This special issue of the *English Times* is dedicated to the memory of Winston Anthony Napier, E. Franklin Frazier Professor of African American Literature, who died under tragic circumstances on May 18, 2008. Here you will find thoughts and recollections sent to the English Department last spring and over the summer from students and alumni who studied with Winston during his thirteen years at Clark. Put together, they portray a man who devoted himself to the life of the mind and to sharing that passion for ideas and books with his students and colleagues. During his time in our department, Winston pushed us to venture beyond the tried and true – by bringing innovative scholars to campus in the African American Intellectual Culture Lecture Series, by incorporating the latest works of fiction into our reading lists, by introducing the latest technology into our classrooms, and by thinking broadly and compassionately about issues of diversity on campus. As you read through this memorial issue, you will realize just what an impact he had on our community during his relatively short time here.

Virginia Vaughan, Chair
Although Winston Napier’s death is, clearly, a loss for the Department as a whole, allow me to say just a few words here about Winston’s seminal role in the graduate program. Winston possessed the rare capability of being impassioned about the most abstract of ideas, a passion that energized his graduate students in a way few scholars of ideas can. Coming to the English House in the evenings, I often witnessed how excited he was about an idea and how he could fire up his students to pursue the thought. Just as frequently, I saw him talking with graduate students after class, and, leaving the department earlier than he, I also heard from students about how he would engage them in discussions, explaining some of the more complex ideas into the early hours of the morning. The personal attention he was able to give to our MA students was, simply, invaluable. He is sorely missed.

SunHee Kim Gertz, Director
Graduate Studies in English

Conference to Honor Professor Winston Napier

Plans are underway for a conference to honor the intellectual contributions of Professor Winston Napier and to commemorate the significance of the African American Intellectual Culture Series that he initiated and nurtured for over ten years at Clark University. To be held February 27-28, 2008 during Black History Month, the conference will focus on the contributions of African American intellectual culture to advancing and broadening the study of Blacks in America, to deepening our understanding of race through the lenses of humanities, and to laying a sophisticated and multi-faceted groundwork for social and political action. Panels at the conference will include topics such as the role of the intellectual in African American culture, literary theory and African American Studies, the historical legacy of Black Arts, and explorations of gender identity in a racialized context. The keynote speaker for the conference will be Dr. Karla F.C. Holloway, who is the James B. Duke Professor of English and Professor of Law at Duke University. Dr. Holloway, who spoke at Clark early in the African American Intellectual Culture Series, also holds appointments in Women’s Studies and African & African American Studies. The author of six books, her most recent is BookMarks: Readings in Black and White-A Memoir (Rutgers University Press, 2006).

Fern Johnson 8/31/08
Dania Dwyer

There was never a Tuesday or Thursday evening in the fall when I didn't race to get to Professor Napier's class on time. There was never an evening when I was not at least ten minutes early to explore 'Radical Thought and the Black Arts Movement.' Winston had a commanding presence that hung in the room even after he had left, a voice that still echoed after he had long finished yelling at those who were late, unprepared or inattentive in his class. He was always prepared, passionate and probing. Every session was intense as he brought various intellectual challenges and demanded we meet them. His sharp wit and great sense of humor served as affable complements to his sometimes dry candor and rigorous approach to instruction. Professor Napier fulfilled all my old-fashioned expectations of what a 'great teacher' should be. His fervor was contagious and I have truly been inspired.

Jennifer Moy

Professor Napier challenged me more than I ever thought a professor could and because of that I became a more confident writer and thinker. He changed the way I read books and ask questions. I will never forget such a unique man. Remembering his empty pipe, bicycle, and glasses on top of his head will always bring a smile to my face. Thank you and my heart goes out to everyone in the Clark community that Professor Napier's passing has affected.

Georgia Rushing Macey

When I think of Winston, I remember how he always encouraged students to push beyond the boundaries of their previous experience, both in their studies and in their lives as a whole. He instilled in us a keen sense that we, as students of literature, are the future of literary theory and study. We are the ones who will break new ground, create new terms, and embrace new philosophies. We are the ones who will inspire and encourage future students through our discoveries and our writing, and he made us understand both the importance of and the joy in that responsibility. Winston's boundless enthusiasm and unparalleled ability to break new ground critically were instrumental to my growth as a student at Clark, and I am sure most of his other students could say the same. He will no doubt be greatly missed, but there is no doubt in my mind that his work and his indomitable spirit will live on through the many lives he touched during his tenure at Clark.

Dagmar Lonian

I studied under Winston Napier in 2002/2003 and, to this day, his classes remain among the most memorable of my academic career. I especially fondly remember his seminar on African American Literary Theory, which seems to me was his favorite, most passionate subject. Because we were only 4 students: 2 grad students and 2 undergrads, he decided we would do a "salon." So, every week we'd meet in his office, sit on the sofas, Jazz playing softly in the background, and have lively discussions about everything from DuBois to Baraka. It was an atmosphere of intellectual curiosity and vigor. His love and enthusiasm for theory and literature was palpable and inspiring to everyone present. This memory, as well as the image of him with his hand-held fan, scarf and sunglasses perched on top of his head, will always be cherished by this grad student.
Nickesia Gordon

It is with deep sadness that I received the news of Prof. Napier's passing. While I was a graduate student at Clark, I got to know Prof. Napier quite well as he was my thesis advisor. It was such a pleasure to take his classes as his love for what he was teaching was so infectious. He was a true scholar of English, erudite and intellectually savvy. He really cared about his students as I remember him giving me many books from his library that he thought would help with my research. It was because of his meticulous attention to detail and expert guidance that I was able to publish one of the chapters from my thesis in a leading scholarly journal.

One of my favourite memories of Prof. Napier is actually of his office. It would always be smelling of incense and candles which made our weekly advising meetings so pleasant.

My condolences to his family. He will be missed.

Anonymous

As a sophomore in his African American Literature course, Winston pushed me to grow into a stronger English major. There was some resentment on my behalf at the time, but he was merely trying to cultivate my capabilities. And he did. By senior year, I jumped at the chance to take his Critical Theory course, which I expected to be a challenge. Winston shined in this class. Never before have I witnessed such passion in the classroom, coupled with incredible knowledge. He was a master of literary theory, from formalism to deconstructionism. I smile when I recall his lecture...’the center is not the center’!

Tara Baratono

Though it has been years since we spoke, Professor Napier was the highlight of my academic career at Clark. Not only was he my honors thesis advisor after many classes I took with him, but also a dear friend. His passion, intelligence and belief in me opened up a world of possibilities and changed my life in a profound way. He will be sorely missed, and I am truly sorry for all the students that will never have the opportunity to engage this amazing professor. I will never forget him.

Christoph Lanzen

He was a very sincere and honest man that would share his thoughts about your comments and criticize or approve them. I appreciate this characteristic so much; it leaves the comforting feeling that he appreciates you and takes you and your thoughts serious. Last semester, we would often walk back to the Anderson House from Jefferson Hall and talk about the class, theory, and American Studies in Germany. We stood outside Anderson in the rain or snow and he always told me how much he loved this kind of weather. I was planning to stay in touch with him and write him every now and then. He was one of the few people that changed my way of perception and I really thank him for that. I will never forget him and I am very honored that it was possible for me to meet him.

Willa Deitch

Winston was a vital and important person in our department. He was both an extremely challenging and inspiring professor.
Adam Kohrman

He was such a delightful, brilliant, and often intimidating man. But underneath all of that was a layer of pure altruism and kindness. It was something only the students who ventured forth to know Napier saw. I'm lucky to be one of them.

Mark Duhaime

I saw Professor Napier for the softie/gentle giant that he was. He was a man rife with contradictions, inconsistencies, and spunk. Though it all, and because of it all, I had the utmost admiration for him. Professor Napier was IT for me. He is the professor who got me into my niche, who got me interested in all of the ethnic/subterranean and all around ass-kicking literature that I love. For me, he was the start, the push. Without him I wouldn't know Oreo, Paul Beatty, Black No More, Negrophobia and so on. I know its because of him that I may be fired from and reprimanded at future teaching jobs for trying to push the limit and incorporate as much as I can the vital text and literature of his example. Academically, personally, critically, radically, I am who I am in a large part because of Professor Napier.

Matthew Gilbert

I just thought about him this morning as I sifted through an anthology and spotted his name in the acknowledgments. I have emailed some friends who knew him while at Clark. My thoughts are with the Clark Community. So many people have lost a wonderful teacher, mentor, colleague, friend.

Tracy Walsh

He was a tremendously challenging and inspiring man, and everyone who was lucky enough to have him as an educator will miss him terribly. I certainly do.

Ubaraj Katawal

Professor Napier was one of the few people who inspired me. After attending his graduate seminar during the fall of 2005, I was equipped with new intellectual power to face the world. I often visited his office to discuss about my performance and to discuss about my future plan for a doctoral school. He provided me with inspiring advices. One day, I was in the hallway of the English Department when Prof. Napier climbed down the stairs from his office and asked how I was doing in my preparation for doctoral degree. I told him that I was reading some African-American authors to see if I could pursue in this area. Then he said, “Mr. Katawal, you should decide quickly because otherwise you might miss the deadline for the program.” It was very much needed at that time for me; otherwise, I would not be here today.

Marc Zagelbaum

Professor Napier was probably the most influential person in my life. He was extremely kind and caring, offering unflagging support and encouragement as my honors adviser. He encouraged me to continue my education and as a result I recently completed my MA in English at SUNY Buffalo. Professor Napier was one of a kind--eccentric, witty, and full of an energy that lit up his classroom and any conversation that I had with him. I feel that my intellectual experiences with him will stay with me forever and in many ways have made me the person I am today.
Joshua Flaccavento

Prof. Napier was running a few minutes late and I sat down in his usual seat. Nikki Rabin who jokingly said, "You should teach class, Josh." I refused, but I hesitatingly said, "Maybe I could do my Napier impression?" Then I recanted. I said, "As soon as I start, he'll walk in." Right then, Winston walked in the front door, and I said, "See? Quod est demonstrum." And as he walked into the room, he bellowed, "Quod ERAT demonstrum" - totally calling me out on my shoddy Latin.

Darlene Dobisch

Prof. Napier was a wonderful professor and a fine gentleman. It is very sad to lose such a young, energetic and engaged member of the Clark community.

Hannah Kelley

I never had a class with him, but he did give me advice on some literature titles when I was preparing for orals. He was very kind and knowledgeable--I know he will be missed at Clark.

Chris Ancona

I was saddened to hear about Professor Napier the other day. I offer my sincerest condolences. I only had one class with him and I prepared for it vigorously since word around campus was that he was pretty tough when questioning students. I read the book I was assigned - and most of the books from that class - backwards and forwards. I never studied anything so hard as Logic by Olympia Vernon - which I still have on the shelf next to me today. The English Department has lost a giant, and future Clarkies have lost a great mentor.

Pam Taylor

My condolences to you and the rest of the English Department for losing your colleague, Professor Napier. I can only imagine how you all feel, as I only had him for this semester and am deeply shaken by his passing.

Jill Bahadir and Eva Ehrgott

We just heard about Professor Napier and we are so very sorry. We still often think about the year that we could spend at Clark. We remember Professor Napier as an inspiring and engaging personality who was always truly committed to his students and his work. We know that his death means a great loss to the Clark community and especially to the English Department.

Clark University has established a memorial fund in Winston’s honor.

Contributions can be sent to
University Advancement, Clark University,
950 Main St. Worcester, MA 01610-1477.