

The Newsletter of the
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AAAS AND THE DIFFICULT DIALOGUES INITIATIVE SPONSOR A SUCCESSFUL SERIES OF LECTURES

After Affirmative Action?

Close to one hundred community participants, U-M faculty and students attended the brilliant lecture on affirmative action presented on video by **Prof. Cheryl Harris** at the U-M Detroit Center on October 23. From her position as law professor at UCLA, Prof. Harris analyzed the social and economic effects of the reversal of affirmative action in California. Two ACLU experts, **Khaled Beydoun, Esq.** and **Mark Fancher, Esq.** facilitated the question and answer session following Prof. Harris' lecture.



Cheryl I. Harris teaches Constitutional Law, Civil Rights, Employment Discrimination and Critical Race Theory at UCLA Law School.

AAAS and Difficult Dialogues co-sponsored this event in the U-M Downtown Center in order to offer the metro Detroit community an opportunity to reflect upon the history of affirmative action and its attendant controversies. This lecture was particularly relevant given the Michigan ballot initiative, which succeeded in overturning the provisions of affirmative action in our State. Members of the audience engaged in a rigorous, thought-provoking dialogue for two and a half hours. We believe it was an enlightening program.

Historic New Orleans/Katrina's New Orleans: Still Under a Cloud of Racist Assumptions

Such was the conclusion we drew from the lecture by **Dr. Daniel E. Walker**, a scholar of Latin American and African American Studies, who was the featured speaker at the November 14 program jointly sponsored by *Difficult Dialogues* and the African American Studies Program. Dr. Walker's passionate, energetic presentation, a

summary of his book, *No More, No More: Slavery and Cultural Resistance in New Orleans* (University of Minnesota Press, 2004), reviewed the ways in which the infrastructure and operations of the slave economy in New Orleans prescribed particular uses of the city's spaces, and generated deeply entrenched prejudices against people of African descent which persist in the social realities of contemporary New Orleans. Prof. Walker said that the government's abandonment of and irresponsibility towards the flood victims reflected the long-standing resistance of the dominant society to see African Americans as human beings. This very difficult assessment was

corroborated by Ms. **Nancy Novak**, one of the editors who worked with **Spike Lee** in the making of the brilliant documentary on Katrina, "When the Levees Broke." Ms. Novak commented briefly on an excerpt of the documentary that was screened during the evening, and joined Dr. Walker for the question and answer session. She told the audience that many of the interviewees in the documentary reported that their experience of demoralization during the flood was so overwhelming that they would never be able to return to the city.

With such a sad, but enlightening reflection on New Orleans and Katrina, it was a good thing that there was music, including a recording of Louis Armstrong's "Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans?", and refreshments inspired by New Orleans traditional cuisine. Ah, Cajun sausage, red beans and rice can help us survive a world of trouble!



Daniel E. Walker: author, historian, and director of the Center for Public History and the Arts.



Questions? Comments? Contact AAAS Director, Professor Gloria House at 313-593-5366.
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