

“It is an affront to treat falsehood with complacency.” Thomas Paine

CAMPUS REPORT

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MLA TRIVIALIZES BLACK HISTORY

By Malcolm A. Kline

Segregating history can lend to
inaccuracy, at least.

The good news is that the Modern Language Association (MLA) is giving civil rights history the attention it deserves. The bad news is they are doing it their way.

Why Martin Luther King, Jr. Still Matters

It is startling to realize how much the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. accomplished in a life span that did not even reach 40 years.

At this year's Modern Language Association (MLA) convention, Adrienne Brown of the University of Chicago remembered, arguably, one of Dr. King's less successful crusades. In 1966, Dr. King and his wife Coretta moved into the dilapidated housing Chicago's blacks endured and attempted to rehabilitate it and get the attention of the municipal administration of Chicago mayor Richard Daley.

Andrew Young, who worked with Dr. King, remembered that babies in the projects were wrapped in newspaper rather than blankets. Dr. King eventually did get the attention of the Daley administration, and compromises were made on the housing front, by Chicago's legendary political boss.

What got Daley's attention was the widely circulated photo of Dr. King getting a rock thrown at him at a demonstration. "Mayor Daley did not want to be the Bull Connor of Chicago," Brown opined.

Theophilus Eugene "Bull" Connor (1897-1973) served as a city commissioner in Birmingham, Alabama during the civil rights demonstrations there. "Connor ordered Birmingham police officers and firemen to use dogs and high-pressure water hoses against demonstrators," James L. Baggett of the Birmingham Public Library Archives writes. "Images of the resulting mayhem appeared on television and in newspapers throughout the country and helped to shift public opinion in favor of national civil-rights legislation."

Director's Corner

By Malcolm A. Kline, Executive Director of AIA



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Forewords by M. Stanton Evans & Malcolm A. Kline


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February 2017

Dear Reader,

You are looking at the first part of our series on this year's Modern Language Association (MLA) annual meeting. We always attend this gathering of thousands of English professors in order to give you the clearest picture that we can of what happens in their classrooms.

As well, it gives us a chance to review and preview the multitude of “studies” that proliferate in academe. Held in different metropolises every year, these gatherings are akin to political conventions, only not as much fun. This is not to say they are apolitical. They are anything but, although, oddly, their quest for the exotic seems to work at cross purposes with their politics, as the stories in this issue—which originally appeared on our website, www.academia.org—indicate.

Up until now, they have reserved their malign neglect for historical figures such as the framers of the U. S. Constitution. Really, it is remarkable that institutions which are ever on the lookout for “teachable moments” do so little instruction, even in the history they allegedly cherish.

Against this backdrop, is it at all surprising that there are budding young feminists who don't know what women's suffrage is? Some of these would-be women's rights advocates even want to end it!

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Editor: Malcolm A. Kline
Contributing Editor: Deborah Lambert

4350 East West Highway | Suite 555
Bethesda, MD 20814
202-364-4401 | www.academia.org

Please remember AIA in your will.

All the best,

Mal Kline,
Executive Director

“Images of the demonstrations are still regularly broadcast and published and have helped cement Connor and Birmingham as symbols of racial intolerance.”

Civil Rights History, MLA-style

Occasionally, professors at the Modern Language Association (MLA) have good points to make. Unfortunately, they soon get buried in the MLA’s favorite themes and concepts.

“Chicago remains one of the most deeply segregated cities in the United States,” Soyica Diggs Colbert of Georgetown said at this year’s MLA convention in Philadelphia. She then went on to explore “theories of white gender as performative,” “white gender problems,”



“white supremacist desire to control black people,” and “misapprehension” of “vertices of domination.”

Colbert spoke at “a special session” of the MLA conference on “Queering the Civil Rights Movement.” Actually, Colbert and her co-panelists—Salamishah Tillet of Penn and Dagmawi Woubshet of Cornell— examined the work of three artists active in the Civil Rights movement—Lorraine Hansberry, Nina Simone and James Baldwin.

Actually, with the exception of Woubshet’s presentation on Baldwin, the speakers did not spend much time examining the sexual preferences of their subjects:

- Hansberry, author of the still-performed *Raisin in the Sun*, once described herself as a “heterosexually married lesbian,” according to Colbert; and
- Simone, who recorded several songs chronicling violent episodes of the civil rights struggle, struggled with her own bisexuality, Tillet alleged. Tillet teaches a course in Black Rage at Penn.

Most English departments are represented at the MLA along with the various “studies” that proliferate in academe.

One of the many ironies in academe is the degree to which academics invert reality. This tendency is usually on full display at the Modern Language Association (MLA) annual convention during which thousands of English professors from around the world gather to see and hear previews of the latest courses and “studies” that proliferate in academe.

For example, in a panel discussion on “Racial Configurations of Queer Kinship,” GerShun Avilez of the Department of Sexual Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill quoted at length from a poem nearly three decades old by a noted, at least at the MLA, black lesbian poet named Pat Parker.

The poem is entitled “Where will you be?” and goes, in part, like this:

Boots are being polished

Trumpeters clean their horns
Chains and locks forged
The crusade has begun.
Once again flags of Christ
are unfurled in the dawn
and cries of soul saviors
sing apocalyptic on air waves.
Citizens, good citizens all
parade into voting booths
and in self-righteous sanctity,
X away our right to life.
I do not believe as some
that the vote is an end,
I fear even more
It is just a beginning.
So I must make assessment

Look to you and ask:

Where will you be when they come?

Of course, at the MLA, this poem with no rhymes was treated like the Battle Hymn of the Republic. With all due respect to the late poetess and Mr. Avilez and his studies, Christians from what you call the “heteropatriarchy,” are not coming for anybody.

Indeed, it is activists and lawyers who demand endorsement of a lifestyle many do not share who are suing, boycotting and attempting to put out of business Christian vendors willing to serve any customers, short of endorsing what they do not believe in.

Just ask Barronelle Stutzman. “Barronelle Stutzman, the sole owner of Arlene’s Flowers in Richland, Washington, has for her entire career served and employed people who identify as LGBT,” according to the Alliance Defense Fund. “Despite this, the American Civil Liberties Union and the Washington attorney general allege that she is guilty of unlawful discrimination because she acted consistent with her faith and declined to create custom floral arrangements for one same-sex ceremony of a long-

time customer and friend.”

He was a “customer and friend for ten years,” according to Mrs. Stutzman, who still considers him to be.

Black Lives Matter Street Theater @ The MLA

At the Modern Language Association (MLA) annual convention in Philadelphia this year, we got to see some of the “Creative Responses to Black Lives Matter”

They included:

- A filmed street theater presentation on “The Shooting of Africa,” presented by Kimberly Welch of UCLA, featuring actors with signs.
- A group called #Justice for Flint, that did a rap & music video which featured such lyrics as “Flintstones, yabba dabba do is a negro spiritual” and “Ready for your poison, the girls and boys in...,” which was presented by Elizabeth Anne “Betsy” Wheeler of the University of Oregon.
- A video entitled 11-10-10 by Alexandria Eregbu presented by Misty De Berry of Northwestern. It featured the filmmaker, Ms. Eregbu, lying face down on the streets of Chicago as passers-by walked past. The movements of two of them were scrutinized by the audience at the MLA panel discussion replete with freeze frames. One wonders if their ears were burning somewhere in the Midwest as they were deconstructed at the MLA.

Nevertheless, the deconstruction was not physical. Although you might argue that creativity should come more naturally to the MLA, the largest association of professors in the world, you have to give them credit. No people or property were harmed in the above presentations.

Malcolm A. Kline is the Executive Director of Accuracy in Academia. If you would like to comment on this article, e-mail mal.kline@academia.org.