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Steans Center Newsletter

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‘The Way They Saw It:’

BOOK ON BRONZEVILLE SHARES STUDENT RESEARCH, REFLECTIONS

In the last eight years, more than 200 DePaul students—including Doreen Hopkins—have participated in the Black Metropolis Project, an innovative and interdisciplinary effort to observe, analyze and preserve the history of the Bronzeville community on Chicago’s South Side. Bronzeville, also known as the Black Metropolis, was the original settlement area of African Americans in Chicago during the Great Migration nearly a century ago. Today, the community is in the midst of dramatic change, one that features mixed-income development and an uncertain future for public housing residents who once called Bronzeville their home.

This fall, student research, photos and reflections about the Black Metropolis are brought to life in the new scholarly work, *The Way They Saw It: The Changing Face of Bronzeville* (Dorrance Publishing Company). *The Way They Saw It* builds on Horace Clayton and St. Clair Drake’s landmark study of the neighborhood, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, published in 1945.

The Black Metropolis Project, a long-term collaboration between Professor Ted Manley (Sociology) and the Steans Center, focuses on the transformation of Bronzeville. The Project and *The Way They Saw It* are prominently concerned with a different kind of transformation, the kind that happens when students are engaged in a service learning project that transforms their perceptions of a subject and a neighborhood. The Black Metropolis Project embodies a service learning model focused on intensive community-based research conducted by students—research that draws from sociology, history, economics, the arts and many other disciplines. Three DePaul students who contributed to the book shared thoughts about this experience and what it meant to their academic life at the university.

DOREEN HOPKINS

Native to the South Side, Doreen Hopkins was no newcomer to Chicago when she first took a class on the Black Metropolis. “The Project gave us a different lens to look at the things we saw. DePaul is full of commuter students and transfer students—many of whom have grown up in Chicago. We take trains and buses—we see neighborhoods changing every day. What this experience gave me was a different pair of glasses to look at the city. Now, when I see a billboard, or a housing development, or a new Starbucks, I ask different questions about that neighborhood. You can’t go out and collect data and think ‘That was just for class,’ because we would see

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DIRECTOR'S LETTER

In this edition of the Steans Center newsletter, we present two stories that reflect model service-learning programs supported by the Center: The Black Metropolis Project (BMP) and Jumpstart. When juxtaposed with one another, these programs highlight the inherent political nature of service learning as DePaul students address the issues of gentrification and early childhood education in a racially segregated and economically divided city. BMP students document the transformation of a neighborhood, ethnographically piecing together bits and pieces of information that will be fashioned into reports to be shared publicly with Bronzeville residents. As these residents are displaced by higher-end housing development that professes to maintain Bronzeville's historical character, BMP data and town hall meetings provide a means for those who remain in the neighborhood to maintain a more accurate understanding of their past and to build a greater sense of community, while attaining a critical understanding of changes going on around them.

Jumpstart students engage with pre-school children from low-income families to enhance their ability to succeed socially and intellectually when they enter what are often under-resourced urban schools. Through detailed training and reflection, DePaul students are forced to look at the social contexts for what are often falsely explained as individualized reasons for why specific children face literacy challenges.

What is political about these programs is that the students begin to recognize the role of their education in challenging the inequitable structures that produce low-income, racially-divided urban communities. They learn by practicing community-based research or dialogical reading methods how to contribute to the already existing economic and cultural resources generally created by the communities themselves. Meanwhile, through critical analysis and reflection, their service experience pushes them to think about issues of privilege and larger structural constraints on efforts to truly resolve social inequality and to reflect upon who is complicit in the formation of such constraints.

By working directly on gentrification and education-related projects in Chicago, service learning students begin to understand the historical and contemporary impact of racism and classism in the city and the way communities are utilizing their assets to resist such forces. As a reflection of DePaul's Vincentian mission of educating and serving the underserved, the Center supports students in such projects as a means of producing socially responsible leaders and engaged alumni.

This newsletter is dedicated to the late Dr. Caleb Dube, an extraordinary scholar, colleague, and professor and a beloved friend to many at DePaul.

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In July 2007, the Steans Center partnered with Professors Richard Farkas and Cathy May in Political Science and the Hungarian NGO Foundation for Democratic Youth (DIA) to integrate service learning projects into the Budapest study abroad program. The goal of this pilot program was to provide students with a first-hand experience with two aspects of the new Hungarian democracy: youth engagement and civil society. Accompanied by Hungarian students organized by DIA, DePaul students divided into two teams, one serving at a group home for single and pregnant women and the other working at a community supported agricultural (CSA) program that provided the public with fresh fruits and vegetables. At the group home, students engaged in organizing donations and doing hands-on yard work where they had a chance to converse with residents about their lives and the challenges they faced daily. In contrast, students at the CSA harvested organic parsnips. According to Steans Center Student Development Coordinator Billie Drakeford, students reflected on the role of each of the organizations in the development of civil society in Hungary. Drakeford noted that the service led students to pose numerous questions including: "how does one get the 'underclass' on board with democracy?" The marriage of their experiences and reflection sessions organized by the Steans Center, challenged students to present answers to some of their questions about the difficulties of developing a civil society in a country working towards democracy. The role of all international service learning programs is to give students the ability to understand the different layers of society that exist in other countries.



STEANS WELCOMES
CHAD WILLIAMS
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Chad brings a variety of experience with nonprofits to his role as Community Development Director including employment specialist/life skills counselor for homeless youth, mental health counselor, and third grade teacher through Teach for America. He worked with I.C. Stars that provides technology training to adults, as Technology Coordinator for Chicago Public Schools and for Lumity that offers technology/business consulting to nonprofits. He ran a technology center for Alternatives, Inc. and a school for African-American males at Chicago Urban League. "I believe the breadth of my experience with nonprofits in Chicago has helped me understand what it takes to build relationships with these organizations," Williams says. "I understand what kinds of challenges they face on a day-to-day basis, because I've been there." His new position involves partnership development with community organizations to develop service learning opportunities. Williams graduated Beloit College with a BA in sociology and is completing a MA focused on public policy at DePaul.

JUMPSTARTING AN EDUCATION:

Program benefits DePaul students, families

For two years, DePaul student Susan Chun headed north from the school's Lincoln Park campus twice a week for a different kind of experience—working directly with children and building her leadership skills at a preschool in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood.

Chun was employed through Jumpstart, a national AmeriCorps program, which uses a research-based approach to prepare and train college students in a one-on-one relationship with a preschool child. The program has become an integral part of life at DePaul for a growing number of students, providing them with a chance to serve communities and enhance their academic career at school while working in a part-time job. The Jumpstart program at DePaul partners with seven preschools located in low-income communities in various Chicago neighborhoods. The program, which attracts both education and non-education majors, is based at the Steans Center for Community-based Service Learning & Community Service Studies.

In her first year with Jumpstart, Chun worked one-on-one with a young boy, Nicholas; in her second year, she served as a Team Leader, leading and organizing other DePaul students involved in the program (both times she worked at Christopher House—Uptown). “Every child needs this kind of support, and Jumpstart really encourages their love of reading and learning—and the ability of students to help provide that,” says Chun, a senior who is majoring in elementary education. “Yes, Jumpstart is a job, but it's also fun and rewarding to work with young children.”

PROGRAM EXPANDING

In recent years, the Jumpstart program at DePaul has grown dramatically. When the program started in 2003-2004, 20 students worked at two preschools; now, 70 students work at seven preschools (students commit 300 hours over the course of the year in the program). “The Jumpstart program has extended its reach and ability to serve children and families in neighborhoods that need it the most,” says Missy Frazin, Site Manager for Jumpstart at DePaul. Frazin adds that DePaul students have a high rate of succeeding in the program, based on how many

students have completed a year at a Jumpstart site. The program has also fared well according to benchmarks established by the program's national office. James Cleveland, President of Jumpstart for Young Children, based in Boston, calls the DePaul program “one of the top tier programs in the Chicago area. The DePaul program is the only one in Chicago that has grown substantially in size. When it comes to how the program is administered and outcomes for children, DePaul tends to knock it out of the park.”

RELEVANCE OF JUMPSTART

Even though Jumpstart is not formally linked to curriculum at DePaul, it is yielding major academic benefits for students, according to Marie Donovan, Associate Dean of DePaul's School of Education. “Jumpstart gives students the newfound realization about how they learn in a university classroom,” Donovan says. “Just watching young children learn helps us understand how we learn.” Donovan, however, is not just referring to the academic benefits of the program for education majors. “What I find from both education and non-education majors who participate in the program is that they see themselves as adult learners in ways that pay off in the classroom,” she says.

Donovan adds that faculty have also pointed out the impact of the Jumpstart program to her. “I hear from faculty that once Jumpstart students are responsible for a young child, they are more responsible in their approach to courses. It gets students to realize that education is a powerful social justice and social change mechanism.”

REACHING OUT: STUDENTS GROW, LEARN THROUGH PROGRAM

For Regina Cotto, who graduated from DePaul this year with a finance degree, the bond she developed with a young boy named Brian through the Jumpstart program

stands out. “He still calls me to talk about school,” she says, three years after partnering with him at Christopher House—Uptown.

“I learned skills in this program that have helped me in job interviews,” says Cotto, who is now a bank examiner for the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency. “The program also helped me enhance planning and communications skills that I was able to use in classes as well as in my job,” she says.

Ashley Nydam, a senior and elementary education major at DePaul who has worked at the Carole Robertson Center and Erie Neighborhood House, said that “to be able to have an impact on a child is an amazing thing.” Nydam, like all others who participate in the program, also had the opportunity to spend time in the classroom as well as plan and reflect with other participants in the program. This fall, Nydam is a Team Leader for the program at the Mary Crane Center in Chicago's East Logan Square community.

Meanwhile, the strong impact of Jumpstart is reaching organizations partnering with DePaul as well as the families they serve.

“You can see a big change in the life of these children, you see so many positive things happen,” says Louis Falk, Head Start Director at Erie Neighborhood House in West Town, a Jumpstart site since 2003-2004. “I've seen how this program works for five years, and I'm a big supporter.”

For Janet Mitchell, the impact of the program is apparent every day. Mitchell is the mother of Nicholas, who worked one-on-one with Susan Chun. “When my son started to read in the Jumpstart program with Susan, he learned more about reading, sharing, taking turns and so much else. The attention children get in this program motivates them.”



Susan Chun (above, left) reads to a child during a Jumpstart session. While another Jumpstart Corps Member and child smile for a picture during their session.



ENGAGE PARTNER REFLECT

MISSION STATEMENT: The Steans Center for Community-based Service Learning provides educational opportunities grounded in Vincentian community values to DePaul students. The Center seeks to develop mutually beneficial, reciprocal relationships with community organizations in order to develop a sense of social agency in our students through enrollment in CbSL courses, community internships and placements, and community-based student employment.

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evidence of the same thing when we went home.”

Hopkins, who graduated from DePaul in 2001 and majored in Psychology, now works for the McNair Scholars program at DePaul. She adds that learning about Bronzeville through this project was significantly different than being in a classroom. “When you are in a classroom, you expect lectures, facts,” she says. “You are supposed to learn material and take a test. This class made everything current. I remember how we used to go out on Saturday mornings to do field work—walk the street and record what we saw on a pad of paper. If there was an empty parking lot, we would estimate the address for that. From week to week, we might even see the neighborhood changing. It was happening right in front of us. At the same time, we talked with residents who wanted to share their story. They were excited to see us.”

MATTHEW MURPHY

Matthew Murphy, who graduated from DePaul with a marketing degree last spring, vividly recalls taking digital pictures in Bronzeville of landmarks, changing landscapes, housing and businesses.

Just as indelible as those photos, he says, is the way his preconceived images of Bronzeville and the South Side changed because of this project. “Outside of going to Sox games, I had never crossed the Dan Ryan,” says Murphy. “This was a whole different world for me. On top of that, I never thought I’d go into public housing units. The first time I went to Bronzeville, I was kind of scared. It felt strange walking around with a camera in what was a new world for me.”

The process of observing and learning that comes through in *The Way They Saw It* was a key part of the learning process for Murphy. “I listened, and that really made a difference in my academic career

at DePaul. It’s easy to treat people as subjects, especially if you are looking to have them fit specific stereotypes. But a lot of it was about listening.”

Murphy says *The Way They Saw It*, like the rest of this project, provides a “necessary tool” for studying Bronzeville. “In essence, if you only go by secondary research, books or statistics from a census, you will never know firsthand what happened in a community. To actually be there and think about issues—that was a great experience.”

MOLLY SZYMANSKI

Some students who contributed to this book and are already on a path to working with urban communities say the project provided them with invaluable experiences. “This Project solidified my passion for working with urban populations and the economically disadvantaged. It gave me knowledge and tools,” says Molly Szymanski, who is pursuing a master’s in public service at Marquette University in Milwaukee. Working on the book and Project not only exposed her to the community—it allowed her to learn a wide range of skills. “Through the project, I learned so many skills,” she says, “including geographic mapping, data entry, qualitative research, how to conduct interviews, how to organize meetings at the public library. And, because I was also a teaching assistant, how to work with students.”

For Szymanski and many other students who produced this book, the experience had an impact on how she learns and how she views the city. “Going out and getting that firsthand data—actually walking the streets—you are gathering information, not just reading about what happened. Because of this Project, I definitely have become a more attuned observer of my environment. Your city as you see it gets bigger,” she adds. “It’s not just the four blocks near where you live or go to school.”

In her senior year at DePaul, Szymanski worked

with Manley and the late Caleb Dube (right) to select photos for the project and collaborate on the development of its editorial content. The book is dedicated to Dube, a former visiting professor in the Department of Sociology and, later, principal investigator for the Black Metropolis Project. The book credits Dube for his “unfailing commitment, devotion and passion for African American culture.”

COMMUNITY AS PARTNER

Manley and students who participated in the Black Metropolis Project worked closely with a range of community partners, including several libraries on the South Side where “town hall” meetings on the project were held. According to Sherri Ervin, Head Librarian at the George Cleveland Hall Branch of the Chicago Public Library, “This Project encouraged people who were interested in the changes occurring in Bronzeville to come together. Anything that has a direct impact on community residents as it relates to housing, education and other key issues—that’s important for people to know about.”

Meanwhile, this new book not only depicts how history transforms a community—and the students who learn about it. Manley says that *The Way They Saw It* could also serve as a learning tool for students, schools and organizations that want to understand a neighborhood’s history and how it is changing. “This book, and the Black Metropolis Project, demonstrate how students can learn about a community by documenting the history of that community. *The Way They Saw It* shows how service learning plays a key role in the academic experience of students—while contributing to what we know about the Black Metropolis.”



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