



**June 1, 2009**

## **Spring Recap: Plenty Going On**

by Tonysha E. Taylor-Samuels

Spring started strong and kept up the pace. On the heels of March break, the annual Junior Leadership Weekend launched April. During two fun-filled days at Camp Bournedale in Bourne, Massachusetts, rising Class I students got to know their classmates from a different and closer point of view; they brainstormed ways to set a positive tone and establish themselves as leaders of the School and the Class of 2010. Many of our students carried energy from Leadership Weekend to the Student of Color Conference (SOCC) sponsored by the Association of Independent Schools of New England (AISNE), hosted at Thayer Academy. Continuing the conversations about community that began at SOCC, student members of Common Ground, held their yearly social justice institute in May. In typical Milton fashion, students balanced their academic work with organized play at the annual multischool Onyx dance, biennial Culturefest, and a newly-fashioned multicultural dance co-sponsored by the Student Activities Office, Caribbean Students Association, Asian Society, and Jewish Student Union.

As part of our Alumni of Color Series, Ohene Asare '96, Langston Dugger '00, Regine Jean-Charles '96, and Jamal Shipman '03 returned to campus and shared their experiences, knowledge, and wisdom with our brother and sister bonding groups, a memorable experience. Brother and sister bonding is an opportunity available for black and Latino students to build a sense of community through biweekly meetings and quarterly outings. This year, the students in the group expressed a strong desire to meet Milton graduates of color; their idea resulted in the informal dinner and discussion series with local alumni of color. Ohene, Langston, Regine and Jamal shared experiences of church involvement, youth development work, counseling and advocacy work. Their voices were encouraging and their stories of perseverance and resilience were inspiring. In his article, "Why are all the black kids sitting together?" John Allan Williams '10 describes the meaning of the brother/sister bonding to him. Other student writers in this issue reflect on various recent activities such as Community Service Day, The Prison Project, and the West Roxbury-Milton Academy exchange. They highlight the opportunities at Milton for students not only express their diverse identities, as Elias Mizrahi did in an all-school assembly, but to also explore the world outside of our green acres. Enjoy this issue and please let us know what you think!

## Outside → ← In

by Heather Flewelling

“When the surface is all you see, it becomes all you know”

Sir Sidney Poitier shared that idea recently with a crowd of 3000 educators and students. He addressed a National Association of Independent Schools People of Color Conference. His vision of the world had expanded, he explained, through experiences, participation in various communities, and understanding the myriad roles he played over the years. His challenge to us was to pursue exactly what Milton compels: to dig, question and ponder with a desire to understand; to connect with the world around us. Walk in the shoes of another to imagine a different birth and life; consider who we might have been.

I have had many opportunities this year to help deepen our experiences. Multicultural programming and the Affective Education curriculum (see the glossary) strive to broaden students’ perspectives and help them consider, in meaningful ways, the experiences of others. We have stretched ourselves: through Community Service Day; through our speakers—faculty, students and guests; through course work and cultural events. Pushing ourselves out of our routines to permeate the Milton bubble has been the theme, encourage students outside of their comfort zones.

One “bubble buster” this year partnered the Class II Social Awareness class with Prison Empowerment Program (PEP) of Boston’s City School. PEP connects young people with prison inmates who have reflected on their actions and their lives; the program facilitates dialogue about crime and punishment among diverse groups of youth and adults inside and outside the walls of Massachusetts’ prisons. Comprehensive, realistic conversations about prisons and justice take place. Forty Milton students traveled to local prisons to hear inmates’ stories and explore their realities. Students confronted stereotypes sitting by inmates, often not much older than themselves, whose lives have involve very different circumstances.

Another mutually rewarding exchange via the Social Awareness Class occurred when seniors from West Roxbury High spent a day at Milton with several Class II students. Some of their comments: “When I first saw this place it looked like a college— it made me angry and sad [comparing Milton to their school]...” “This place is wild — the teachers really seem to care about the students and talk *with* them, not yell at them or think they should just be controlling the class.” “I couldn’t believe how focused everyone was. If you all saw our school you would be amazed.” “For all the cool things I saw, I’m not sure I would want to go here—it’s too competitive and we’ll spend our whole life being grown-up so maybe we should just be able to be kids.”

At Milton we ask students to move past their chronological age and meet their intellectual potential. Teachers’ expertise in providing deep and rigorous material and approaches are necessary to support this effort. Our visitors from West Roxbury suggest our faculty are achieving this goal.

Through discussions with urban public school students on campus to visits with inmates in local prisons we come closer to humanizing insights into conditions that affect others’ decisions and actions. Our students can listen, ask questions, and build realistic awareness of what is possible in the world. In the “pages” that follow, students speak about their experiences and the wisdom each has gained.

We at Milton look for inspiration in many venues: at Monday morning assemblies, over a CultureFest celebration, in a local prison visitors’ rooms, at various sites during Community Service Day, in our resting or exploration points over the summer. Don’t underestimate the possibilities. Even the side of a Starbucks cup reminds us, “The Way I See It- isn’t necessarily the way you see it- or the way it is- or ought to be. What’s more important- is that we’re all looking for it- and a way to see it.” Desi Denado Starbucks cup #293

## Culture and Affinity Clubs at Milton

**Asian Society** - promotes Asian, Asian-American and Pacific Island cultures through weekly meetings and activities.

**Latino Association** - is a social and cultural organization designed to promote awareness of Latino/Hispanic culture in the U.S. and abroad.

**Onyx** - is an organization through which Black students can find social, cultural and political support among their peers through weekly meetings and activities. Membership is open to all students who are interested in appreciating, respecting and learning about the Black experience.

**HAPA** - the Hawaiian word for half, is the name of the weekly discussion group for bi-racial and multiracial students.

**Jewish Student Union** - is a public forum for the Milton community to actively discuss issues about and affecting the Jewish community within Milton and beyond. All members of the Milton community are encouraged to share their thoughts, opinions and ideas regardless of their religion, race or ethnicity.

**Muslim Student Association** - is an organization for Muslim and Middle Eastern students to share their culture with each other and with other students in the school.

**Christian Fellowship** – reads books and holds discussion on how own's faith pertains to living one's life.

**GASP (Gay & Straight People)** - discusses issues of sexual orientation, to educate the campus, and to provide support to people of all orientations.

**Gender Equity** – meets to discuss issues pertinent to girls and women in independent schools

**Common Ground** - is a multicultural action-oriented association working to help Milton fully embrace all of its diversity. Its goal is to educate the community about ethnic, racial, religious, gender, family and sexual differences, while celebrating the "common ground" that brings together all groups at the school.

**South Asian Student Society**- is a social group for students of South Asian decent

## Upcoming Events

- May 29 - Asian Society banquet
- June 1 - Jewish Student Union end-of-the year fest
- June 3 - Onyx senior recognition ceremony
- June 5 - Graduation

## CultureFest: A First Visit

by Sherrie Holder-Watts P'09

*CultureFest is the biennial K-12 indoor cultural street fair celebrating the cultures of Milton Academy with food, dancing and performances.*

I thoroughly enjoyed my first visit to the Milton Academy CultureFest this year.

Milton has a wonderfully diverse culture. If you were ever in doubt, you had only to look around the room. It was a microcosm of our world. Begin with the displays of foods that represent the various countries and cultures. The options for snacking were endless, items from my Caribbean heritage to another personal favorite, Middle Eastern dishes, including stuffed grape leaves; to Latin and Southern style dishes; to those French crepes that were so popular. As for the entertainment, that too was fun. You didn't have to be Irish to tap your feet to the beat or to attempt a little Irish step dancing.

Students' pride in their cultures was very evident at each booth. The creative booth banners were impressive as were the unique table displays. Students manned their stations, served foods, and educated all visitors about their cultures. How very talented are the Milton Academy students.

This is my last year as a parent at Milton, as my daughter Loreen is graduating, and I am wondering how it could be that four years have flown by already. I will miss being a Milton parent, but I have committed to donate Bajan fishcakes to the next CultureFest. See you there. Smile.

## **Mexican and Jewish, too?**

*That's Right, Says Elias Mizrahi '10*

Good morning, some of you know me as Ilias (or flats), some of you know me as Elias (gringo), and some simply know me as big E. Besides being 6 foot 4, I am also Mexican and Jewish. Some of you may be wondering: Is that even possible? Never heard of a Mexican Jew before? Well, Mexico has a small community of Jews; Jews represent less than point one percent of the total Mexican population. That fact tells a lot about who I am.

I was born and raised in Mexico City, the second largest city in the world. I am the oldest of four. Up until last year when I came to Milton, I went to American school. I am sure my childhood was different than some of yours, growing in a city with 20 million people has various disadvantages. As a child I was never able to go ride my bike down the street, or walk home from school. Mexico City can be a very dangerous place, even more so for a child. However, I as grew older, I learned to love the city and the different opportunities it made available to me.

Some facts about Mexico:

- Main language is Spanish
- The minimum wage is five dollars a day, believe it or not.
- Burritos are not Mexican, just wanted to clear that up for many of you.
- The college process starts midway through senior year
- The city is divided into neighborhoods—very nice neighborhoods as well as very poor neighborhoods. I grew up in one of the more well-to-do neighborhoods.

When I came to the Milton, the major differences I saw were the those between American and Mexican cultures. Some examples:

People in Mexico usually have lunch at three or four in the afternoon, pm and dinner at 8 through 10 pm. In the U.S., many people don't take the sufficient time to sit down and enjoy a meal. An average American family only spends 20 minutes at the typical dining table. You might think that the whole eating culture does not make much of a difference in your lives, but believe me, it does.

I came to Milton primarily for the education. Another major difference between Mexico and Milton is how much people value their education. Back home, my friends have lots of priorities ahead of their learning. This is a major problem with Mexico's youth. I know that none of us would be here at Milton, if we didn't care about our high school education.

The things I value the most about Milton are the teacher-student relationships that you can build. In Mexico, such relationships are nearly impossible to build, at least from my experience. This is only one of the many things that learned to value here at Milton. This is one of the many things that I would have missed, if I had stayed in Mexico City.

## **Community Service Day: 837 Milton Students Learn While They Serve**

by Jasmine Reid '09

On April 29, 2009, Milton's biennial Community Service Day, a program started to help Milton students see the world beyond the "Milton bubble," went off without a hitch. In lieu of classes, the entire school participated for about three hours in a variety of service-oriented activities. Projects ranged from putting on a field day for a Boston public school to doing maintenance work at Mujeres Unidas en Acción, an organization helping low-income Latina women with their educational needs. A total of forty-four sites benefited from the enthusiasm and selflessness that 837 Milton students and faculty brought to each location, and the people at the sites were not the only ones to benefit from Community Service Day: Milton students responded just as positively to serving as the sites did to being helped.

In my thirteen years at Milton, I have found that, on the whole, black and white (and Asian and Hispanic) students recognize the merits of each culture and work towards the most accepting social structure possible. Outside of the brick and ivy, however, the race puzzle does not fit together as snugly as it does here. For me, Community Service Day held an unexpected – and yet very important – glimpse into the world beyond the Milton bubble.

Karen, a first grader from a Boston public elementary school, helped to remind me that, despite the leaps and bounds we have made in the past few decades, we still have a long way to go as a society. At the field day held on Milton's campus, I was Karen's host student, and when Karen decided that she wanted to get her face painted, I thought nothing of it. She forewent the traditional hearts, balloons, and cats for something more dramatic – and more disheartening: she painted her face entirely white because she believed she was more beautiful white than black. Her lips and eyebrows weren't even safe from the thick white paint. As articulate and thoughtful as Milton students are, neither I nor my friends could piece together a proper response to Karen's actions. In retrospect, we should have professed over and over again how beautiful she already was as a young African-American girl, but at the time, we were struck dumb – floored by her shame.

In the weeks since Community Service Day, the story of Karen has circulated around Milton's campus and has incited many necessary conversations. For me – and for all who witnessed Karen's attempt to disguise her true self – Community Service Day served its purpose: the Milton bubble fell away and in its place stood a host of issues that we as a community still need to face head-on.

## **Visiting at Prison; Talking with Inmates**

by Lukas Gaffney '10

My Prison Experience Project (PEP) visit was one of the more influential events in my time at Milton. Not only did it serve as a warning, but it also inspired through the commitment of the inmates themselves. The trip successfully debunked of the media-driven stereotypes that many people have would expect to verify.

Prior to this experience, I had never had any interaction with people who were or had been incarcerated. Admittedly, my expectations were stereotypical—I expected the vast majority of inmates to be from inner city areas, for example. However the inmates with whom I spoke (who are not necessarily an accurate representation of overall inmate percentages) came from various backgrounds, including from backgrounds similar to my own. If the trip was judged solely on its ability to remove superstition and stereotypes, then it would be remarkably successful.

It not only recast preconceived notions of America's prison system, however. The trip allowed meaningful discussion between inmates and students that otherwise would never happen. These discussions served as warnings about learning life lessons in a safer way than those the inmates chose.

Two particular elements resonated throughout all of the inmates' discussions: their dedication to family and drug use. Nearly all of the inmates talked about how all of their friends (who had helped land them in jail) had swiftly abandoned them, whereas their families (whose advice they had mostly ignored and scorned) were as supportive as they could be throughout the process. Moreover, the fact that nearly all of the inmates had children provided heightened context and helped us focus on their imprisonment on a much more intense and personal level.

The other recurring warning was that of drug use. Even if they were not incarcerated for drug use or trafficking, the majority of the inmates I spoke had committed their crimes while under the influence of some narcotic. Perhaps most striking was the fact that nearly all of them had, at one point, only drank or only smoked weed, but had then moved on. In a more effective way than reading a Discipline Committee statement, these testimonies served as a clear warning.

In every regard, the prison visiting experience was a positive one that I will not soon forget. From the workshop prior to the trip to the discussions with inmates themselves, the trip was important, moving, and constructive, and I would recommend it to all of my classmates.

### **Brother Bonding: Every Week It's Time Well Spent**

by Allan Williams '10

I started to attend brother bonding at the end of my Class IV year and have since become a committed member; I look forward to our weekly meetings. Not many students at Milton are familiar with Brother Bonding, but it is a great way for minority students to discuss current events and bond with one another at the same time. Minority students gather together to discuss race issues and our personal experiences. Brother Bonding is a great program.

My experience is that we cover an array of topics. We are not limited to talking about race issues in prep schools. Although race issues are usually at the core of our discussions, we actually focus on other news through out the world, such as politics, sports, and music. We can talk about anything that has captured our interest. This aspect is vital because no one wants discussion to be limited. Our freedom to talk about anything makes it clear that Brother Bonding is a tranquil and fun program. The atmosphere, for the most part, is open and light-hearted. No one is pressured to take a certain role; you can contribute to a discussion or just observe. On some occasions, I haven't contributed much, but still enjoyed myself. Ultimately, the opportunity to talk about almost anything, the tranquil and fun environment, and the food at our meetings makes Brother Bonding Milton Academy's best programs for minority students.