

Maya Cave '11 Reflects on Dr. Cornel West Lecture

Will Robinson, Feb 23 2011

(Editor's Note: Author Maya Cave '11 traveled with almost 100 of her classmates and teachers to nearby University of Delaware to hear Dr. Cornel West speak as part of the University's Black History Month celebration. Special thanks to Faculty members Stacey Duprey '85 and Treava Milton '83 for organizing the event.)

Being a senior at St. Andrew's, I've had a variety of opportunities to attend lectures and listen to speakers on any number of subjects. However, I can say with total confidence that Dr. Cornel West is the most intellectual and progressive speaker I have ever heard, and probably will ever hear. Approximately a third of SAS students and faculty had the opportunity to listen to Dr. West this past Monday at the University of Delaware, where Dr. West culminated their celebration of Black History Month. UD commemorated Black History Month through the theme 'Living and Loving Out Loud,' which attracted engaging, multi-faceted performances from all over the world. Without a doubt, Dr. West exuded a radiance and a passion that can only be described as 'Living Out Loud' in the pursuit of an appreciation for and a commitment to Black History.

Dr. Cornel West centered his talk on what he called the 'Socratic gift' in Black History and how the Socratic method of viewing one's life (asking oneself, 'How will I live?') can illuminate and uplift the world's need for a Black History Month. West used language so simple, yet so incredibly complex to paint the beauty in any sort of celebration of Black History, stating in the words of Socrates, "The unexamined life is not worth living." Thus, we must examine Black History in all its forms so as to decide what type of lives we will lead, regardless of our race. In this Dr. West cited our fundamental need for education because, as he put it, "Once you enter a classroom you are learning how to die, because you cannot live without first dying." West sees education as a lesson in death because the physical act of learning redefines the way one thinks, rebirthing students into people who can use their metamorphosis to transform humanity. Though West spoke to Black History Month in particular, his Socratic lesson is this: There can be no living, and as a result no changing, without learning about histories and peoples past.

In his reflections, Dr. West asked a powerful question to the audience, emphasizing the importance of the younger generation's response: "What kind of human will I choose to be?" That question, he said, is a question defined by the courage to love our roots enough to use our routes, or the opportunities life will grant us, to go out into the world and affect positive change. After listening to a man so filled with passion, so defined by love, I feel as though I have been given the tools and the courage to do just that, both at St. Andrew's and beyond.