosophy, then an M.A. in philosophy, and on to doctoral studies.

In Orlando, Florida, the

valedictorian at last year's Valencia College commencement was a fellow who was homeless when he came to the Clemente Course. Lots of homeless people in Vancouver, Canada, have gone on to the University of British Columbia, which has had a course now for many years. In Australia we have two courses just for homeless people. We also have a course for homeless men in Seoul, Korea.

As the years have gone by, I have begun to think of homelessness as a sort of passage for many people --in Chicago and Charleston, SC, and California, and Halifax, Canada, and of course in Madison. Some people are sick and need help, but a lot of homeless people are there because of one kind of cir-

cumstance or another. What I find with homeless people who come to the course is that they bring the kinds of experiences that enrich the classes and teach the teachers.

Like you, they identified themselves as homeless when they came to the course, but they became students and scholars, and that is who they are now, like you. So keep doing well, writing well, and you will be guiding future students in America and Korea and Ghana and the Dominican Republic and Canada.

The future thanks you for your good work, and writer to writer I send you a collegial hug.

What are you feeding my grandchild?

Our children need healthy school menus

By Juanita Wilson

Most food is prepared and packaged at a central food service facility. It is transferred to schools and reheated or cooled and served on site. Nothing is made at the school. They put everything in foil.

Everything is prepackaged. Nothing about it looks natural.

During the breakfast program, too much sugar gets into the system way too early in the morning. There is too much sugar in the different colors in the cereal. The children have a hard time settling down.

The children are not given the fruits that they need, and they need to know that a treat is a treat and should not be a daily expectation.

Chocolate milk should not be served every day.

The school lunches need to be healthy. School lunches consist of French fries, burgers, pizza, chicken fingers, nachos, chocolate chip cookies, puppy chow, sub

sandwiches, and taco salads. Most of these choices are not healthy.

Highly processed diets are harming our children.

Certain foods—vegetables, fruits, proteins—build body strength and help functions of the body.

Head Start helps children and parents

By Katy Farrens

Head Start serves 3-5 year-old children from low-income families and children with disabilities. It was started in 1965 as a pilot program and was so successful, it turned into a permanent program across the United States.

It's funded federally, so it's always at risk of losing its funding. It has been 40 plus years, and Head Start is still going strong!

This program is unique, and year after year it proves through the NRS (National Reporting System) to be a very beneficial and positive experience for low-income children

whose families can't afford to put them in a preschool. Parents don't have to pay for a thing, except if they put their child in an all-day program, and then they still

would only have to pay a co-pay, and their childcare subsidy would handle the rest.

The kids learn a curriculum that prepares them for school and beyond, and they serve the whole family. They are there for the family, whether it's job searching, housing, GED or ESL classes, or if they just need someone to support and guide them through a tough time in their lives.

Head Start also has something called a policy council made up of parents, staff, and members of the community. Through this council parents get to know what's going on in the program and what will happen in the future. They learn that they are part of something important and crucial to the program, and with their participation, they can make a difference. Their opinions matter, and their voices are heard.

The Head Start Program has changed my life. When my child first started, I took his schooling very lightly. Being a young first-time parent, I didn't know how important and beneficial it was for him to get a headstart for kindergarten. The teachers kept talking to me about my child and encouraging me to get involved. They made me see how important I am in my child's life, and the more I'm involved, the better off my child will be in the future.

I decided to try out the policy council, not knowing that three years later my life would have such a positive change. Head Start showed me how important I am in my children's education and how to advocate for them if needed, not by yelling or arguing, but by talking with some sense and intelligence. They showed me how to sit on a council, a

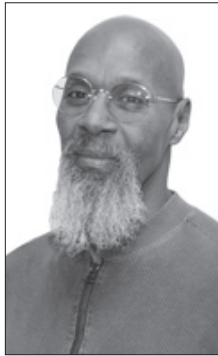


committee, and a board, and now I can go out in my community and get involved and not feel as if I don't know what I'm doing. It brought out a side of me I liked and didn't know I had.

I now have very high hopes and expectations for my family and myself. I'm back in school hoping to become a social worker because I realized I wanted to help others just like Head Start helped me. I thank God every day for this program that made me a better parent. I will always be the biggest supporter of it.

A View from the Outside: It's Democracy "On Paper" By Tillman Morris

I served time in prison. In theory, we ex-cons have paid our debt to society. This country should encourage us to vote instead of turning us into outsiders. But even after getting out, we don't get all our rights back.



According to Marc Mauer of The Sentencing Project in Washington, D.C., over four million people in the U.S. can't vote because they have a conviction record. It's illegal for ex-cons to vote if they're still on parole or probation, also known as being "on paper." A lot of men and women I know didn't vote in the last election because they're still "on paper." In fact, many states never restore voting rights to ex-cons. Research

by The Sentencing Project also reports that about 13% of black men in the U.S. are permanently denied the right to vote because of their prison record.

It's a modern version of slavery. Today, states count prisoners when it comes to padding the population in congressional districts where prisons are located. Under slavery, states counted blacks as 3/5's of a person in electoral districts.

This country calls itself the best democracy in the world, but it has a long way to go. The vote should be restored to former prisoners. Why should ex-cons want to be tax-paying, law-abiding citizens if we can't even vote after coming home? Without genuine electoral reform, the U.S. is a democracy "on paper."

Keeping Our Children Safe from Guns By Lorena Lovejoy

I've dealt personally with guns and violence since I was 21 years old. Almost six years ago, one of my dearest friends that I have known since 4th grade was shot and killed. We were good friends in elementary school, shared the same birthday, and even "dated." Then we met up again in 1996 after years of not seeing each other. We started hanging out again and remained very close. Then one



May day in 2001 he shot himself.

If it wouldn't have been for the gun, one of my friends would probably still be alive today. The newspaper said it was a man playing Russian roulette, but I don't think that was the case at all. I learned to accept that he was gone

and continued on with my life, and then just in 2006 it happened again. Another one of my good friends passed away due to guns and violence. He was actually just standing on a family member's porch and was shot by a drive-by.

It just kills me inside to know that so many young African-American men are dying so tragically. According to WISQARS, Leading Cause of Death Reports, the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, and the Centers for Disease Control, in 2002 firearm homicide was the #1 cause of death for 15-34 year old African Americans. Can you believe it?

Both of the young men I knew had children, friends, and people who loved them. It is heartbreaking that so many people have to deal with losing loved ones to gun violence. Being a parent of an African-American young man, I wonder what kind of society he is going to grow up in.

We need to do something to put an end to this. We can start by us being good parents and setting good examples for our

kids, starting when they are young and learning the most. Moving to good neighborhoods, paying attention to who our kids hang out with, watching what they view on TV, and learning and teaching self control can also help prevent violence later on in life. We need to work as one to save our kids from a bad way of life.

They Say I Look Like Whoopi

By Molinda Henry

“You look like Whoopi!” they say. Who are they? They are strangers—men, women, and children from everywhere. Who is Whoopi? W h o o p i



Goldberg is a very famous black comedian with

dreadlocks. She has performed in movies like *Ghost* with Patrick Swayze and Demi Moore and *Sister Act I and II*, and she has a stand up comedy act. If I had a dollar for every time a person said I looked like Whoopi, I would be as rich as she.

I’ve been asked the question in a variety of forms: “Has anyone ever told you look like—?” or “Did you know you look like—?” as if some profound epiphany could be claimed from such a revelation. This suggests that I could equate my face to any other person’s face in the entire world, as if my face

isn’t good enough or is too good to be my face.

I have dreadlocks and am black as well. I think it’s the hair that makes people say I look like Whoopi. I do see some similarities; however, the presumption that I will take this look-alike-stuff as a compliment and be gracious rather than be insulted astounds me.

I do find Whoopi Goldberg vastly talented, extremely witty, and hilariously funny. I would not describe her as being an amazingly beautiful woman as I would describe myself, of course. I’ve faced it. I have to like what I see in the mirror, and I do.

I hope Whoopi is as happy with her face as I am mine. I know those of you who say I look like Whoopi mean no harm. For those of you who think I want your unsolicited opinion about whom I resemble, do you want to know who or what you look like to me?

The “N-Word”

By Anne Meyer

“Death to the N-word”!

You heard it right. I am talking about the word ‘n i g g e r .’ Recently there was a funeral for this word, the goal being to eliminate its existence, past and present.

I would hope that Black Americans would take a look at the real issue which is the intent behind its use. To censor or sanitize the word, referring to it as the “N-word,” simply erases the sting and with it the shameful past that gave rise to the word. You can try to kill



the word, but there will always be another word to take its place.

This is an opportunity for those of us who have been hurt by the use of the word to explore the emotions beneath our reaction and the emotions that compel the offenders to use the word in hate, ignorance and fear. These are weighty issues, not easy to look at, not easy to solve, but as long as we hide from them, there will never be any resolution.

We can begin by making a choice as individuals to not use the word at home, not use it against others, not use it as a term of endearment, and most importantly, to speak out to those who use the word in our presence or use the word against us. Let our experiences serve as a catalyst for change and a bridge of understanding. That is truly the only way to diminish the power of the word.

How can you ban a word?

By Yasmin Horton

Have the leaders of the black community gone mad?

How in the world do they have the audacity to suggest banning a word, especially one so embedded

in our speech, a word that we’ve heard since even before we began to speak?

Granted, the word does have an ugly, nasty, harmful stigma attached to it, but nonetheless this word is a part of the language that we have become



accustomed to. I have no problem with the suggestion that we no longer use this word; my qualm is actually with the word 'ban.' How can you officially prohibit someone from using a word?

I totally agree that we should discontinue the use of this awful word, but using such a harsh word as ban to get it done is not the way to do it. I think that as soon as people, particularly young people, hear the word 'ban' in reference to this subject, the suggestion becomes null and void. Our young people are not for being prohibited from doing anything. The cause is a great one, but I think using the word 'ban' should be banned.

Are we losing our kids in MySpace?

By Angie Williams

What is happening to our kids with MySpace and texting? The parents don't know what is going on anymore.

Ever since texting and MySpace came out, kids are changing. Before, I could walk past my daughter's room and get a sense of whom she was talking to and what she was talking about. But now she either stays in her room, bathroom, or wherever texting someone back and forth. I have two girlfriends who are going through the same thing, and we are just trying to see what we as parents can do to get our kids back. There is just so much that has been going on since



MySpace and texting has come around.

The danger is that we parents have no idea whom our kids are talking to or what they're talking about. I often wonder if that's why some of our kids have mood swings sometimes.

I think we parents should allow our kids a certain amount of time and also from time to time should read some of their text so we can be aware of how they're feeling and what they're going through.

A Child's Right to a Safe Education

By Kathleen Brown

We protect our money.
Why not our children's safety!

Schools today are becoming more of a target for homicides, suicides, and sexual assault cases. Recently in Racine, a six-year-old boy was sexually assaulted in the bathroom by a stranger who entered the school through an unlocked door. This is a child and a parent torn for life. Children are walking into schools killing teachers, other children, even the principal, and then turning the gun on themselves. These situations are all a cry out for help!

Maybe if we as parents, teachers, and counselors look and listen to the small issues surrounding our children, we can prevent a bigger issue from arising. If we don't, eventually teachers will feel the need to carry guns in school. Then what? As a parent I



might spend the rest of my life in jail because a teacher accidentally shot my child and I accidentally retaliated.

The government is pushing to put sobriety equipment in schools to test our children for drinking. But what about pushing the issue for working metal detectors, security guards, extra cameras, more concerned counselors, and getting teachers and students to better their communication?

Dear government: the war in Iraq has worsened, and the war on our school's safety is not getting better either.

Stop Criticizing Oprah

By Sonia Spencer

When you ask American children what they want, they say Play Station, sneakers, and MP3 players. When you ask children from Africa what they want, they say a new school, school





uniforms, books, and food. That comment came from Oprah Winfrey in her decision to build the Oprah Winfrey Academy in South Africa. A lot of people were upset about Oprah's comment about our children, but in reality she is right. Kids in America are so overexposed to materialistic things. They are not taught the importance of an education from the day they are born. In the continent of Africa, education is a MUST and is not taken for granted. Before you can talk, you already know you must have an education. Education in the United States is seen as a means to wealth, but in Africa it is seen as a key to freedom.

I am from Angola, Africa, but have been living in America for 24 years. Although at first I too was a little upset with Oprah's comments, being that I am also an African American that enjoys listening to my MP3 player, I understood her reasons after watching her special on television about the Academy she built in South Africa. The Academy itself is like a mini college for executives. It is decked out with a library with books from every part on the continent, sitting rooms where the girls can unwind, a studio, a dining room with the

very best china, and expensive African artwork Oprah personally chose for display throughout the campus. When the girls went into

her dorm room and lay on her bed, she began to cry. Back home in her village, she slept on the hard cold floor, waking up every morning to a back ache. When you see a young girl at the tender age of 10 crying because she finally has something that we take for granted here in the United States, a bed, how can you not honor Oprah Winfrey for giving 4000 girls a chance to succeed? How can we not thank her for her good will?

"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality."
--Desmond Tutu

Sometimes I Cry Review by Lakeitha Sanyang

I went to see the play about HIV/AIDS with celebrity Sheryl Lee Ralph at the Mount Zion Church. It was fabulous, with great information and reasons why we should get the word out on this issue and topic. I took along with me my mother and friend.



I want to give big thanks to Cameron's mother, Daphne Daniels (Odyssey Class of 2004-2005), for inviting us to this event. It was a fulfilling, educational, inspiring, and great performance. We all know that it is important that we know about HIV/AIDS, keep getting tested, and get the word out through the media, but not all of us are willing to learn more about it.

I have faith that tonight's performance has affected a lot of people, especially black women. It has been shown that it is a leading cause in our sisters who are being promiscuous and unsafe. It is a higher growing percentage in them than it is in Caucasian sisters. So let's strap up, put the umbrella on every time it rains, or keep it tight, which means abstain. Let's keep it real.



Tenant Rights

By Tiffani Puccio

Did you know it's illegal for your landlord to keep the temperature less than 68 degrees in the winter? Or that it's illegal for him/her to charge you more than a month's rent for a security deposit without paying you simple interest?



Most people don't know this. Their rights are overlooked due to the fact that they are unaware that they have rights.

Tenant Resources is a place where you can get advice on problems that may occur as you rent. You can call them at 257-0006 or you can visit their website www.tenantresourcecenter.org

You may also decide to take matters into your own hands by forming a tenant union. Going door-to-door and observing problems other tenants are having—maintenance issues, insect/animal issues, and safety—are some points you can bring up. If the tenants have been trying to get things done, make sure that they know to have proper documentation of events—i.e. dates and times, responses of management.

Once you have information collected, inform the landlord of the group's issues. You may also request records of repair or even call the building inspector to look at the problems.

Conquer AIDS Together

By Juanita Wilson

I attended an African American Health Network program regarding HIV/AIDS. Sheryl Lee Ralph, an original Broadway Dream Girl, delivered the speech entitled "Sometimes I Cry." She delivered her message through a one-woman play that she wrote. She presented her version of the stories of three women that have been affected by AIDS. The first story was of a 46-year-old entrepreneur who was infected. The second story was of a 19-year-old African exchange student who was affected. The last story was of a 68-year-old retired widow who was

affected. Ms. Ralph transitioned into each character by singing soul-stirring gospel songs.

This performance is Ms. Ralph's way of passionately presenting her concerns of the effect this disease is having on our African-American community. Her performance was inspired by open discussions about this deadly disease and motivated others to get involved about spreading the word. She stressed safe sex and the importance of wearing a condom. The only way to conquer AIDS is to conquer it together.



Molinda Hits the Jackpot

Molinda Henry has been selected as a winner of a \$5000 UW Osher Reentry Scholarship for 2007-2008 to assist with tuition, books, and other educational expenses. The Osher scholarships are “designed to provide financial assistance to individuals with financial need between the ages of 25 and 50 whose collegiate studies were interrupted for several years by circumstances beyond their control and who now wish to resume their studies and complete a four-year baccalaureate degree.” The Osher Foundation seeks “to recognize the commitment, efforts, and financial hardships of reentry adults as they balance their family, work, and school responsibilities in order to achieve their educational goals.”

The UW committee members who selected Molinda have notified Odyssey Project Director Emily Auerbach that they hope this is the first of many Osher grants given to Odyssey students admitted to degree programs at the UW. In her note to Molinda, Emily observed, “Congratulations on having the COURAGE to apply for so many scholarships and the EMPATHY to share that information with others. I applaud you for not feeling in competi-

tion with other Odyssey students but just in solidarity with their struggles to go forward past all the gatekeepers that invariably try to get in the way.” Last fall Molinda shared with the Odyssey class an entire packet of information listing all the scholarships she had discovered that they might be eligible for now or in the future.

Excited to learn she had won the scholarship, Molinda noted, “I will be forever grateful to the 30+ individuals who gave me the courage to accept myself, as they have accepted me. I’ve been given healing and empowering spiritual support that has assisted me in being who and where I am today.”



Epiphany By Molinda Henry

Find your own rhythm
it's deep inside.
Find your own way
it's in you to abide

By the tick, tock, ticking
The divine cadence profound
To the solid kicking
Of the bass drum sound

Much we need the beat
Leave it on the seat
Under your chin
Pat, Pat, Patting come in.

Much we need the beat,
Keeps the heat
Trek to the measure you hear,
Cause the sound is fresh on an ear

Of another, who cannot be
an ant if you're a tree,
a mouse if you're a bee,
an intricate part of me!

Odyssey Alums Win Scholarships

Three Odyssey alumni were honored on Tuesday, March 6, at a dinner and ceremony at the Monona Terrace Convention Center sponsored by the Business Forum. Kegan Carter ('04), Denise Maddox ('04), and Denise Hardnett ('05) won a collective total of \$10,000 in scholarships to help pay for their continued education.

“I’m very proud!”

Project Director Emily Auerbach commented after snapping this photo of the three. Looking at the photo later, Emily confessed, “I have yet to take a photo of Denise Hardnett with her eyes open!”

She will have one more opportunity: all three women will again be honored at a May luncheon at the Madison Club. Business Forum staff members who interviewed them as part of the competition praised their eloquence in describing the way the Odyssey Project had given them newfound hope and confidence.



What's Done in the Dark: Play Review by Lorena Lovejoy

Milwaukee Theatre, March 10, 2007

Tyler Perry's play *What's Done in the Dark* starts out in a hospital. It's basically about African Americans and their everyday struggle with life.

The play starts off with one family where the mom is raising her son on her own without any help from the father. Her son is a good student who is really good at basketball. She promises to attend her son's basketball game, but she isn't able to because she has to stay at work to make some extra money to pay the bills and pay for his new school jersey and tennis shoes. The dad is around but doesn't claim the kid. He feels that making \$25/hour is way more important than being in his son's life.

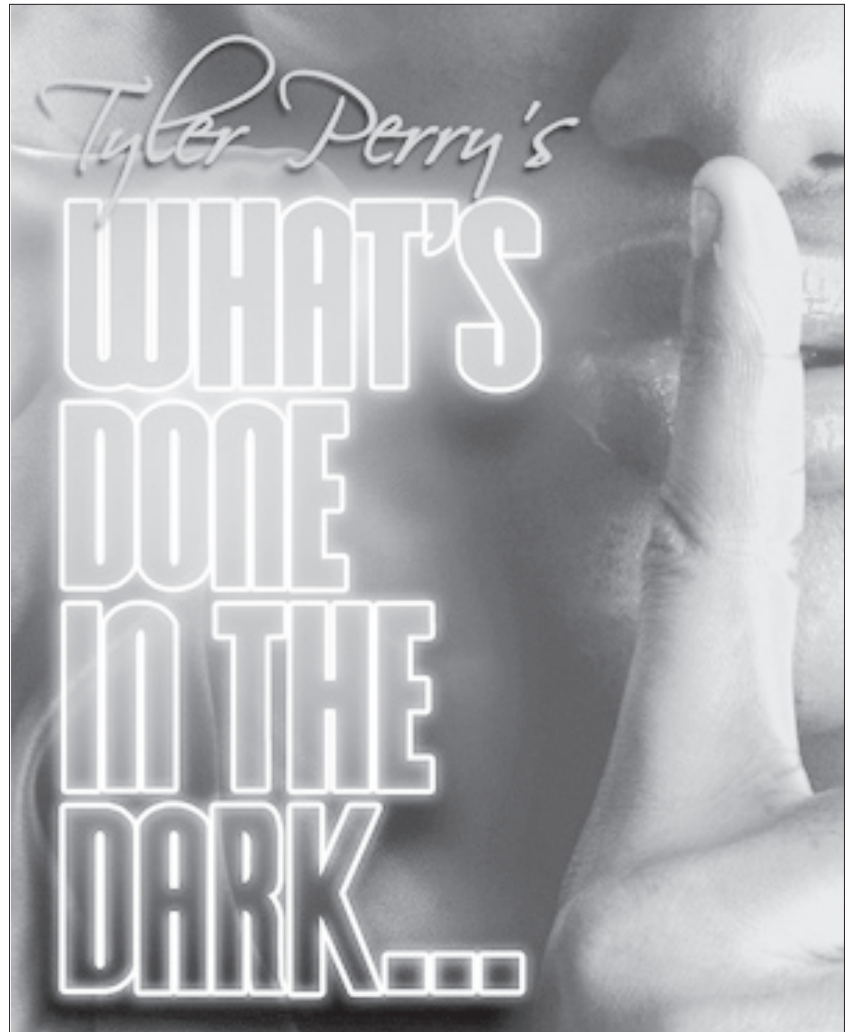
The second family story is about a nurse who is seeing one of the doctors. She brags to one of the other nurses about all the material things he has bought her and how she would like to be with him and eventually marry him. He keeps telling her they need to wait for whatever reason. It turns out he is already married and has a baby on the way. The nurse finds this out because the wife comes to the hospital to have the baby.

In the third family, the husband comes to clinic because he's having pain (can you guess where he's having the pain?) and gets checked out for STDs. He is very upset because he's only slept with his wife of 15 years. When he finds out he does have an STD, he goes and gets his wife and brings her back to the clinic for a check up. The whole time the audience is thinking automatically

he was the one cheating. I could tell because when he was talking to the doctor about hurting his wife if she cheated on him, the audience was muttering, "Ah, yeah, right!" The wife ends up having an STD

which obviously proved he was faking.

The last couple was a nurse who was crazy about one of the doctors but was approaching him the wrong way (too strong).



and finally admits she was the one that was cheating.

The fourth family consists of a father and his daughter coming to the clinic because the father thinks he is sick. The doctor has a hunch the father is sick in his head and decides to give him some "medicine," which in fact was actually candy, to see if he was really sick. The father felt so much better because of his "medication,"

All she had to was just be herself and give him some space.

I felt so connected to all of these characters. Their problems were all things that either I or somebody I know has gone through. The son tried to go out and sell drugs to help his mom and ended up getting shot and fighting for his life. So many young men are out doing that very same thing to help ends

meet because their fathers are too busy taking care of themselves and not trying to take care of their responsibilities. One of the doctors complained about paying so much money to his child. He wanted to know how a baby can spend \$9,000 a month and demanded "receipts." The nurse broke it down: "Do you need a receipt when we carry your baby for nine months? Do you need a receipt when we have to get up early every morning to get your kid ready for school? Do you need a receipt when we get stretch marks here, here, here, and here?" She had the women in the audience clapping and cheering, and at that moment I forgot she was even acting.

Then when the other nurse found out the other doctor was married already I felt her pain, her disappointment, her feeling of betrayal. She then discovered she was more valuable than that and cut him loose.

I could go on and on about ways many women and myself can relate to this play, but I'll let all of you see it for yourselves. It was an excellent play and I recommend anybody, no matter sex or age, see this play.

Tyler Perry is a fascinating writer. He not only writes plays about life and the good and bad it has to offer us, but he also uses comedy and music to keep his audience's attention. I definitely hope to see another play by him and hope he continues to make movies that everybody can relate to. So if you get an opportunity to see one of his plays or rent one of his many movies he has out, do it! It's worth the time and money, and I guarantee you'll be craving to see another one.

Hair Continues to Shock

A Review by E. Oroki Rice

Wow, I'd forgotten about the total nudity!

Hair, subtitled *The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical*, is a musical about hippies and was a significant part of the drug, music, and peace-love culture of the 1960s. It is famous, among other things, for a scene where the majority of the cast appears naked, and especially for its popular rock music score, which generated several pop radio hits.

The Strollers Company production playing at Madison's Bartell Theatre through March 24 made me laugh and made me cry. I'd been a pseudo-hippie myself when I'd first seen the Chicago production in the late 1960s. I owned the vinyl record and played it until the grooves were gone. Many of the songs—*Aquarius*, *Easy to Be Hard*, *Walking in Space*, *Good Morning Sunshine*, *What a Piece of Work is Man*—defined and helped to shape my emerging core values.

The Strollers Company cast fired high energy and unadulterated eagerness, which transported me back to my younger days. The troupe was not perfect. Some of the vocalists were a little off tune but made up for it in their enthusiasm. They actively interacted with the audience, possibly intimidating those faint at heart. The

show ended with a heartfelt performance of *Let the Sunshine In*. The audience rose to their feet singing and dancing along with the cast.

Hair is a story of hippies, drugs, free love, and music, but entwined throughout the love-rock musical is a resilient theme of peace. This is an anti-war saga, clearly against the Viet Nam War. Thirty-plus years later our youth are being asked to hand over their lives to another unpopular war. The song *Where Do I Go?* reverberates just as strongly as in the original production. Every generation and every individual is faced with this question. May our youth find an answer that leads us to peace.

