

tional highlight of the convocation activities was the presence of Dede Mirabal, the surviving sister, and Jacqueline Guzman, a daughter of one of the martyred sisters.

Following the book discussion in August, students and discussion leaders were asked to evaluate the book and the program. Over two-thirds of the students read all or a portion of the book, and many indicated they planned to finish the book in anticipation of the author's visit to campus. Comments from students and discussion leaders were overwhelmingly positive. Many upperclass students, community persons, and alumni also read the book and participated in convocation activities. The book and its themes have been incorporated into both freshman and upperclass courses.

The program's success has gone far beyond the planning committee's expectations. In addition to providing the communal experience and stimulus for more intellectual discussion among incoming freshmen and their discussion leaders, the ripple effects of the program and sources for analogies in other contexts have just begun to emerge. We plan to continue to track and evaluate the effects of the 1997 summer reading program as we plan and implement future summer reading experiences.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Walter M. Kimbrough, *Associate Editor*

Seniors: Four Years In Retrospect

by Dan Geller and Dayna Goldfine

A Film by California Newsreel, 1997, 57 minutes

Reviewed by

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As an administrator, one often contemplates the future of certain students. What will these students look like by the senior year? What challenges and hurdles will they face? How will they develop as mature adults?

The recently released film, *Seniors: Four Years in Retrospect*, produced by California Newsreel, offers case studies of five freshmen who matriculate through Stanford University. This film is a sequel to the film, *Frosh*, which was the culmination of a nine-month study in an eighty-person residence hall at Stanford.

Each of the students profiled in the new film represent diverse backgrounds and, accordingly, face different challenges throughout their Stanford careers. The film begins with Monique, an Oakland student, who makes it to school despite a tumultuous relationship with her crack-addicted mother. Monique, during her freshman year, suffers from a lack of motivation and enthusiasm. Her priorities include scheduling classes around her soap opera. While Monique attempts to find herself, a residence dean intervenes, and connects her with a strong female mentor. During her senior year, Monique becomes a confident and motivated student. She becomes the only senior at Stanford selected to teach an undergraduate course, "The History of African American Women," which correlates with her major.

Debbie, according to the film, could be a poster child for Chickering's vectors. She divulges her fears of being so far from her home in Connecticut, of being the least bright student in her classes, and of not being accepted socially. Even though she begins dating a classmate, she struggles with her major and reconsiders her plans to attend medical school. Additionally, she participates in sorority rush and pledges, seeking to connect socially. By her senior year, Debbie has changed her major to feminist studies, as well as resigned her membership from the sorority, fearing that she has been focusing on superficial traits.

Cheng comes to Stanford with high expectations of himself and is stressful about his ability to achieve academically. He too is concerned about other students being smarter, more so because they might hinder his goal to attend Harvard Law School. After his first C paper, he openly contemplates transferring. He also discusses growing up in an Asian family and how that experience may have added to his level of stress. Cheng stays at

Stanford and does well academically and, as a result, receives two job offers and admittance to two law schools. However, his personal issues remain prevalent, as he comments about an "Asian American thing that nothing is ever enough."

Sam comes to Stanford from New Jersey, and he makes the basketball team. He speaks openly about his insecurities as a high school student, calling himself a nerd. Sam places his energies in the basketball team but ends up working as a team manager. During his freshman year, he joins one of the "more athletic" oriented fraternity chapters. He indicates that this is a good experience for him, especially the bonding activities with the other men. By his senior year, Sam is chapter president, and his peers refer to him as a "Big Man On Campus." He credits his fraternity experience with enhancing his social skills and comfort in groups. He is also the senior manager for the basketball team.

Lastly, Brandi arrives at Stanford from Indiana. She is the confused freshman, without a focus on either a major or area of interest, but she takes calculus and biology courses. During her freshman year, she becomes inspired through a philosophy class and begins to question the meaning of life. She also begins to explore her identity as an African-American. Brandi remains concerned about her future until her senior year. Although she feels more connected, especially with black women through membership in her sorority, she seeks an alternative course of action. Brandi leaves Stanford during her senior year to go home and work and returns to school three years later to graduate.

This film appears to provide many opportunities for substantive dialogue through an orientation program or a freshman year experience course/hall. Each of the students raises pertinent issues that today's freshmen face, such as staying in school or taking time off, deciding whether to join a Greek organization, finding reasons for academic motivation, and deciding their majors and careers. The five students chronicled are success stories, which should provide motivation for new freshmen. The realism of their experiences, including some of the setbacks and pitfalls, offers a full range of possibilities that college can provide.

The film is frank and real, which generally appeals to today's students. The dialogue contains profanity as well as positive scenes of friendship and mentoring. Accordingly, there are several themes which should be followed through discussion in order to provide an understanding of the collegiate experience. Issues of gender, race, family, and choices are abundant in the film.

In less than an hour, this film adequately introduces the major issues facing college freshmen and their matriculation. The only awkward scene is between Debbie and Sam who, as freshmen, discuss issues of race and gender. Debbie declares that she believes people of color hate Sam because he is a white man and later declares that she thinks women hate him as well. While this discussion can provoke thoughtful discussion, it appears out of context with the rest of the film—an unnecessary attempt to include a thought-provoking statement on race and gender.

Seniors is by far one of the better films this reviewer has previewed for orientation programs. The students are believable and real, their dialogue is genuine and frank, and their experiences are typical of many college undergraduates. More than anything else, *Seniors* might serve as a motivator to students who experience similar situations throughout their college experiences. All of the students in the film, despite struggles, graduate

and do well. This film offers both the reality of college life and a strong message of persistence and hope. As a result, *Seniors: Four Years in Retrospect* provides an excellent opportunity to initiate open and frank discussions with orientation and first-year students.