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Volume 1, Issue 5



*Message from the Director*

Welcome to the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (MSA) and fifth issue of the *Drums of Diversity*.

This issue pays tribute to two initiatives that proudly and successfully support a long-standing commitment to diversity and awareness of racial and ethnic issues in higher education at ISU and around the country – the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity (NCORE) and Iowa State's Conference on Race and Ethnicity (ISCORE).

For the past six years, ISU has been sending participants to NCORE “in search of clarification concerning matters of race and ethnicity and the state of our communities.” Participants return as ISCORE presenters – ready to share knowledge, research, ideal models for change, new perspectives, and better practice.

The idea...to give the ISU community members an equal share of the investment, an equal opportunity to learn, grow,

***The Only Race There Is***

By Dr. Eugenio Matibag —Based on his Opening Address given at ISCORE 2003

African American writer Ralph Ellison, in his 1952 novel *Invisible Man*, has his central character explain the sense of the book's title: it means that the black man feels invisible, for all practical purposes is invisible. When others look at him, they don't really see *him*, they see only the image produced by their prejudices. And the black man as invisible man may grow so accustomed to his invisibility that he may one day begin to see himself, sadly, through the filter of those same prejudices. He may come to accept his social invisibility by accepting erroneous attributions to his character based on his race.

If race, as the World Book Dictionary defines it, is “any one of the major divisions of the world's people thought of as distinctive by characteristics and common ancestry”; if a race is constituted by “a group of persons connected by common descent or origin”—then I would like to propose to you, my fellow scholars, that the very facts of culture and history can do nothing but confound the concept of race.

And why is that? Because the concept of race is totally inadequate for making any scientific determination of character or prediction of behavior and thought. Anthropologist Ashley Montagu proposes that thesis when he states, “there is no such thing in reality as ‘race.’” This statement is true in the sense that no genetic linkage exists among three variables: the variable of phenotype or physical appearance, the variable of individual

intelligence, and the third variable, the ability of the group “to achieve a high civilization.”

One may protest, however: Racial identifications are too obvious to be disputed! Skin color and bodily type, one may argue, are clear and obvious signs of who you are! But racial classifications are based on what Lucien Lefebvre has called the “deceptively clear label.” And the deceptively clear labeling done by racial classifications is contradicted by at least two facts. First, racial classifications are invalid due to the fact that vast variations exist within those classifications, to an extent equaling if not exceeding that of distinctions between populations. Is there a white race, a black race, a yellow race, a red race? Look again. It was only until as recently as 1924 that U.S. immigration law recognized Asian Indian Americans as white! Only after the U.S. Supreme Court decided, in the case of U.S. v. Bhagat Singh Thind, that Asian Indian Americans were not “white” but people of color, did it nullify their eligibility for citizenship. Second, racial classifications become invalidated all the more as humans migrate outside the boundaries of their ancestral “homelands” and they intermarry outside the confines of their family and tribal groupings.

Exogamy rules. Mixtures and syntheses are the norm. These crossings of racial lines confirm the idea that there are no longer any pure racial stocks. The mixing of races—in all the mestizos, mulattos, so-called half-breeds and cross-breeds and hybrids of the world—has completely



**Our Sound Effects:**

and appreciate diversity.

- Leonard Perry,  
Assoc. Dean of Students  
and MSA Director

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**Matibag (*The Only Race There Is* cont. from page 1).**

confounded any neat racialist categorization of peoples.

African American philosopher Anthony Appiah points out that racial classifications have no validity in theories of biological determinism. Why? “First,” says Appiah, “because there are simply too many people who do not fit into any such category; and second because, even when you succeed in assigning someone to one of these categories—on the basis of skin-pigmentation and hair, say—that implies very little about most of their other biological characteristics.”

Evolutionary biologists confirm that differences of color, hair and physiognomy are relatively recent and superficial adaptations to earth’s varied climactic conditions under which diverse populations live. Physiologically and genetically, then, we humans truly are more alike than we are different. Due to this inescapable commonality and to historical processes of migration and mixing, the human species is racing toward

race, as Ashley Montagu states it, have no validity in determining aptitude or moral character. “Race is the witchcraft, the demonology of our time”; race according to Montagu is no less than “humankind’s most dangerous myth, America’s Original Sin.”

**Why Study Race?**

Now, if race is a myth, a fallacy, an “unsound term,” why then, pray tell, devote a whole university conference to the subjects of race and ethnicity? Why all this fuss about an invalid concept?

*Why study race?* Because although race is a fiction, it is a powerful fiction, it is an ingrained cognitive principal that provides a basis for group identification and a sanction for group action. By the opaque illogic of racialist assumptions, race-based thinking guides and justifies a wide range of abuse, from everyday discrimination to genocide.

African American social critic W.E.B. Du Bois was correct in stating that “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line” (5).

by racialist reasoning, the distribution of power in society is determined, the allocation of resources and access to them is decided, by appeal to factors of “color, hair and bone,” to use Du Bois’s phrase. We have to understand the race-based assumptions that justify the production of social difference, in order to expose those assumptions and strip them of their destructive power.

Sociologist Stuart Hall refers to race as “a major concept that organizes the great classificatory systems of society”; it provides the justification for sociopolitical mobilizations: the concept of racial difference has “legitimized” Slavery in the American South, Anti-Semitism, South African Apartheid, the Japanese American Internment, Ethnic Cleansing in the former Yugoslavia.

*Why study race?* Because we fight to achieve social justice and an end to the atrocities. We know that invidious racial distinctions stand in the way of the fair and equitable treatment of everyone. Barriers of color, body type and facial feature block the access to the means by which everyone should have a chance at fulfillment and happiness in this life.

***The task of ISCORE, to my mind, is to expose this process of racialization, so that it isn’t carried out uncritically and perniciously, so that division by race can be demystified and eventually left behind. — Dr. Eugenio Matibag***

Montagu’s “unity without uniformity.” The commingling of the races indicates as well that there is no hierarchy of racial types existent in nature.

Moreover: “There is no hatred of races,” wrote Cuban patriot José Martí in 1891 with incredible prescience, “because there are no races. [...] The soul emanates, equal and eternal, from bodies diverse in form and in color. They sin against Humanity who would foment and propagate opposition and hatred of races.”

Yet the fallacy of race persists: people continue not only to believe in but to assume without questioning a supposed correlation between physical appearance, intelligence and level of civilization. Although, the markers of

*Why study race?* Because the concept of race is indeed a dangerous, fallacious concept, all the more so because even once its fallacy is banished from rational discourse, it sneaks its way back in, operates covertly, as the hidden “guarantee” we seek in reading the character of racialized others. It is a habit of thought we have, once we place a person in his or her racial category, to believe that we know the person, to think mistakenly that we have them “pegged,” that we know their “essence.” But it simply isn’t so! That person has been rendered invisible by our racializing judgment.

*Why study race?* Because we must understand its function in social systems. Because by racist criteria and

**The Subject of Race**

Dominant groups exploit and oppress subordinate groups. Race in a social system structured on inequalities becomes the marker that consigns, unjustly, individuals to particular positions within the social hierarchy. But in the institutions of higher education we can critique and contest racialist beliefs and practices—armed with the power of knowledge that gives us courage, and the vision of justice that guides our efforts. Doing so, we have to recognize that racist educational policies have not only mirrored society’s inequalities, but have also produced and perpetuated social inequalities.

**Cont. on the next page.**

## Iowa State Conference on Race and Ethnicity

*Matibag, cont. from page 2.*

These considerations support the very idea of affirmative action—properly managed, it balances the equation, levels the playing field for individuals whose racially-identified groups have been stigmatized, held back, and denied access for centuries.

A conference like **ISCORE** has important business at hand: to study not racial identities per se, but racializing identifications, to register and report the ways that racial attribution and race-based action have shaped society. The distinction is important. Human groups, by accidents of color, geography and bodily appearance, have been racialized, and on that basis divided into separate and unequal groups. And so racialized, humans groups are subject to the stereotypes and exclusionary-repressive mechanisms that determine the extent of their life chances. The task of **ISCORE**, to my mind, is to expose this process of racialization, so that it isn't carried out uncritically and perniciously, so that division by race can be demystified and eventually left behind.

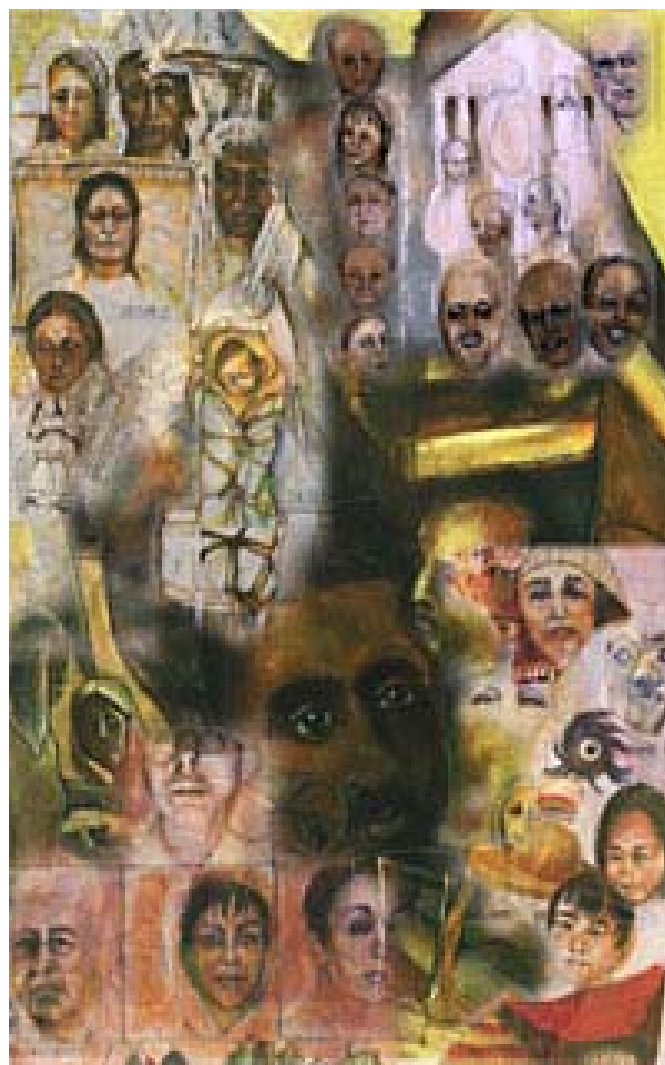
We have to research and write the history of American race relations. This project entails the realization that although race is a myth, and the uses of racist identifications can oppress and exclude peoples, the markers of race can also have a positive, productive use for a people seeking to secure their rights: race can be an empowering myth—think of Black Power, Yellow Power, La Raza Unida, the Native American Civil Rights Movement. Race can serve as a unifying and emboldening myth, like a banner, by which a people self-consciously identify themselves as a people, fighting in solidarity for the common cause. Through such voluntary self-identifications invoking a sociocultural concept of race, a people so defined can work to attain recognition, opportunity, and the right to dignity.

We, the **ISCORE** presenters and participants, have a stake in that dream, and as Dr. King exemplified by his words and his works, we will not stay content with only dreaming. We must be “pragmatic idealists,” as Mahatma Gandhi would say, to improve this world blighted by racism. Let us work to make ours a nation in which all children, women and men will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. Let us put our heads and hearts and hands together and work to advance and elevate the race, and by that I mean the only race there is. And the only race there is, my fellow Americans, is the human race.

**Dr. Eugenio Matibag is an associate professor of Spanish in the ISU Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures.**

**THE 6TH ANNUAL  
IOWA STATE CONFERENCE ON  
RACE AND ETHNICITY  
Friday, March 4, 2005  
8 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
(On-site Registration Begins at 8:00 a.m.)**

**Memorial Union  
Iowa State University**



**Artist: Brenda Jones, ISU Associate Professor in Art and Design.** This artwork represents a collage of works Brenda Jones contributed to **ISCORE** over the past five years.

## A Faculty Member's Perspective on Race and Ethnicity

### *“Muscles for Justice” — by Dr. Suzanne Hendrich*

I have become a fitness fanatic, especially in the last year or so, as I've been forced to make some big changes in my life to try to combat those chronic diseases that creep up on us in middle age. Strength training hurts, but I like being stronger. Likewise, painful experiences seem to be effective catalysts for developing a stronger sense of social justice. Building “muscles for justice” is a positive reaction to being treated unfairly, or to someone else being treated unfairly. It's not just a feeling, but doing something about that feeling, and at least sometimes knowing that what you did made a difference.

An African American Physics major went to the first meeting of an exam preparation group organized by her fellow students. She was told bluntly, “You don't belong here—this is only for serious students.” She collected herself, bore this humiliation with silent dignity, and made sure to show her exam paper (with a higher score) to this same bigoted classmate after the graded exams were returned. He never apologized, exactly, but she could see a bit of respect in his eyes.

#### ***How would you feel if this happened to you?***

A group of international students was talking about the upcoming US election with their professor, a US citizen. The professor talked proudly about the first time she voted and how exciting it was to watch the election results when her candidate won, how depressed she was feeling after last November, when one student, a female native of Saudi Arabia, said, “I have never had the opportunity to vote.” The conversation stopped in a stunned silence.

#### ***How would you feel if this happened to you?***

An African American male student was bicycling across campus in the early evening breeze. It was a pleasant spring with the leaves beginning to bud out. No one was around, except for a guy wearing a hooded sweatshirt. As the bicyclist passed, the hooded man snarled out, “No ni\*\*\*\*s on campus.”

#### ***How would you feel if this happened to you?***

These stories are similar to ones told to me by ISU students over the past 10 years. Since I've been involved in facilitating “Dialogues on Diversity”, US 150, a one credit seminar offered second half-semester, I have been filled with admiration, awe, rage, sadness, hope, despair, as I listened. How could you hear about such experiences and not want to

do something to make a world in which people can be free to be themselves, to have their own voice, to not live in fear? What I needed to do was help create an opportunity for more people to listen and really hear other people's stories of injustice with an open heart, a heart that is moved to action.

How does “Dialogues...” work? We help people get to know each other first. Once you know what someone's favorite food or color is, your preconceptions about them are usually challenged, your mind is opened to them a bit. Then we simulate situations of injustice in some creative ways that allow students to explore these issues from a “safe” distance. As the course progresses, we ask students to take more risks in disclosing their own views, and mapping out and practicing how they might respond to challenges to justice. I sense that “Dialogues...” (US 150) is making some difference. Students who've taken the class talk in specifics about how they stand up for justice and freedom better.

It may be that some people are just born with a stronger muscle for justice. I remember my grandfather's outrage that Satchel Paige, whom he deemed the greatest pitcher of all time, wasn't allowed to play Major League baseball until he was in his late 40s because Paige was African American. My mother recently told me how she agonized about wanting to join the Freedom Riders, but finally decided that she could not leave us, her children, to do this. I'm glad that I inherited this spirit, but it needs constant attention. Whatever your natural inclinations are, spending time with people who are different from yourself, listening to their stories, and following where your heart leads after hearing them, will help you develop muscles that are the most important to your health, because these “muscles for justice” help OUR WHOLE COMMUNITY to be healthy.

In the words of that famous example of multiculturalism, Mr. Spock, “Live long and prosper”!

**Dr. Suzanne Hendrich is the Associate Dean in the ISU College of Family and Consumer Sciences and Professor for Food Science and Human Nutrition.**

# Student Perspectives on Race and Ethnicity

## *NCORE Experiences of Erin Hughes, ISU Sophomore*

As I look back on my experiences at NCORE '04 in Miami, I “taste” several things: pure ecstasy at the touch of Atlantic Ocean breezes while sleeping in the swinging hammocks underneath a canopy of palm trees, the richness of Spanish *paella*, Japanese sushi, and Cuban fried plantains, confusion produced by pointed comments during nightly two to three hour conversations as an ISU group, the sting of hot tears on burning cheeks at being called “racist,” a first true experience of feeling judgment based on my skin color – and cowering in the corner of the elevator.

These experiences and many more have produced, what I like to call, a constant state of confusion, the drive to “work on myself,” and the simultaneous relief and despair of never being “done.” I hesitate to summarize my experiences because I fear I could never be truly accurate based on my said state. But, I know I am growing in my confusion. I know, too, that I will never see and feel life the same as I did before. I catapulted myself down the path of reality, much like “Leo” in the *The Matrix*, by making the conscious choice to attend NCORE. If given the choice, I would not swallow the other pill – the pill of ignorance.

Did I know what the pill of reality would bring? No. I had no clue. I compare my personal NCORE experience to sprinting into a concrete wall – and, consequently, I have been collecting the scattered pieces of myself ever since. Did I foresee learning about and still struggling with the truth of my privilege as a European American in an institutionalized system of racism in the United States? Could I possibly have imagined the feelings in reaction to being judged based on my skin color? Could I have fathomed the pain and frustration of being scathingly polar opposites to my parents in all discussions based on race and ethnicity? The answers are no, no, and no.

But, in finishing my NCORE/ISCORE experience, I realize I have many things to be thankful for: my developed drive, desire, and apparent need to continue “working on myself” through dialogue and discussion opportunities, the sustained wish to help others “work on themselves,” too, by spreading the word of my experiences, opposing, (one real time so far), deeply held stereotypes and ignorance via racial/ethnic jokes and slurs, and organizing a workshop (April 2nd) designed for White women ready to learn about and explore their privileges.

My gratitude continues in knowing that in my confusion I grow stronger, in my frustrations I am human, and in my peace I am relaxing and celebrating my accomplishments. I can look back and say I would not change a thing. And thus, I end my experience on a celebratory note.

*For more information about the NCORE/ISCORE Project  
Please Visit the ISCORE website at  
[www.admissions.iastate.edu/iscore/](http://www.admissions.iastate.edu/iscore/)*

## *NCORE Experiences of Violeta Aleman, ISU Senior*

Yes, I had a learning experience while attending NCORE 2004. And yes, in these experiences, I learned a lot of new things I did not know about other cultures. But more importantly, I accepted some things I completely ignored about my own culture, and I am more clear about my own identity. Before NCORE, there was a period when I did not know where I belonged or who I was. When I first came to the U.S, I knew I was Mexican. As time passed, people and situations in the U.S. would remind me that I was Mexican. But whenever I would return to Mexico, I was treated as a foreigner as the Mexicans would make it a point to tell me that I was from the U.S. This created much confusion for me; I considered myself Mexican, but people back home did not. After that I began questioning my identity. During NCORE '04, I took time to attend some of the Latino sessions in hopes that I could figure out who I was. I came to the conclusion that I am not simply someone from the U.S, nor am I just someone from Mexico. I am a Mexican-American immigrant living in the United States. That is who I am; that is what I concluded during the entire NCORE/ISCORE project.

Back in high school, I felt ashamed of being Mexican. My classmates would always make fun of me because I had a “funny” accent when I spoke English. My first two years in high school were awful. During that time, I felt that the worst thing that could have ever happened to me was being Mexican. I hated my black hair, brown skin and my “funny” accent. As the years passed, I began to appreciate my black hair, brown skin and accent, especially when I arrived at ISU and people were no longer making fun of me. I never talked about this because I was ashamed of myself for being ashamed of who I was. I thought that I was the only one who had these feelings, and I hated myself for that. I remember during one of my NCORE sessions, a Mexican-American lady talked about how when she was a teenager she hated herself for being Mexican. She told us that once she scrubbed herself until she bled because she wanted to be white. And she thought that by scrubbing her body, she would become white. I was shocked, sad and happy at the same time. I could not believe she had done that, and I was sad because I was all too familiar with the feeling. But I was also happy because for once I was not alone in my feelings. There was someone with whom I could finally identify.

The whole NCORE/ISCORE project is a great learning experience. Learning about other cultures and about your own, and being able to identify with individuals bring an understanding that we as humans have more similarities than we would like to admit. Every single person has his/her own story that ironically can be very similar to yours.

## Calendar of Events

# March 2005

- 3<sup>rd</sup>:**            **Art Show (through April 2nd)**  
Wallace "Butch" Thunder Hawk  
MU Gallery Room
- 4<sup>th</sup>:**            **Iowa State Conference on Race & Ethnicity (ISCORE)**  
8 am-5 pm; MU South Ballroom/Sun Room
- 5<sup>th</sup>:**            **Announcing the Iowa Chapter of NAME: the National Association for Multicultural Education.**  
Theme: "Critical Multiculturalism in Iowa: Building on our Strengths"  
12:00 pm; MU Pioneer Room
- 6<sup>th</sup>:**            **Celebrating our Cultures: Student Pot Luck**  
Bring food from your culture to serve 10 people  
4-5:30 pm; Sloss House
- International Food & Entertainment**  
6-9 pm; MU Gallery Room
- 8<sup>th</sup>:**            **Café Au Lait Presents...Calle Sur with Los Reflejos Latinos!**  
8:00 pm, MU Maintenance Shop  
\$3 at the door
- 11<sup>th</sup>:**           **"Uncolor" Graffiti Theatre**  
8-10 pm; MU Maintenance Shop
- 17<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup>:**     **SPRING BREAK**
- 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup>:**     **Iowa Conference on Islam (register at [www.iowamuslims.org](http://www.iowamuslims.org))**  
Open to the Public  
Friday thru Sunday; Memorial Union
- 25<sup>th</sup>:**           **Panel Presentation: "Recuperating & Revisiting Latina Voices"**  
11-1 pm; MU Pioneer Room
- 26<sup>th</sup>:**           **APAAC Basketball Tournament; 10am – 6pm**  
Registration fee: \$80.00 per team  
Cash prizes for 1<sup>st</sup> place; Trophies awarded  
Contact: [ghuisman@iastate.edu](mailto:ghuisman@iastate.edu)
- 30<sup>th</sup>:**           **34th Annual Symposium on the American Indian (through April 2nd)**  
"Cultures in Contact/Cultures in Conflict: Native Perspectives"  
Memorial Union
- 30<sup>th</sup>:**           **Jack Gladstone (Blackfeet) Singer/Storyteller**  
Music and Storytelling Performance, Signing to Follow  
8pm; MU Gallery Room
- 31<sup>st</sup>:**           **Jack Gladstone (Blackfeet) Singer/Storyteller**  
Narrating the 'Official' Lewis & Clark Expedition Film, Reception to Follow  
8pm; MU Campanile Room

To add your event to our calendar, please  
email: [omsa.iastate.edu](mailto:omsa.iastate.edu)