

Fall 2006

# PRISM

*dialogue, diversity, difference*

*PLUS: poetry, photography, reflections, commentaries, and more!*

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT  
by The Salvageman Project  
Manifesto: Hello

**INSIDE:**  
Original Prism Proposal  
Race in the Media  
Interview with Paula Chow  
On Western Beauty  
The American Dream

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## Letter From the Editor

Dear *Prism* readers:

It has been almost a year since the *Prism* magazine was last published in January 2005. Today, *Prism's* return comes at the heels of increased global turbulence, America's midterm elections, and the University's strides to make the campus a more equitable environment for all. From the approval of financial provisions for all juniors and seniors on aid to cover eating club contracts, to co-hosting "Kaleidoscope: An Alumni Conference on Race and Community at Princeton University" and "Coming Back and Looking Forward" with Black Princeton Alumni, to establishing the new Center for African American Studies, the University is making visible progress.

Despite these steps in the positive direction, there is still much to be done, and it is up to us students to affect change on the individual level. The *Prism's* return builds on the efforts of many in the past and present who see Princeton as what one makes of it. As brought up in a recent discussion on "self-segregation" led by the USG, if we allow it, Princeton can introduce us to people from all different walks of life. The *Prism* is a forum for embracing differences, sharing similarities, and giving voice to the traditionally voiceless or overlooked. This Fall, we have hosted the "Faces of America" show alongside weekly free-writing hours to promote expression and sharing of ideas. This first issue encapsulates voices from staff (Paula Chow of the International Center and Dean Maria Flores-Mills of ODUS), students from all four classes, and an alumna (Elizabeth Landau '06, former *Prism* co-editor-in-chief). Our hope is that you might come away from reading this issue intrigued, challenged, and having learned something new!

happy reading,  
Aitalohi Amaize '07  
([aamaize@princeton.edu](mailto:aamaize@princeton.edu))  
Editor-in-Chief

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Prism Winter 2007 Issue  
Submission Deadline:  
TUESDAY January 10, 2007  
Write us!  
[prism@princeton.edu](mailto:prism@princeton.edu)

## REDOUBLING THE REDOUBLING:

### A PROPOSAL FOR A PUBLICATION ON DIVERSITY AT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

by Elizabeth Landau '06

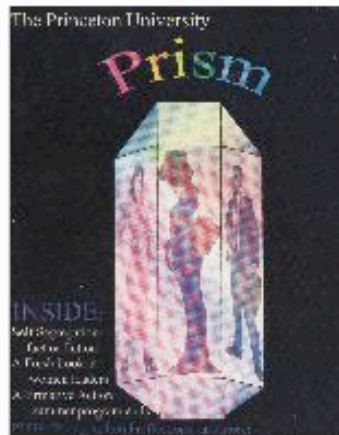
"Difference defines our world" (McIlvaine). Urging the Princeton University community to discuss race, gender, and sexuality rather than "sweep" them "under the carpet," Robert McIlvaine '97 emphasizes the importance of discussing the various types of difference and confronting the stereotypes associated with them ("Celebrating Difference"). This open discussion, McIlvaine argues, will give community members a greater understanding of diversity. This student's point about confronting difference is a good one. To ensure that we, the members of the diverse community of Princeton University, do not hold opinions of each other based on stereotypes, we must discuss and analyze our differences in an open forum. Indeed, by communicating these ideas in an article for *The Progressive Review*, McIlvaine shows us that a publication can serve as this open forum. Dialogue on diversity, McIlvaine's article demonstrates, is not always oral.

Having just received a \$225,000 grant for initiatives to increase dialogue about diversity—both the number of discussions and the number of participants—Princeton University has the opportunity to both initiate new forms of dialogue and harness existing resources. The primary existing dialogue-on-diversity efforts at Princeton, the International Center Consortium (ICC) and Sustained

Dialogue, currently host separate oral discussions on different categories of "diversity." The ICC's discussions primarily revolve around "nationality" and "culture" as traits of diversity—programs particularly attractive to

international students—while Sustained Dialogue meets in 12 groups of 10 to discuss race relations—discussions pertaining to American minorities (Chow, E-mail, Re: Paper). Given their shared goal of fostering understanding between all people with cultural differences, the ICC and Sustained Dialogue's separation is somewhat disconcerting. By implicitly catering to different populations, these groups further separate students into categories of "international," "American minority," and "American majority." Though students do choose for themselves where to attend dialogues, after one session a student will either feel engaged in or disconnected from the subject matter. Some diversity coordinators at other colleges are similarly concerned about an abundance of diversity initiatives that actually separate students. In her essay "Multiculturalism: An 'As If' Phenomenon," Beaver College Minority Affairs counselor Ana Maria Garcia observes that in higher education "diversity... often means producing static and repetitive programs, dialogues and services that polarize the community" (3). Garcia's observation about colleges' diversity services is particularly relevant as Princeton seeks to "redouble" its own efforts (Quiñones). It means that Princeton needs a diversity initiative that does not further polarize the community according to types of difference, but allows students of all cultural backgrounds one forum to analyze all types of difference.

Vice President Dickerson wants to use the Bildner Fund to "redouble Princeton's efforts to make this a place that is truly inclusive for all of the students," (Quiñones), but the first step towards a sense of inclusion is creating more forms of dialogue in which students can unpack the meaning of "inclusive." In order to ensure that ICC and Sustained Dialogue are not static and repetitive of each other, they must pool their efforts in an innovative, more comprehensive dialogue initiative. This initiative would provide the University community with both an overview of relevant diversity topics and a space for community input. The necessity of such an initiative is clear. Princeton University needs a new lens through



expressions that encourage further thought on issues regarding diversity. Visual media can juxtapose ideas to directly challenge assumptions that viewers may hold about cultural differences, and Princeton students already have much to contribute on this topic. Emy Kim '02, for example, painted a "Self-Portrait" that depicts only an empty chair with a white cultural garment ("Nassau Notes"). A current sophomore, Evelyn Thai, expressed her interest in contributing photographs of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma to *Prism* (E-mail, "Re: Publication"). Both Emy's painting and Evelyn's photographs are images that challenge viewers to re-examine their assumptions about the nature of identity and the beliefs and practices of other cultures. Oral dialogue groups might also use this artwork as discussion prompts. Rather than replacing oral dialogues, *Prism* can add new dimensions to them.

One might object that Princeton already has an array of publications that may serve similar purposes to *Prism* implicitly, such as a daily newspaper or literary magazine. Though Princeton the University recognizes sixteen different periodicals,

however, none is distinctly devoted to dialogue about diversity ("Newspapers and Periodicals"). *The Daily Princetonian*, the student daily paper, will report on brand new initiatives—such as the Bildner Fund—but does not report on ongoing dialogue programs. *The Progressive Review*, as already noted, concentrates on a

variety of worldly affairs such as the death penalty and presidential elections. In terms of student submissions, a stronger accusation might be that the newly founded *Troubadour Magazine* already dominates the arena for Princeton students to submit articles, poetry, short fiction, artwork, and photographs about their cultures. Indeed, *Troubadour's* mission to capture "how people understand themselves through where they've been" is seductively similar to notions of cultural difference that submissions to *Prism* will address ("Mission of *Troubadour*"). But "diversity" encompasses more than just the places a person has visited. Differences such as gender, race, religion, and sexual orientation are not necessarily issues of location; rather, they are issues of self-perception and how that self-perception affects one's daily life. *Troubadour* presents tourism; *Prism* alone will present dialogue to Princeton.

While unique as a publication at Princeton, *Prism* will not be the first magazine devoted to increasing a college community's understanding of diversity. In fact, Princeton's age-old Ivy rival Harvard University already has a similar publication called *Diversity and Distinction* ("Diversity and Distinction"). This award-winning Harvard initiative, like *Prism*, is published quarterly and "deals explicitly with issues of diversity, social justice, and identity" through articles, personal essays, and photography ("Diversity and Distinction"). *Diversity and Distinction* writers also go into the Cambridge, MA, community and analyze diversity initiatives at public schools, such as a program for disabled students. This model suggests that *Prism* too may connect more students to the community surrounding the University.



May 2004 *Prism* Corner (Vol. 3 No. 1)

Community-Based Learning Initiative

Want your research projects to promote social action and influence real communities?

Want to take your research out of the classroom and into the community?

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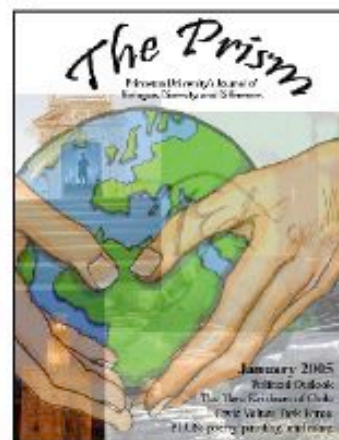
The publication in your hands grew out of a CBLI project.

Outreach? Check out [www.princeton.edu/cbl](http://www.princeton.edu/cbl) for more information or email [cbl@princeton.edu](mailto:cbl@princeton.edu).



Other colleges sponsor publications with more of a focus on the artistic and poetic expressions of diversity. St. Cloud State University publishes an annual literary arts magazine called "Kaleidoscope" with the "poetry, essays, short stories, art, and photography with a multicultural theme" ("Kaleidoscope"). Websites through other colleges such as Oregon State University display content similar to that proposed for *Prism* ("Diversity at OSU"), but such sites are not as accessible as a printed publication delivered to a student's doorstep. With *Prism*, then, Princeton can join and strengthen this emerging trend of publications as dialogue venues on college campuses. A published collection of diversity-themed prose and art should be as commonplace in colleges as discussions intended to "celebrate differences."

The *Prism* staff itself, comprised of representatives from each existing initiatives and other interested persons, is a microcosm of what the magazines hopes to help build: a community of students with many differences who work together to understand each other and learn from each other. No doubt this is what President Tilghman envisioned when she told the 2002 freshman class that Princeton seeks to make students "cosmopolitan," which she defined as "a person whose spirit is informed by a deep understanding and appreciation of the world in all of its manifold subtlety and complexity" (Stevens). Beyond making students with differences feel included in all aspects of campus life, Princeton is fundamentally geared towards building a community of students who, by understanding and appreciating diversity, have a better understanding of the world at large. We are all here to learn, but there is no better



January 2005 *Prism* Corner (Vol. 4 No. 1)

way for us to learn about the complexities and subtleties of a diverse world than through each other. As a large cosmopolitan community, therefore, we must strive to maximize our exposure to each other's worldviews.

Sustained Dialogue at Princeton groups are safe spaces for Princeton students of all backgrounds to share their personal experiences with their peers and to discuss important issues facing Princeton students, with the final aim of improving the campus community for all students. Sustained Dialogue supports the *Prism* magazine as an additional forum for valuable open dialogue among Princeton students. For more information about how you or your student group can get involved with Sustained Dialogue see [princeton.edu/~sd](http://princeton.edu/~sd) or contact Sian O'Faolain '08 at [ofaolain@princeton.edu](mailto:ofaolain@princeton.edu).

This exposure, with the help of the Bildner Fund, can happen in the form of a quarterly magazine whose content reflects student perceptions of this diversity. *Prism* is thus a teaching tool as it promotes dialogue on diversity. The ICC, Sustained Dialogue, and other programs can continue to thrive as oral discussions, but collaboratively they can facilitate the ideal complement to these discussions. No matter what other creative and innovative programs the Bildner Fund supports, these developing initiatives should have a common connection to the community at large. That connection should be *Prism*.

Elizabeth Landan, co-founder of the PRISM, wrote this piece in her freshman writing seminar. She graduated from Princeton in 2006 and currently attends the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. You can reach her at [elizabethl@gmail.com](mailto:elizabethl@gmail.com). Works cited list and footnotes on website: [www.princeton.edu/~prism](http://www.princeton.edu/~prism).

PRISM INTERVIEWS  
PAULA CHOW,  
DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL CENTER  
by Teck Hsien Ho '10

**Prism:** I understand you were a student here in America. What was it like back then? How was life for you as an international student?

**Paula:** First I studied for two years at a small Catholic school called Edgewood College which was in Madison, Wisconsin. Then I went to the University of Wisconsin for my bachelor degree before getting my Masters in Social Service Administration from the University of Chicago. At Edgewood I was one of the only 2 Chinese students. Life there was non-threatening. The Catholic nuns at the college were warm, friendly and always ready to help me through my cultural accommodation process. I think I was more fragile emotionally than some of our international students here. Most of them seem well adjusted to life here. Back then, in the first months, I missed my family very much -- especially my

kid sister who was only 4 when I left home. Language was a huge issue -- it was a challenge trying to express myself. I was forever preparing several iterations ahead before I dared to engage in any conversation.

**Prism:** *And how was it in the University of Wisconsin?*

**Paula:** The people in the Midwest are very friendly. At Wisconsin, I don't think I ever felt out of place. I was active, joined the leadership of the International Club and participated in student activities at the Student Union. At that time, there weren't many Asian-Americans on campus but a good number of Chinese international students, many were graduate students and we did things together socially.

**Prism:** *What about at the University of Chicago?*

**Paula:** At Chicago I lived at the International House. Half of the residents were international students, while the other half were Americans. There weren't many Asian-Americans at the University of Chicago at the time. We had great fun informing each other of our unique perspectives as we all came from so many cultures and countries, and talked through the nights. I also learned about the underbellies of American society as I did field work in the slums of Chicago.

**Prism:** *How different was life for international students during your studying days compared to the present?*

**Paula:** I haven't been a student for some time now, so I can't really say what the differences might be. From my observation, as it is true with those during my time, international students need to be a part of the larger and mainstream community and simultaneously they do have their needs that stemmed from being uprooted from their own cultures. Above all, they are amazing resources for us to understand the world beyond. Being away from their own and having to acclimate quickly to a new culture and new language, and feeling the need to come up to their same speed of accomplishments back home etc. can all be very frustrating. These were problems we faced back then as well.

However, I do believe that many of our international students here at Princeton are much more mature, sophisticated and worldly than we were. Many have traveled to many different countries, studied at boarding schools in other countries and are quite sophisticated and keenly interested in world issues. Here they are active with so many student organizations on campus -- some ethnic, some national, some cultural, and many very mainstream as participants of sport and debate



teams, reporters and editors for the Daily Prince, or initiators of periodicals that reflect diverse perspectives, being with the Graduate and Undergraduate Student Governments, and taking part in the governance of their residential colleges' programs. In sum, they really make our campus so much more cosmopolitan, colorful and vibrant.

**Prism:** *Now that premier universities are welcoming, and perhaps actively pursuing, applications from students around the world, do you think that this is a positive development?*

**Paula:** I think this is a very good thing for our students. It is really important that our future leaders of this country and of the world should know about the happenings, experiences and perspectives around the world. Having more international students on campus means that more students would be exposed to more varieties of perspectives. In many areas, American institutions of higher education are in cutting edge positions, so it is very exciting for top students from around the world to be able to come to these institutions, to learn and to be exposed to different ways of thinking and doing research. This has to be good, both for our admitted students and for their country of origin, to which many return to serve and to lead. It is very important that international students learn about the American and their fellow international students' ways of thinking, because they are the world's future leaders and will be those who influence how our world will move. Our world is shrinking, we need to understand one another in a profound way, for us to survive.

**Prism:** *But now that there is a larger population of international students, and in some cases, a sizeable number from just one foreign country, do you think that self-segregation is more of a problem than before? Almost every year there is some kind of article decrying this phenomenon in the Daily Princetonian. What do you think about this?*

**Paula:** That is an interesting issue. I think people tend to congregate with others with whom they could feel comfortable and with some kind of a common bond. A large number of our international freshmen come on campus earlier to a Pre-Orientation program organized by Dean Baldwin so they have had this opportunity to interact in a meaningful way -- discovering their commonalities and differences. And that bond continues to hold even after classes begin. I think that it is important that you have a core group of friends to depend upon, but that doesn't mean that having this group would exclude you from establishing meaningful relationship with other people. Many international students are active in mainstream student organizations including the USG, and they have American friends.

International minded Americans benefit from being with foreign students. If you, American or foreign, only interact with your own kind, you do yourself a disservice by not taking advantage of this University's amazing pool of resources in cultural diversity. I haven't read the articles you mentioned in the Daily Prince, but almost every year I suggest to my Chinese friends in the Graduate School that although I empathize with their desire to speak Chinese with each other in order to 'let their hair down' while eating, they should at least plan on one or two meals each week to speak in English with their other friends, or else their English would not improve with much speed. It is important that you retreat to your comfort zone, but it is also important that you venture out of that zone in order to develop a real sense of comfort with your newly adopted environment.

**Prism:** *What do you think about discrimination on campus?*

**Paula:** That's a difficult question to answer. We can be openly or unconsciously discriminatory. Some unconscious discriminations stem from misguided sense of superiority, and we all are tempted to feel that way at times. Through discussions, dialogues and formal or informal presentations, we here all try very

hard to facilitate Princetonians' understanding of our common grounds and our common need for respect.

**Prism:** *Do you think that the push for diversity has overbeaten; in the sense that now people look for diversity just for diversity's sake?*

**Paula:** Some members of perceived minority groups when invited to discuss or exam issues on diversity might question the "token" factor of their selection. Actually, by becoming a member of such groups, one becomes an integral part and can start transforming the mindset of the group. Let me see whether my story can illustrate this point.

Back in 1974, Princeton didn't have an International Center; a group of us volunteers were thinking about ways to be helpful to our international students as they adjusted to life at Princeton. President Bowen agreed to give us an office, four years later he agreed for us to become an office of the University and I became the director of this International Center. As a Chinese I was invited to join many committees on diversity issues because I was an 'Asian'. At times I rebelled against this kind of designation because I always

looked at myself as a Chinese or a foreigner who had recently went through the naturalization, acculturation and consolidation processes. But I tried hard, as participant of these committees, to learn about and to understand historical and discriminatory issues against Asian-Americans in this country. As a result I believe I was able to extend my fellow committee members' insights and concerns beyond the prevailing 'Black vs. White' mentality, and we began to talk about the many complicated multi-racial and multi-ethnic issues in the US and at Princeton. We also started to examine Admissions issues of Asian American applicants at Princeton as we became more specific in students' ethnic and racial designations and refrained from lumping them together as 'minorities'.

That was back in the 1980s. I believe some current Princetonians feel that their self identifications are different from their designated (or perceived) identity, and they don't like that. ☹

Got a thought on  
discrimination on campus?  
Write us!  
[prism@princeton.edu](mailto:prism@princeton.edu)

Paula Chow is the director of the International Center at Princeton. She is also the wife of Class of 1913 Professor of Political Economy, Emeritus, Gregory Chow. Prism staff member, Teek Hsien Ho is a freshman from Malaysia and can be reached at [tho@princeton.edu](mailto:tho@princeton.edu).

## ROBBED KNOWLEDGE

by Natalia Naman '08

Black grease  
under her nails  
in the grooves on the sides  
where it has built up for months.

A nip where the real  
and synthetic embrace

and then her fingers fly,  
uncrossing,  
unbraiding,  
collecting black grease.  
Unleashing herself.

The Trinidadian sun.

I ask where her family comes from  
before Jersey,  
before America.

Her fingers are acrobats.

"Virginia," she says,

"Sharecroppers."

And another few strands are free.

"Ehuse" by Khang Nguyen '07, Quang Ninh, Viet Nam, Summer 2006

Natalia Naman '08 (namana@princeton.edu) is an English major who hopes to get a certificate in the Creative Writing program as well as the African-American Studies and Theater programs. She is the co-artistic director of sKpassions Dance Co. and a member of the Hallelujah! Worship Committee on campus.

## UNDERNEATH UNUM

by Jean Beebe '10

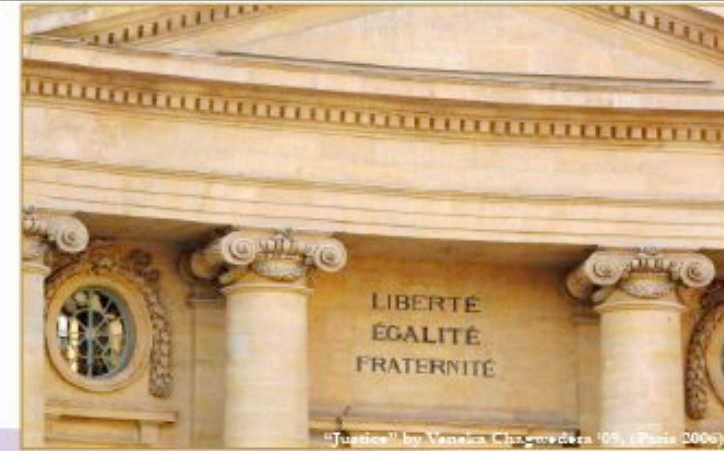
"E Pluribus Unum": "From Many One",

as appeared on the first Great Seal of the United States, September 16, 1782.

This poem was written on September 16, 2006, 224 years subsequent to the motto's first appearance.

Striding from the Des Moines Science Center  
bathroom, a woman gives me a second look, *wait*,  
*what are you, am I in the right place?* The two small *chicas*,  
white girl, and black boy toddler are squirrels shifting  
around her hips, *what's wrong, Mommy, why did we st--?*,  
but their sign stutters, hides in the ruffles of her hem,  
no, we are strangers, this is not the place: she says, *Hush*.

My father looks up from the drinking fountain,  
spittle soggy on his mustache, stooping between  
those two doors, *Men* and *Women*. He sees her confusion,  
rolls his eyes like the schoolgirl his mother wished  
him to be (after all, she did name him *Gail*, even  
spelled the wrong way for a guy). He stands, awkward  
between those two plastered figures, dark metal stuck



"Justice" by Vanessa Chazwooden '08, (Paris 2006)

on whatever doors are made of, one in a skirt  
and the other standing supposedly naked, protected  
not even with shoes. I brush against the door to which  
I think I belong, yep, the chick with the skirt, although  
I'm wearing pants and have bound my chest, bandaged  
as if I wear two wounds, left and right, drawn centrally.  
I am spread into one long ribbon, flattened as much

as the fabric will allow. She tries to place me,  
put it there, but I could be a slightly chubby boy  
or a mangirl (says my brother), but not, of course,  
a girly man. Or a butch dyke (says my mother), but  
not a trans boi, *what are you?* Freud would nod,  
the first thing we notice about others is sex. Which?  
She couldn't get beyond it, and stumbled out

of the door, the fuzzy heads of her children  
wondering why, saying *bi, bi*, and I trying not  
to be self-righteous, trying to stay here. I decided  
that this time, I would sit down in the stall. I sat,  
dribbled and wiped. Yes, I painted the seat red  
and brown, brown like her skin, and I thought  
she was Mexican by the way her cheeks met her eyes,

and wondered why there was an Anglo girl and two  
Hispanics at her thighs, and that black boy bouncing *bi, bi*.  
How we try to know each other before even greeting,  
how when we brushed, she thought I wasn't legal  
and I thought she wasn't legal, and our families weren't legal,  
and how my white father waited, smirking at our dance,  
wanting to get going, to forget, to move on.

Jean M. Beebe (jbbeebe@princeton.edu) is a *fresh(w)man* and Frisn staff member from Des Moines, Iowa. As a spoken word activist and small business entrepreneur ([www.movingforwords.com](http://www.movingforwords.com)), Jean uses *fresh* forms of poetic media to bring about feminist change. This poem won first prize in this year's Mathew College Freshman Writing Contest on Marta Tienda's address entitled "Diversity and the Boundaries of Belonging."

## 96TH &amp; 3RD

by Kim Kamarebe '07

1

For some, liquid X is the depressant of choice. For Mumtaz, it was sex. Or maybe just sex with Sa'ed. She sat glumly through her class, dejected, slumped in her seat, thinking back to the night before. It was meant to have been a night of sheer bliss, one to finally give Sa'ed's old dorm room bed something to crank about. Crank it did. Sa'ed – quite surprisingly for a first timer – had rocked her world. But the tremors and aftershocks had left her petite frame, and her mind, more shaken up than anything else. In the rapture of climax, all that had lain buried within burst forth, subduing the once-settled surface, spurting out frenziedly with every ecstatic shudder. Still dazed, Mumtaz had watched Sa'ed flop over and fall sound asleep, his body overwhelmed by the all-too-new sensation of release. She had lain awake next to him all night, envious of his blissful state. She couldn't sleep; each time she tried she was forced to contend with the wasteland that pervaded her mind's eye.

It was a Friday afternoon. Mumtaz was grateful that her class, and week, was minutes from over. She had been so distracted all day, impatient for the chore of NYU lectures to be over, desperate to leave the suddenly suffocating lecture halls and take refuge in the endless sea that was New York City. Professor Chomsky, her blubbery and balding Finance Professor, wearing yet another of his tight tweed jackets and perpetually dabbing his shiny top with his crumpled hanky, suddenly gestured in her direction. Afraid he had made a snide reference to her daydreaming, she came in time to hear him trail off, "... outsourcing to the Indian sub-continent ...". Though she looked vacuously at him, her mind yelled, 'Prick! 'Am more American than your Hasidic ass!' Ordinarily, her thought would have astounded her; today, she very nearly said it out loud.

Five minutes later, Mumtaz was dashing out of the building and towards the subway station at Astor Place. She only had a couple of hours to get home to Midwood, take a quick shower, change into the 'model Pakistani girl', and rush over to their semi-family reunion in the Bronx. Midwood, though only six

subway stops away, was another world entirely. Known as Little Pakistan, it was picture-perfect 1970's Karachi, complete with cricket stumps in the alleys and curry stalls at every corner. Each train ride home was like an express flight to Pakistan. Her day – and more and more her life – was half-Midwood, half-Manhattan. It concerned her how many times she had lingered in Manhattan, hesitant to leave it.

She waited on the platform, her mind still resplendent with thoughts of sex and Sa'ed, of her father and her future. Train after train passed her by. The monotonous sound blended with the dripping of the overhead sewers to create a maddening buzzing in her ears. The station felt like a torture chamber – the humidity choking and the smell repugnant. Her mind was clogged, her person claustrophobic. Like reflux, anxiety began to well up within her. She needed to breathe.

"Fuck this!" she mumbled, as she ran up the steps and out the station, "this aint worth it."

Outside, Mumtaz breathed in the smog-thick – or in New York speak, 'fresh' – air. She resolved to go straight to the Bronx, 'get the darn thing over with'.

'Besides,' she thought, 'I could use the long stroll through the city.'

Family reunions were always the same old pseudo-nostalgic odes to the old country – tacky Urdu music playing from generation-old cassette tapes, saree-clad mothers boasting about their children's math grades, the potent smell of curry eating into the very woodwork, and loud conversations that eventually gravitated towards three things: arranged marriages, accountancy careers and American bigotry. Looking down at her Gap jeans and 'Baby Phat' tee, she remarked to herself, smiling for the first time all day, "Guess someone's got to be the Paki Paris Hilton tonight!"

Mumtaz knew her outfit would raise an eyebrow or two, and spice up the predictable dinner table conversation. She could see her father shifting uncomfortably, attempting to make up for the slight embarrassment by 'casually' commenting on how well her Economics degree at NYU was going.

"Economics is the future, you know," she mimicked in his Urdu-tainted accent and bobbing her head from side-to-side, "NYU is a fine school, finest Economics department in the country, I tell you. Jeffery Sachs is there, you know. 'Tis very good. Very, very good."

She couldn't help but giggle.

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Mumtaz started up Third Avenue. She had picked Third, because it was the only one that could take her right up to the Bronx: no hassles, no shifting from avenue to avenue to circumvent Central Park or to evade the Hudson, no inordinate name changes to pay tribute to other times, other spaces. Just good old reliable Third Avenue.

'If I was an avenue I'd like to be Third,' she thought to herself, 'I mean ... Fifth, such a show-off, Park and Madison, minions. And as for anything *past* Fifth ... 11th who?' She smiled.

'I'd probably be Sixth though or the verbose "Avenue of the Americas";' she said, rolling her eyes, 'or whatever name the schizophrenic's going by in that part of the City.' She shrugged, pondering it for a moment, 'Yep, that'd be me – Sixth, slash Ave. of the Americas – ostentatious and yet ordinary, so close to Fifth's pomp yet in effect parallel to it ...'

She sighed. 'Better me than old Chomsky – he'd definitely be Broadway! Anyone can see that that avenue aint straight!'

A stranger caught her smiling to herself. He grimaced. In the process, he almost tripped on an empty Starbucks cup. Avenged, Mumtaz deliberately returned the judgmental gesture.

Looking around, she noticed she had long left the Village and was approaching 28th Street. Curry Hill, as it was colloquially known, was a haven of South Indian restaurants. That's another thing Mumtaz loved about Third – it always offered her a taste of home. Nearly everyone in Midwood, at some time or other, had worked in Curry Hill. Surveying the new breed of busboys, the 'latest shipment from the motherland,' she thought, 'Maybe I should just come pick me a man down here!'

Despite her flippancy, she was beginning to realize that this idea was, in essence, the axis about which her distressed psyche whirled. The past four months had been bliss. Sa'ed was seemingly perfect focused yet tons of fun, conservative yet not close-minded, super-sexy yet surprisingly sweet and, almost miraculously – Pakistani. But her sensational seizure the night before had left Mumtaz musing: was the magic Sa'ed's being Pakistani, or did the mere fact he was do the trick?

The previous week, amidst a steamy session in his dorm, Sa'ed had suddenly popped up:

"I've been thinking about it, and ... well, I ..." he had labored, frowning so hard that his thick brows seemed to merge, "I think ..."

He had then paused, exhaled, straightened up, and continued:

"I decided, despite the whole exclusive-moral-religion thing, or maybe because of it, anyway, I ... I have decided I'd like to ... I mean, its time I ... you know ..." he had stuttered, sinking back into an abyss of inarticulacy.

Attempting to regain control and make light of the topic, he had exhaled again, smiled and said, "Basically, where're the goods at?"

Mumtaz had honestly been shell-shocked. Even though they had exhausted all possible 'etcetera', she had never dreamt that Sa'ed – pious as he was – would budge on the full-on 'p-thing'. It was too sacred to him. And yet there he was, opening himself up for business. For her. The phrase "or maybe because of it" had reverberated over and over again in her mind. That Sa'ed thought their relationship so serious that he would consider penetrating the Holy Grail scared her. Sa'ed's clarity, in place of bolstering her own, shattered it.

"Are ... You're ... You're sure, right? You have, like, thought about it?" she managed, unsure of how to react.

"Clearly! I love you. I ... I want to be with you ..."

He had looked down, aware that he had unwittingly backed himself into a corner, "like ... terminally."

Mumtaz had stared at him as he spoke. No sooner had she recognized his scary sincerity than she had shoved it away, banishing it to the back of her mind.

Consciously attempting to focus on the frivolous, she had thought, 'Terminally? What are you, cancer?'

"Me too, boo," she had said instead, with a simper of a smile, "Hey, whilst you're in the transcendent mood, ready to meet the family?"

"Sure," he had said, looking visibly relieved at the eased tension, "why not. I'll do 'em on the same day. That way I'll have one thing to look forward to, and then go through spending the night with you!"

She slapped him playfully on the head. Then, to show her appreciation for the compliment of his colossal sacrifice, Mumtaz straddled Sa'ed's erect frame, so close that she could hear his heart race. She slowly pushed him back on the bed, looking lustfully into his brown eyes, and then at his navy boxers. She lowered herself towards him. Sa'ed's eyes closed. How he loved being thanked! 🍷

Want to know how it ends? Catch Parts 3 & 4 at [www.princeton.edu/~prism](http://www.princeton.edu/~prism)

Prism staff member, Kim Kamarebe ([kamarebe@princeton.edu](mailto:kamarebe@princeton.edu)) is a senior from Uganda currently working on a collection of short stories about individuals grappling with a single dilemma: negotiating changing identities. The collection spans issues of biculturalism (and multiculturalism), multigenerational migration, overseas education and sexual ambiguity, and elucidates the contiguous circumstances and sequential effects of escalating identity disjunctions in our rapidly globalizing world.

## ON WESTERN BEAUTY

by Jessica Pottenger '10

I ducked my head into a bow at the elderly woman sitting next to me on the subway station, and was about to turn back to talk to Grace when the woman spoke. "Oh, you're so beautiful."

I gave my standard blush, smile, half bow and polite thanks, all in rapid succession. After all, this was Korea and ever since I had stepped off the plane people had been exclaiming over how pretty I was. I was more than used to it – it happened back

in the States in all the Korean communities I visited. I mostly shrugged it off as Koreans being polite to the foreign girl. After all, I couldn't be that gorgeous or guys would be commenting, not old Korean women.

But this time as I turned away, I noticed Grace smiling crookedly, in a not-quite-embarrassed way. The woman hadn't commented

on Grace's features at all, and I could tell that she felt hurt by it, especially when the woman continued to talk to me, reaching out for my hand in a friendly manner, clasping it as she spoke. Her Korean was too rapid for me to understand, and all I caught was something about church, so I simply nodded and said "neh, yes, ma'am, neh" and smiled until the subway came.

I bowed and smiled my way onto the subway, and then asked Grace, "Wait, what was she saying?" Grace shrugged. "She was inviting you to her church next week." I grinned for a moment at the perfect Korean randomness of it all, and tried to ignore the fact that that smile was still on Grace's face.



"Asian Beauty" by Veneka Chagwedera '09  
(Galerie Menouan, Paris, Summer 2006)

It had never occurred to me to question why everyone thought I was so especially beautiful in Korea. I took it as part of Korean culture, like taking off your shoes when you entered the house. Whenever I went to Koreatown, a Korean church or a Korean party, Korean mothers would pinch my cheeks, run their hands through my hair and congratulate my mother. And I never thought it should or would be any other way until I noticed Grace's smile.

A few days later I was out in a local shopping center with Gloria, a Korean student who lived in America that I was tutoring for the SAT I. She was showing me around the practical part of Seoul, pointing out where I could buy food, rent DVDs, and get my clothes tailored if I wanted. We stopped to buy duk, a type of sweet Korean dumpling, when the woman over the counter smiled at me, and told Gloria, "She's so pretty."

This time I instantly recognized the same smile on Gloria's face, and told her right away, "Oh, it's because I'm Western. You know, like, all over the world there is this ingrained idea that white skin is more beautiful – it's a really Eurocentric idea of beauty. I think it's left

over from the colonial times, when Europe ruled over a lot of foreign countries. Since they were at the top, their standard of beauty, class, etc. got passed down to everyone else."

Gloria enthusiastically agreed with me, and we spent the rest of the trip talking about Western influences on Eastern countries and I began wishing that these well-meaning Korean mothers and grandmothers would stop seeing me as the paradigm of beauty especially as it hurt my friends. But it was more than that. I didn't want to be beautiful just for my Caucasian side. I wanted to be beautiful being half. ☺

Jess (jpotteng@princeton.edu) is a bi-racial American who likes to think, talk and write about being a bi-racial American. Also an editor at *Prism* and a participant of Sustained Dialogue, Jess enjoys analyzing social, racial and gender issues.

## GROCERY SHOPPING

by Tamara Spitzer-Hobeika '10

Behind an oversized shopping cart in a New York supermarket, I stretch out, up on my tiptoes, to reach a pack of Entenman's low-fat blueberry muffins off one of the towering shelves. Then hesitation strikes. Would I rather have Krispy Kreme's "old fashioned" donuts? In the end, a box of mixed berry Nutri-Grain bars gets to topple onto the pile of selected products. Three thousand miles across the Atlantic, the pharmacist around the corner from my high-school in Paris aligns hairbrushes on display behind the window. Simultaneously, a vendor in Beirut makes his first transaction of the day: an old woman purchases a juicy watermelon from the back of his truck.

Large supermarkets evidently exist in France and Lebanon, and nearly replicate those found throughout the United States.

However, the instant the automatic doors slide shut on the chilled air contained within these microcosms, the true character of the country just entered becomes pervasive. The spreading of a standard model does not in fact entail a worldwide synchronization of lifestyles. How would the pharmacist from Paris react if she followed home the woman with the watermelon? The Parisian would be stunned to find the Lebanese woman cutting up the whole of the newly acquired fruit, simply in case the neighbors dropped by unexpectedly for a convivial lunch. Impromptu gatherings are indeed most unlikely in a "Rive Gauche" apartment building, where residents do not even converse in the elevator. On the other hand, the Lebanese woman may be able to relate to the gargantuan servings at a diner in Manhattan: it is after all part of her traditions to present company with far more food and drinks than necessary. Finally, an American in Paris would probably be intrigued by the care with which the pharmacist is perfectly exposing the sleek and tiny hairbrushes, oblivious to the line forming in front of the counter. Yet, when the pharmacist does turn to her clientele, she pays as acute attention to the slightest details of each customer's life

as to those of her neat little commerce. In contrast with CVS-type stores, where impersonal efficiency is the guiding principle, any item bought comes with the added cost of feeling scrutinized for the reasons behind its acquisition.

For some, the idea of being immersed in a different culture may be daunting. As surprising as it may seem, a good first step is to take a stroll in one of those apparently nondescript supermarkets. They can be reassuring since they are often perceived as familiar no matter where they are on the globe. Still, far from portending a progression towards Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, these stores actually vary depending on their location. For instance, supermarkets are always stocked with a plethora of local favorites,

For some, the idea of being immersed in a different culture may be daunting. As surprising as it may seem, a good first step is to take a stroll in one of those apparently nondescript supermarkets.

such as "dulce de leche" and "yerba mate" in Argentina. Even global brands are tinted with

national flavor: a L'Oréal shampoo bottle is labeled "Elvive" or "Elsève", depending on whether it is aimed at the American or the French market. The crackling voice on the loudspeaker in a Lebanese supermarket addresses the customers in a familiar tone that would be inappropriate in many other countries. In the United States, the dizzying array of items adapted to individual tastes and needs reflects the diversity among the people that compose American society. When paid attention to, the sights, sounds and other details which appear trivial to begin with, confer a new dimension to the simple act of grocery shopping. The subtle peculiarities of a store mirror the uniqueness of the country in which it is situated; and thus wandering along the labyrinthine aisles of a supermarket forges a perspective on the reality that lies beyond. As the sliding doors of these stores allow a country's character to seep through, they can become the "looking glass" giving access to a wonderland that prepares and entices its visitors to explore the culture waiting just outside. ☺

Tamara Spitzer-Hobeika '10 is from Paris, France. She wrote this piece for her Princeton application, and can be reached at tspitzer@princeton.edu



# THE UNNECESSARY USE OF RACE IN NEWS MEDIA

by Kelley Frances Fenelon '09

From crimescenes to flowershows, governmental actions to community projects, international events to the home team's performance last night, members of the news media report the gamut. Oftentimes, stories include individuals or groups, and one of the best ways to capture an audience is to present the human face of an event. Thinking back over the many articles you have read, how are individuals most often written about or presented? Do the characterizations or descriptions differ depending upon the circumstances of the piece? Do reporters highlight some aspects of one person's physical attributes while downplaying – or not even mentioning them – in another? Most importantly, what role does race play when making descriptive decisions?

There are a myriad of issues concerning race and the news media, and here I'd like to discuss a specific one: the unnecessary use of race,

ethnicity, and what some call the "default race" in the news media, as well as what the news media itself can do in bringing an end to this practice.

First of all, this default race: white. Both in descriptions and in coverage, the so-called "white" race has become the race most often seen and the race assumed when none is given. The use of the default race is actually problematic – and harmful to more groups and individuals – in more ways than you might at first expect, by both placing a stigma on anything non-white as "different" and assigning a sort of racelessness to those known as whites.

This practice of describing an individual by their race unless they are "white" also leads to the unnecessary use of race, which in turn perpetuates stereotypes. Stereotypes themselves require a bit of unpacking. While sometimes useful, they most often simply allow those using them to assume. In essence,

stereotypes let one be lazy in talking about, describing, or judging a person.

As an example, complete this sentence from a news report: "A Muslim man was arrested this morning for..." With the racial fallout following the 9-11 terrorist attacks and continued terrorism around the world, the automatic assumption would be that this man, too, falls into a terrorist category. This could just as easily, however, be completely untrue. He could have tried to shoplift a candy bar. Even if valid, and the man was attempting to set off his shoe bomb in a crowded bus, the description – Muslim – has no place. It is not simply because he is Muslim that he made the decision to become a terrorist. To use the term in describing him

seems to correlate his Muslim identity with the act of terrorism – or terrorism with Muslims – is an unfair association. In reality, Muslims around the world would condemn his terrorist action. It would instead be another, more precise description of a specific system of beliefs or membership

in a smaller sect, such as Radical Islam or Al Qaeda, which prompted his actions and should rightfully be used.

The Muslim association with the terrorism stereotype played out in a real life media example in 1995 when "[t]he headline of the Chicago Sun-Times [following the Oklahoma City bombing] read 'In the Name of Islam[.]'" Below this headline, a large picture was shown of a firefighter holding a dead child in his arms" (qtd. in Kazmi). This instance was recalled by Nader S. Nasir Al Aulqi, whose study concerning "the attitudes of Arab Muslim students towards the US government, people and media since 9/11" (Kazmi) led him to assert that "[t]he American media has been a primary agent responsible for creating racist stereotypes, images and viewpoints for Arab Muslims before and after September 11, 2001" (qtd. in Kazmi). This indictment, especially in the face of media occurrences such as that

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A mug shot of a black defendant is four times more likely to appear in a local television news report than of a white defendant. The accused is two times more likely to be shown physically restrained in a local television news report when black than when the accused is white. The name of the accused is two times more likely to be shown on screen in a local TV news report if the defendant is black, rather than white.

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printed following the Oklahoma City bombing, rings startlingly true.

The use of race in describing someone can, however, at times be necessary and even good, such as when the piece describes a cultural event associated with a specific race or a "be on the lookout for" style bulletin. Use of race can and should be permitted in providing physical descriptions – but only with care, for, unfortunately, using such descriptors can also bring much more to the table. Imagine hearing or reading "the two green-eyed perpetrators were apprehended." This line sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? Yet replace 'green eyed' with 'African American' – only as useful as and seemingly just another physical description – yet also seeming to fit where 'green-eyed' does not. 'African American' too has no place here, for readers gain nothing from knowing the shade of the captured criminals' skin.

Furthermore, one must examine media reports beyond their face value. Such reports which include race in needless situations have great social ramifications. The misuse of race in reporting can even seem to support a stereotype's veracity when used in cases in which that stereotype seems to fit, causing more people to buy into it as valid. This feeds discrimination and misperception.

For example, in a study by Proctor and Snyder, participants were shown "a news story about the arrest of a person charged with the murder of three individuals." There were, however, three different photographs associated with the story; in two, an African-American man's skin tone was altered, one dark, one light. 64% of the participants "judged the accused as guilty" when his skin was darker, contrasted with 44% when his skin done was digitally lightened (Oliver et al. 88). While one might shrug and say that these results have nothing to do with news media or that they're simply individuals' conditioned perceptions, from where do you think a great deal of this conditioning comes? Why, the news media. In fact, many instances show that racism bleeds into decisions made in presenting news on a regular basis. This reality becomes increasingly clear in many collected statistics from *The Black Image in the White Mind* by Robert M. Entman and Andrew Rojecki regarding race and the news media:

*A mug shot of a black defendant is four times more likely to appear in a local television news report than of a white defendant. The accused is two times more likely to be shown physically restrained in a local television news report when black than when the accused is white. The name of the accused is two times more*

*likely to be shown on screen in a local TV news report if the defendant is black, rather than white. (qtd. in 'Ethnic')*

Furthermore, a study by Martin Gilens, an assistant professor in Yale's political science department, found that "[n]ational news magazines, including Time, Newsweek and U.S. News and World Report, pictured Blacks 62 percent of the time in stories on poverty, though statistics show only 29 percent of Americans below the poverty line are Black" ("Media"). Clearly, those producing such programming and selecting pictures for such stories are inadvertently affirming stereotypical racial misconceptions.

Not only are these many racial categories unfair, they are oftentimes untrue and even contrived. Race – in the sense that provokes racism and racial stereotypes – is not biological; in fact, according to an anthropology website, "all humans today are 99.9% genetically identical" (O'Neil). Thus, racial perceptions have come about purely through our judgments and opinions. Ethnicity, too, largely consists of arbitrary groupings. For example, the term "Hispanic" "was actually created by federal bureaucrats working under President Nixon" (O'Neil). Use of these classifications, especially when contrived, remains unjustifiable in most situations.

But these phenomena in the news harm more than those who find themselves ascribed to a particular race. As "the writer Tony Morrison has observed[,] 'whites see themselves as unraced.'" (qtd. in O'Neil). While on the one hand this alludes to racism on the part of so-called whites, it also suggests the lack of ethnicity or identity that plagues many who don't fall into an ethnically distinct category, prompting some to adopt the ethnic trends of other groups (O'Neil). Whether its consequences show in supremacy or ethnic emptiness, the use of white as a "default race" only serves to harm.

With a more watchful attitude on the part of the news media to ensure that racial stereotypes are avoided, especially in situations in which it proves truly unnecessary, the face of the news might be changed for the better. Most times, race does not matter, in tragedy or joy, crime or compassion, any and all races are equally deserving of honest coverage. ☞

(Kelley Frances Fenelon '09 (kfenelon@princeton.edu) grew up in the Deep South, an area rich with history and tradition but with a past filled with racial strife as well. With the influence of this background, along with her involvement in Sustained Dialogue at Princeton, Kelley Frances decided to write on race in the news media for her writing seminars, taught by Professor Robin Meeks. See [www.princeton.edu/~prism](http://www.princeton.edu/~prism) for works cited list

## AN AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL

by *Karolina Brook '10*

"Yo wassup!..Uh...South Africa, right?" Right. From this opening (and rather typical) salutation, I believe you can gather I'm from South Africa. As a freshman entering the great class of 2010, I'm here to give my opinion about the "international experience" here at Princeton.

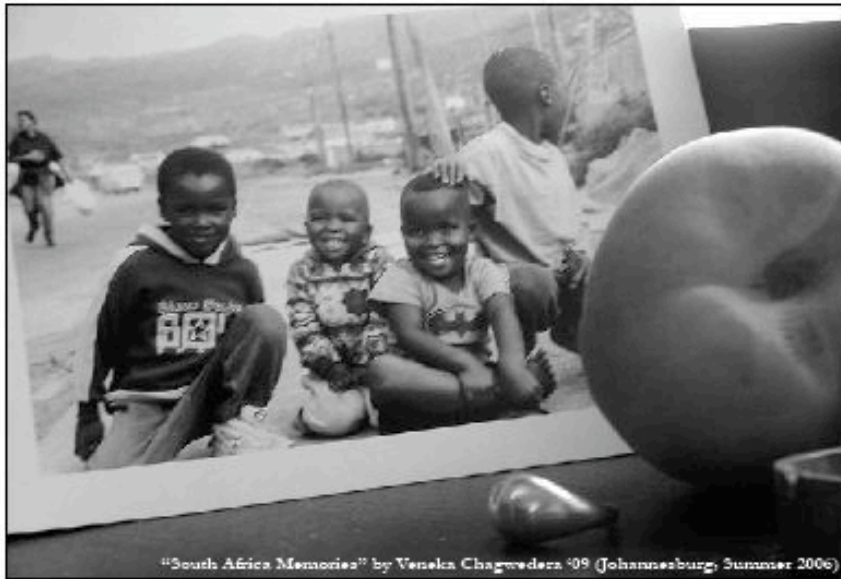
In writing this article, I initially thought I should describe my experiences regarding how America and my country differ from what I've experienced thus far. Looking back to two months ago, to the beginning of September when I first arrived at Princeton after a grueling twenty-hour flight, I remember how excited I was to finally have landed on the continent — the continent where the American dream was born and, I believe, continues to exist today. After a few incoherent and babbling (and rather incriminating) e-mails which I sent while completely jet-lagged, I awoke the day after my flight, eager to start my Princeton experience with the much-anticipated International Pre-orientation.

Many international students will relate to the initial and, well, unique experience of International Pre-orientation — who will ever forget buying blankets and sheets at Wal-Mart, or running around campus on a scavenger hunt (oh, the days when we had time to do fifty pushups on the top floor of Fine...), or playing "raunchy" (not) games in Café Vit, or trying to crash the OA party in Dillon Gym while our own "International Pre-or" party died after Frist decided to kick us out at the wee hour of 10... definitely, our initial taste of Princeton was rather bewildering. We all got along — or at least, we all understood what we were going through and commiserated. It was us "internationals" all the way,

bonded and united as one against the "Americans" — that is, until the school year actually began.

It was inevitable — we see that now. After the magical and surreal days of International Preorientation, we had to do the unthinkable and actually interact with Americans. It was at this point that my "American Culture 101" course began (as clichéd as that sounds).

I have to say, young American adults are a fascinating species: I realized that what I thought was the outrageous stereotype that the most common topics in American conversation are the weather and the traffic is scarily true... It is a rather frightening prospect that there exist American college students who do not know



"South Africa Memories" by Veneka Chagwedera '08 (Johannesburg, Summer 2006)

that South Africa is a country as opposed to a region (yes, it's happened)... Many international students do not understand the American concept of drinking for the sole purpose of getting drunk, as opposed to having a good time with friends... And, I'm sorry to say, from the point of view who has studied Standard Oxford English, American slang represents the demise of the English language.

I could go on listing the quirks of America, but, for all that I sound critical and rather cynical, I've realized it's impossible not to love Americans for all of

their idiosyncrasies. Far be it for me not to admire them; South Africa is still a developing country while America is a booming empire. And, while I was on Fall Break, I also realized (in one of those rare and inspiring light bulb moments) that it's not the differences between the two cultures I should be observing, but rather the similarities.

During Fall Break, I headed off to Louisiana with nine other people on a SVC (Student Volunteers Council) trip to help with Hurricane Rita relief. Having heard about the terrible destruction and the tragedy as a result of Hurricane Katrina, I wanted to see with my own eyes what was really happening down in the south. And it was while I was in Louisiana, that I realized two things: first, the stereotyping of groups of people within a country is something that, unfortunately, happens everywhere. Whereas in South Africa you might hear generalizations of the stressed-out/upright "Jozi's" and the laid-back/beach-bum "Durbanites", in America, one always hears negative comments about the Rednecks and the Yankees (negative depending on where you come from). And the second thing was, as I sadly realized, suffering and destruction are universal. South Africa is at the pinnacle of the AIDS crisis, and millions are dying either as a direct or indirect result of the virus; while in Louisiana hundreds died from the hurricane and thousands more lost their homes and their possessions.

If one sets aside international boundaries, it's not hard to see how we are all linked together in the chaos and meandering of life. In writing this article, I do not intend to make some grand or profound statement about the condition of human life. I simply hope to reflect that, despite superficial differences between American and international cultures, I am intrinsically the same as an American: we laugh the same way (though perhaps not at the same things), and we all cry together. Sure, my accent's strange and my sense of humour may not be up to American standard (sadly enough); but when I look past that, I see myself as an individual — just like anybody else — who simply grew up in a different country and was exposed to different living conditions and lives her life differently. Now, isn't that an idealistic way to look at the world? ☺

Prism staff member, Karolina Brook '10 (kbrook@princeton.edu) comes from Johannesburg, South Africa. She is an active member on the OWL (Organization of Women Leaders) board as Community Service Chair, and on SHAD (Student Health Advisory Board). She is involved in Sustained Dialogue and participates in community service by learning American Sign Language to communicate with students in the Katzenbach School of the Deaf.

## STRAIGHT: A MONOLOGUE OF FOLLICULAR ORIENTATION

by *Nicholas Lilly '07*

To the barber, I said: Hold on a second here—let's talk about this decision we're making; it's never good to rush into things...

Never, he shook his head.

Good, we agree. Now... do you ever think about your hair? I mean, really think about it? That it's more than just strings of dead cells dangling down from your scalp? It is for me, you know—more than that, more than my body's waste.

I was born with my hair, you know that? My mother says I came out with a head covered in a dark, jellied mass, like paint. And the hair didn't fall out all at once like my brother's. Nope, my hair stayed with me and grew. Sometimes I wonder if any of the originals are still hanging around, buried beneath the outer tanned and flattened layers, hiding at the bottom of the heap, where it's warm and familiar. It's because my hair didn't fall out that I have my cowlicks now—it just grew the way it had been while I was waiting to be born. All angled grains from leaning against the inside of mom's tummy.

It's odd now, to think how the cowlicks used to give me trouble. When I was little, I'd go to school and my hair—even though it was stubbornly straight—would still stick out from my head in funny mounds. 'Conspicuous' is the term—'conspicuous' and 'painful'—not funny for me. All the other kids with their second round hairdos, heads hung with obedient reborn locks, thought it was great fun to laugh at them, at my lumps. For me they were like scars—prenatal bedsores.

But in spite of them I enjoyed my hair, took pleasure in it. At seven, I already carried a comb in my pocket. When I was alone, I obsessively rolled it through my hair, determined to smooth out the bumps that protruded from its surface. I imagined it, even and elegantly quaffed...

Then... my parents split, and they worried for my

brother and me. They used to feed us to show they loved us . . . grandiose school lunches of Twinkies, miniature apple pies, and salami sandwiches—advantageous in elementary school lunch-table trading sessions, but not good for health. We gained weight, both my brother and I—we swelled with their offerings. And my hair made even less sense with my face than it had before. Its cowlicks and currents lifted away from my head more so than they had when I was younger, more than was natural even for them. They were scattered—sparse and inconsistent over my distended scalp.

That was when I experimented, lathered my hair in handfuls of gluey gels and mousses—de-volumizers, sleekers, and other straightening corrosives . . . I thought it'd make me look more like I did when I was born, with the smooth wet matte of hair that my mother had been so proud of. If it did—I have no way of knowing exactly what my mother saw—then no one noticed. At school, they called me 'helmet head,' rattled their fingers along the shell I had painstakingly built up around my face . . . when the products finally dried, it did feel like my head was covered in glass. My hair must have looked like beetles' wings—closed, striated, and shingly smooth. But fake, nonetheless.

I tried to give it up, then—to let it sculpt itself into its 'conspicuous' and 'painful' knobs. It was because of Tom Sawyer that I failed. They made me play Injun Joe in our fifth grade production; I had to wear a wig—a long, black wig, coarse and cheap but free of any waves. After the show, the girl who played Huck Finn (yes, a girl!); her hair was perfect, with blonde ringlets—she asked me how it felt to have hair hanging down my back . . . Though I did not admit it then, that fake hair gave me power on stage—a respected and feared presence . . . and I guess I felt that power would carry over into the rest of my life, if only I could imitate the wig . . .

. . . but, as my own hair grew out, the lumpy cowlicks overshadowed any evenness that might have come with length. No one feared or respected me anymore. I fell from villain to androgynous cherub. They thought I was a girl, called me as much. They told me I was pretty. It's difficult for a pubescent twelve year old boy to have to explain every day that—despite all appearances to the contrary—he's not in fact female.

So I gave up again, let them think what they wanted. I didn't snarl at our school carnival when parent after unobservant parent complimented my rosy cheeks as I painted butterflies and glittered stars on theirs. I didn't correct anyone. Maybe that's why the children

were so surprised the day I came to school with it cut short around my neck and ears, terrified in my sandals and hiding behind sunglasses . . . They had forgotten I was a boy, but for once—in their shock at my reversed metamorphosis—they did not mock my hair. Since then, I've gotten it cut short every six weeks. No variations. Monotonously straight, with the cowlicks disguised.

And what do you want done today, he asked.

Shave it off. ☹

Nicholas Lilly is a senior from Oak Park, Illinois, majoring in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology; though straight-haired, he is decidedly not straight. Nicholas can be reached at [nlilly@princeton.edu](mailto:nlilly@princeton.edu).

## I NEVER FORGET A FACE!

by Tao Leigh Goffe '09

I never forget a face. I remember every single person I've ever met: the color of the hair, whether it's mousy blonde, fiery red, intricately braided, or a big fat fro. I remember whether the nose is aquiline, pug, hooked. I remember whether the nostrils are so thin that you wonder how they are able to breathe or so wide you wonder if they are getting too much of everyone else's oxygen. I remember if the eyes are almond like mine or droopy like a good friend of mine's or beady like a preceptor who gave me a lower grade than I'd expected. I remember people with bat ears like Will Smith. I remember whether a person has a square chin, a double chin, or no chin at all. I never forget a face. I'm good like that.

So you can imagine how surprised I was when I returned to campus this fall and realized that though I never forget a face, everybody, it seems, had forgotten mine.

When I shouted 'Hey' across campus to a face I know well, she greeted me in a way that made it obvious that she had no idea who I was and why I was approaching her. From friends, I learned that other people -- some very short, some very tall, some of medium height, some with light hair, some with dark hair, some with no hair, some with dark skin, some with light skin -- were being mistaken for me.

I've figured out, after much contemplation and wrestling with the problem like a problem set, that there is a calculus, that there is a system, that there is a science -- maybe a social science -- to this forgetting, this forgetting of names, this forgetting of faces, this forgetting of people.

This forgetting is almost epidemic. Other friends of mine, the least forgettable people anyone could imagine, said they'd been forgotten, too.

I discovered that forgetting is the preserve of the powerful (or of those that are playing at being powerful). It's the preserve of the privileged. It's the preserve of the patrician to forget, or claim to forget, the plebian.

"The struggle of man against power," said Milan Kundera, "is the struggle of memory against forgetting."

For most, though, it's simply a pose. This forgetting of faces is not a medical condition, nor a malady, nor a memory lapse. It's no accident. It's planned. It's pre-meditated. Those who play at being patrician mean to harm, to hurt, and they do. Though they seem to pay no attention, they pay the most attention. They know whom they believe to be their superior and they certainly know whom they believe to be their inferior. The former, they never forget. The latter, they never remember. For these Pretenders to remember is to be weak. To be weak is to remember.

We all want to be remembered -- poor people who give their children unusual unpronounceable names, rich people who purchase large plaques with their names emblazoned on them above Blair Arch. Neither want to be forgotten; both want to be remembered. "The remedy for wrongs," Publilius Syrus said unforgettably, "is to forget them." As I said before, I never, ever forget a face. ☹

Tao Leigh Goffe ([tgoffe@princeton.edu](mailto:tgoffe@princeton.edu)) is a sophomore who enjoys fencing and high speed elevators. She focuses on East Asian Studies and Philosophy.

## MOUNTAINS BEYOND MOUNTAINS: REFLECTIONS FROM A COMMUNITY SERVICE TRIP IN MOROCCO

by Jireh Li '08

AT 800 departing from Casablanca to New York. The local time is 12:30pm on 19th March, 2006. Flight attendants, prepare for take-off.

The Morocco Service Trip has ended. Did I really make a difference? How realistic are my conclusions on Morocco's community development based on my few days of ethnography? We communicated in French instead of their native Arabic or Berber dialect. There could have been misunderstandings we were unaware of. Nevertheless, out of all the teachings I have received, I find this one the most important: Nothing belongs to me. Of what there is, of what I take, I must share. Thus, I have documented my thoughts and reflections to transport us back in time and re-experience the Morocco Service Trip together. I will narrate some projects in Ain Leuh at the Village of Hope (VoH) and Atlas Mountain Community School, and describe the dilemmas I faced in my endeavours to be civically engaged with a foreign community. Join me now to embrace the spirit of Morocco, her culture, and her people.

The VoH is literally a village of hope. A community of foster homes in Ain Leuh, Azrou, abandoned Moroccan children are cared for in a family

situation. Three families are currently caring for nineteen foster children. Their love and care offers security and hope, enabling the children to fully integrate into the Moroccan community. I shared my stories with the workers and children through drawing and acting due to language barriers. Did they make sense of what I said? Perhaps I was just another girl to play with. What kind of difference, then, did I make? The conclusion I have reached is that attitudes to service matter more than the magnitude. 1st Corinthians 13:1 says, "If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing." Love lies at the core of service whether it is making a donation or working hands-on in an impoverished place. Though I cannot measure the difference I made in the children's lives, I am glad that I served with love.

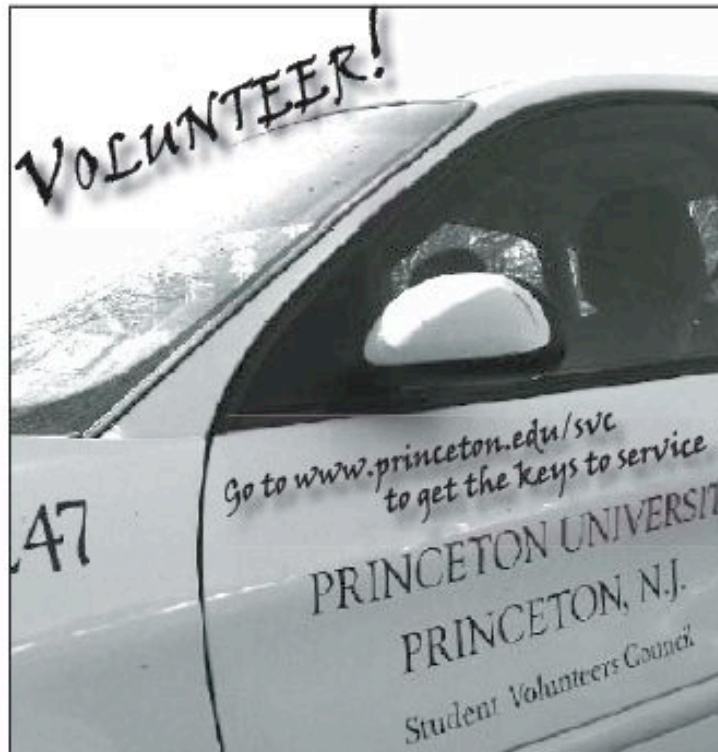
Apart from interacting with the friendly workers and lovely children, we served in conjunction with the VoH's on-going building project. It was physical in nature and involved earth moving and removing rocks and debris. The idea of going all the way to Morocco to spend a morning moving rocks was not particularly appealing. I tried but found no nobler way to perceive "moving rocks." No, it was as plain as can be - I had gone all the way to Africa to move rocks.

In spite of my hesitation, I picked the rocks up and loaded them into a rusty trolley. The weather was fine but too sunny for moving rocks. As I looked up at the sky in silent protest, I suddenly realised why I felt so out of place. Standing under the clear, blue skies I smelled the freshness of the grass, I heard the lovely chirp of the birds, I was touched by the innocent laughter of the Moroccan children. I was lost in the magnificence of mountains beyond mountains. Yet this very paradise is struck with indigence, gender inequality, and discrimination. I was extremely disheartened by the paradox. How is it that suffering and poverty is so prevalent in an amazingly beautiful place? Ecclesiastes 3:11-22 reminds me, however, that the Lord has already made everything beautiful in His time. There is nothing better than to do all I can and patiently await for the Lord's plan to unfold. In the end I decided that if all I could do was move rocks, rocks I would move and with love, humility, enthusiasm, and praise to the Lord.

While some continued to work at the VoH, some undertook service projects at the Atlas Mountain Community School (l'École d'Atlas Ain Leuh). We painted a classroom that was to be the students' dining hall. The headmaster Abdul\* and all the teachers anticipated our arrival with much excitement and gratitude. They showed us into the dining-hall-to-be classroom. The ceiling was peeling off, and the grey-chipped walls were bare. It looked rather miserable, but I was thrilled to bring happiness to Moroccan students and teachers with my first painting project.

Along with Mohammed,\* the Moroccan painter-in-charge, a few of us mounted the ladder to repaint the ceiling while others painted doors and windows. Mohammed spoke French and a bit of English in addition to Arabic and the Berber dialect. He worked as a butcher when he was not a painter for he had eight children to take care of. What impressed me the most was his optimism despite life's challenges. He found it a privilege to serve with us, he was very protective and always checked that the ladders were sturdy and stable before allowing anyone on. His joyful serving attitude reminded me of the purpose of the trip – to work with the Moroccan community and devote ourselves to fulfilling their needs.

More gratifying than serving through painting was the interaction with local teenagers from the village. If their teachers were not on strike, they would go to school. In the winter they would not worry about tending the



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fireplace because heating does not exist. In summer, they would not complain about exhaust air from air-conditioners because there were not any. If they were thirsty, water was available from nearby contaminated streams. Life seems simple... but three meals a day? That troubles them. Yet regardless of their living conditions and financial difficulties, they were open to concepts of community sharing. When they first approached us, we had a short and disjointed conversation. Once past the ice-breaking stage, we started to teach each other English and Arabic. The following day, they decided to join us in painting! I was more than overjoyed. Affirmative action in community building starts off with a few taking the initiative



"Moroccan Ware" by Venela Chagwedera '09 (Paris, Summer 2006)

to serve and develop relationships between different facets of society, which is exactly what the teenagers did. Such were heartening moments.

Cultural learning in Fez and Rabat in Casablanca further enriched our fascinating experiences in the village of Ain Leuh. Fez is one of Morocco's tourist attractions, famous for its hand-made carpets and leather products, while the Royal Palace of his majesty Hassan II is set in Rabat. There, we visited the RPF International Church and chatted at length with the congregation. I met Marie\* who comes from the Ivory Coast and was visiting Morocco. She has dedicated her life to serving natives in a jungle in Congo where transportation is limited to walking or rafting. She has tried to improve hygiene and living conditions by teaching the natives farming and irrigation methods. It is not easy to serve in a jungle, but for Marie, the power of one is the power to do something. Anything.

I also got a glimpse of the political and cultural conditions that hinder Christians from fully integrating into an Islamic country with a 99% Muslim population. Being a Christian is not illegal in Morocco if you are not originally a Muslim. But to be Christian, *that* is a problem. Political restrictions dictate that it is illegal to evangelise to Muslims and for Muslims to be converted to another religion. Christians are forbidden to share with Muslims

about Christianity even in a neutral exchange of ideas. How can a Christian be Christian if he or she cannot freely share the joy of knowing the Lord?

Female Christians encounter other cultural challenges. Where men and women are equal in the Lord's eyes but women are subordinate to men in Moroccan culture, how should female Christians behave in social occasions? Should they value Moroccan culture over their beliefs? Moreover, cultural shocks can deeply affect the lifestyles of female Christians. Some women confided that they do not feel safe walking alone in any part of Morocco simply by being female. I shared their sentiments. After all, women are of an inferior race there, they are naturally the ones to blame for incidents of rape, adultery, or sexual or verbal harassment...

Estimated arrival time is 16:30pm local time. Thank you for flying with Air Maroc. Flight attendants, prepare for landing.

Just like that, I was back in New York. I had mixed feelings. I could not wait to share my experiences but I felt guilty for having left Morocco. It seemed as if I went to stir up the lives of a random few and disappeared before they realised. Still, like Antoine de Saint-Exupéry wrote in *Le Petit Prince*, "Le plus important est invisible." (What is essential is invisible to the eye). Morocco has left footprints in my heart. I am blessed to have immersed in her culture and learnt about the obstacles in social building. I have felt the joy of reinvigorating the hearts and lives of those who may be weary from life's toils. Once again, I am convinced of the obligation to actively serve our communities. Perhaps the Trip has ended in Morocco, but I hope it will live on through us. ☺

\* all the names have been changed

Prism staff member Jireh Li is a Junior from Hong Kong. A major at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs with a minor in French, Jireh enjoys being an Undergraduate Fellow at Mathew College. She wrote this piece as a reflection of her community service trip in Morocco and she can be reached at jirehli@princeton.edu. Read the rest of her reflection at www.princeton.edu/~prism!

## THE AMERICAN DREAM

by Mgbetchi Erondu '10

Amarachi wants nothing to do with the Igbo language or culture. Whenever someone greets her with "kedi" how are you, instead of responding "odinma" I am fine, she stubbornly answers "good." She doesn't like jollof rice (too spicy), egusi soup, (looks gross), or even tomato stew, (too spicy and too red). Her mother, Rosemary, does not know what to do with her. She wishes she could take her to Nigeria – show her how to make a real wood fire, show her what it is like to have to carry a heavy water jug from the pump to the house. Teach her appreciation for reliable electricity and seemingly limitless running water, the simple pleasures of American life that children like Amarachi take for granted.

But right now they just do not have the money.

While still in Nigeria, Rosemary and her husband had looked at the United States with wide-eyes shining and filled with golden hopes and dreams. It would be the perfect place to raise their children. They would have the best of both worlds: a good education, an easier way of life, fluency in two languages, and most importantly United States citizenship.

But nothing seemed to work out as they had planned.

When they left Nigeria, Rosemary was already six months pregnant with Amarachi, or "Blessing," as she now insists on being called. Had she not been a big woman, they might have been stopped and sent home. But it is hard to carry a child in a foreign place, a place where your heart isn't. And Rosemary, not usually one to fall ill, had a difficult pregnancy. One particularly cold evening, she unexpectedly went into labor. The delivery was no easier than the last few months of her pregnancy, and while the baby survived, her uterus did not. Rosemary was heartbroken: one measured success by counting the number of healthy children. And to make matters worse, this her one child was not even a boy. Now there would be no one to carry the family name, to inherit what is the father's.

It was one more straw to add to the hay stack.

Indeed life in New York was very difficult to adjust to. Rosemary was a village girl; she was not used to encountering people who rushed past her and down the streets like cold glazed pottery down a conveyor belt. She was not used to hard, unyielding, unfeeling ground from which sprung buildings like crowded, jagged teeth. Instead, she was used to seeing people, receiving

and returning smiles, warm hugs, firm handshakes. She was used to feeling the land, the red earth, the blue sky and the miles of green become the very essence of her blood as she drew each breath. She wanted to be able to see the sun, the hot, red, relentless sun. The sun that shone bright with the power of human feeling and sucked the earth dry like a nursing child. She did not like how there was always a dirty gray cloth across the sky in New York, and how the air was always thick with smoke and chemical and ice cold. And when it rained here, it didn't rain in the same rushing, pounding, pour-everything-out-at-once way, to Rosemary, the New York rain was light and timid like a mouse and what was the point if it was scarcely enough to fill a water bucket. They had dreamed of a large white house complete with all of the typical American appliances (of course) and a huge green yard with an actual soccer goal. But the one bedroom apartment with drug dealers, ugly streets, ambulance sirens and gunshots for a backyard was the only thing they could afford then.

And it is the only thing they can afford now.

There was an emptiness, a sense of utter loneliness here that Rosemary had never felt before. Here, the neighbors are not your relatives or even your friends, there is no comradeship, no one to come to your rescue. It's a dog eat dog world they say. Even your own husband becomes a stranger to you. Rosemary hates how her husband is always away for nights on end. Working, always working, but nothing to show for it. No appreciation, no sympathy, no respect. They hear the different cadences in his speech and label him uneducated and unfit. To them he is only an immigrant, maybe even an alien, yet another victim of the impossible to realize American Dream. She misses the days when she could lie next to her husband and feel his warm breath, and the strong beat of his heart. She misses how he used to make her feel whole and safe and secure. The man is supposed to be the one that heads the family, without him, the family has no name, it is lost. In Nigeria, his family had been very wealthy and he would have been made chief had he not been the rebel, the thrill-seeking son of the family. His dream was America and they thought that they had nothing to lose and everything to gain.

But Rosemary now looks across the table at her daughter, her only child who is ashamed of her culture, her parents.

She looks across the table at her husband whom she no longer remembers because he is but a shadow of his old self.

She listens as he mechanically thanks the Lord for the meal the government's food stamps program has provided. And she wipes a tear away. One for the son she will never have.

And then another one rolls down her cheek for the daughter she is losing.

And she cannot hold back a final one for the husband who may never return.

She closes her eyes and sighs in memory of all the dreams they have had to lock up and place far into the dark depth of memory's closet. The dreams they have had to defer in pursuit of the ultimate American Dream. How ironic. They all bow their heads and begin to eat. ☺

Mgbetchi Erondu '10 is from Millstone, New Jersey. She wrote this piece for a senior English elective, is a member of AFCEAADA and POC to name a few, and can be reached at maeondu@princeton.edu. This piece won second prize in this year's Madley College Freshman Writing Contest on Mista (Erondu's address omitted "Diversity and the Boundaries of Belonging."

## NEVER BEEN SO GRATEFUL

by Ellen Adams '10

The night after Kary died  
Joumana said the first thing she had ever said just to me.  
She used to just rattle off in Arabic to her sister  
but that night her English was strengthened all of a sudden.

It was on the way back to the cabin. We were walking  
in the dark trying not to trip on tree roots, which  
isn't really something you need to talk about to understand.  
She told me about how back home in Palestine  
they had pinned her brother up against the wall  
and shot him in the head  
right in front of her own two eyes.

She said,  
"I am sorry about your friend."

Photo Credit:

"Artist's Work"

by Veneka Chagnvedera '09  
(Galerie Menouss, Paris,  
Summer 2006)

Ellen Adams (eadams@princeton.edu) is a first-year. She attended the University of Granada, and is a Matthew Shepard scholar of the Point Foundation.

## GIRLHOOD

by Ellen Adams '10



Photo Credit: "On Being Woman"  
by Veneka Chagnvedera '09

By sixteen we learn how to dance with drinks in our hands  
and how to let cigarettes loll from our lips  
and how to lie to our mothers  
and how to be a good girl  
and still be a piece of something that all the boys want.

We learn that seduction is sexy  
and that good boys are not  
and that bad boys are better in bed  
because they will always leave you in the morning  
with your hair matted to the side  
and your mother making French toast back home in the kitchen.

We learn that rape is a personal choice  
and sex is as good as gospel  
and the thing that will turn us into  
smiling bodied married thirtysomethings ready to be mothers is  
time not love.

# Carl A. Fields Center

for equality and cultural understanding

## RECENT EVENTS

### On Common Ground Reflections on our Fall Break Retreat

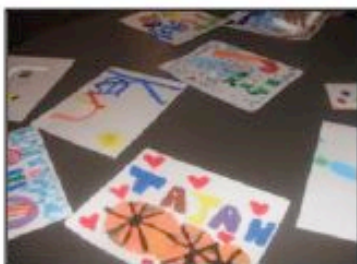
At our first annual Carl A. Fields Retreat, students were motivated to LEARN, LEAD and SERVE in a Diverse and Changing World.

Sponsored in collaboration with the Carl A. Fields Center, Center for Jewish Life, Office of Religious Life, the LGBT Center and the Inter-group Fund for Diversity.



The conference was a learning period where I had to address my own personal stereotypes and resignations.  
--Michelle Jasmin

On campus, ...it's easy to forget what you are passionate about. While working on presentations and problem sets, you forget how much you want to do to fight world hunger, bridge race relations, and promote tolerance. The retreat re-kindled all these desires and placed my passion for change back to the forefront of my mind.  
--Karen Bailey



Inspired by each individual's diverse identity, these colorful paintings are graffiti-style representations of each participant's name.

### Dr. Carlos Silveira

Professor, California State University at Long Beach

On November 8-9, the Carl A. Fields Center was proud to host a series of events by artist and educator, Dr. Carlos Silveira. A powerful and impassioned force in his own community, Dr. Silveira teaches others to use art as a tool for self-understanding, social justice, and community uplift in underserved areas of Brazil and Cambodia. Events included a lecture, an art workshop with Community House's local high school students, and a dinner discussion with Princeton undergraduates.

### Azusa Nishimoto

Professor, Aoyama Gakuin University, Tokyo, Japan

**"It was coincidence but not coincidence--A Japanese Reading of African-American Women Writers"**

Professor Nishimoto discussed the significance and power of the literature by African-American women from a Japanese female researcher's perspective. Sharing the stories of her own encounter with and Japanese students' reactions toward their writings with the participants, she showed students the African-American women's voices do convey strong messages to the readers in Japan today. Her hope is that there can be an exchange of views regarding both the hopes and difficulty that occur when peoples with different histories and cultures try to understand one another and find some common issues.

Sponsored by the Carl A. Fields Center and the Department of African American

**"It was coincidence but not coincidence..."**

A Japanese Reading of African-American Women Writers



A cross-cultural dinner discussion on the genre of African-American women's voices as Japanese students

Azusa Nishimoto is an Assistant Professor of English at Aoyama Gakuin University in Tokyo, Japan.

Sponsored by Carl A. Fields Center

<http://www.princeton.edu/~caf/>

Standing on Common Ground since 1971

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, December 9, 8pm

### CABARET:

**A Tropical Night in December**

Carl A. Fields Center, Liberation Hall

Join us for one of the most anticipated parties of the year! CABARET 2006 will feature tropical themed décor, music, food and beverages. Formal attire is encouraged—come out dressed to impress! Dinner will begin at 8pm. The party begins at 10pm. To attend the CABARET dinner, please RSVP to [caf@princeton.edu](mailto:caf@princeton.edu) by Saturday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Wednesday, December 13, 6:30pm—8:00pm

### KWANZAA!!

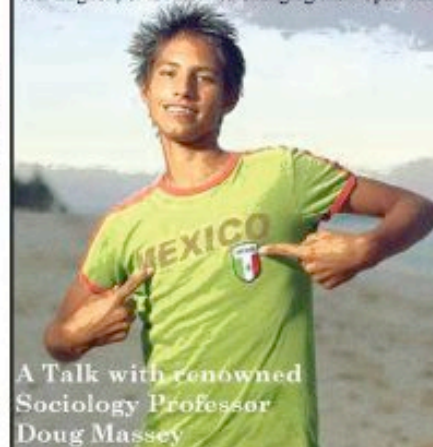
**A Celebration of Kwanzaa**

Frist Campus Center, Multipurpose Room

Come and celebrate Kwanzaa—a holiday that stresses the values of unity and togetherness, family and community, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics and collective strength, purpose, creativity, and faith. It is a time of reaffirming African American people, their ancestors, and culture. The celebration is based on the Nguzo Saba (seven guiding principles), one for each day of the observance, celebrated from December 26th to January 1st. Sponsored by the Carl A. Fields Center, Community House, and Black Graduate Caucus.

### Spanglish 101

Are Latin-American immigrants changing American English, or is America changing their Spanish?



A Talk with renowned Sociology Professor Doug Massey

Tuesday, December 5  
McCosh 10  
6:30pm



Bala Devi Chandrashekar

Mid-January

### TRADITION IN TRANSITION:

**An Experience in South Asian Performance**

Location TBA

Carl A. Fields Center Artist-in-Residence, Bala Devi Chandrashekar will treat the Princeton community to a spectacular presentation of Indian classical dance, followed by a discussion of Indian dance and performance traditions. The performance will be free and open to all members of the Princeton community interested in South Asia, dance, theater, art history (especially temple art), literature, philosophy and religion.

## SUSTAINING THE AMERICAN SPIRIT

by Dean Maria del Carmen Flores-Mills,

who was invited to give an address to women of color at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio as the final program in Women's History month.

I was born on August 24, 1971, the third child and first daughter to Dorothy and Jose Flores in Paulding, Ohio. I spent the first 17 years of my life in Ottoville, Ohio. It's a small town with two gas stations, one church, one school and three bars (four while I was growing up there). The Ottoville Local school district, while limited in resources, provided what I consider to be an extraordinarily sound core curriculum. We were learning how to learn. My introduction to history included snippets of world history, the requisite Ohio history and a concentration on US history at several levels. I remember distinctly my feelings of pride and patriotism as we examined and re-examined the period of "discovery" by Christopher Columbus to a little

beyond the Civil War. After many childhood visits to Texas to visit family, including an excursion to the Alamo, I vividly recall a conversation I had with my father after we covered the event in my class.

"Papi, we learned all about the Alamo today! Even though we lost, Davy Crockett and Jim Bowie fought so bravely against the Mexicans, holding them off for a long time. Santa Anna brought the rest of the army and eventually stole the fort but in the end we got it back."

He looked at me and said "Mija – there's another side to that story – another way of looking at things."

I was so confused. Eventually, the U.S. "won," WE won, what other side to the story? In my own mind I had identified my father as a former Texan and an American, like me, but did not really contemplate the implications of being Mexican American in this context. In a war context, Americans were always the "good guys" and whomever they were fighting were the "bad guys." He gave me a book with the same facts but from the Mexican perspective. I started to get it. To understand about voice, power, perspective, identity and the impossibility of "objectivity." The Alamo had been a Spanish mission and later occupied by Mexicans because Texas had been a part of that country. White settlers eventually entered the land and took over the mission. Santa Anna re-claimed it during the Battle of the Alamo but ultimately suffered defeat as Texas became independent first and then part of the United States. "WE" didn't win that one. Our ancestors lost the most resource rich region of their country. I began to think a little more critically about the information presented as history. However, with no working knowledge or exposure to diverse perspectives, the Civil Rights movement, the farm worker/labor movement, or the plight of Native Americans, I continued on my path with a strong and loyal patriotic sentiment. Around that same time, I submitted the winning essay in our local "Voice of Democracy" competition.

"The United States of America, a synonym for pride, freedom, courage and excellence, is a

A figure from the base of the Angel of the Republic, the city's renowned and recently renovated status celebrating Mexico's nationhood, dwarfed by an American Express skyscraper. It is juxtapositions like these that help one begin to understand why many Mexicans claim that foreign businesses are the modern incarnations of imperialist traditions.



Photo Credit: Aiala Levy '07 (Summer Mexico City)

country created by and for the people. Unified by our constitution, our country has been like a plant. Its roots were created and planted by bloodshed, determination and courage. The stem grew from nourishment called pride, intelligence and great leadership. Excellence, guidance and heritage have caused the flower to fully bloom. Without any one part, the plant dies, but instead, as each works together it prospers. So is our great nation; without any one ingredient it would not have such a rich heritage nor such strong structure."

Some 16 odd years ago, those were my most heartfelt convictions about the United States of America. And then began my journey of self-discovery, identity, and pursuit of articulations of history from multiple perspectives. That essay came from a naïve perspective,

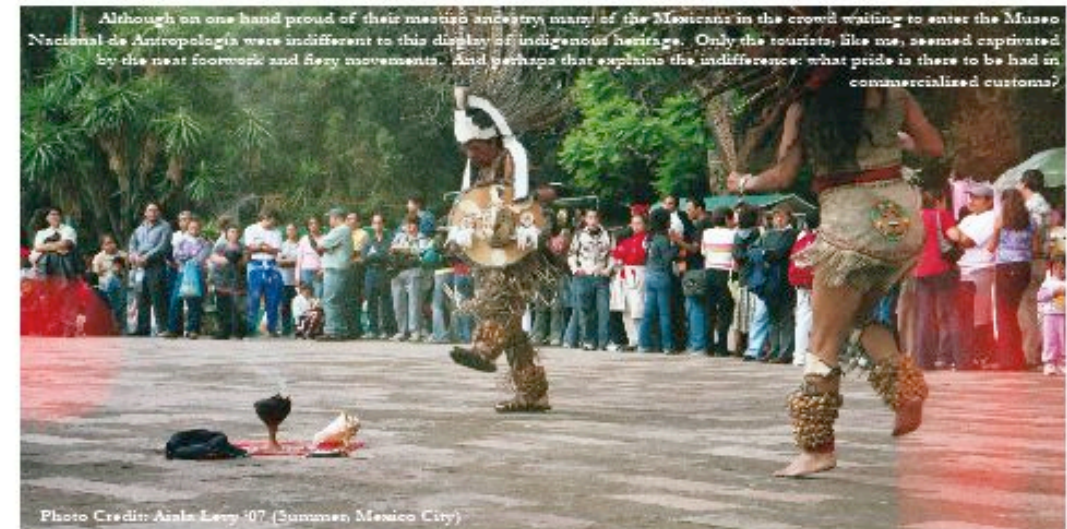


Photo Credit: Aiala Levy '07 (Summer Mexico City)

written before. Before I learned that our government interned thousands of Japanese American citizens during World War II and the Supreme Court deemed the action constitutional in *Korematsu v. U.S.* despite a phrase in the 14th Amendment promising the equal protection of the laws to all people. Before I learned the horrifying details of the "peculiar institution" of slavery in a country which proclaimed to "hold these truths self evident that all men are created equal". Before I knew segregation plagued the Southwest too and Latinos were also legally targeted and separated as inferior. Before my law school career. Before I read court cases that shocked me, like a decision by a Texas judge in 1995 which held that a mother speaking Spanish to her child constituted child abuse. Before

I learned about the Baldus study which proves that a black person is much more likely to be put to death for killing a white person than a white person is for killing a black person.

Please, do not misunderstand me, despite these flaws; I am fully aware that I live in the greatest nation in the world. I would be lying if I said I didn't cheer for American athletes in international and Olympic competitions. It would be a misrepresentation if I didn't admit to the swell of pride in my chest and tears in my eyes when I hear the National Anthem and God Bless America. September 11th recalled my attention to my personal patriotic evolution. More than anything I wanted them to symbolize to the world UNITY – to show the gritty strength, determination and unwavering

will to rebuild and reclaim our lives rather than to crumble in fear. To show that we would emerge from the sorrow, despair, smoke and destruction a defiant and undefeated people undaunted by the gargantuan task of achieving the promises and possibility of our great nation. After all, it is the greatest nation in the world. Where else could the son of undocumented immigrants gain admission and full financial aid to one of the most prestigious institutions of higher education and emerge four years later with a bachelor's degree and head on to medical school like Jesus Lemus? Where else could a poor black girl from Mississippi, become one of the richest and most influential figures in the media like Oprah Winfrey? Where could the son of Baptist minister seek out an education under the oppression

of segregation and set in motion a series of peaceful protests that would change the face of a nation like Martin Luther King Jr? Where else could an openly gay man run for an office in the national legislature like Barney Frank? Where else could Fannie Lou Hammer and Ida Wells defy oppression and speak out for the betterment of the nation? Only in the United States of America.

And so, I would assert that we, as women of color, must not only sustain the American spirit but redefine it and expand it and assist our nation in achieving and fulfilling the lofty, idealistic promises in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the very essence of what it means to be an American. First, let's talk about the redefinition. When I say "the American spirit," what comes to mind? I remember growing up in Ottoville, reading magazines like Teen and Seventeen. I remember my dolls, my books and there were very few people who looked like me. The only Latinos on the TV scene were maids or funny sidekicks. I remember being convinced that I was fat and ugly. Now, my family surely tried to tell me otherwise, especially my papi, but the messages around me clearly communicated what beauty was – blue eyed, blonde, thin and I was none of those things. My peers noted the dark hair on my arms, legs and face. I felt so ugly. I had exactly two dates in high school – neither one of them successful. So I decided to concentrate on being smart – also not a desirable female characteristic in the opinion of many. I went off to Ames, Iowa and Iowa State University on a National Hispanic and George Washington Carver scholarships cloaked in the anonymity of a student body of 25,000 people. I met my husband in October of 1989, my freshman year. **I HAD A BOYFRIEND!** He was (still is!) good looking!! And he significantly contributed to my self-esteem.

But my self-confidence also benefited from my diverse peers. (Yes, there is diversity in Iowa.) The media continued to evolve. People who looked like me were beautiful!! Who knew? My black sisters helped me appreciate something else about myself. Now I was always under the impression that I had a fat butt. Little did I know I did not have an f-a-t "fat" but p-h-a-t phat booty, an onion, if

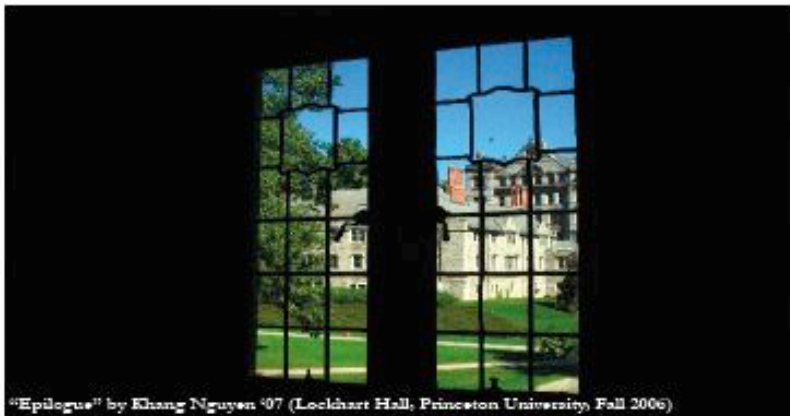
you will and that was a good thing!! Imagine my elation the first time I was forwarded "Phenomenal Woman" by Maya Angelou via e-mail. My spirit embraced those words and they provided sustenance for my soul. I was validated.

In order to sustain the American spirit we must help this nation attain all of its promise and potential. How will we do this? How does one take on such a daunting task? In order to effect change you don't need to sit back and be intimidated by this monumental, amorphous job. Here are some of my thoughts about how to help accomplish this goal.

*Be responsible for the day-to-day realities of bills, babies and work. Do your part by articulating your values to those around you every time you are presented with the opportunity. If there is an opening in a conversation, take it. Witness. Better yet, live it. When you have achieved something, remember those coming behind you. Give back. More than likely you are standing solidly on the shoulders of those who came before you. Make priorities. Contribute what you can. Mentor. Take care of yourself. Start slowly. Pick something. Walk. Drink more water. Quit smoking. Pray. Read. Get the mammogram you've been putting off. (I had one, they really aren't so bad.) Seek opportunities to grow intellectually, emotionally and spiritually.*

*Appreciate and seek out the experiences of others. There is so much to learn from those around us. So much wisdom, emotion and knowledge. To that end, I want to leave you together. Let us move forward in sisterhood to sustain the American Spirit. God bless you and God bless America. ☺*

Dean Flores-Mills has worked in the Office of the Dean of Undergraduate Students at Princeton since August of 2001. She has two children, Alicia Flores, 10 and Matias Jose, 6. Neil Mills is her husband of 14 years. She loves baking, feeding undergraduates with healthy appetites and learning from others through sharing experiences. She is a faculty fellow at Rockefeller College and with the football team. Read the rest of her speech at [www.princeton.edu/~prism/](http://www.princeton.edu/~prism/)



"Epilogue" by Khang Nguyen '07 (Lockhart Hall, Princeton University, Fall 2006)

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"Mother & Daughter" by Khang Nguyen '07 (Ha Long Bay, Viet Nam, Summer 2006)

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