Lamont Hill visits UMSL to discuss social justice and racial inequality

HEATHER WELBORN
FEATURES EDITOR

Some students were visibly uncomfortable as they listened to Lamont Hill, PhD, passionately discuss social activism for over an hour last Thursday in the Century Rooms of the Millennium Student Center. Hill's impassioned argument for racial equality in America was undeniably polarizing. Many students departed within the first half of his lecture. Those who remained gave Hill their rapt attention, fully engaged by Hill's emotional appeal for equality in education.

According to his website, Marc Lamont Hill is one of the leading hip-hop generation intellectuals in the country. He has been involved in social justice activism since childhood. Hill is a news correspondent with BET and a political commentator at CNN. He writes at length about the overlap of culture, politics, and education in western society:

Three years ago, Ebony Magazine named Hill one of America's 100 Most Influential Black Leaders.

Hill's address, entitled "Social Justice and Social Media," was part of the ongoing campus-wide observation of Black History Month.

Each sequential position Hill presented in his speech was backed with more historical attention and emotional appeal for equality and possibility for every member of society.

Hill's main lecture point was a plea to audience members to listen more. As he spoke, his words seemed to gain momentum with every frequent mention of social leaders long since lost, "hard to listen to," Hill said.

"We have a generation of criminals, not criminals," Hill said. "We've militarized the space, and nobody stops you from leaving.

"We've created a freedom document that promises life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, that falsifies freedom on the one hand, while the African remains mired in unfreedom." His tone turned accusatory as audience members nodded their heads in agreement.

"America, look at what you promised your citizens, just for being human," Hill said. "Listen to yourself."

For such serious subjects, Hill had his moments of hilarity. "Picking on poor people is easy. Bill Cosby!" Hill said at one point. The humor took the edge off of statistics he shared about current educational standards and incarceration rates. Hill stated that 250,000 Americans were in prison in 1964, and the nation saw it as a travesty. Today, there are 2.5 million locked up, an increase in prison populations by tenfold.

Do not be seduced by the logic that we created a generation of criminals," Hill said, comparing the structure of public schools to that of prisons. "We've militarized the space, and nobody stops you from leaving.

"The War on Drugs is over, poor people. We lost," Hill said.

When poverty is made illegal, Hill urges students to fight criminalization. According to Hill, the biggest problem in America today is the presence of too many people who don't do anything. He tells the audience that the truth is hard to listen to, and difficult to listen upon, but it is necessary to address social inequality in a realistic way. He ended his lecture with an appeal to courage and action.

"Speak the truth even when it's difficult and unpopular," Hill said. "Hope relentlessly."
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the editor should be brief, and those not exceeding 250 words will be given preference. We edit letters for clarity and length, not for dialect, correctness, intent, or grammar. All letters must be signed and must include a daytime phone number. Students must include their student ID numbers. Faculty and staff must include their title(s) and department(s). The Editor-in-Chief reserves the right to respond to letters. The Current reserves the right to deny letters.

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The Current values feedback from the campus community. What do you think of our campus coverage? Let us know your thoughts at thecurrent@umsl.edu.

NOW HIRING!

The Current is now seeking students to fill a number of positions. These positions are available on a volunteer basis or for internship credit. Applications are available on our website at thecurrent-online.com. Please submit completed applications to 388 Millennium Student Center or thecurrentjobs@umsl.edu to be considered for open positions. For more information, contact us at thecurrentjobs@umsl.edu.

THE UNDERCURRENT

By Siyun Zhang

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO DOING ONCE THE WEATHER WARM UP?

CARLOS NAVARRETE
Junior, Communication

"Going to a park with my wife."

JENNIFER GOLDRING
Graduate Student, Masters of Fine Arts - Poetry

"Hiking."

PAIGE LEIBLE
Graduate Student, Masters in Accounting

"Going on The Bull Float Trip this summer, and spending more time outside."

MON 39 HI 24 LOW
TUE 37 HI 9 LOW
WED 27 HI 19 LOW
THU 39 HI 20 LOW
FRI 31 HI 17 LOW
SAT 33 HI 20 LOW
SUN 36 HI 20 LOW
Discussions on higher education funding continue at capitol

Conversations continue in the Missouri Legislature over how to fund higher education in the next year. After much excitement from Governor Jay Nixon’s State of the State address, where he pledged to boost funding for higher education, came the narrowing process of getting such a proposal through the rigors of the bicameral legislature.

Nixon had called for state universities to freeze their tuition rates for the 2014-2015 school year in exchange for the increase. The University of Missouri System was the first to answer the governor’s call, with a Board of Curators approval days after Nixon’s speech.

At the 46th Annual Legislative Day on February 18, both Nixon and Wolfe called for increased investment in higher education, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Wolfe cited a backlog of overdue infrastructure development and rehabilitation needs totaling over $1 billion among the four UM system campuses.

But while the Legislature appears to be on-board for increasing higher education funding, there is some disagreement over where the money should go.

Missouri Senate Bill 492, sponsored by Senator David Pearce, R-Warrensburg, is referred to as the college performance funding bill. It calls for universities to meet certain performance criteria in order to receive funding increases from the state when available. The bill would expire in 2016. The criteria would include statistics such as retention rates, job placement, and graduation rates, among other metrics.

The importance of the bill is that it would require universities to include such metrics in their goal-setting and evaluation process for funding. Opponents of the bill were assuaged, however, by the 2016 expiration, an amendment added to the bill that would enable legislators to give the bill a shot but not renew it if it doesn’t work.

The bill will need to be voted on again before passing to the House.

“The bill will need to be voted on again before passing to the House.”

would hold them accountable for good and bad performance.

Some concerns were raised as to whether the bill would leave lawmakers powerless for some time by codifying such a strict evaluation process for funding. Opponents of the bill were disposed, however, by the 2016 expiration, an amendment added to the bill that would enable legislators to give the bill a shot but not renew it if it doesn’t work.

The bill will need to be voted on again before passing to the House.

In addition to SB 492, Representative Mike Thomson, R-Martville, is sponsoring a measure that would allow Bright Flight recipients to receive forgivable loans. Missouri House Bill 1308 will expand the Higher Education, Academic Scholarship Program, also known as the Bright Flight Program, to include loans that would be incrementally forgiven in exchange for a certain period of employment in Missouri after graduation. Bright Flight recipients are determined based upon performance on ACT or SAT standardized tests. To qualify, students must rank in the top 3 percent or in the top 4th or 5th percentile of all Missouri students taking the test.

Thomson contends that this would help with a phenomenon called “brain drain,” whereby the best and brightest students are leaving the state in search of better scholarships and post-graduation employment. He hopes that by increasing the financial incentive for remaining in Missouri for school and also work the bill would help with this issue. Mike Thomson is chairman of the House Higher Education Committee.

NEWS BRIEF

‘News at Noon’ focuses on sexual assault

“News at Noon: Sexual Assault in the Military” was held on February 19 from 12:15 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. Hosted each year by The Current, News at Noon serves as a forum for open discussion between faculty and students regarding current events.

Jim Craig, Chair of the Department of Military and Veterans Studies at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, and Pamela Dorsey, Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Coordinator for Scott Air Force Base, served as presenters. Discussion was lively, as attendees discussed a variety of viewpoints, including societal views of sexual assault in America and the effectiveness of newly-introduced sexual assault prevention programs in the military.

News at Noon is co-sponsored by The Current and The New York Times, with support from the Center for Teaching and Learning and the Office of Student Life at UMSL. Visit thecurrent-online.com for more information on upcoming events.
UMSL hosts ‘Inequality for All’ screening

CATE MARQUIS
A&E EDITOR

The University of Missouri-St. Louis joined universities across the nation for a documentary screening and discussion that focused on income inequality and the declining American middle class. The Sundance award-winning documentary “Inequality for All” was shown on February 20, followed by a webcast discussion with the documentary’s creator, political economist and former United States Secretary of Labor Robert Reich. The free event took place in the J.C. Penney Conference Center Auditorium at 4 p.m. and was sponsored on campus by the Des Lee Collaborative Vision at UMSL.

“Today’s screening of ‘Inequality for All’ is part of a national event sponsored by the American Democracy Project. UMSL has been affiliated with ADP for over a decade, working to create and offer opportunities related to civic engagement on our college campuses,” Patricia Zahn, director of the Des Lee Collaborative Vision, said.

The American Democracy Project is also a co-sponsor of “News at Noon,” a monthly current events discussion co-sponsored by the Current. The Des Lee Collaborative Vision “brings together educational, cultural, governmental and social service institutions to establish programs and share resources to benefit the St. Louis community.

The documentary is a “passionate argument on behalf of the middle class,” according to its website http://inequalityforall.com. “The 400 richest Americans now own more wealth than the bottom 150 million combined,” Reich notes in the documentary. While the middle class has continued to prosper in other developed nations, such as Great Britain, Australia, Germany and Sweden, the middle class has been in decline in this country. The United States now has the greatest level of income inequality among developed nations. Income inequality has become a frequent topic of political discussion in recent months.

Turnout for the UMSL event was good. “We had about 100 people, a good mix of students, faculty and staff with a few community members,” Zahn said.

Robert Reich, the force behind the film, led a discussion by webcast after the screening. Reich was Secretary of Labor under President Clinton but also served in the Ford and Carter administrations. He is now a professor of public policy at University of California - Berkeley and was a Rhodes Scholar who studied Philosophy, Politics, and Economics at Oxford University.

The film was shown at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival, where it won the U.S. Documentary Special Jury Award for Achievement in Filmmaking for its director Jacob Kornbluth. The film was distributed theatrically last year by the Weinstein Company and played locally at the Plaza Frontenac Cinema.

The documentary is hosted in part on Reich’s bestselling book Aftershock: The Next Economy and America’s Future. A study guide for the documentary describes the film: “In the wake of the U.S. economic crisis, the widening gap between the rich and the poor has gained unprecedented public awareness. [The documentary’s] narrator and guide, UC Berkeley professor and noted economic policy expert Robert Reich, helps us understand how the extreme inequality we are now facing has roots in economic and policy changes that began over 30 years ago.”

As the study guide notes, “Reich sees this disparity as a threat to democracy. ‘Inequality For All’ explains why. There is no vilifying of the rich here. Instead, ‘Inequality For All’ investigates how policy changes have stacked the deck against the middle class.”

The documentary uses graphics, new and archival footage and economic facts to explain how this economic imbalance came about and where the country is headed if that course is not changed. The film shows how policies that benefit the middle class also benefit the country as a whole, even the wealthy, through something known to economists as a “virtuous circle.” The film also offers some of Reich’s personal story as well as “his unswerving passion to return our society to one in which the American dream is possible for everyone.” The film’s website has background information and resources for further research on the issue.

Annual high school step show rocks the Touhill

The Associated Black Collegians of the University of Missouri-St. Louis hosted their annual high school step show on February 21 in the Blanche M. Touhill Performing Arts Center. This two-division step show allows student teams from the St. Louis area to strut their stuff on stage, utilizing rhythm, spirit and imagination to create the best possible show.

Photos taken by Ryan Brooks, with special thanks to the Touhill volunteers and staff.

1. The Elite Steppers’ routine revolved around women working in factories during World War II.
2. Girls Inc. were among the largest step groups to perform.
3. Platinum performed a large and well-synchronized act.
4. Sounds of Stomp performed a routine telling the story of a scientist who created a number of humanoid robots.
'Sacred Symbols in Sequins: Vintage Haitian Vodou Flags' exhibit displays beautiful bead work of a vastly misunderstood culture

CATE MARQUIS
A&E EDITOR

Say "voodoo" and for many it brings to mind images of curses, scary ceremonies and even zombies. That's the Hollywood version. The real Vodou is the unique national religion of Haiti, a religion that blends influences from Christianity, West and Central Africa and the Taino people who were native to the island.

"Sacred Symbols in Sequins: Vintage Haitian Vodou Flags" is a traveling exhibit of a central liturgical object in the Haitian religion, the Vodou flag, one that also is a stunningly beautiful piece of textile art. The free exhibit opened February 8 and continues through March 15 at Gallery 210.

Photos do not do justice to these dazzling art objects. The flags are densely embroidered with brilliant, colorful sequins and bead work, creating objects that rival the best of other Native American beading. During religious services, the flags are waved around in elaborate fashion, so that the brilliant colors and sparkling sequins come to life.

The point of the colorful, light-catching religious art is to boost a congregation's spiritual link to the divine, much as stained glass church windows, elaborate priestly vestments and banners for holy day processions do. In fact, the European tradition of banners for holy day processions are a direct inspiration for the Haitian practice.

The exhibit includes a wonderful array of these gorgeous religious objects, as well as beaded bottles also used in services, photos of altars, temples and modern Haitians themselves. There are 16 flags, known as Drapo Vodou, mostly from the early to mid-20th century. The exhibit also puts this sacred art in context, with several posters describing the origins of the religion, its practices and traditions and some of Haiti's history. The exhibit also includes some touchable objects.

The bead work is exquisite throughout and gallery patrons will find a close-up look at the works very rewarding. The flags incorporate symbols of the Vodou religion that are important in religious services and often include icons of Christianity. The religion has a single god but worshipers appeal to that deity for favors through an array of lesser gods often associated with Catholic saints. These spirits are viewed as "hot" or "cool" and are often paired, with a few deities seen as neutral mediators between the hot and cool realms.

A common theme in the flags are images of saints, frequently a Catholic printed image of the Virgin Mary or a saint cut out and incorporated into the flag. The name of the spirit represented is often included in the flag. Some flags feature snakes wrapping around a central staff, a figure on a white horse carrying a flag with a sideways cross, or skulls. Others include palm trees or geometric patterns, all of which have specific meaning for the Vodou religion.

Similar symbols appear on the decorated bottles than are also featured in ceremonies and in this exhibit. These colors are nearly always brilliant, and the sequins and bead work cover the cloth or bottle surface completely.

One example is "Ogou Sen Jak Maje" (St. Jacques Majorel), a late 20th century flag that depicts a spirit associated with St. James the Greater. According to its plaque, "As a hard, hot spiritual force, Ogou Sen Jak Maje balances the cool Danbula." Banners representing the two spirits are most often paired in Vodou temples.

The exhibit also includes one modern secular work, by artist Evelyne Alcide, which depicts the aftermath of the 2012 Haitian earthquake. Like the sacred objects, the subject is depicted in bright colors and dense beading.

A trip to this exhibit is well worthwhile, whether one goes to take in the pure beauty of these objects or to learn a little more about a misunderstood, misrepresented tradition and culture. Either way, "Sacred Symbols in Sequins: Vintage Haitian Vodou Flags" is a rewarding experience.
IN A WORLD where technology is always evolving, you need to consider what qualities make you more marketable. What skills will help you become a driver of organizational change, renewal, and innovation?

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An internship with a leading St. Louis firm working on projects in their course of study is offered to students in the MSIS program who choose the curriculum format with the internship option. Students will gain real world experience during a four-month semester internship. If students are not interested in participating in the internship curriculum format, it is not required for completion of the MSIS program.

A capstone course is required to finalize degree requirements (3 Credit Hours).
IS THE ADVANCEMENT OF TECHNOLOGY DETRIMENTAL TO THE HUMAN RACE?

POINT: Too much has a negative impact

Today, technology is completely unavoidable and almost mandatory in every day life for us humans. We are provided with instant knowledge and answers being more quickly and easily. Because they rely on technology so much, people don't think profoundly for themselves anymore. Our devices are becoming an attachment.

Adults, on average, spend at least eight hours a day in front of a screen. In the classroom, students no longer pay very much attention to the teachers when they have a computer screen or tablet right in front of them. Studies also show that social skills suffer if individuals spend too much time in front of a screen, due to the lack of interaction with other humans.

Meanwhile, communication has been taken over by texting and social media websites, such as Facebook and Twitter. Before texting or Facebook, people were more thoughtful and expressive to one another. Hesitant or introspective conversations, taking someone out on a date, and even telling someone a simple “thank you” are all things that are better performed in person.

Which would you choose:

COUNTER: Technology is a gift to us all

Technology is not something to be feared. Though advanced technology is finding its way into most facets of our everyday life, this shift toward a more hi-tech world is one we should celebrate.

Today, we can get to where we are going more quickly and contact one another more easily. Thanks to technology, the day-to-day tasks in our lives are as close to hassle-free as they have ever been.

The advancement of technology has also allowed us to go further than we ever dreamed of in the field of medicine. Many of us have loved ones who would not even be alive today, were it not for modern technology and the things it has done for the world of health care. If you were sick, would you prefer to go to a hospital with state-of-the-art equipment, or an institution stuck in the middle ages?

Progress never comes without its downsides. While technology has changed the way we communicate, who’s to say that that change is necessarily a bad thing? While social media isn’t the same as talking to someone face to face, it opens up the realm of communication so that you can have debates and meaningful conversations with someone on the other side of the world (using only one hundred and forty characters or less). Thanks to Facebook, we can now keep in touch with our loved ones overseas, bridging physical gaps between families with nothing but an internet connection and a computer screen.

Advanced technology has also helped individuals express themselves creatively in new and exciting ways. Digital art is just as beautiful as anything painted by hand, and it would not have been possible without computers.

Word processors revolutionized the world of literature by allowing writers to record their work more quickly than ever. New technology provided yet another medium in which art and beauty could thrive.

As many of us have been claiming since the 1980s: it is only a matter of time before we are all riding jet packs to work. With that said, embrace the change and have fun with the changes technology can bring.
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