African American Women in Public Service and Government

The National Women’s History Month theme for 2016 is “Working to Form A More Perfect Union: Honoring Women in Government and Public Service.” Historically African American women have a rich tradition of public service and working in local, state and national government. For example, in Montgomery, Alabama it was the Women’s Political Council, founded by Mary Fair Burks in 1946, that first called for a local bus boycott. There is also the late Shirley Chisolm, the first black woman elected to Congress, who represented New York’s 12th Congressional District from 1969-1983. In 1972, she also became the first woman to run for the Democratic Party’s presidential nomination. In light of this theme we are featuring several African American women in Government and Public Service who have recently been featured in the national news.

Mia Love – in 2014 Love became the first black Republican woman elected to Congress. Love, the daughter of Haitian immigrants, was born in Brooklyn, N. Y. and raised in Connecticut. After graduating from the University of Hartford, Love moved to Utah where she would meet her husband and begin her political career. After becoming engaged in community concerns she was encouraged to run for city council. Six years after her stint as a council woman she became Mayor of Sarasota Springs, Utah. In 2012 she ran for a seat representing Utah’s 4th Congressional District. She lost that election but returned to run again for the same position in 2014 and won. She is currently serving and is up for re-election in 2016.

Marilyn Mosby- in January 2015 Mosby was elected to office and became State’s Attorney for Baltimore, Maryland. At the time of her election, she was the youngest top prosecutor in a major U. S. city. Raised in Boston, Massachusetts, Mosby became interested in becoming a lawyer after the tragic murder of her 17 year old cousin. Mosby recently has received a lot of national media attention during the spring 2015 uprisings in Baltimore due to the death of Freddie Gray in Baltimore City Police custody. She graduated from Tuskegee University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and earned her Juris Doctor degree from Boston College Law School. She was named as one of The Baltimore Sun’s 50 Women to Watch in 2013 and 2014 and Baltimore Magazine’s Top 40 under 40 in 2014.

Karen Weaver – was elected the first woman Mayor of Flint, Michigan in November 2015. Prior to being elected mayor, Weaver was Director of Behavioral Services, Mott Children’s Center and also served on several community boards and committees, including the Hurley Hospital Board of Managers, and the Community Foundation of Greater Flint. Immediately upon taking office, Weaver declared an emergency due to the inordinate high

continued on pg. 7
The Purdue Black Cultural Center has established two noteworthy collaborations this spring. The first was with the Art Museum of Greater Lafayette *Ambiguous Reflections of Race and Identity: A Question of Color* exhibiting the artwork of Gerald Griffin. The second is a partnership with Lafayette Symphony Orchestra *Gospel Meets Symphony* (April 9) featuring the BCC Black Voices of Inspiration choir and the Lafayette Symphony. These three organizations represent the cultural fabric of our community and bring together artistically talented individuals. The collaborations that have been created are a logical extension of our missions. A goal of the BCC was to expand our footprint in Lafayette. The LSO and Art Museum wanted to engage more audiences of color in their program offerings. Partnering the BCC with these mainstream organizations created a win-win situation for all involved.

Though conversations with the Art Museum executive director, Kendall Smith, we envisioned an exhibition during Black History Month that would feature the works of African American artists. As a result of this collaboration, we have introduced to the community a variety of renowned visual artists including Preston Jackson, Joyce Owens, Robert Peppers and others. We are grateful the Art Museum has been deliberate in efforts to showcase African American artists by providing vital gallery space. This community partnership offers the public a greater understanding of African American history and culture through the visual arts. The BCC and the Art Museum are institutions of kindred spirit and common purpose. Last month our partnership with the Art Museum of Greater Lafayette reached a new level. The collections committee of the Art Museum voted unanimously to purchase a piece of artwork by Gerald Griffin “Black Friday” for their permanent collection and put it on a long term loan at the BCC. As a result of this partnership, BCC visitors can see this magnificent piece of artwork on exhibition.

*Gospel Meets Symphony* was created to build bridges and bring people together. The intergenerational multi-racial collaboration of musically talented individuals is designed to uplift and unify the community. The concert will fuse mesmerizing orchestral sounds with powerful vocal melodies for an unforgettable evening of song.

Our collaborations with the Art Museum and the Lafayette Symphony Orchestra have generated positive outcomes. We discovered that collectively our organizations could reach more constituents by working together, we could demonstrate artistic excellence and positioned ourselves to satisfy multiple goals, artistic, social and civic. Working in partnership we have achieved more than each of us working independently. These types of collaborations are meaningful, creative and enduring. This partnership enabled us to bring strong community values, networks and diversity of experience into environments where they are most needed.

Renee A. Thomas
Director
Harakafest: Creating a New World

People attending Harakafest on Friday or Saturday, April 1-2, 2016 will be submerged into a new reality. Haraka writers will perform their poetry through expressions of their individual personalities during the free show. Poems featured in this show are exploring a “what if” scenario rooted in Afrofuturistic conceptualism. Khari B. Haraka Artist–In-Residence explains it this way, “For this show we have decided that instead of continually fighting the ever present beast called institutional racism and its most prominent tool, capitalism, we are making the planet more and more inhabitable for healthy, sustainable animal life. We also tap into abilities within our spirits and leave “earth” behind to start somewhere new.” This group of poets is one of the largest with 15 members strong. They are composing work around making their place in this new world and the role they will play in benefitting the whole. Leaving earth is not simply an escape from the ravages of the present world but an opportunity to build a better place for future generations without baggage or earthly limitations.

Latrice Young, Haraka student coordinator, says that audiences should expect “a deeper meaning behind each poem. We each were told that we would be transported to a new space now known as HERE. The only requirements before our departure were that we could not take anyone with us at first and that we had to have a significant role in this new space.”

Some pieces will be accompanied by music; others will simply rely exclusively on the performer to assert the emotional power behind the words. In order to effectively perform their pieces, the artists have thrown a significant amount of hours into practicing and refining their pieces. Practices are held every Monday and Wednesday from 6:30 p.m.-9:30 p.m. at the BCC for more brainstorming, writing workshops, and critiques. Before they get on stage to perform, they run through the show to perfect every technical aspect of the performance as a whole. If you would like a place here at Purdue to share what you write and have an avenue to help your writing grow, you are invited to join Haraka. We look forward to seeing you there.

Juanita Crider, Editor

www.purdue.edu/BCC
For the second time, the Lafayette Symphony Orchestra and the Black Voices Of Inspiration will team up to make music radiate through the Long Center for the Performing Arts on Saturday, April 9, 2016 at 7:30 p.m.

During this event, called Gospel Meets Symphony, both groups will perform collaboratively and independently. The performance is modeled after the annual concert that was started by the Akron Symphony Orchestra and has been running for more than 21 years.

BVOI, established in 1971, is dedicated to the performance of spirituals, gospels and contemporary songs of inspiration by African American composers. The choirs has won several awards of excellence and toured extensively throughout Indiana, visiting other university campuses, metropolitan churches, civic organizations and elementary schools. The Lafayette Symphony Orchestra began in 1949 by local musicians with a goal of providing an opportunity for local musicians to perform orchestral music. By 1950 the group had grown into a full fledged orchestra, with a board and a part-time conductor. The Black Voices Of Inspiration (BVOI) is currently under the direction of BCC full-time Artist-In-Residence, James Dekle. When asked how he prepares the choir for an event like this, Dekle states, “There are a couple points of focus that I reference in regards to the Gospel Meets Symphony concert. First is the blending of musical culture. When we think of symphony, we think of Western European Classical music and when we think of Gospel music, we think of music that was birthed from the lineage of African Americans. Bringing these two distinctly different musical idioms together embraces what the American vision is all about, celebrating different cultures together.” Dekle believes that people experience complete change of being through exposure to good live music. Therefore the audience should expect a powerful experience from attending this concert.

The Black Voices Of Inspiration, will perform an adaptation of *Porgy and Bess* featuring two soloists and choir. Additionally they will perform “The Promise Lives On,” a beautiful piece from the work *Sing for the Cure*. Sing for the Cure is based on stories of breast cancer survivors. As well, a list of traditional and contemporary gospel selections from up-tempo clap your hands and stomp your feet, to gospel ballads and a few acapella pieces will be included in the evening’s repertoire. Dekle says “the audience should expect an exciting event!”

BCC Director, Renee Thomas, remembers the first Gospel Meets Symphony event in 2014 as “a powerful concert that helped to build bridges. There were many African-American patrons who attended a symphony orchestra concert for the first time and a large number of white symphony patrons who attended a live gospel concert for the first time. It was a great way to uplift the community.”

Tickets for concert are on sale now and can be purchased online at www.lafayettesymphony.org or by calling the Long Center Box Office at 765-742-6463. Tickets range from $8 to $39 for main floor seats. Reduced ticket pricing will be available for BCC patrons; the $39 value tickets will be available for $15 through the BCC website so purchase them quickly. They will be limited in number.
The BCC and Purdue Theatre Department Partnership

On February 5th and 6th Purdue Theatre in partnership with the Black Cultural Center produced a staged reading of the play, Baltimore, by award winning African American playwright Kirsten Greenidge. Greenidge’s plays engage the intersection of race and class in the United States. BCC Assistant Director, Bill Caise attended college with Greenidge and also starred in the production. Other cast members included BCC New Directional Players Aanisah Mubarak and Daison McKee.

Baltimore centers around the character, Shelby, who accepts a resident advisor position at her university believing it will enhance her resume. As a millennial she is used to planning everything down to the minute. However, her plans change suddenly when a racially charged incident occurs on her watch and she has no idea how to respond. Her students demand she take sides. But choosing who to believe and how to act is complicated. Was the incident a joke? Or are its roots deeper than Shelby wants to admit? Does it speak to some part of the American experience that, despite being black, Shelby just does not know how to talk about?

This production is a part of the Big Ten initiative for women playwrights. In 2010, leaders of the Big Ten Theatre Consortium recognized an under-representation of women in theatre, both as playwrights and in the availability of substantial female roles, particularly those suitable for college-age actors. Uniquely positioned to address this need, the Big Ten Theatre chairs decided to commission, produce, and publicize three new works by female playwrights over a three-year period, with a secondary goal of creating strong age-appropriate roles for young women.

Recommended Reading

Sisters in the Statehouse:
Black Women and Legislative Decision Making
by Nadia E. Brown

Black Women and Politics in New York City
by Julie A. Gallagher

www.purdue.edu/BCC
Fall semester Purdue’s Diversity and Inclusion Leadership Team announced the Diversity Transformation Award Program to address recruitment, enrollment, retention, and graduation of underrepresented minority students, as well as their transition into graduate programs. They received 67 proposals which exceeded their expectations. One of the successful proposals, The Purdue Express, was the brainchild of BCC Artist-In-Residence and Black Voices Of Inspiration choir director, James Dekle. Purdue Express is a performance company that will perform a 30-minute high energy show including singing, dancing, and speaking around the theme of Purdue University as their destination for higher education. The production will provide audience members and prospective students an overview of the university, student organizations, campus life and notable alumni and other information. Purdue Express will play a primary role in the university’s goals to strengthen its efforts to recruit and retain underrepresented minorities. The students who will be participating in this group will receive a scholarship for their participation.

When asked why the Purdue Express, James Dekle responds, “Actions speak louder than words. Let me put it this way, if you were an underrepresented minority attending a recruitment seminar, more specifically African American, would you rather the Office of Admissions representative say how diverse their school is as you flip through materials or would you like to see a high energy performance that includes students that are from various ethnic backgrounds and share your cultural norms, as well as the possibilities you may enjoy upon your arrival at Purdue. Which one of these methods do you feel will be successful at recruiting more students to choose the latter example?” Dekle expects that the Purdue Express will be successful and believes the university will see the benefits of this ensemble soon after its implementation. As of this writing Dekle is busy meeting with campus partners and developing creative content for the show. Auditions for the Purdue Express will be held April 13, 2016.

More than 140 first graders from Burnett Creek Elementary school visited the Black Cultural Center as a field trip for Black History Month. Students, teachers, and some parents participated in several multi-sensory hands on activities, including African dance & drumming and book readings by African American authors.
“Black Friday”- A Gerald Griffin Masterpiece

“Black Friday” – An oil painting by Chicago artist Gerald Griffin strives to connect the habits we adhere to today to our historical experiences as Black people in America. Today when we hear the term Black Friday, we immediately think of amazing discounted department store sales…However, only six generations ago Black Friday would mean the sale of African men, women and children and the vast amounts of wealth buyers could amass from owning them. This 80” x 55” painting shows 3 women in the foreground chained to the auction block. The young girl appears to be self-conscious of her nudity and is covering her body. The athletic woman, in traditional braids, is gazing to the lush plantation that represents the reason she is being auctioned. The third woman represents the antebellum South. She appears to be unconscious of her nakedness. While in the middle ground, a man is lynched for attempting to escape. Finally, in the background we see scene of a lush countryside…Through this painting, we come to understand that art can be about more than engaging in an aesthetic experience. This painting speaks to historical social issues that can be linked, metaphorically, to issues we deal with today.

Black Friday will be installed at the BCC on long term loan from the Art Museum of Greater Lafayette.

levels of lead in the city’s water. A Flint native, Mayor Weaver earned a bachelor’s degree from Tougaloo College. She also received a master’s degree from Long Island University and holds a doctorate in clinical psychology from Michigan State University.

Kamala Harris - was elected Attorney General of California in 2010 and re-elected in 2014. She is the first African American, first Asian-American and first woman to hold the office in California’s history. She is the daughter of an Indian mother and Jamaican American father. From 1990-1998 Harris served as the Deputy District Attorney in Alameda County, California and afterwards became Managing Attorney of the Career Criminal Unit in the San Francisco District Attorney’s office. Harris earned her undergraduate degree from Howard University and received her Juris Doctor (J.D.) from the University of California, Hastings College of Law in 1989. She is currently running for the United States Senate seat being vacated by Senator Barbara Boxer in the 2016 election.

Juanita Crider, Editor
Accolades to....

Congratulations to Lisa Young, American studies PhD candidate and BCC library employee, on receiving the prestigious Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Dissertation Grant. This grant is available to graduate students who were participants in the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program. The grant provides students at the critical juncture of completing their dissertation support to spend a year on writing.

Way to go Brandon Allen, doctoral student in the Department of Youth Development and Agricultural Education and BCC night manager on his Op-Ed published in *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*. The editorial, “Changing the Political Rhetoric Surrounding HBCU’s” was written with Dr. Levon Esters, associate professor in the Department of Youth Development and Agricultural Education. Professor Esters research focuses on STEM career development of underrepresented minorities (URMs) mentoring of females and URM graduate students in STEM, and the role of historically Black land-grant institutions in fostering the STEM success of females and URMs. The article can be accessed here: http://diverseeducation.com/article/81451/