University of Nebraska - Lincoln
DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Eighth Annual National Conference, POCPWI (2003)

People of Color in Predominantly White Institutions

11-17-2003

Teaching the History of Civil Rights at A Predominantly White Institution

David L. Jamison
Dean, School of Communication and Information Systems, Robert Morris University, Moon Township, PA

Rex Crawley
Assistant Professor, Communications, Robert Morris University, Moon Township, PA

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/pocpwi8

Part of the Race, Ethnicity and post-Colonial Studies Commons

Jamison, David L. and Crawley, Rex, "Teaching the History of Civil Rights at A Predominantly White Institution " (2003). *Eighth Annual National Conference, POCPWI (2003)*. Paper 7.
http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/pocpwi8/7

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the People of Color in Predominantly White Institutions at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Eighth Annual National Conference, POCPWI (2003) by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Teaching the History of Civil Rights at A Predominantly White Institution

Abstract
Building on a 2003 pilgrimage to a dozen sites important in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 1960's, ant;(conversations with movement leaders of then and now, the authors created an initiative at their 93% white campus to educate today's students about the heritage the civil rights struggle.

David L. Jamison
Dean, School of Communication and InfofU1ation Systems, Robert Morris University, Moon Township, PA

Rex Crawley
Assistant Professor, Communications, Robert Morris University, Moon Township, PA

The authors, an African-American and a white professor, took part in an eight-day bus trip to cities across the American South which were important in the history of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 1960's: Greensboro, Birmingham, Memphis, Selma, Montgomery, and Atlanta. We met and talked with pioneers of the movement, from Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth to people who survived "Bloody Sunday" on the Edmund Pettus Bridge. We absorbed the documentary and visual history of the movement at a dozen historic sites, museums, archives, and university centers. We met contemporary heirs of the struggle, the recently-elected mayor of Selma, Alabama (the first African-American mayor of that city), and the first African-American woman to hold the job of police chief in Memphis, Tennessee.

As professors of communication, we both had taught courses in the rhetoric of civil rights, in intercultural communication, and in the history of American discourse. We felt we had been appropriately prepared for those courses, and had given our students rich educational experiences. But we felt informed, energized, and inspired as never before to help our students experience for themselves the spirit of the movement that perhaps more than any other shaped the dimensions of social relations in America today.

We were determined not to let the richness of this experience escape, not to fail to share the profound emotions and intellectual challenge we had experienced in the trip. However, we faced a particular challenge. We teach at a predominantly white institution (about 93-94% of the undergraduate population). Moreover, the university's long and still predominant identity as a business school meant that students shared a highly practical, business-oriented, "bottom-line" approach to their educations. There was little heritage of a liberal arts orientation or attention to social problems.

Recently, however, the university has revised its general education curriculum to be broader in the social sciences and humanities. The campus has undertaken a serious effort to diversify its

population, both in employment and in its student body. The remaining piece will include curricular changes and co-curricular activities which can more fully emphasize the diversity of our culture, and how we got there.

The authors sought to contribute to this curricular and co-curricular development and to share the results of their own memorable experience in three ways, which we describe in this paper. First, we are creating a new course to be added to our university curriculum, "Civil Rights in Historical Perspective." This will be the first course with a strictly civil rights focus ever offered at our university. We plan to use primary and documentary sources gathered in our trip to enrich the experience for undergraduate students. Secondly, we plan a series of student-focused educational activities to be carried out during Black History Month, including exhibits, guest lectures, and student participation events. Finally, we will seek to create and nurture a partnership between students at our university and a local school district with a diverse student population, so that our students may share what they have learned with the next generation, and learn what challenges that generation faces.

We hope that our experience and the activities that flow from it may stimulate ideas among colleagues for innovative programs at other predominantly white institutions.

Presenters

David L. Jamison is Professor of Communications and Dean of the School of Communications and Information Systems at Robert Morris University. Jamison, who holds his advanced degrees from the University of Michigan, is the co-editor of *Essays on Freedom of Speech,* a 1987 collection published by the Speech Communication Association. He also was the principal translator of the American edition of Michel Meyer's *On Problematology.* He has presented over 50 times at scholarly and professional meetings. He has taught at the University of Akron, both in the Department of Communication and in the Law School, and in the Human Values in Medicine program at the Northeastern Ohio Universities College of Medicine. A lawyer as well as a communications professor, he testifies as an expert witness on standards of care in journalism. He joined Robert Morris University in 2002 as the Dean of the School, and teaches argumentation, information law, and intercultural communication.

Rex Crawley is an Assistant Professor of Communications and Director of the Honors Program at Robert Morris University. Crawley received his B.A., MAP A and Ph.D. from Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. Currently, he serves as Vice-President of the African American Division of the National Communication Association, President of the Jefferson County Unit of the American Cancer Society and President of the Pittsburgh Alumni Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc. His primary area of interest centers on the experiences of African American men and hopes to contribute to the development of Black Masculinist Theory, rooted in intercultural communication. Crawley has presented at numerous professional meetings and has published articles centering on intercultural communication and diversity. He joined Robert Morris in 1999 and teaches at both the undergraduate and doctoral levels.