The Exoticism of the Minority

By Brandon Matthews
Class of ‘10

“Stacks on deck, patron no ice...we can pop bottles all night, baby you can have whatever you like...” The music vibrated through my body while the bass made the ground tremble. Our bodies swayed to the beat; the dance floor had become an inferno of pleasure. Lost in the moment, my friends and I were in a world of our own. “Ey, man, WHAT’S CRACKIN’?” Ice filled the room. The fires had been put out, our moment interrupted. Why? What crashed our precious ecstasy? Tyrone. He and his homies...they had ruined everything. How could anyone enjoy themselves with these thugs around...How could anyone enjoy themselves around THESE people?

Our minds are daily penetrated by stereotypes. We decide to attend an ethnic event by the inferences we make about the culture. Diwali, the festival of lights, annually yields an enormous audience of all races while AASA and Alma Latina events such as Kwanzaa and Casa De Alma do not attract such diverse crowds. The reason that such an imbalance exists: IMSA is plagued by the popular belief that African-American and Hispanic cultures are trite, characterized by stereotypes.

When students come to IMSA, they look for a group of people who can provide a sense of belonging. Often times, this comfort is found with people of their own race because of the inherent pre-established connection. Yet, interestingly, Americans are also attracted to Asian culture due to its exoticism. This interest causes us to strive to attain knowledge about their customs and traditions. When Asian events like Diwali or Chinese Lunar New Year take place, whites, blacks and Hispanics are inclined to attend as a result of their curiosity.

The exoticism of Asian culture originates from the unfamiliarity of its customs. Asian culture is not exotic in itself but the fact that the clothes, music, art, food, and appearance of the nation are highly contrasted by normal American customs creates an exotic appeal. African Americans and Hispanics are so common (continued on page 6)
Undoubtedly at IMSA, it’s quite impossible to walk around for a day and not notice the great diversity that exists amongst us. Whether it’s peeking your head into a classroom or just having lunch in the cafeteria, one can see how diversity essentially formulates a picture of IMSA where learning along side colleagues from different cultural backgrounds becomes a reality. This notion, however, can be misinterpreted by many, especially when cultural factors such as language are forgotten.

Upon entering IMSA, one common thought I shared with other incoming students was the question of my ability to thrive in such an environment. Once here, I realized I had many deficiencies I had never noticed before. Unquestionably, language was my biggest. Now, what I mean isn’t that I couldn’t speak or understand the English language, but rather that I lacked a good vocabulary. When it comes to writing papers, for instance, it becomes difficult to write at a level in which IMSA’s teachers sometimes expect. This inability places students, like myself, below the expected writing level line. Now, one thing to keep in mind is the fact that Latinos aren’t the only race affected by this language barrier. Other races such as Asians which includes people from the Indian subcontinent, Far East, and Southeast Asia, have similar problems. Usually, however, it appears not to have as big of an impact on them because they often learn the language at a much younger age. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that they are affected and therefore, it is an issue.

A different issue that arises from the lack of a high-quality vocabulary is speech. Students whose second language is English and whom speak a language other than English at home find it harder to communicate a point effectively. Naturally, in an argument or debate, the winner tends to be the person who is the better speaker and not necessarily the one with the best point. For instance, Rand Quinn who is the Policy Analyst for Stanford University and my advisor for the LEAD Summer Business Program stated that, “The offered service or product is not necessarily the most significant factor in a competition but rather the way in which the product or service is presented.” This statement in itself made me realize that more focus should be placed on my presentation rather than the actual product idea. In a sense, if your product or service idea is well rounded as far as your business plan is concerned but your presentation doesn’t resemble it, everything would be useless for judges wouldn’t be able to picture it. Similarly, if an idea or issue is ineffectively brought up and communicated terribly at IMSA by a student like myself, there is a large probability the issue won’t be taken seriously.

No matter how you look at it, language barriers can critically affect an IMSA student both academically and socially. I know that for me personally, talking to another student with a similar language background appears more natural than talking to someone who doesn’t. For that matter, many of our parents, parents of students with English as their second language, only speak our first language, Spanish in my case, and therefore, extend our responsibilities far beyond that of being just a student. In a sense, this is an issue that doesn’t necessarily have a definite solution but requires awareness. Through awareness, we will be able to better comprehend why we have the particular troubles that we do and why we sometimes ask, “¿Que?” In addition, we can come up with a way to help these students by offering a grammar and composition elective here at IMSA that could not only help students with English as their second language but also students who would just like to sharpen up their writing skills. Another way is by starting up ESL (English as Second Language) clubs that can help students better their speaking skills. Whatever the case may be, I truly believe that these actions will only furthermore lead us closer to accomplishing IMSA’s mission of “igniting and nurturing creative, ethical scientific minds that advance the human condition”. There is no doubt in my mind an issue exists and it’s up to us to take action towards resolving it.
I Represent the Black Culture...

By Melcolm Ruffin
Class of ‘09

The comments of athletes have always been harshly criticized by sports fans and writers, especially when their words can be construed as unpatriotic. Over the summer Josh Howard of the Dallas Mavericks experienced firsthand what it feels like to be placed in the public eye for statements that he made off record. On July 10th, 2008, at Allen Iverson’s Celebrity Summer Classic, NBA star Josh Howard was socializing with some of his friends with a camera phone present while the Star Spangled Banner was being played. Howard didn’t know his 9 second segment in the 4 minute video would be placed on YouTube and become infamous. Howard’s controversial statement is, “The Star-Spangled Banner is going on right now. I don’t even celebrate that shit. I’m black God damn it.”

Regardless of whether he expresses it verbally or not Howard will still feel unsatisfied with the American flag and what it stands for, because he thinks his race has been treated unfairly throughout this country’s history. It’s understandable to see why an individual might feel the way that Howard does, but my problem with Howard’s statements are that he includes the entire black race. By bringing the entire black community into the argument he is making too vast of a generalization. Many African Americans would strongly disagree with his statements, and some would even label it “unpatriotic” and “unacceptable.” There are thousands of black soldiers that have died for the American flag and thousands more that are currently serving in the military and would die for this country as well.

Howard could have chosen plenty of other ways to articulate the way that he felt without making generalizations. A much more effective, appropriate protest occurred in 2003 when a basketball player at New York’s Manhattanville College named Toni Smith, a 21 year old Caucasian female, refused to face the flag during “The Star-Spangled Banner.” As a result, Smith was thrust into the national spotlight. One of her several interviews concerning the incident was broadcast on the Outside the Lines program on ESPN. During her interview she told the reasoning behind her actions: “What the flag means to me: first, it stands for the millions and millions of indigenous people who were massacred to claim it. It means the millions of those enslaved in order to build it up. And it means the millions of those who are still oppressed in order for it to prosper.” Once Smith was given the chance to publicly explain herself the controversy and criticisms surrounding her actions died down, and she actually continued to turn her back on the flag during the national anthem for the remainder of the season without consequences from the college or team.

On the other hand, Howard’s “unpatriotic” comments cost him millions of dollars in endorsement deals and sponsorships. Howard’s ideas were not original or even that absurd, however, by suggesting that his skin color alone mandated his feelings was out of line. One’s opinion of this country is a completely personal decision that every individual, regardless of race and ethnicity must make for themselves. This country gives us freedom of speech, and it is our right to express how we feel, but it is inappropriate to claim that a group of millions of people automatically share our belief. Howard made this mistake and has to live with the consequences.
Of the many routes one takes to the IRC, one staircase generates an exceptional amount of controversy. The base of this particular staircase epitomizes exclusivity at the Academy. On one side, a group of senior students gathers and pointedly prohibits the inclusion of others to their bench. The other side, however, denies access to nobody who desires a seat. Regardless, the crowd that gathers consists of a group of students with striking similarities.

How did the name “Black Hole” come to describe the backside of the staircase leading up to the library? Despite many urban myths that have surfaced to explain the origin of its name, the label that this area has been given has nothing to do with race. In fact, the name derived from the shadow that casts itself under the stairs and causes a lack of lighting, hence, “The Black Hole.”

The Black Hole is a manifestation of a culture. Keep in mind that culture does not necessarily signify a blatant celebration or traditional display. It is a representation of culture because anybody has the ability to observe the habits, actions, and culture of the the people that sit there. A large group of students with the same goals as the rest of the students attending this school assemble during break time to complete homework or just to converse. While walking around school or sitting near the senior U-Bench, the prejudices surrounding this location can be observed.

How unfortunate that the disputes and disagreements of our parents’ and grandparents’ generation continue to transcend generational lines and have led to unfounded friction between the races of today. As far as we have come in society, there is no reason for this separatist attitude. Why is a group of IMSA minorities intimidating to the rest if the student body?

Though there is nothing wrong with sticking to a comfort zone, when people fail to look outside of their notions, they thrive on ignorance. Many IMSA students come from schools where they have been exposed to very little in regards to other races and the prospect of approaching another group of people strange to them unfortunately induces apprehension. People of all of the races that make up the IMSA campus have allowed this inherent fear of the unknown to drive their actions and has hindered the expansion and richness of what the true diverse IMSA learning experience could really be.

Sure, people of different backgrounds and interest are required to interact in school group assignments and projects; however, when the hypothetical school bell rings to signify the end of the school day or the end of a class and a break ensues or the residential life phase begins, these interactions decrease. IMSA possesses student representations from almost every continent on Earth “tossed” together in a single school. However, the “salad bowl” that is the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy will not turn into a melting pot if people continue to repudiate the fact that they can learn from cultures other than their own and some of their rigid misdefinitions regarding other races, particularly those in the minority are wrong.

The divide that exists between cultural lines must be crossed. Truly, ignorance is bliss. Many blissful people continue to walk around campus refusing to challenge their preconceived notions. If one were to observe the activity of the Black Hole or any other congregation of similar people on campus, he or she would see that our differences make up the cohesive IMSA community. There have been changes. The Black Hole, this year of 2008, is a much more diverse group of people. This goes to show that times are changing and hope still remains. Perhaps the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stated it best when he declared that, “We must learn to live together as brothers, or perish together as fools.”

I Can’t Watch BET?

Many people would agree that a person’s choice of clothing is a representation of their culture, but should character also be associated with race? If so, then race must not only dictate the way someone acts but also how they live. Early this school year, while lounging in the senior U-bench I overheard a couple of sophomores reference the BET awards. What they said sounded interesting so I asked, “What about BET?” In response, the girl asked, “Wait, who said that? You? Don’t worry about it, you don’t watch BET.” The girl that she was speaking with then replied, “Yeah, he doesn’t know anything about BET.”

I initially took nothing from her statement, I thought “ok?” It wasn’t until (continued on page 5)
later on that I realized the implications of what she said. According to her, because of what little she had seen from me in about 3 weeks, this girl concluded that I am sort of outsider, who is out of touch with black culture. According to her, one must wear baggy clothes and speak with poor English in order to be considered black. But when is my race and creed defined by such superficial things. No amount of slang can effectively change who I am and who my ancestors were, quite frankly, to think otherwise would be purely ignorance.

I will admit that I’ve never considered myself as being “truly black,” in fact; I’d wholly confess that I try to steer away from black stereotypes as much as I can. I’ve never been one to accept ‘thug life” or other absurd things that I know are commonly associated with “being black”. I proudly tell people, “No, I’m Nigerian” whenever they ask questions like, “do you wear a durag?” or “have you ever been in a gang?”

I don’t watch BET, but only because I can’t. I came home one weekend and I guess my parents decided our family would be better off with dish rather than Comcast. That’s not to say that I did not enjoy watching the channel, I was once an avid fan who greatly enjoyed quite a few of the shows that the station presented. It was entertainment, and it was often hilarious. From what these girls said I wonder does the name Black Entertainment Television imply that shows presented can only be viewed by African Americans? Quite frankly no, so it becomes apparent that their aim was not highlight that I’m not allowed to watch BET but that I don’t want any association with anything that has to do with being “black.” What an absurd assertion to make based solely on outerly appearance.

It’s funny how things tend to come full circle. I remember two years ago, standing at the front desk the day of registration, next to me stood the first black male I encountered at IMSA, Robert Washington. There he was tight jeans, small shirt, yet, the darkest skin. I remember standing there thinking, “who is this guy?” with a slight air of indignation. Who would’ve guessed that I’d eventually learn to like him? He lived in my wing sophomore and junior year and for my first two years here, I judged him for wearing tight shirts and considered him a sellout. It wasn’t just him, it was my own cousin, Dayo, the king of the too small Express shirt.

I guess all in all what strikes me the most isn’t the necessarily the assumptions that those two girls made about me, but the fact that I did the same thing two years ago. I now must say that I’m appreciative of the fact that those two chose to associate with people not based on race or listen to music because it was the “black thing to do” but rather on their own personal preferences. I don’t want to say that people who don’t act in the manner associated with their race, transcend their race, but rather they are wise enough to realize that birth does not dictate the way you want to live your life.

If I want to watch BET, I will watch BET.
in our society that we take their customs for granted. For example, some people do not realize that there are many types of Hispanic music. Each type of music has its own rhythm and an inherent dance form. African Americans also have music that is not the normal hip-hop or rap that you can hear on the radio every day. Soul music appeals to the heart of its listeners focusing on issues of love and other emotional topics. Still, the masses are unaware of these exciting art forms.

Why, then, isn’t there a curiosity about African-American or Hispanic culture? The belief that African-American and Hispanic cultures can be consolidated into a single preconception, a stereotype, is wholly inaccurate as well as ignorant. One item that people frequently lose sight of is that African-American culture includes the traditions of Africa, which are unique. African customs are just as, if not more, distinctive as any other culture. The societal perception of Africa is clouded by the public service announcements and documentaries about the crises that Africa is facing. Many people think that the exotic traditions of Africa died out long ago but that is simply untrue. We fail to notice the elaborate clothing, complex languages, oral history and complex dancing that permeate Africa even today. Not only is the entire continent of Africa unique, but each country within the continent has its own traditions and rich culture. Africa is full of striking characteristics and deserves recognition. Hispanic culture is also interesting because the widespread geographical origins of the people bring many variations to it. Most people know very little about the facets of Hispanic and African-American traditions and customs. Yet, the reputation that follows African Americans and Hispanics deters others from wanting to know more about these cultures.

Generally, African Americans and Hispanics are expected to be loud, belligerent, lazy, and unintelligent. But at IMSA, most minorities do not fit these rigid stereotypes. IMSA’s minority students are very receptive to people of all races and are usually open to informing other students about African-American customs and traditions. Interaction between a black student and white student is normal and commonplace. An average IMSA student is not afraid to approach a minority student when they are alone. Yet, when a white student sees this same black student with a group of other black people, they become intimidated. Often we assume that people get the mob mentality in a large group and act differently. Students should not be afraid of the group based on an assumption. This ignorance causes unwarranted fear among peers.

In admission, IMSA seeks to create a diverse environment for its students and their families. IMSA seeks to integrate all cultures into the learning environment because diversity can lead to new outlooks on other people and a greater understanding of the people students may encounter throughout their lives. Since IMSA has given students the opportunity to meet people who they may not have encountered in their hometown, every student should take advantage of this privilege. Students should break through the stigmas that cause them to restrain from conversing with students of different backgrounds. By choosing to attend IMSA, you accepted the challenge of breaking out of your comfort zone and challenging stereotypes.

“Students should break through the stigmas that cause them to restrain from conversing with students of different backgrounds.”

In conclusion, people attend SASA events because of the curiosity they arouse. The general opinion that Asian culture is more interesting than African-American and Hispanic culture hinders one’s participation in AASA and Alma Latina events. You should not be afraid to talk to Hispanic kids in a large group because they do not necessarily fit common stereotypes. If you fail to learn about African-American or Hispanic culture, you are missing out on an amazing experience. I challenge you to come to the next AASA or Alma Latina event and explore the diversity of another culture.
Americans with heavy accents? Their inability to speak English well only makes the Asian population appear dumb. Another thing that really bothered me is the idea that Asian Americans are afraid of the idea of a black president. According to an article entitled "Asian Americans Outraged by CNN Election Report" by Jun Wang, "CNN should be held responsible for making Asians appear racist, which is not true." Quite frankly, I agree. The report makes it seem like the only reason why Asian Americans voted for Clinton is because they don’t want to see a black president in office. However, the report failed to address that Clinton supported the 80-20 Initiative, a committee working for equal opportunities for Asian Americans in the workplace. In fact, Clinton’s endorsement of the 80-20 Initiative is probably the main factor in most of the Asian Americans’ decision to vote for her.

CNN is a very popular source for news and current events, but people should be aware that not everything on CNN is completely true. CNN, FOX NEWS, The New York Times, and almost every other type of media contain some sort of bias. It turns out that 41 percent of Asian Americans favor Barack Obama, while only 24 percent support John McCain according to the National Asian American Survey. If Asian Americans are really racist like the CNN report says, then the percentage of people voting for John McCain would be far greater than those voting for Barack Obama. So the next time you turn on the TV for a report on the presidential election, just remember to keep an open mind and not be fooled with what the media has to say.

There is one question that no matter how many times people ask it, I’m taken by surprise. “Can I touch your hair?” My first reaction to this is always, “Excuse me?” I am not a mysterious animal in a petting zoo. Why should I let you pet me like one? What takes me even more by surprise is when people have the audacity to touch someone else without asking? Years ago, when someone would ask me, I would let them, but as I’ve gotten older, I realized something. I am not a dog. No, you can not touch my hair.

Many people who aren’t African American have this strange curiosity about Black hair. Now, there is nothing wrong with curiosity, but there is a point when it becomes insulting. When I answer your question about my hair, don’t follow it up with disgust or an insult. For instance, one common question people ask is, “How often do you wash your hair?” First, not all African American girls wash their hair at the same time. Some wash their hair every one to two weeks, but it depends on the person. The response I often get from this is, “Eew, doesn’t that make your hair smell?” When someone takes the time to answer your question, don’t insult them. No, my hair does not smell after a couple days because it doesn’t get very oily. Other questions commonly heard are in the table below.

President-elect Barack Obama standing with his running mate, Joe Biden, at Grant Park
Courtesy of www.wsj.net

My Hair is not a Petting Zoo

By Chelsea Elder
Class of ’09

Many people who aren’t African American have this strange curiosity about Black hair. Now, there is nothing wrong with curiosity, but there is a point when it becomes insulting. When I answer your question about my hair, don’t follow it up with disgust or an insult. For instance, one common question people ask is, “How often do you wash your hair?” First, not all African American girls wash their hair at the same time. Some wash their hair every one to two weeks, but it depends on the person. The response I often get from this is, “Eew, doesn’t that make your hair smell?” When someone takes the time to answer your question, don’t insult them. No, my hair does not smell after a couple days because it doesn’t get very oily. Other questions commonly heard are in the table below.

Q: Why do you wear a headscarf at night?
A: Black hair, usually, is not as oily as other ethnicities so the scarf keeps the hair’s natural oils in and helps prevent hair from becoming tangled.

Q: If you don’t straighten your hair, will you have an afro?
A: No. Not every African American girl’s hair is really an afro. Most girls’ hair will either be slightly curly or slightly frizzy when it isn’t straight. An afro is an actual hairstyle; it is not the natural state of Black hair.

Q: Why do African American girls wear weave and what is it?
A: First off, African American girls are not the only people who wear weave. Weave is the same thing as hair extensions and tracks. Many people from other ethnicities wear weave as well. Also, not every African American girl wears weave. As for what weave is, it varies. Some weave is synthetic and man made while some is human hair that people grow and sell to companies. Weave is NOT animal hair.
Rap vs. Hip-hop

By Malik Alim
Class of ‘10

What is the difference between hip hop and rap? The term “rap” was not always connected to a form of music. In the 1950s and 60s, it was used as slang for “talk.” Old folks would say to younger kids, “Let me rap to you real quick.” Then they would say something that they esteemed as valuable knowledge or wisdom. That’s where “rap music” comes from. Real rap music is intelligent, poetic wisdom recited over synthesized sounds and beats. So what is hip hop? Hip hop is an entire culture of music, dance, clothing, and attitude.

When most people think about rap music, the image that comes to mind is a music video with a rapper with way too much jewelry, clothes that don’t fit, and scantily dressed women dancing in the background. Sometimes they throw in a couple of Escalades or old school Chevys with 30 inch rims, too. But that’s not REAL rap. That should not be what you think of when someone brings up rap music. I’m not saying that the example above is a perversion of the hip hop culture as a whole; catchy beats and sex appeal have a place in the culture. I’m saying that people should understand that these things are not what rap, or hip hop for that matter, is defined by.

When people talk about rap music, I think of artists like Common, Mos Def, and Jay-Z, to mention a few. Their music is politically conscious and intelligent most of the time. They actually have a purpose and a message in the songs they write and perform. But rappers like Lil Wayne and Young Jeezy are too focused on one aspect of the culture of hip hop (drugs, money, women etc.) for their music to be really engaging. I believe artists like Kanye West and Jay-Z have mastered the art of rap because they incorporate both aspects of hip hop into their music: the political side and the darker, more materialistic side as well. Understand that every culture in the history of humanity has had its beautiful facets and its ugly facets. Hip hop is often unfairly attacked for the things contained within it that are not perfect.

So when someone says to you that rap music is violent and disrespectful to women, realize that they do not know what rap is really about. They only see the mainstream artists that do not talk about things that really matter, instead of the less popular mainstream artists that espouse knowledge in their verse. This is why I feel sorry for people who say that rap is the worst type of music on earth, because if they really understood it, they would never say that. Rap music is a beautiful form of poetic expression, and that is why I love it.

From New Beginnings

By Mehmet Badur
Editor-in-chief

Sitting in a lab down at U of I, I had a lot of downtime waiting for my experiments (which never seemed to work, but that’s another story). I would spend countless hours on Gchat just trying to pass the time. Luckily, Ope always seemed to be online and we would somehow have drawn-out discussions about race and injustices in the world. I knew that there must be other students that thought the same thing that we believed and that many more would like to know what we thought. There was only one medium I knew of that would allow me to get these viewpoints across, the Minority Report. So one faithful summer day, I decided that I needed to revive the once prominent figure in the IMSA community. I told Ope my idea and he was quite the skeptic. He gave me reason after reason as to why we shouldn’t revive the newspaper. But, despite his hesitations, I knew that Ope was someone that I needed. After many hours of argument, I was finally able to convince Ope why IMSA needed the Minority Report. Still, the combine prowess of Ope and I would not be enough, and I knew I needed another editors. Pedro instantly popped into my mind as the other. He didn’t hesitate. However, reality dawned on us; we need a writing staff. So, in a hectic week, I managed to round up an enthusiastic writing staff and presented Bob Hernandez our proposed revival. From there, it is history.

We now present to you all the Minority Report. Our goal is to give another medium for the IMSA campus that, quite frankly, is rarely heard. I hope that you, the reader, is able to gain some new insight on another culture by reading this paper.