

**On the Road with “The Play with the Name that Nobody Wants to Say”:
A Sabbatical Report for the 2005-2006 Academic Year**

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10/6/2006**

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Statement of Purpose

The purpose of my sabbatical was to meet a combination of travel and project goals. The travel component involved several months' worth of travel to nine U.S. states with the theater production *N*GGER WETB*CK CH*NK*, sometimes described in publicity materials as "the play with the name nobody wants to say." Venues for the production of the show and associated residency programs included dozens of performing arts centers, colleges, universities, community colleges, high schools, museums, community centers, and public theaters. While traveling I supervised the theatrical productions and facilitated the residency programs. The objective of this latter component of my work was to strengthen my personal communication competence in the arena of Intercultural Communication. Additionally, I expected the work to restore my energies for my work with forensics program at Mt. SAC and to bring prestige to the College through the endeavor, while expanding our opportunities to advise and support students who aspire to careers in the performing arts.

The project aspect of my work involved the development of course outlines for the residency programs, as well multiple case study activities and activities for two courses offered in the Department of Communication at Mt. SAC: Intercultural Communication, a new course for Mt. SAC, and Readers Theater. The Intercultural Communication course is being offered for the first time in the fall of 2007, and I will be teaching it in the spring term.

Of course, I was also open to the vast possibilities that might arise from traveling with such a potentially controversial play, and hoped that the year would lead to many personal and professional revelations I had not even expected.

Summary of Activities

My activities during the 2005-2006 year included theatrical presentations of the play *N*GGER WETB*CK CH*NK*, residency programs associated with the production, workshops and dialogues with artists and arts presenters, and attendance at a variety of other theatrical productions. The “company” in this report refers to Speak Theater Arts, a small group of artists that include myself (Managing Director), Rafael Agustin, Miles Gregley, Allan Axibal (cast), Steven T. Seagle (Set Supervisor) and Joel Williamson (Technical Director). All of the company members collaborated to write the show, with the exception of Williamson.

Theatrical Presentations of *N*GGER WETB*CK CH*NK*

The first performance of the academic year occurred at Chapman University in Orange, California in August. The presentation was the capstone experience of their fall freshman orientation program and all 800 incoming students were in attendance. Following the show, student and staff orientation facilitators joined the cast and directors for an extended dialogue about the show, and specifically ways in which the show could serve as a foundation for addressing issues of race and ethnicity during the next four years on campus.

After a few months of developing and learning our residency programs, preparing the tour technically for travel, and rehearsing the show, the company was ready to leave Los Angeles for the first time and get the show on the road, so to speak. The first stop was the Kirkland Performing Arts Center, in Kirkland, WA, whose Executive Director, Steve Lorian, knew he was

taking a risk in bringing the show to his primarily white, affluent community. In fact, the theater is only a few blocks from the headquarters of Microsoft and the home of Bill Gates.

Upon our arrival we learned that marketing the show had been a bit of a problem for Lorian and his staff; The *Seattle Times* and some local radio stations were refusing to advertise the show, even with its abbreviated title, *N*W*C*. Ironically, a *Seattle Times* columnist decided that the paper's decision to refuse the ad was newsworthy and wrote a story about it, using the full title of the show (see Appendix G).

Following a few days' worth of residency activities, the show was performed three times for full and appreciative houses. A reception after the show allowed for some informal feedback about the presentation from community members, who indicated that they originally were skeptical about the work, but found it to be highly entertaining and also a meaningful commentary on race issues in the United States. In particular, we learned that terms like "wetback," had traveled as far as the Pacific Northwest, and that the Asian-American community in Washington is hungry for more dialogue about the issues they face as the so-called "model minority."

Lorian later wrote to us that the event was, "one of the true highlights of our season." The show was such a success that the Kirkland Performance Center will present the show again in May of 2007 for *ten* performances and two full weeks of residency programs in the community and with local schools.

Following the shows in Kirkland, the company immediately traveled to Olympia, Washington for a show at the 1700 seat Washington Center, a grand opera house with three balconies. We arrived in town to bubbling controversy and a story on the front page of the local newspaper (see Appendix G). Evidently a few local merchants had refused to place posters for

the show in their store windows. Even though more than a hundred stores did carry the poster, the Olympian found the event worth a slot on their front page, sparking a lot of curiosity about the show and an increase in ticket sales. Residency sessions at Evergreen State College and St. Martin's University led to large sales of student tickets for the show, which was a welcome surprise for the downtown theater, which has no formal academic affiliation.

After the show in Olympia, the company traveled directly to St. Cloud, Minnesota for several days of residency and three shows at the Stephen B. Humphrey Theater at St. John's University in mid-November. Executive Director of Performing Arts, Anna Thompson, advised in advance that the audience (drawn from both the campus and community) is more than 95% Caucasian, with the remainder a largely international students studying abroad. It was our least diverse audience for the show to date, and for the first twenty minutes, our quietest. However, once the audience began to be more comfortable with the cast members and the show moved through a discussion of stereotypes and into personal narratives, the audience began to loosen up and start laughing. By the end, they gave the cast the typical standing ovation, and many stayed for the post-show discussion.

The questions asked to the performers during the post-show sessions up to this point had been fairly consistent, so a few of the remarks from the audience in Minnesota were noteworthy. One audience member commented that she enjoyed the show and thought the performers looked the part, but felt they didn't do a very good job with the voices of their characters. As she explained, "The black man didn't sound black, and the Hispanic and the Asian didn't have accents." After a little more discussion, it became clear that she had virtually no experience of knowing people from these three ethnic groups other than media portrayals. Her comments led to some other audience members opening up and confessing that they, too, had

limited experience meeting other people of color, especially ones who they could “relate to so well,” as one person explained.

After this experience, the company was eager for reflection about the reactions they had in St. Cloud. An article by Guo-Ming Chen and William J. Sarosta provided a framework for understanding the audience reactions and the nature of their post-show questions (Chen & Sarosta, 1998). They explain that intercultural awareness is a three-step process by which a person internalizes insights about the values, beliefs and outlooks of those in another culture. The first level is an understanding of another culture based on stereotypes, which is superficial and often partial.

The second level of awareness is achieved when one compares and contrasts cultural traits and experiences of another group with one’s own experiences. Chen and Sarosta explain that media portrayals can provide the evidence that there is contrast between another group and one’s own group, but rarely helps people see the *connection* they also share. Interpersonal experiences are often needed to achieve this level of awareness.

The final level of intercultural awareness occurs when a person perceives another culture with empathy, from an “insider’s perspective” (Chen & Sarosta). In this stage, individuals can develop a multicultural perspective, in which they are able to process experiences through their own lens, as well as understand how an experience might feel to someone with a different background.

It became apparent from this framework that audience members who view *N*GGER WETB*CK CH*NK* will each arrive with a particular level of intercultural awareness. Within the content of the show itself, popular stereotypes are directly challenged and the characters share personal narratives about their experiences dealing with challenges related to their ethnic

identity. After reviewing Chen and Sarosta's article, I began to work specifically on activities and case studies that seek to help individuals move forward with their intercultural awareness.

The shows in Minnesota were followed up by a pair of successful shows at Elgin Community College and College of DuPage the week of November 14th, each in the western suburbs of Chicago. The show at Elgin was especially spirited. There was significant turn out by members of the growing local Latino population, many of whom has heard about the show following cast member Rafael Agustin's appearance on a local Spanish-language radio station talk show. Some of the Latinos who attended explained after the show that they were very excited to hear the story of another immigrant brought to Illinois, where they said the dialogue about the issue was very divisive (a sentiment that would come up again in Spring at the College of Lake County).

The spring leg of the tour began in early February with a performance for more than 3000 people at the National Association for Campus Activities (NACA) National Convention in Boston. The show shared the stage with comedian Lewis Black and Martin Luther King, III, among others all in search of opportunities to perform for college audiences. *N*GGER WETB*CK CH*NK* was extremely well received at the convention and secured enough bookings to continue the tour for at least another full year.

Also in February, we were able to work with Mt. SAC's Associated Students, communication department, and broadcasting unit to present two free student shows at the Clarke Theater. These were well attended events with excellent discussion from students in the post show dialogue hosted by Phil Maynard.

The first week of March the company returned to the Midwest for week of residency and a pair of shows at the Ohio Theater in the heart of downtown. The event was co-sponsored by

Cuyahoga Community College, which has three separate campuses in the Cleveland area. These were our worst – attended shows, largely due to the choice of an off-campus venue and minimal advertising by the local presenter. However, the evening show audience grew substantially when 87 members of cast member Miles Gregley’s extended family showed up.

After Cleveland, the show moved to Cincinnati for a week of shows and residency with the Aronoff Center in Cincinnati, Ohio. Two performances in the Jarson Kaplan Theater were nearly sold-out, and local audience members were extremely positive about the show. In particular, we received feedback from several people in the post show dialogue that they were happy to see a Latino and an Asian-American represented on stage. As one person explained, “Race in Cincinnati usually means black and white.”

In our discussions we also learned about the boycott of downtown Cincinnati by African Americans that started exactly five years before our arrival, spurred on by a beating incident between a white officer and a black man. The boycott devastated the downtown economy and, three years since it was lifted, the area is still only at 50% of its past economic strength.

After Cincinnati, we traveled back to the Chicago area for residency and shows at the College of Lake County in Grayslake, IL a northern suburb. This affluent suburb is experiencing changes as a result of an influx of Latinos and African Americans. Audiences responded very positively to the show and were substantially more diverse than the surrounding community. It turned out that a large number of people in the audience had come to the show from the Elgin area after hearing about the show from friends after the November performance there.

Our final stop in the Midwest was at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio in early April. Imagine our surprise to arrive in town the same day as a white supremacy rally and march across campus. Shockingly, it wasn’t because of our show. It was in response to a statewide controversy

with immigration policy. Still, it was a jarring event, and the lack of any official or grassroots response to the march was also shocking.

The Miami crowd was extremely engaged in the show, though the majority of those who stayed for the post show discussion were students of color. Some of them shared stories of their difficulties fitting in on campus, especially into the Greek system. The theater students we met in residency programs were very progressive and shared with us scenes from the original work they created about homelessness and poverty in Ohio.

In mid-April, we traveled for the first time to New Mexico for a show at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces. The campus was shockingly empty, even with classes in session. There was virtually no advertising for the show, no technical support in the theater, and nobody to sell tickets, but somehow 700 students showed up for our performance and had a great time. It was, however, one of our least-attended post show sessions ever. It could be deduced that a lack of dialogue before the show correlates with a lack of dialogue afterward, as well.

May rounded out our tour season with a pair of shows at UCLA and CSU-LA. The UCLA show, sponsored by UCLA Live, sold out in two days. Many of those who attended had seen the show in its original run back in 2004, so the crowd was very excited. The show at CSU-LA surprised the local presenting group, who originally planned to stage it in the 200 seat intimate theater. In the end, 1400 people showed up for the show on the Luckman mainstage. We were told it was the first time a show in their Cultural Arts Series had filled the balcony.

In all, around 18,000 people saw the play in the 2005-2006 season, and every audience responded with a standing ovation for the performers. It was a very positive and rewarding experience to be a part of each of those shows.

Residency Programs

The purpose of the Speak Theater Arts residency programs is to connect outside of the theatrical event with general audiences, students, faculty, and community members. These programs offer opportunities for dialogue between audiences and artists, encouraging further examination of show topics and themes, as well as education in various aspects of the creative process.

The residency case studies and related activities were designed based on my experiences to date with the production (since its inception in May, 2003), my personal background in communication, interviews with a variety of theater and diversity training experts (detailed in the following section of this report), and a review of several books on the subject, including *Intercultural Communication, A Reader* (Samovar, 2004), *Intercultural Competence* (Lustig and Koester, 1999), *Among Cultures: The Challenge of Communication* (Hall, 2002), *The Race Myth* (Graves, 2005), *Why Black People Tend To Shout* (Wiley, 1991), *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White* (Wu, 2002) and *Who's Afraid of a Large Black Man*, a surprisingly helpful and insightful book of interviews that Charles Barkley conducted with an array of famous individuals on the subject of race in America (Barkley, 2005).

Programs were substantially revised following the fall leg of the tour based on issues brought up in prior sessions and demand for new topics. Additionally, we had received requests for sessions specifically tailored for faculty as well as younger audiences

The most common type of residency program offered was our "Public Forum on Race and Ethnicity," which occurred at virtually every stop on the tour as either a post-show session with interested audience members, or as a stand-alone event.

Another popular topic for residency sessions was “Ethnic Identity And Voice,” which served as both an introduction to the show and a substantive discussion on the use of personal narratives to explore cultural and ethnic identity. This session was conducted at eleven different colleges, as well as one art museum and three high schools, leading to the development of our special high school residency program

The initial programs we conducted for high school students were very spirited and thoughtful, but we were concerned about the use of racial slurs and overt stereotypes in some of the residency components. While we didn't have any complaints, we did hear a few students leaving the sessions mimicking the chant used in the play, “Chink Chink, Wetback, Nigger Nigger...” We decided that it would be more responsible of us to design a specific session for high school students, which we entitled “Upward Bound.” This revised program was extremely successful at multiple high schools in the Cleveland area, including John Marshall High School, a 3000-student inner city school, as well as Lutheran High School East, a small, all-black conservative religious school of just 145 students. Faculty feedback from both of these sessions was very positive, so we used this outline as the basis for our program at Taft High School in Woodland Hills in June.

Another change we made in our residency programs during the year was the addition of a new session in response to the national dialogue about illegal immigration:

The Immigration Debate : An in-depth look at the immigrant experience through the eyes of past undocumented citizen and N*W*C cast member Rafael Agustin. We will follow his journey from illegal immigrant to undocumented citizen to permanent resident. This is an interactive lecture focused on the

personal stories behind the statistics in this controversial national issue.

I worked extensively with cast member Rafael Agustin to develop the outline for this show, anticipating a flood of interest -- and it was never requested.

One of the most beneficial residency sessions was one we presented for an intercultural communication class at the College of Lake County. The instructor allowed me to do a trial run of one of my class activities involving stereotypes, a subject they had recently discussed. It was a productive session, but took far more time than I had budgeted. I have since amended the activity to make it more achievable.

In addition to race-related subjects, our residency programs also included sessions pertaining to theater and forensics. For instance, in October, I participated in a two day intensive artist-in-residency program for El Camino College, working closely with their students in an oral interpretation "boot camp." We also conducted this forensics session for students in forensics at Elgin Community College.

We worked with theater students at a number of venues, including the Washington Center, where we held a three hour performance workshop entitled "It Can't Be Done: Performing Material that Wasn't Meant to be Performed." I have adapted this workshop into an activity for the readers theater classes at Mt. SAC (See Appendix E).

In all, the residency programs were an excellent way for me to explore new styles of teaching, emphasizing open-ended discussion and hands-on activities. In particular, I found that there was extreme pressure to hold the attention of younger audiences. So, in addition to the content I have developed for my classroom, I am hopeful that I can also benefit stylistically from working with a wider range of students.

Workshops, Interviews and Dialogues

In addition to our shows and residency programs, I also participated in some beneficial workshops and also discussion sessions with knowledgeable individuals in the realm of both theater and race and the ethnicity issues.

The first of these was a discussion group with eleven students at Chapman University in August. The students represented each of the multicultural organization on Chapman's campus, their student body leadership, and the president of their very active social justice club. The discussion was intended to provide input toward preparation of our residency program outlines while also providing a forum for the students to discuss issues related to show themes on their campus, since all of the students had recently seen *N*GGER WETB*CK CH*NK*.

Our discussion was dynamic. The students were very interested in sharing their personal narratives, particularly stories about the first time they identified as being a member of a minority group. This was later turned into a case study activity (see Appendix E). I also learned that there had been several racially-motivated acts against students on the campus in recent months, and facilitated a discussion among the students as they tried to plan an appropriate response. By the end of the session, they had created a special committee consisting of one member from each group to develop an intervention strategy for future incidents on campus. Several of the Chapman students wrote letters to the company after the session thanking us for our contributions. An excerpt can be found in Appendix C.

In September I participated in a four day intensive writing workshop called "The Uncab Lab," facilitated by performance artist Beth Lapidés. The goal of this workshop was to assist in the development of our residency program entitled "Life Story to Monologue." It was

particularly relevant because the workshop is specifically geared toward converting life experiences into performable texts. I also attended the workshop with Mt. SAC student Jacinda Strubbe. We are working together to develop material for a future performance.

The most beneficial outcome of the workshop for me was the emphasis on live readings and active revision. Specifically, the facilitator would interrupt a reading and ask for more details. As readers strayed from their notes, they were usually much more interesting. This was an excellent technique for helping to direct the students to the elements of their life stories that are most suited to the dramatic format.

Also in September I was able to meet with Anna Thompson, Executive Director of Performing Arts at St. John's University. The meeting was intended to assist me in developing our residency programs. Thompson has mentored many artists and is currently on the board of Diavolo Dance Company and Circle in the Square Theater Company, both of which have extensive residency course offerings. She reviewed my work to date and provided helpful ideas about format, content, and logistics.

Later that month I met with Ann Kusumoto and Ms. Shabazz. Kusumoto conducts diversity training for higher education and corporate clients. Ms. Shabazz works with a number of multicultural organizations, including the United Nations, and is a noted speaker about race and conflict. Shabazz is the youngest daughter of Malcolm X and traveled extensively with Yolanda King in a two-person play they co-wrote in the 1970's. In our session, we spoke about setting realistic goals for sessions, techniques for reducing defensiveness, and maintaining a positive message. It was a fascinating and valuable experience to meet with these two well-known speakers.

In February, I was able to learn still more about diversity education at American colleges and universities at a workshop presented at the NACA convention in Boston. Among the topics we discussed was "diversity fatigue," and finding ways to keep people energized about discussing diversity issues.

In March, I was able to visit the Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati and had a customized tour with one of their board members as my docent. I stood in an actual slave pen that had been transported from a Kentucky Farm, learned about 100 "Everyday Freedom Heroes," and viewed a film about the underground railroad entitled "Brothers of the Borderland." It was a powerful experience, especially to talk with the docent of our tour specifically about the use of the word "nigger." This continues to be one of the most challenging facets of working with the play, and I gained a lot of perspective about the connotative power of that word from this experience, which I have since utilized in discussions about racial slurs.

Project Outcomes

My work has yielded a revised residency program brochure (Appendix B), detailed outlines for six of the residency programs (Appendix D), six intercultural communication case studies and a dozen activities and worksheets (Appendix E), as well as a special guide for teachers of students grade 7-12 (Appendix F).

Additionally, as outlined in my sabbatical proposal, I sent back regular updates about the tour to both the Mt. SAC Marketing and Communication Office as well as the staff of the *Mountaineer* student newspaper, which ran a nice feature about the play in February.

The inclusion of two performances at Mt. SAC was an unanticipated outcome of the project. The free student shows and post show dialogue were a very gratifying experience for everyone in the company. It was especially exciting to know that Mt. SAC students were seeing three young men who started at their own school and went on to transfer, graduate, and start a successful theater company.

As planned, I created an electronic gallery of photographs of the show, many of which are hosted online at www.NWCbackstage.com in the "media" area. They can be accessed using the account name NWCMedia and the password med!a451. Additional photographs, articles, and a "blog" from the tour can be found at www.NWClive, a website which I built from scratch.

I have also created a 40-minute presentation outline to share my experiences on the tour with the campus community. It combines dozens of photographs and video clips with interesting stories "from the road." I look forward to sharing this presentation on campus in the near future.

An exciting development on the Internet in the last year allowed for us to upload two scenes from the play to a website called "YouTube" at YouTube.com. Two clips posted there have been viewed more than 5,000 times.

Conclusions

I am extremely satisfied with my achievement of my stated goals for this project. The most tangible achievement of these goals is reflected in the case studies and activities in the various appendices of this document. I will be using two of these as a guest instructor for a few sessions of the Intercultural Communication course this fall and intend to implement many of them in my own course in Spring, 2007.

Evaluating my increased intercultural competence is less objective, but after my extensive interactions with audience members, faculty, community leaders, artists, and students during the project I can report that my *confidence level* in this area has vastly improved. Also, my *comprehension* of race-related issues across the country is vastly altered; From the challenges of immigrants in the upper Midwest, to the fallout from the African American boycotts in Cincinnati, the white supremacists who march on campus in Oxford, Ohio and the Latino high school students caught between two worlds in Minnesota – my understanding of the complexities of race and ethnicity in America has improved tremendously.

However, it is through my interpersonal experiences with others that have given me the most valuable insights and taken me closest to the level of intercultural *empathy* that I hope to attain. In the course of our programs, we heard so many surprising and moving personal stories that have left a lasting impact. There are too many to share them all, but all of us remember and often discuss a young woman who attended a residency program at the College of Lake County. She was very active in the discussion and stayed afterwards to share with us her concern about her husband, who she described as “two steps removed from the Klan.” Her view toward African Americans had changed as she moved through higher education, but her husband, a mechanic, held hateful and even violent feelings toward them. She was concerned that his views would rub off on their two young children. I encouraged her to try to bring him to the play. She was very skeptical, but said she would try.

The next night, the two of them arrived at the theater. He sat in the second row with his arms crossed for the first 20 minutes, and then he started to laugh. After the show in the lobby, the young woman brought her husband over to talk to Miles Gregley, the African American man in the cast. I was standing next to Miles. Her husband reached and out shook Miles' hand and

said “thank you” to him, and then the four of us had a great discussion together. We learned that her husband had attended at tough inner city Chicago high school as one of the only white students. He had been bullied by some of the students and developed resentment toward all African Americans as a result. As we talked more, he said that the show reminded him that “not all black people are that way.” It is such a basic conclusion to reach, but I found it very powerful to be able to observe his transformation, and in a small way participate in it, as well.

Through my extensive facilitation of residency programs on the tour, I have demonstrably improved my ability to facilitate dialogues on the subjects of race, racism, and diversity. I have learned the common questions that people have and, more importantly, that I don’t need to have all the answers in order to be effective. My experiences have also fortified me to withstand a challenging attribute I have in this arena: I am white. At a residency session at CSU-Los Angeles, I was challenged directly by a student on this issue. She stood up in front of a large session and said, “I have a problem with a white person standing up there talking about this.” I had to fight my instinct to become defensive and instead asked her to explain her concern more in depth, and also collected feedback from other audience members. Among the ideas that were expressed, most people seemed to agree with one in particular: there can be no widespread social change in the United States unless whites are involved. This comment led to a positive resolution about my role in the session for the student who expressed concern.

I know that this is sometimes an unspoken concern of participants when they see white facilitator for a “diversity” topic, but am more certain now that I am justified and competent to facilitate learning experiences in this subject area.

There are some limitations of the success of my experience, specifically in the arena of intercultural competence. Since the show specifically addresses issues of race and ethnicity, and

primarily focuses on only three ethnic groups, I still have other arenas of culture to explore. I don't want to make the common mistake of assuming that "diversity" is a race-only issue, and fully accept that religion, disability, sexual orientation and identification, age, and other variables necessary to include in any multicultural perspective.

In terms of the broader benefits to the College, I am confident that the ongoing media coverage of the show and, in particular, the successful alumnae in its cast, have brought attention and acclaim to the college. A lengthy feature in the *San Gabriel Valley Tribune* in February of 2006 (see Appendix G) describes their experiences at local high schools and subsequent success at Mt. SAC students. In fact, the cast and I speak extensively about the College in sessions around the country.

Perhaps the most exciting outcome of this project is that the play has recently been announced as the showcase performance at the 2007 National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in American Higher Education (NCORE). After seeing the show at Mt. SAC, Dr. Audrey Yamagata-Nogi suggested that I send materials to NCORE. Following extensive discussions and a review of our residency programs, the show was selected for a full performance in May 2007 at the national conference in San Francisco. Mt. SAC managers and faculty are already planning to attend the event en masse, and together with the cast and directors will make quite an impression about Mt. San Antonio College among more than a thousand top diversity officers from schools across the nation.

I am deeply grateful to the College for this opportunity to be a part of such a fascinating and deeply fulfilling experience and look forward to bringing my experiences, skills, and new course materials to life in the coming years.

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Appendix A
Sabbatical Leave Proposal (November 2004)

Sabbatical Proposal 2005-2006 Academic Year

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NUTSHELL REQUEST

My request is a combination of travel and project for a full academic year.

I propose to travel with the cast of *N*GGER WETB*CK CH*NK* on a national tour of college-based performing arts centers and other public theaters, supervising productions and developing and conducting residency programs with students, faculty and community members.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This is my eighth year as a full-time faculty member at Mt. San Antonio College, and my twelfth overall as a faculty member in speech and as a forensics coach.

Forensics is a particularly time-consuming part of my academic career, averaging an extra 20 or more hours of work per week over the regular faculty load and consuming many weekends, holidays, and every spring break for the past seven years. It is a labor of love that has been rewarding in many ways; the Mt. SAC team has won the community college national title in each of our past four appearances at the national tournament, and we have also ranked in the top ten in all three of our appearances at the four-year national tournament since my arrival here. Students from our national forensics teams have a nearly 100% transfer rate. Many have gone on to graduate school, law school, and professional schools and several of my former students are now teaching and coaching in communication. I have taken the team abroad to Paris and Prague and have had more than a dozen at a time over to my house for a weekend practice retreat when budgets got tight.

For the past three years I have also served as department chair for communication and, for a three semester stint, as co-chair for Foreign Languages. Maintaining both programs has not allowed me any reasonable amount of time to set aside for my professional development, or to take on projects of great scope and long-term benefit to our school and students. But last spring a trio of former forensics students contacted me for help with a project they wanted to put together and I found some time to get involved. It blossomed into an exciting and very meaningful new venture that now needs much more of my focused time and attention: an original theater piece with a shocking name, and a new not-for-profit theater company to develop new works for the stage with our forensics students, past and present.

THE PRODUCTION

N*GGER WETB*CK CH*NK is a provocatively titled original production co-authored by former Mt. SAC students Rafael Agustin Guerrero, Miles Gregley, and Allan Axibal along with adjunct faculty member Steven Seagle and myself. Agustin, Axibal and Gregley were all students on national champion forensics teams at Mt. SAC and all transferred to UCLA.

The show details personal experiences of the three cast members growing up as members of minority groups in America, while also attacking conventional perceptions about ethnicity and, specifically, about the three slurs that constitute the show title. Above all else, the show is about their real-life friendship that defies expectations and provides a model for communities to create their own cross-cultural dialogue and relationships.

The production originated as a twenty-minute readers theater performance and premiered at the American Readers Theater Association national tournament in April, 2003 as an entry from UCLA (where the three were students). It received awards for best show, best actor (Axibal), best script, and the audience prize.

Inspired by the positive response to the show, the performers approached me for assistance in converting the 20-minute show to a full-length production. We immediately began an intensive workshop process and the completed work premiered just over a month later at a 380-seat auditorium at UCLA for three performances. The response was overwhelming. Hundreds were turned away each night. A group of students tried to sneak in the back and pulled the handle off a set of doors before police blocked the entrance.

Over the summer of 2003 our revisions of the show continued, and upon return to UCLA in the fall the three cast members quickly secured over \$15,000 in funding from campus organizations to stage the show at the 600-seat Freud Playhouse at UCLA. A November run packed the Freud and led to another run at the Freud in February, 2004. By the second set of performances, news about the show had spread. Among those who attended was a curious feature writer from the *Los Angeles Times* named Hugh Hart. Hart was so moved by enthusiasm of the student audiences that he convinced his editor at the *Times* to send a photographer for the next (closing) night and secured a full-page story about the show on page three of an upcoming Sunday Calendar section (see APPENDIX 1).

Meanwhile, our creative team accepted an offer from the Latino Theater Company, one of the city's most respected companies, to present the show for a four-week run in downtown Los Angeles. The sold-out 300-seat houses during the run led to a two week extension. During this time, the cast appeared in a feature story on NBC-4 TV, and on KFI, KPFK, KBIG-101, Power 101, and nationally on National Public Radio's Tavis Smiley Show. The show also received excellent reviews, some of which are provided here in appendices 2-6.

Among those who saw the show and offered their support were Councilman Antonio Villaraigosa, the President of the Media Action Network for Asian Americans, and actor John

Laroquette. At least five different colleges sent classes to the production, and the Disney Corporation sponsored a special afternoon show and discussion for 300 public high school students from the Los Angeles area. Among the producers and agents who attended was David Lieberman, a theatrical manager who represents Tim Robbins' Actor's Gang Theater Company, Diavolo Dance Theater, and the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. We signed with Lieberman's company in summer 2004 to book the show for a national tour of college-based performing arts centers (*a la* UCLA Live) for the 2005-2006 season.

In the interim, since these presenters book shows a year in advance, the show has been staged periodically at schools in the Los Angeles area, including Mt. SAC and Chapman University. It's also worth noting that all three of the cast (Agustin, Axibal and Gregley) graduated from UCLA in June 2004 within two years of leaving Mt. SAC. Agustin even received an MA in Theater in June by accelerating his studies.

We have now organized into a nonprofit theater company and plan to develop new original productions in the readers theater style with other former Mt. SAC Forensics students. Since starring in N*GGER WETB*CK CH*NK, the three actors have had incredible interest from agents and casting directors, have been offered TV hosting jobs, and are in development to make a film for HBO about their friendship, in which they will play themselves. For our students who wish to pursue careers in acting, this company will provide both performance opportunities and a step up into the business.

THE RESIDENCY PROGRAM

A critical component of our show tour will be the residency program, which brings together our creative team with audiences, students, faculty, and community members. These programs offer opportunities for dialogue between audiences and artists, encouraging further examination of show topics and themes, as well as education in various aspects of the creative process.

Part of my sabbatical project will include developing customized residencies, presenting material, and engaging in interactive sessions with students and community members while our production is in residency at various colleges and universities.

There are four kinds of residency programs that are being offered in conjunction with N*GGER WETB*CK CH*NK: theoretical and practical classes in oral interpretation and readers theater, intercultural communication programs, and discussion groups/public forums. As of now we have only prepared a description for these programs; I would spend considerable time during my sabbatical creating the detailed outlines and materials for each.

Theoretical Oral Interpretation and Readers Theater Programs

From Life Story to Monologue (8 hours)

Members of the creative team will discuss strategies for creating original performance material. Topics will include selecting subject matter; structuring story; transitional linkage; using personal experiences to tell universal stories; and translating experience into performable text.

From Monologue to Show: Application of a Readers Theater Performance Method (8 hours)

Members of the creative team will discuss strategies for staging original performance texts in emerging formats. Topics will include eliminating “walls”; audience-oriented performance; body as scenic suggestion; symbolic movement; and focal variance.

Applied Oral Interpretation and Readers Theater Programs

Intensive One-Day Creative Workshop (10 hours)

Participants spend an extended day in an intensive group assigned writing workshop. Utilizing techniques of readers theater development, each participant will end the day with an original, life based performance text.

Intensive One-Day Performance Method Workshop (10+ hours)

Participants spend an extended day in intensive rehearsal of the texts originated in the One Day Creative Workshop. Utilizing techniques of staging readers theater, participants will end the day performing their original, life-based scenes.

Intercultural Communication Programs

Ethnic Identity and Voice (3 hours)

One of the best ways to present a multi-cultural message is through performance of life stories reflective of the author/performer’s specific cultural voice. This facilitated discussion group looks at some of the more effective means of presenting personal ethnographies through theatrical convention and innovation.

Cultural Exchange and Understanding (4 hours)

Participants will engage in structured activities to learn how varying cultural perspectives can lead to misunderstandings and conflict during intercultural communication. Special attention is given to helping participants identify similarities with one another across the cultural divide to help build connections and strengthen the foundation for communication.

Dangerous Topics - Popular Theater (3 hours)

Is there any topic too taboo to tackle through public performance? This discussion seminar focuses on strategies for tackling even the toughest subject a writer or performer might want to address. Researching the opposing views; making points without making enemies; entertainment in place of preaching or offending; inoculating the audience against the rough parts are all subjects considered in this program. Special attention is given to current events in the news that pertain to issues of censorship in the arts.

Discussion Groups and Public Forums

The creative team will lead discussion groups and/or participate in community forms on a wide variety subjects. These highly interactive sessions can be facilitated by a company member or by a local host. Each will be customized to meet local community needs and/or to respond to public commentary pertaining the show title or themes.

THE TOUR/TRAVEL SCHEDULE

The show is currently being booked for a national tour beginning August 2005 and continuing through May 2006. David Lieberman/Artists Representatives is representing the show and Allen Moon, an associate at the firm, is arranging all tour dates for shows and residency programs. It is still extremely early in the booking process, but Allen has provided me with a tentative schedule of cities for 2005-2006 based on current arrangements with presenters. *I will have a much more complete and detailed schedule of the tour by late January/early February 2006:*

University of Miami	Coral Gables, Florida
Gusman Center of the Performing Arts	Miami, Florida
Davidson College	Davidson, NC
University of Kentucky	Lexington, Kentucky
Elgin Community College	Elgin, IL
College of DuPage	Wheaton, IL
St. Cloud State University	St. Cloud, MN
San Diego State University	San Diego, CA
Grossmont College	San Diego, CA
Chapman University	Orange, CA
University of Wyoming	Laramie, WY
Tulane University	New Orleans, LA
Louisiana State University	New Orleans, LA
Miami University	Athens, OH

Other important dates:

August 30, 2005	Deadline for completion of first three residency outlines.
September 15, 2005	Deadline for completion of final three residency outlines.
October 15, 2005	Submission of first set of photographs and story for news publication
December 15, 2005	Submission of next set of photographs and story for news publication
February 15, 2006	Submission of third set of photographs and story for news publication
April 15, 2005	Submission of final set of photographs and story for news publication
May 21, 2005	Completion of presentation outline and video/slides

OBJECTIVES:

1. Increased competence in my intercultural communication skills.
2. Acquisition of skills and knowledge to more successfully address some of the intercultural conflicts present on the Mt. SAC campus and better uphold our value of *diversity*.
3. Development of the ability to facilitate dialogues on the subjects of race, racism, and diversity
4. Increased effectiveness of my teaching in the subject area of intercultural communication
5. Increased effectiveness of my teaching in the subject areas of oral interpretation and readers theater
6. Creation of materials, such as case studies and activities, for our new intercultural communication course as well as our oral interpretation and readers theater courses
7. Increased opportunities for Mt. SAC speech and theater students to create and perform original works for wider audiences

OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT

1. Detailed course outlines for six residency programs
2. Six case study activities applicable to the intercultural communication course
3. Twelve activities/worksheets applicable to the intercultural communication course or the readers theater course
4. Personal journal summarizing responses to the show at each stop on the tour
5. At least 25 high quality photographs suitable for publication
6. Four periodic, publishable reports (4 in total) for the Mt. SAC Public Information Office, the *Mountaineer* newspaper, and the Mt. SAC Forensics Alumni Website
7. A compilation of newspaper clippings and copies of all correspondence received about the show during the tour. Given the controversial nature of the show, the volume of media coverage and other feedback about the show will likely be substantial.
8. A detailed speaking outline and slides/video for a 40-minute presentation about the tour. The presentation will focus on responses to the show, the show's title, and the cast and should be of interest and benefit to students in a variety of disciplines at Mt. SAC, particularly our communication courses.

ADDITIONAL BENEFITS:**Prestige to Mt. SAC, its faculty, forensics program, and student body**

Well-publicized accomplishments by student alumni encourage current students in performing arts and communication to set high goals. A successful national tour of the show will also increase student interest and participation in our forensics team.

In the same way that Bruce Rogers directing shows at Carnegie Hall adds prestige to our school and our choral programs, touring the country with this show will increase awareness of the excellence of Mt. SAC's students, faculty, and programs.

Increased public awareness of the power of the California Community College experience

The show is a real-life success story that demonstrates the strengths of the community college experience. The residency programs will highlight the value of community college education in bringing together these diverse young men and propelling them forward academically and professionally. In fact, the show itself dramatizes incidents that occurred while the actors were at Mt. SAC, including Rafael's experience with the Irene Ryan Acting Competition.

Creation of opportunities for theater and forensics students to enter acting as a profession

The success of the show presents opportunities for theater and forensics students from Mt. SAC to have a conduit into the challenging world of theater, film and television. Several other recent Mt. SAC students hope to work with us to create their own original shows, and our management agency is interested in representing other productions down the road if the current tour is a success. I believe the likelihood that the tour will be a success is much greater if I am traveling with the cast as the director and stage manager.

Providing new ventures to ensure for my longevity as both an educator and an artist

I have long toiled on creating original readers theater productions year after year for very limited audiences at national speech tournaments. These works have won all of the top awards available, and then disappeared into record books. It is important for me after many years in forensics to bring my work to wider audiences, as any creative artist ultimately desires. Traveling nationally with the show, engaging in discussions about the show, and seeing its impact is something I have not been able to experience before, despite having some 15 other original works in my credits. The past seven years of forensics have been wonderful, but has taken a lot out of me; going on this tour will help regenerate my flagging energies, and inspire new directions for my work in the classroom and as a forensics coach.

I thank the committee for your time and consideration with this request.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

- Appendix 1: *Los Angeles Times* Feature, March 21 2004
- Appendix 2: *Los Angeles Times* Theater Review, April 23, 2004
- Appendix 3: *La Opinion* Review, April 22, 2004
- Appendix 4: *LA Daily News* Review, April 23, 2004
- Appendix 5: *Asia Pacific Arts Magazine*, November 21, 2003
- Appendix 6: *UCLA Daily Bruin*, May 11, 2003

ON-LINE INFORMATION:

www.speaktheaterarts.com Website for N*GGER WETB*CK CH*NK

www.dlartists.com Website for Davis Lieberman/Artists' Representatives

Appendix B
Revised Residency Program Brochure

College, Community & Professional Residency Courses and Forums

**N*GGER
WETB*CK
CH*NK**

FOR ALL AUDIENCES:

Post-show Question & Answer

Cast members return to the stage immediately following the performance to take audience questions. These sessions are a natural extension of the dialogue created by the performance, and are also funny, personal, and informative. Notify company at least one week in advance for planning and scheduling of tech and tech crew. 20 minutes.

Ethnic Identity and Voice in *N*GGER WETB*CK CH*NK*

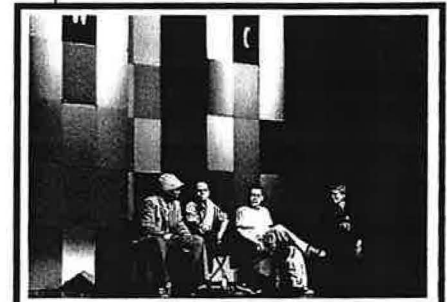
This session discusses the development of the play from its earliest inspirations to its first legendary performances on the campus of UCLA. The show creators/performers will discuss the process of translating their life stories for the stage, perform short scenes from the show, and engage in a fun and informative dialogue about their experiences in the show to date, including some of the controversial aspects. Strong promotional event, as well. 50-70 minutes.

Public Forum on Race and Ethnicity

Cast members lead an open forum discussion on subjects relating to themes addressed in the show, including the use of racial slurs, stereotyping, personal identity, the concept of "race," and more. The performers want to be clear that they don't speak on behalf of everyone in their cultural groups, nor are they the definitive experts on race and ethnicity, but they have gained many insights in their travels with the show across the nation and also from their unique personal experiences. 40-60 minutes.

The Immigration Debate

An in-depth look at the immigrant experience through the eyes of past undocumented citizen and *N*W*C* cast member Rafael Agustin. We will follow his journey from illegal immigrant to undocumented citizen to permanent resident. This is an interactive lecture focused on the personal stories behind the statistics in this controversial national issue. 40-60 minutes.



Post-show discussion at UCLA.

FOR FACULTY

Faculty Workshop

A special program specifically for instructors whose students have seen or will see the stage performance *N*GGER WETB*CK CH*NK* and/or faculty who would like further opportunity for discussion and reflection about their role in supporting students of diverse ethnic and economic backgrounds. Session time varies.



A faculty session at St. Martin's University in Washington.

FOR THEATER & WRITING STUDENTS:**Ethnic Identity and Voice in Performance**

One of the best ways to present a multi-cultural message is through performance of life stories reflective of the author's specific cultural voice. This facilitated discussion looks at some of the more effective means of presenting personal ethnographies through theatrical convention and innovation. 70-90 minutes.



Theater students in a session at Elgin Community College (IL)

Dangerous Topics - Popular Theater

Is there any topic too taboo to tackle through public performance? This discussion seminar focuses on strategies for tackling even the toughest subject a writer or performer might want to address. Researching the opposing views, making points without making enemies, use of humor in lieu of preaching, and inoculating the audience are all subjects considered in this program. 70-90 minutes.

It Can't Be Done: Performing Material that Wasn't Meant to Be Performed

A core concept of the Speak Theater Arts philosophy is that all text is performable. Don't believe it? Experience this hands on creative endeavor in which found texts — from fast food menus to phone books, and beyond — take on new life through innovative performance choices. A very fun and highly interactive experience that opens the windows of the imagination and lets the fresh air rush in. 90-120 mins.

Space: Preferred setting is a black box/stage/larger classroom

Tech: Boom box/CD player. *Maximum Participants:* 30

FOR FORENSICS STUDENTS:**Oral Interpretation Boot Camp**

N*W*C/STA company members have won top awards in every category of intercollegiate oral interpretation and readers theater and have coached many of the top students in the nation to additional titles. This session combines brief lecture and hand-on coaching to help students reach the next level of success in forensics. 90-120 mins.

Maximum Participants: 15

FOR YOUNGER STUDENTS:**Upward Bound**

The cast/creators of N*W*C are outstanding in their work with younger audiences. These sessions are specifically designed for at-risk high school or junior-high students and use performance activities and small group discussions to address issues of race and identity in an authentic, powerful way. 40-60 mins.

Maximum Participants: 30. Concurrent sessions with individual company members are possible.

Please note: While it is possible to avoid the use of most profane language for these sessions, the use of racial slurs in the discussion is likely, and an important part of the session. Company members will make a clear distinction between using the terminology for discussion purposes and using it in a hateful manner.



High school students work with the cast/creators of N*W*C.

COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS:

Philosophy Professor from St. John's University (from an internal program evaluation form):

"Thanks for bringing such a phenomenal group to campus. My students got so much out of the residency and performance. It was a fabulous way to cap off 3 weeks of class discussions about race. My only hope is that we will bring Miles, Allen, and Rafael back to campus again—and soon. They were phenomenal performers, dedicated educators, and such personable and accessible young men. I think that cultivating a longer term connection w/them would be so wonderful for our institutions, esp. as we struggle with becoming more knowledgeable about/accepting of cultural and racial diversity. I really can't say enough good things about them and the performance. I'm glad we're willing to take some risks with our performances, b/c they so often really pay off."

Catherine Cordero, Chapman University Student and Social Justice Coordinator:

"I cannot thank you enough for coming out to Chapman University during our orientation week. Your performance perfectly mixed the seemingly delicate topic of diversity issued with gut-wrenching entertainment. On top of that, you took time out to meet with our campus student leaders. Personally I am still taken aback at how thoughtful our session was. I was expecting small talk, but simple introductions quickly developed into students opening up about specific matters of diversity programming and apathy on campus. As for any apprehensions stemming from your show that may have potentially arisen at my predominantly white school, they dissolved with the extremely positive response you received in the weeks to follow. Your messages resonated long after the curtains drew."

Rev. Matt Williams, Lutheran High School East, Cleveland, OH:

"Brilliant! Powerful! An attention — getting, blunt exposition of real world experiences of people of color in these so-called "United" States. "N*W*C — The Race Show" is a straight forward, in your face experience that tells the truth about race relations in our day and time. The Christian admonition is to speak the truth in love. That is exactly what these young men have accomplished, speaking the truth, combined with comedy and hurt, in a loving, educating, edifying manner. My High School Freshmen were blown away by the manner in which N*W*C dealt forthrightly and honestly with prejudice and racism. Attending this performance should be required in every High School across our country."

Phillip D. Maynard, Academic Senate President, Mt. San Antonio College, CA:

"The show and programs these young people presented were fantastic. In all, it was a transformative event at our campus. The post-show Q&A was as enjoyable as the play itself, and made sure the material connected with everyone in the audience. I was also very impressed with the turn out from our local community for this show, and to see those folks side by side with our students in a dialogue about the most important issue of our time was maybe the best part of all. We are still talking about it months later. I am asked almost daily by teachers and students, "When will they be back?"

ABOUT THE COMPANY MEMBERS:

Rafael Agustin (performer/writer) holds a BA in Theater and an MA in Theater Directing from UCLA. In addition to a long resume of theater credits, he is also a national champion in intercollegiate forensics (oral interpretation) competition, has college teaching experience, and was the Director of the 2005 Los Angeles Latino International Film Festival.

Allan Axibal (performer/writer) holds a BA in Communication Studies from UCLA and is currently in graduate school at CSU-Los Angeles. He has taught at both the high school and college levels, including extensive work with at-risk students. Allan is also a successful spoken word poet.

Miles Gregley (performer/writer) earned a BA in Theater from UCLA, and has honed his performance skills through stand-up comedy experience, as well as live hip-hop shows with several groups, including current LA club fave *The Elevatorx*. He is also an international award-winning public speaker in the comedy category.

Liesel Reinhart (director/writer) is past Chair of Speech and Theater at Mt. San Antonio College, as well as the school's past Assistant Dean of Humanities and Performing Arts. In addition to more than 15 years college-level teaching experience, she is also one of the top forensics (speech and debate) coaches in the nation with more than 64 national champion students and 6 team titles.

Steven T. Seagle (director/writer) is one of the nation's premier comic book and graphic novel authors, with credits like *Uncanny X-men*, *Superman*, and the critically acclaimed *It's a Bird*. He has sold screenplays and TV pilots to Universal and Fox and with his creative team, Man of Action, created the Cartoon Network sensation *Ben 10*. In earlier years he was also a college instructor.

NOTE: Company members in attendance for residency activities subject to change based on scheduling and other commitments.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Hospitality: It is much preferred that full-day workshops include on-site food and occasional refreshments for participants and facilitators as part of the program to keep the flow of the day moving well and everyone engaged in the process at all times.

Session Size/Space Needs: Unless specified, there is no limit to the number of participants in a session. For all workshop programs, additional participants are always welcome to participate as observers. Unless a particular type of space is indicated, the type of venue for the session is flexible.

Advance Notice: Please contact the company at least 2-3 weeks in advance of residency activities to make final scheduling decisions.

Questions: Charity Rodriguez charity@speaktheaterarts.com 408-720-1914

Appendix C
Residency Program Evaluations



“Chaffey College, with some trepidation, brought “N*W*C to campus. It was met with great enthusiasm and resulted in engaging our college community in dialogue about racism and stereotyping that has opened the lines of communication, as no other performance before or since. Kudos to the production team!”

*Christine Flores
Equal Opportunity Programs and Services Coordinator
Chaffey College, CA*

“Brilliant! Powerful! An attention - getting, blunt exposition of real world experiences of people of color in these so-called “United” States. NWC is a straight-forward, in your face experience that tells the truth about race relations in our day and time.

“The Christian admonition is to speak the truth in love. That is exactly what these young men have accomplished, speaking the truth, combined with comedy and hurt, in a loving, educating, edifying manner. My high school freshmen were blown away by the manner in which NWC dealt forthrightly and honestly with prejudice and racism. Attending this performance should be required in every high school across our country.”

*Rev. Matt Williams
Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church/ Lutheran High School East
Cleveland, OH*

“The performance was powerful—students so appreciated learning more about racism and stereotypes without feeling blamed. The ability of the performers to have us hilariously laughing—then slow us down to appreciate a painful form racism took in their lives personally—was powerful. Students really appreciated the use of humor as a means of education and hearing personal stories and getting a sense of how race looks among Asians, African Americans, and Latinos—as race is so often discussed in terms of black and white.

“My students got so much out of the residency sessions, too. It was a fabulous way to cap off three weeks of class discussions about race. My only hope is that we will bring Miles, Allen, and Rafael back to campus again—and soon. They were phenomenal performers, dedicated educators, and such personable and accessible young men. I really can’t say enough good things about them and the performance. I’m glad we’re willing to take some risks with our performances because they so often really pay off.”

*Jean Keller
Professor, Philosophy
St. John’s University, MN*

more...

“One of the most incredible things about the show is that draws audiences in with humor and high energy, but also leaves them with a sense of self-worth and community. Because the show has three people with different ethnic backgrounds, the common issues and experiences that you highlight brings audiences closer to one another. We get to see that we all have more in common than societal influences have led us to believe.”

*Joel Chmara
Professor of Communication
College of Lake County, IL*

“Thanks for such a great show. It is the only time an orientation program at Morehead has ever gotten a standing ovation. The students were there and totally into the program. We had a good number of administrators and faculty that came to the show and I have heard more praises for the group than any other program of its kind we have ever hosted. I always fear being innovative and forward-thinking for fear of failure or backlash, but NWC has helped us push the envelope and hopefully change some lives in the process.”

*E. Gerome Stephens
Student Activities Coordinator
Morehead State University, KY*

“I was delighted by the great turnout for this program. Clearly there are many folks in Cincinnati who wanted to hear what they had to say, not simply in the context of the performance itself but in this ancillary education program that allowed for and encouraged interaction. People responded to the program passionately, humorously, comfortably, directly, all of which came from the engaging, disarming personality of the performers themselves. This event provided the CAC with a great opportunity to partner with the Cincinnati Arts Association, our neighbors across the street, in providing a forum for dialogue that speaks to neighborhoods across Cincinnati in a difficult, yet necessary conversation that worked because of the program’s ability to balance being urgent with being funny.”

*Scott Boberg
Curator of Education
Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH*

“I cannot thank you enough for coming out to Chapman University during our orientation week. Your performance perfectly mixed the seemingly delicate topic of diversity issued with gut-wrenching entertainment. On top of that, you took time out to meet with our campus student leaders. I was expecting small talk, but simple introductions quickly developed into students opening up about specific matters of diversity on campus. As for any apprehensions stemming from your show that may have potentially arisen at my predominantly white school, they dissolved with the extremely positive response you received in the weeks to follow. Your messages resonated long after the curtains drew.”

*Catherine Cordero
Student and Social Justice Coordinator
Chapman University, CA*

“The show and programs these young people presented were fantastic. It was a transformative event at our campus. The post-show Q&A was as enjoyable as the play itself and ensured that the material connected with everyone in the audience. We are still talking about it months later. I am asked almost daily by teachers and students, ‘When will NWC be back?’”

*Phillip D. Maynard
Academic Senate President
Mt. San Antonio College, CA*

more...

“My name is Robbie Wilbur and I’m a junior at Saint Martin’s University. This past fall I had the privilege of attending not only the NWC performance, but also a forum the night before the performance. Being of multicultural background, I was excited to attend such events with hopes of better understanding both my Asian background as well as my Caucasian side, unlike some of my peers who were a little nervous at the thought of such events. After the forum, I don’t think I have ever been as excited to attend a performance of any kind. Imagine being on the set of an exciting movie soon to be released and you had the privilege of seeing a live preview.

“The performance itself left me speechless. I had never witnessed a live performance of such magnitude. I can’t describe the thoughts that were going through my head, but to give a little insight I had goose bumps throughout most of the performance. The personal stories each of the three performers shared touched on several topics, many of which I could relate. Even though I have never been discriminated against because of my race, I could sympathize with the Filipino actor because I myself am half Filipino. Even though I am not African American, I could relate to his experiences with behaving outside the stereotypes of his race because I, too, have done the same thing.

The most ridiculous words I have heard to describe this performance is that it is “racist.” I don’t understand how three men describing their personal experiences with racism and other hardships as being racist. Without a doubt this performance is an original, one of a kind that should not be passed up by a single person of any race. The performance left me with a piece of knowledge that I will never forget: There is only one race...the HUMAN race.”

Robbie Wilbur
Student
St. Martin’s University, WA

“When we announced that we were presenting N*gger Wetb*ck Ch*nk, there were some who suggested we were crazy and would alienate our community. What they were missing was the basic point of the piece which is to engage the community in a real discussion on racial stereotyping. The show drains the power from those taboo words and, once you get past your discomfort with the title, allows audiences to laugh and feel comfortable dealing with the topic. It was one of the true highlights of our season. It’s the type of show that can become a word-of-mouth run-away hit, giving presenters the chance to present topical, challenging work and, at the same time, do big business at the box office. What’s not to like about that?”

Steve Lorian
Executive Director
Kirkland Performance Center, WA

Appendix D
Residency Program Course Outlines

From Life Story to Monologue

Description: Members of the creative team will discuss strategies for creating original performance material. Topics will include selecting subject matter; structuring story; transitional linkage; using personal experiences to tell universal stories; and translating experience into performable text.
Full-day workshop (six hours). Maximum 12 participants.

Objective: Participants will create a two-minute monologue based on specific incidents from their lives.

Topical outline:

I. Demonstration of process

- A. Allan Axibal explains his experience as a third grader
- B. Identification of key plot elements in the story (discussion)
- C. Determination of transformation Allan makes during the scene, such as...
 - 1. State of mind
 - 2. Emotional state
 - 3. Physical state
 - 4. Relationship to others
- D. Cast members perform "Tom Cruise" scene from N*GGER WETB*CK CH*NK
- E. Compare and contrast original version of the story with the final scene (discussion)

II. Students create and write their own monologues

- A. Brainstorming of 3-4 possible stories
- B. Selection of story
- C. Identification of key plot elements in the story
- D. Determination of transformation experienced in the story
- E. Crafting language for storytelling
- F. First draft readings and notes (group discussion)
- G. Revisions
- H. Final readings.

Ethnic Identity and Voice

Description: One of the best ways to present a multi-cultural message is through performance of life stories reflective of the author/performer's specific cultural voice. This facilitated discussion group introduces audience members to the play *N*GGER WETB*CK CH*NK* and its technique of using personal narratives to convey broader social themes.
70-90 minutes

Objectives: Participants will be able to identify the use of personal narratives in *N*GGER WETB*CK CH*NK* as well as the larger themes they address.

Topical outline:

- I. Introduction and Welcome
 - A. Introduce the "company members"
 - B. Very briefly summarize the show and how it got started
 - C. Reveal the format of the show: performance of scene (*Where Did We Meet?*)
- II. Understanding our ethnic identity, part one: Who Am I?
 - A. Share personal stories of confusion about ethnic identity
 - B. Performance of scene (*The Year I was Black*)
- III. Understanding our ethnic identity, part two: Who Do You Think I Am?
 - A. Explanation of perception as reality
 - B. Performance of scene (*The Night I was Gay*)
 - C. Discussion question: What is the external perception of your ethnicity?
- IV. Understanding our ethnic identity, part three: Who could I be?
 - A. Confronting and challenging expectations
 - B. Performance of scene (*Chinese Superman*)
 - C. Discussion question: What will it take to accept others in new roles?
- V. Use of narratives to convey broader social themes
 - A. Review the four scenes performed and identify the political ideas conveyed in each
 - B. Explain that narratives (stories) are especially useful for cultural expression because they demonstrate the complexity and uniqueness of individuals through details in the story while having the ability to present broader themes and messages.

Dangerous Topics - Popular Theater

Description: Is there any topic too taboo to tackle through public performance? This discussion seminar focuses on strategies for tackling even the toughest subject a writer or performer might want to address. Special attention is given to current events in the news that pertain to issues of censorship in the arts.

Objective: Participants will understand how certain themes and content in theater can violate audience expectations and generate both positive and negative outcomes.

Topical outline:

I. Part One: Framework

- A. Theory of theater as a “public” event
- B. Traditional topics for theater, including heavy dependence of the “family” as means for conveying social and political messages
- C. Violating theatrical expectations in classical works, including Sophocles and Shakespeare
- D. Contemporary theater artists with controversial approaches to subject and theme
 - 1. El Teatro Campesino
 - 2. The Theater Offensive
 - 3. Holly Hughes
 - 4. Peter Handke
- E. Works that proved to be especially controversial
 - 1. *All God's Chillun Got Wings* by Eugene O’Neill
 - 2. *Angels in America* by Tony Kushner
 - 3. *The Vagina Monologues* by Eve Ensler
 - 4. *The Goat* by Edward Albee
 - 5. *Talking Cock* by Richard Herring
- F. Case study in censorship: *Name is Rachel Corrie*, cancelled by the New York Theatre Workshop in 2004

II. Part Two: Working with dangerous topics in theater

- A. The careful approach
 - 1. Researching and incorporating opposing views
 - 2. Assigning radical views to minor characters
 - 3. Use of humor and narrative in lieu of preaching or politicizing
 - 4. Inoculating the audience
- B. The radical approach
 - 1. Dangerous language
 - 2. Dangerous themes
 - 3. Importance of dialogue

Oral Interpretation Boot Camp

Description: Company members have won top awards in every category of intercollegiate oral interpretation and readers theater and have coached many of the top students in the nation to additional titles. This session combines brief lecture and hands-on coaching to help students reach the next level of success in forensics.
90-120 mins. Maximum Participants: 15

Objectives: Students will be able to identify “operative words” in sentences and the “critical mass” moment of a literature selection. They will also understand the variation in vocal performance style for prosaic narration, poetry, and dramatic dialogue.

Topical outline:

I. “Operative Words” in performance

- A. Definition
- B. Examples (using a sample student text)
- C. Options for emphasis of operative words
 1. Pausing
 2. Elongating the word
 3. Volume change
 4. Gesture or facial expression

II. “Critical Mass” moments

- A. Definition
- B. Example (performance of monologue: *The Summer I was White*)
- C. Types of critical mass moments
- D. Activity: students identify and perform “critical mass” moments from their selections

III. Vocal performance style for narrative voice

- A. Prosaic narration – definition and example
- B. Poetic voice– definition and example
- C. Dramatic dialogue– definition and example
- E. Activity: students identify narrative voice in their selections and use appropriate style to perform a short excerpt, then chose an inappropriate voice and re-read the selection again.

IV. With remaining time, participants will work in small groups with company members for one-on-one coaching of their selections.

Upward Bound: High School Workshop

Description: A special program specifically for younger students who have seen *N*GGER WETB*CK CH*NK* and will benefit from further discussion about some of the more controversial aspects of the production.

45 minutes.

Objectives: Participants who have seen the play *N*GGER WETB*CK CH*NK* will be able to identify key themes in the show, and to avoid misinterpreting the use of slurs and stereotypes as presented in the play.

Topical outline:

I. Open discussion: responses to the show

II. Identification of the controversial aspects of the show

III. Discussion of racial slurs

A. Origins of popular slurs

B. Contemporary uses

C. Contrasting the use of slurs for dialogue and for divisiveness

D. Potential harms of using slurs

IV. Discussion of stereotypes

A. Definition of stereotypes

B. Discussion question: are stereotypes sometimes right?

C. Dangers of stereotypes

D. Activity: identifying stereotypes people might have of you

V. Discussion of "mature themes" in subject matter: If you handle it responsibly, you will be exposed to more of it.

Public Forum on Race & Ethnicity

Description: Cast members team with campus and/or community leaders to lead an open forum discussion on subjects relating to themes addressed in the show, including the use of racial slurs, stereotyping, personal identity, the concept of "race," and more. These highly interactive sessions can be facilitated by a company member or by a local host. Each will be customized to meet local community needs and/or to respond to public commentary pertaining the show.
40-60 minutes.

Objectives: Participants will ask questions and/or make comments about the theater production *N*GGER WETB*CK CH*NK*, and/or topics or themes related to the play.

Topical outline:

I. Introduction of all panelists and facilitator

II. Explanation of format

1. Opening comments from each panelist
2. Facilitator is the only one who can recognize a speaker from the floor
3. Comments and questions should be succinct
4. All remarks should reflect respectful communication toward one another

III. Opening remarks by panelists

IV. Open the floor for comments and questions

V. If comments and questions are not offered, facilitator will ask questions to prompt discussion:

- A. Is it ever acceptable to use racial slurs like nigger, wetback and chink?
- B. Who has a life story that is similar to the storied told in this play?
- C. Should everyone who immigrates to the United States be required to learn English?
- D. Is it realistic to assert that "there is only one race" while also celebrating cultural differences?

Appendix E
Intercultural Communication Case Studies and Activities

Intercultural Communication Case Study #1: Who Deserves to Be an American?

Directions: You have the ability to grant immediate residency status to one of the following individuals. Using only the information provided, determine who is most deserving of this status. Be prepared to explain your decision.

Eduardo Martinez has six children, four of whom were born in the United States and are citizens. His wife has residency status, but he didn't understand the process and never applied. He works 70 hours a week doing assembly work at a local factory and is paid in cash, though he does file his US income taxes every year and reports most of his income. He speaks relatively little English, despite living in the U.S. for more than 11 years.

Vero Sarkissian came to the United States to join her extended family, many of whom fled to the United States after the Armenian genocide. She is in the country on an expired student visa. seventeen and hopes to attend UCLA after she completes a few more courses to improve her English, which is fairly strong already.

Gorka Urzaiz is a high tech Internet programmer from Spain who hopes to strike it rich in Silicon Valley, California, but post-9/11 rules took away work visas for people with his particular type of training. He is waiting in his home country to come to the U.S. as a legal resident, since he opposes illegal immigration.

Laura Milhaus came to the United States as a tourist from her home country of Norway just one year ago, and while visiting she met the love of her life, a U.S. Citizen. Laura wants desperately to stay in the United States, but her partner cannot marry her and give her legal status though marriage, since she is also a woman. Laura is fluent in English and is trained as a nurse.

Intercultural Communication Case Study #2: Rejecting Cultural Identity

Directions: Read the following excerpt from the play N*GGER WETB*CK CH*NK. Identify the specific characteristics described in the selection that are attributed to African Americans and Asian Americans, including those which are indirectly implied. Be prepared to discuss your interpretation of the validity of these attributes with respect to each of these groups.

Chink:

Make me black

I want a world where hip hop ain't a bunny

Where I'll pull up in a caddie to pick up my honey

And buy her some dope ass bling with all my fresh money

Tell a joke and people think it's funny?

I wanna turn oppression into a (boom boom) beat

Where disadvantage is a melody

And pain is just poetry bumpin through a (boom boom) baseline

Make me romantic

I wanna spit game like only a brotha can

I want women to lose themselves in skin as dark and engulfing as a midnight sky

Make me athletic

I wanna 200 meter dash for the nearest Chinese food store in 19.32 seconds.

And while I'm running it back

I'm gonna cross over stop lights

Spin fake the center divider

And stiff arm the BMW

And for my victory dance

I'm a chop suey every loudmouth who ever said that Asians can't drive.

Cuz we can

We're just being CAUTIOUS!

Give me all a that

Cuz I'm having trouble speaking out

And as a child, I was always afraid to raise my hand

Even though I knew all the answers

Intercultural Communication Case Study #3: Ethnic Associations

Directions: Review the following list of words and decide if the words are “black,” “white,” “Asian,” “middle eastern,” or “native American” words. Work quickly. You must label each word with only one of these terms.

home	money	corn	lazy	guns	religion
democrat	republican	intelligent	gambling	divorce	passion
welfare	arrogant	scary	smart	powerful	invisible

Intercultural Communication Case Study #4: Ain't I a Woman

Directions: Read the following speech delivered by former slave Sojourner Truth in 1851 at the National Woman's Convention. Next, replace each reference to "woman" and replace it with the name of a group of people who are currently marginalized somewhere in the world. Read the speech again. Does the argument apply to the new group? Be prepared to share your thoughts with the class.

Well, children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter. I think that 'twixt the negroes of the South and the women at the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all this here talking about?

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

Then they talk about this thing in the head; what's this they call it? [member of audience whispers, "intellect"] That's it, honey. What's that got to do with women's rights or negroes' rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half measure full?

Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him.

If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them.

Obliged to you for hearing me, and now old Sojourner ain't got nothing more to say.

Intercultural Communication Case Study #5: Relative Offensiveness

Directions: Rank the following slurs and insults in order of their offensiveness, with 1 being the most offensive and 10 being the least offensive. If you are unfamiliar with the word, use your best guess. Be prepared to discuss the rationale for your decisions.

_____ Cracker

_____ Bible Thumper

_____ Four-eyes

_____ Wetback

_____ Retard

_____ Beaner

_____ Nigger

_____ Old Fart

_____ Jap

_____ Femi-nazi

Intercultural Communication Case Study #6: Diversity Fatigue

Directions: Are you getting tired of diversity initiatives and discussions? You are not alone. Overuse of the term has led to frustration and even rejection toward the term and all that it stands for. Review the following list of diversity initiatives and terms. Which, if any, do you feel are no longer necessary on a wide scale? Be prepared to discuss your answers.

Affirmative action to increase minority enrollment at colleges and universities

Diversity training in the workplace

Laws to ban targeted marketing to members of certain minority groups

Political correctness in daily speech

Sexual harassment provisions in the workplace

Hate crime legislation

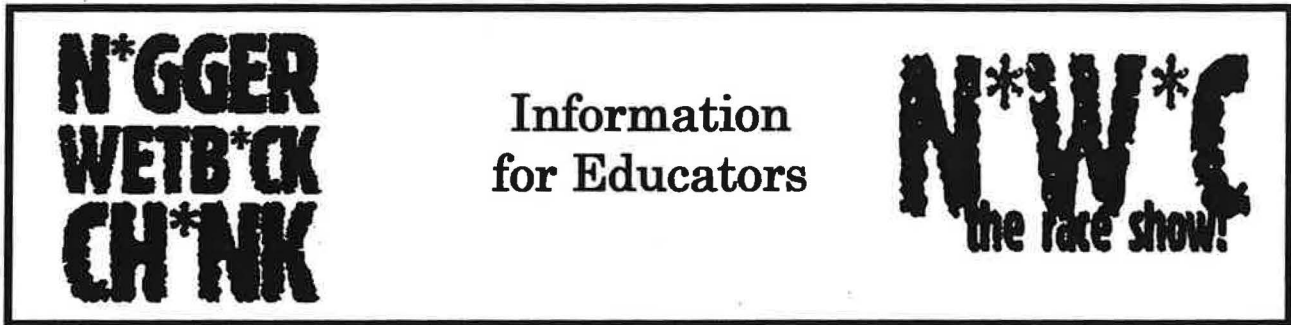
Intercultural Communication Activities

1. There are at least six categories of cultural groups that you may belong to (ethnic/national, gender, profession, geographic, physical ability, sexual orientation). Identify and list at least four of your cultural affiliations.
2. Brainstorm as many stereotypes as you can for a group you belong to. Review the list and cross off all items that do not accurately describe you. If some items still remain on the list, what is the meaning of this?
3. Write a description of how your friends of family spend your favorite holiday. Include details such as what you eat, wear, and how you spend the day. Share your description with a classmate. Discuss what your traditions communicate about your respective families.
4. Place a line of tape or string about 3-4 feet long on the floor of the classroom. Place half the class on each side of the tape, naming them team A and team B. This is now "The Border." Team A is now instructed to attempt to cross the border and team B must stop them, but neither group may touch another person in the process, and everyone must remain silent. Anyone who initiates touch or speaks is returned to the side of Team A and assumes their team's goal of crossing the border. The exercise ends when everyone has arrived on the side of Team B.
Follow-up question: What does this exercise demonstrate about situations where people have competing goals? Does it relate at all to the current debate over control of the US border with Mexico?
5. Each student will bring an object to class that they feel communicates something about their cultural identity. They will show the object to the class and describe the attributes that make it relevant to their personal cultural identification.
6. An example of a character in the media who would violate cultural expectations is a "Chinese Superman". Brainstorm at least five other archetypes that we would be likely to see in real or fictionalized media portrayals.
7. List the top ten positive attributes of being a member of one of your cultural or sub-cultural groups.
8. List the five worst aspects of being affiliated with your cultural group(s).

Readers Theater Activities:

1. Bring in a piece of text that is not written in dramatic or narrative form, such as a list, food label, telephone bill, or poster. Trade texts with another classmate. This is your text for performance. Identify "characters" in the selection, "action," and, if possible, dialogue and stage the text as a scene using at least two performers under your direction. You will also need to perform in at least two other scenes.
2. Analyze a script for performance by marking one word in each sentence with a highlighter that is the operative word. Write in the margin of the text a specific direction for the type of delivery you will use to emphasize that word, such as "elongate," or "pause."

Appendix F
Teachers Guide for Grades 7-12



Summary of the Show

*N*W*C* tells the real-life stories of three young men from different ethnic backgrounds to deconstruct the notion of race in America. Drama, hip hop, slam poetry, and stand-up comedy are intermingled to communicate the show's overall message: "There's only one race: the human race." Along the way, *N*W*C* also addresses various themes and issues inherently tied to racism such as ethnic identity, racial slander, media representation, race, stereotyping, immigration, and inter-group conflict.

Show Themes and Topics

Ethnic Identity:

- Early childhood experiences of first discovering ones ethnicity
- Accusations of "Talking White" among African-Americans
- Asian-Americans as the "Model Minority"
- Sexual emasculation of Asian-American male
- Use of eye surgery as a means for Asian-Americans to better assimilate
- Machismo and sexuality expectations for Latino males

Language/Racial Slurs:

- The power of language
- The difference between using the words against people and in dialogues about racism
- How the context in which we use language can vastly alter its meaning

Media Representation:

- Lack of representation of minorities
- Misrepresentation of minorities
- Effect of the media's representation of minorities on young children

Race:

- Race as a social construct rather than a biological construct
- Genetic research disproving the concept of “race”

Stereotyping:

- Inherent nature of stereotypes
- Origin of racial stereotyping

Immigration:

- Living illegally in the United States
- Immigrants “taking jobs” away from other groups of people
- Contributions of immigrants to the US culture and economy
- Impact of illegal immigration on young children brought into the country by their parents

Conflict Between Ethnic Groups in the US:

- Fear of “rioting” by minority groups
- Value of sticking together rather than fighting against one another
- The progression of Tolerating/Accepting/Celebrating/Desiring attributes of other cultural groups

Pre- and Post-Show Discussion Questions

1. Is it ever appropriate to use the words in the title of this show?
2. Do you think people of other ages, ethnicities, or from other parts of the country or world would answer the previous question differently than you? Why?
3. When was the first time you realized you have a racial or ethnic identity?
4. What are some of the reasons for conflict between different ethnic groups in the United States?
5. How many different “races” are there in the world? Is race a biological or a social construct?

Web Resources

www.nwclive.com (includes articles about the show and artists biographical information)

www.speaktheaterarts.com (background information about the company and show)

Appendix G
Media Coverage

San Gabriel Valley Tribune

February 3, 2006

Putting race in your face

By Esther Chou, Staff Writer

During the question and answer portion of 'N*gger W*tback Ch*nk,' one woman asked: 'Aren't you supposed to have accents?'

From the performers' appearance and dress, the three cast members were clearly African American, Latino and Asian American. And if anything, they had California accents. But the woman's question, perhaps unusual, wasn't taboo. Considering the title of the show, there are few questions about race and identity that could be more provocative.



Controversial and comedic, 'N*gger W*tback Ch*nk' is a mix of comedy, drama, slam poetry, stand-up and hip hop. Returning to Mt. San Antonio College's Clarke Theater on Tuesday, the show confronts underlying racial tensions people don't necessarily want to talk about.

Co-written and performed by former Mt. SAC students Allan Axibal, Miles Ellington Gregley and Rafael Agustin, the show brings all the ugly racial slurs and stereotypes to the stage and explores race issues through real-life stories, beginning with the title. It may be offensive, but 'there's a difference between calling people these words ... and using them in conversation and discussions,' Axibal said.

All natives of the San Gabriel Valley, the trio met on the speech team at Mt. SAC about six years ago and transferred to UCLA. The show grew out of frustration that Agustin, 25, felt when he was typecast for Latino parts in theater productions. At an audition for a Tennessee Williams play, the director told Agustin that he was fantastic, yet nudged him toward Latino parts. In fact, the only lead role he got was for a prison drama called 'Short Eyes,' Agustin said. 'For people in general, it's hard to see a lead man being Asian or a lead man being different,' said Gregley, 24.

'We challenge that in the show,' Axibal said.

'N*gger W*tback Ch*nk' opened in May 2003 at UCLA and the three have since formed a production company, Speak Theater Arts, with their former Mt. SAC debate coaches Liesel Reinhart and Steven T. Seagle. They've brought the show to colleges and performing arts centers around the country. Part of a two-year national tour, the Mt. SAC engagement is the first performance of the year.

In one scene, 'Sticking your ethnic faces where they don't belong,' the actors run through a list of stereotypical oxymorons: Latino basketball player, Black Santa Claus, Chinese Superman. Like a roller coaster ride, the show starts fast by throwing all the negative stereotypes out into the open and slamming them right into your face, said Gregley. The tension keeps building and building, and when you think it can't get any worse, it does.

It begins with the list game. Axibal, Agustin and Gregley throw out stereotypes commonly made about their ethnicity.

'Rice eater.'

'Bean eater.'

'Watermelon.'

Offensive, maybe. But there's reality behind the drama. Each of the three have been called the names they use as their act at some point in their lives. (Axibal is Filipino.) 'The reason why our show has validity is because we talk about our own stories,' Axibal said.

Education and realization about race, identity, diversity is a major part of the show.

Axibal said that an Asian guy sitting next to an African-American guy in the audience might be thinking, Is it really OK to laugh a joke about being black? (Yes, it is.)

After the show, the cast takes questions from the audience to promote discussion about race. There are the usual questions about how the three met and how they started. But the debate often takes a political and philosophical turn.

'Are racism, stereotypes necessary?'

'Does race exist?'

'Aren't you supposed to have accents?'

Because of the title, the show has seen its share of controversy. At the first performance, there was a huge line of protesters but an even bigger line of people going to see it, Agustin recalled. Eventually, the protesters went inside to watch and later told the cast they loved it, he said.

'The title creates buzz. By the time we get there, they're already talking about these issues,' Axibal said.

At another show in Olympia, Wash., there were rumors that a neo-Nazi group was planning to protest, but nothing happened.

'The show is called N*gger W*tback Ch*nk,' Agustin said. 'How can they be mad?'

Because of the performers' willingness to talk frankly about race issues, they're sometimes viewed as ambassadors of their cultures or spokesmen of ethnic identity. But Axibal does not consider himself an expert or an ambassador.

'(The show) makes us experts of our lives, which have been affected by race,' Agustin said.

A graduate of West Covina High School, Agustin said a defining moment for him came during his freshman year. There was a substitute PE teacher who told the class to play football, and students divided themselves into the Mexicans versus the Filipinos. Agustin, who's from Ecuador, remembered a distinct 'us vs. them' mentality. He decided to go against convention and joined the Asian team.

'We got our a-- handed to us that day. I have never gotten hit so hard,' Agustin said. 'So the moral of the story is always play with the Latinos,' he joked.

Axibal, who attended the predominantly Asian and Latino campus of Wilson High School in Hacienda Heights, found himself wondering 'Which Asian?' There were lots of Chinese and Korean students, but Filipinos were a small minority.

'Being Filipino, you're drifting a lot because Asian is such a big umbrella,' he said. 'I didn't find that out until I got to UCLA because there is a big Filipino contingent there.' For Gregley, who graduated from Charter Oak High School, there's a part in the show about the year he learned to be African-American.

It's about the two years during middle school he moved out of a mostly-white neighborhood in Covina to an almost all-black neighborhood in Georgia. There, Gregley wasn't accepted until he walked a certain way, talked a certain way and dressed a certain way. So the California 'dude' wasn't proper slang. Gregley added colorful pants blue, green, purple, yellow to his wardrobe and wore necklaces, earrings and boots.

When he moved back to California, Gregley said he started to hang out with other African-American students and noticed, for the first time, the color lines.

And that's one reason why they have taken the show its controversial name and all on the road and perhaps to Broadway or Hollywood one day.

It's to open up that dialogue about why some people are supposed to act a certain way, why others are supposed to dress a certain way, and why they're all supposed to have accents.

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THE NEWS RECORD

MARCH 30 / APRIL 2, 2006 THE INDEPENDENT STUDENT NEWSPAPER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI SINCE 1881



Carol Peterson/Speak The Arts

Miles Gregley, (left), Allan Axibal and Rafael Agustin are "N*gger Wetb*ck Ch*nk" at the Aronoff Center Friday and Saturday.

Three friends seek to attack racial stereotypes with show

By Kerry Terrana
The News Record

As the five-year anniversary of the Cincinnati Riots approaches, the Cincinnati Arts Association is bringing the nationally-acclaimed show "N*gger Wetb*ck Ch*nk" to the Aronoff Center Friday and Saturday at 7:30 p.m.

The creators behind the eclectic show are scheduled to be at the MainStreet Cinema Friday from noon-2 p.m. to preview some of the scenes from the entertaining yet provocative show.

"One of our major missions here is to present entertainment to diverse audiences that are not normally well served in this city, as it reaches a large group of minority audiences," said Van Ackerman, the director of marketing and public relations at the Cincinnati Arts Association.

The show features Miles Gregley, Rafael Agustin and Allan Axibal, three friends of black, Hispanic and Asian descent, respectively.

During the show, the three wear stereotypical garb while mixing dramatic monologues with sketch comedy to recount their dreams and challenges while struggling to succeed and feeling the pinch as minority actors.

"We feel this show does this in a great way," Ackerman said. "It deals with race relations in a very funny way, but also a very serious way, and it also involves a very young audience, which is another good thing because we don't get young audiences in our show very often."

The core of the show is not about race and stereotypes, but instead about personal identity and the struggle to find it.

Through poetry, songs and skits, the actors share their struggle to find their identity outside of stereotypes.

"The show is very biographical and based on their shared experiences, as all of them are from three very different minority groups, which created the

See Comedy, Page 6



Liesel Reinhart/Speak The Arts

The three friends, all from different minority groups, came up with the show while at UCLA.

Comedy, continued from Page 5

bases for their unlikely friendship," Liesel Reinhart, one of the directors of the show, said in a phone interview.

Gregely, Axibal and Agustin met at a community college in Los Angeles, became good friends and then transferred together to UCLA, where they began to formulate the show.

"The guys are really great guys and they really care about the message of the show," said Reinhart. "They wanted the show to be their honest experience and not some exaggeration starring Jamie Foxx and Antonio Banderas. So they got together and said 'Let's put together something that speaks to our array of experiences.'"

After some brainstorming, the three came up with a show they thought would have a short shelf life at UCLA.

"The show is about the fact that political correctness, which is supposedly about not saying the words, but without the words, no one talks about the stereotypes," Reinhart said. "Some people come to rage about race and ethnicity, but we choose to laugh about it instead."

While attacking stereotypes head-on, the only problems the show has had have been with the challenging title, which was chosen as an attack on the racial slurs.

"Some people have ripped off all three of the offensive names of the fliers for the show, while some have ripped off only the 'N*gger' part of it and left the other two," Reinhart said. "One poster even had all three words crossed out and 'Honky Honky Honky' written over top. The guys got a good laugh out of that."

Reinhart says audiences of all kinds respond positively to the show. "The only difference in the shows between conservative and liberal audiences is how long it takes to relax and start laughing."

The show lightly pokes fun



Carol Peterson/Speak The Arts

The three actors, who were responsible for creating "NWC: The Race Show," based the show on their real-life experiences.

at important racial issues while addressing topics most people would be reluctant to discuss.

The show then follows up with a discussion session breaking down preconceived notions and misunderstandings audience members had before coming to the show.

"One audience member in a very conservative audience asked afterwards, 'I loved the show, but why don't the three of you have accents?'" Reinhart said, adding that audiences everywhere seem to take something from the show. "We are booking a lot of dates in the area."

The show seems to carry a message that varies from audience to audience and is finally getting booked in the South and other areas that have been slow to accept the ideas and themes this show carries.

"The show is coming to Miami University in Oxford soon as well, as well as other area colleges like Northern Kentucky University, and even the small 800-person school of Mount St. Joseph in Delhi, so it tells us that there is something about that part of the country feels that this show is important, and they are really looking to come here and share their story," Reinhart said.

"They didn't set out to do

this show as experts on race," Reinhart said. "They try to use their stories to answer the questions and try to help people to come to their own conclusions."

The audience at MainStreet Cinema on Friday will see roughly half of the 90-minute show, with the performers acting out roughly half the show without costumes or sets.

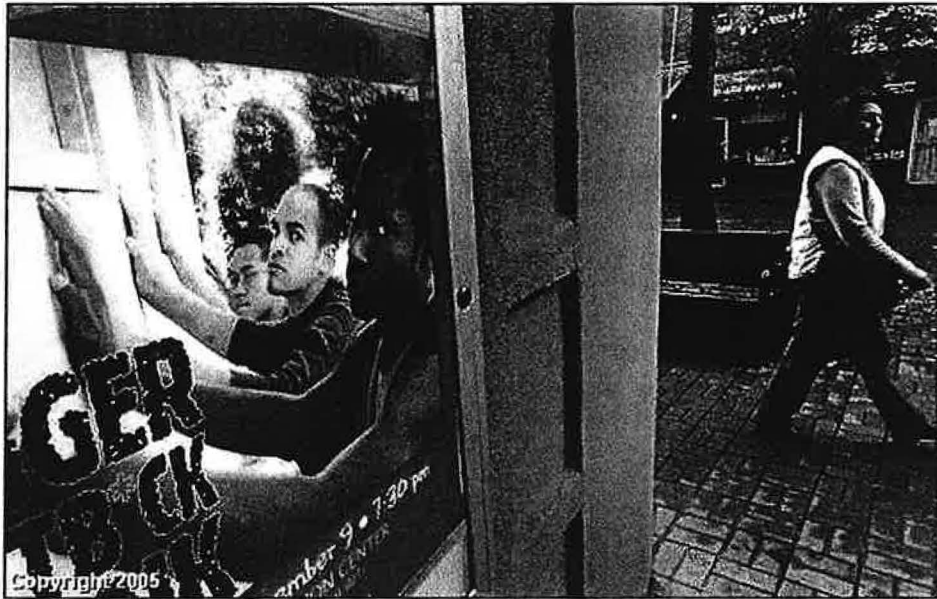
"The show began to receive immense positive feedback, people started to take notice, word spread and it turned into a success," Reinhart said. "A management company saw it and thought it could be a great national show, so this is where we are at now."

Sharing their story is certainly something they can do with Cincinnati audiences.

"The three lived through the L.A. riots and look forward to talking with people about the 2001 Cincinnati riots," Reinhart said. "They especially want to talk to students and audiences this weekend about how it has affected the youth of the city."

The show is scheduled to run at the Aronoff Center in the Jarson-Kaplan Theater on Friday and Saturday at 7:30 p.m.

Tickets are \$25, but students with an ID pay half price. Tickets are available at cincinnatiarts.org or at 621-ARTS.



Play promotion stokes debate on race, language
Some businesses refuse flier for Washington Center performance

The Olympian (WA) 11/4/2005

BY KARI NEUMEYER
THE OLYMPIAN

The name of a play to be performed next week is posing a challenge for The Washington Center for the Performing Arts, which is trying to promote it.

The intent of "N*gger Wetb*ck Ch*nk," written and performed by men of color, is to use comedy to defuse the power of racial slurs. But several establishments that regularly hang posters for the center refused to post this one, out of concern the title would offend people.

A teaser poster for the Wednesday performance gave little information other than large black letters advertising "N*W*C" and smaller red letters identifying it as "The Race Show." A week ago, two of the posters were taped back to back on the glass doors of the county building that houses the Thurston County Sheriff's Office. After learning what the letters stood for, a county employee tore the signs down.

Posters spelling out the full title went out Monday.

"We started putting out posters today and instantly ran into difficulty with people not wanting to put them up," said Kevin Boyer, the center's director of marketing.

The center has a list of about 350 places where it routinely hangs posters for its plays, Boyer said. At least five businesses and offices declined to hang the posters this week.

In places where the show was advertised, the name sparked debate about whether using the words is appropriate.

Tim Carns, owner of Cutters Point Coffee in Lacey, said the center pulled a fast one on him by not telling him what the letters on the first poster meant.

"If I would have ever known what the initials stood for, I would have never put it up in the window," Carns said. "I'm offended as a Caucasian."

When the distributor came by this week with the follow-up poster, Carns took down the old one and decided he would no longer advertise Washington Center shows, he said.

The distributor explained that the play is about breaking down racism, Carns said. The show, awarded "Best Play" by the American Readers Theater Association in 2003, depicts the actors' experiences as minorities.

Still, Carns said he doesn't understand why they'd use words in the title that shouldn't be said out loud. "If I was an African American or an Asian American ... I would not know what the content of the play is," he added. "I would simply see the poster that called me derogatory names."

Don Krupp, Thurston County's chief administrative officer, said he decided not to allow either sign because he heard complaints a year or two ago about a different theatrical poster using the N-word. "Sometimes folks, when they see something like that -- it may be very well-intentioned in terms of the production that it refers to -- the language made some folks feel uncomfortable," he said. "It was sort of a line I really didn't want to step over."

Race is the "elephant in the dining room, dancing on a table in a polka-dot dress, and we can't talk about it," said Nat Jackson, who is active with the James Byrd Foundation for Racial Healing. Byrd was a black man in Texas who was beaten and dragged to death behind a pickup in 1998. Three white men who were later convicted of his murder used the N-word multiple times during the attack, Jackson said.

"Kids need to know that these kinds of things happen," he said. "They need to know why they happen, how they happen, how detrimental and destructive they are."

Jackson, a longtime leader in the black community, works with area schools to encourage acceptance of diversity and positive race relations. He doesn't have a problem with the slurs being used for those purposes.

"It's hard to educate without using the words," he said. He hadn't seen the N*W*C posters, so he couldn't say whether he found them objectionable.

"We generally encourage kids to check themselves about their own racial slurs," Jackson added. "Our position is that the hip-hop generation should not be using those terms."

Hip-hop and rap artists have desensitized some people to the power of racial slurs, including writer Bryan Connolly of Olympia.

"I don't know if they're taboo anymore," he said. "It seems like in this day and age, nothing is offensive anymore."

Connolly was hanging posters for an all-night horror movie marathon at the Capitol Theater. He said it would make more sense for people to be disturbed by his posters, which depicted a man with his guts hanging out and the words, "Die die kill kill."

People in Olympia know better than to think a performance at The Washington Center would feature white supremacists or be a "racist jam," Connolly added.

"So many situations where people are afraid of offending people, no one's actually offended," said Zack Carlson, Connolly's friend and an employee of Orca Books.

A poster for "N*gger Wetb*ck Ch*nk" hung in the bookstore window on Fourth Avenue. "I guess it's OK because it has an asterisk," Connolly joked.

At Last Word Books, a customer saw a poster on the door and said, "Something subversive in the window, right on," said David Accurso, one of the co-owners.

Neither bookstore had heard complaints.

Talking about it

The play's title prompted discussions at Saint Martin's University, which had workshops Tuesday with actors from the play.

Renee Ellis, director of the Office of Intercultural Initiatives at the university, has been playing a promotional DVD of N*W*C in her office.

"I met with a great deal of emotion," she said. "Some people are laughing their heads off." Others reacted with, "Turn it off, I don't want to watch this," she said.

As an African-American woman, Ellis said, she related to some of the experiences depicted in the show. "It's funny ha-ha, yes," she said. "But comedy associated with stereotypes -- it's really sad."

Some students were angered by the DVD and the posters, she said. Others were brought to tears.

Ellis does not find the title offensive. She took a flier to a class at the university and asked students to read it to her.

"I can't say those words," was the response.

Pointing out that asterisks replaced key vowels in the title, Ellis asked, "Are there words on that page?" "I understand where it comes from," she said later. "Those are the discussions that need to be had."

For some, racism is too serious an issue to be the subject of comedy, she said. And the words are too provocative to be used, even theatrically.

"If you can't get past the words, you can't get to the real issue that lies beneath," she said.

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