Black Heritage Month Aims to Redefine “Black Strength”

Death of Coretta Scott King gives pause for more-than-usual reflection

B y Kelsy Chauvin

The death of Coretta Scott King and the celebration of Black Heritage Month this year offer an occasion to celebrate the roots of black Americans as well as their wealth of contributions to the nation’s culture. It is also a time to reflect on past struggles of African Americans and consider the progress yet to be made.

This month’s events at Columbia, built on the theme of “Black Power: Redefining the Concept of Black Strength,” kicked off with a lively and well-attended reception Feb. 1. The evening featured speeches, song and dance performances by Columbia students, as well as a raffle of African artwork. Organized by the office of multicultural affairs and the Black Heritage Month student committee, the event was the first in a series of black history-related activities on campus.

At the reception, keynote speaker Tricia Rose and University president Lee C. Bollinger noted that the Jan. 30 death of civil rights champion Coretta Scott King marked a moment for assessing what has taken place in the decades following the birth of the American civil rights movement.

Rose, an American studies professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz, spoke of the reluctance of many of today’s Americans to acknowledge that racism persists in the 21st century. “We have a new racialized climate, where we have to convince people that there’s racism.” Rose has written extensively on black popular music and black women’s issues.

Introducing African Diaspora Cultural Arts into City Classrooms

By Kelsy Chauvin

This year’s Black Heritage Month provided an occasion for New York City teachers to join with Teachers College students for a day-long conference on “African Diaspora Cultural Arts in Education.”

On Saturday, Feb. 11, more than 80 teachers, parents, educational reform advocates, teaching students, and artists gathered at the Milbank Chapel at Teachers College to discuss methods of developing lesson plans that incorporate African-derived cultural arts—such as Haitian music and dance, Brazilian martial arts and hip-hop poetry—into the everyday learning experience for New York City’s students.

The conference was sponsored by the Williams Caribbean Cultural Center/African Diaspora Institute, a New York-based nonprofit dedicated to promoting the cultural traditions and expressions of people of African descent, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year.

“While this celebration brings us a wealth of contributions to the American culture, and continues to permeate our society today,” Bollinger recalled his own experience in the civil rights era as well as his personal involvement in a Supreme Court case on affirmative action in 2003. He cautioned that many of the values and ideals that the movement championed are now in danger of eroding.

Dinkins enjoys multimedia tribute to Malcolm X

The occasion was a Feb. 6 reception in honor of Black Heritage Month, hosted by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg at the Malcolm X and Dr. Betty Shabazz Memorial and Educational Center in Harlem. The occasion was a Feb. 6 reception in honor of Black Heritage Month, hosted by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg at the Malcolm X and Dr. Betty Shabazz Memorial and Educational Center in Harlem. The touch-screen kiosks by Digital Knowledge Ventures (DKV) for the new center, which is located in the former Audubon Ballroom—the site of Malcolm X’s assassination 41 years ago this month.

Shabazz Memorial and Educational Center in Harlem. The touch-screen kiosks by Digital Knowledge Ventures (DKV) for the new center, which is located in the former Audubon Ballroom—the site of Malcolm X’s assassination 41 years ago this month.

In 2005, the center will provide educational and public programs and serve as a cultural resource for the Harlem and Washington Heights communities.

Figures from DKV’s Malcolm X kiosks