NEWS

"The frosts of winter had ceased; its snows were melted, its cutting winds ameliorated."
JANE EYRE CHARLOTTE BRONTË

Cornel West speaks at Yale event about Black politics

BY LEO NYBERG
STAFF REPORTER

Cornel West, a left-wing academic who mounted a long-shot bid for president as an independent candidate in 2024, spoke in Battell Chapel on Thursday afternoon at a panel on Black politics "in dark times."

As a part of a day-long symposium on Harvard professor Brandon Terry's new book called "Shattered Dreams, Infinite Hope," which is about the history of the Civil Rights Movement and how popular accounts often romanticize the movement, West spoke with Terry and Columbia professor Farah Jasmine Griffin about progress and pessimism in what he described as today's "grim" political climate — all the while avoiding direct mention of President Donald Trump.

Panelists referenced current events, including the United States' and Israel's war in Iran, the shooting of Renee Good in Minneapolis by an Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent, and the federal government's crackdown on universities. The panelists, however, did not utter Trump's name, instead referring to him indirectly or as "the gangster in the White House" and "the current administration."

"We should be overwhelmed when we have a gangster in the White House," West said. He said we are in a moment of "grimness and dimness," and the panelists largely agreed that the Black political movement is in crisis. West, who currently teaches at the Union Theological Seminary, is a long-time critic of capitalism and has claimed that the United States is facing "moral collapse and democratic decay."

Cajetan Iheka, the director of the Whitney Humanities Center, which hosted the symposium, said in an interview after the event that he was not concerned about bringing in potentially controversial speakers and believes that it is important for Yale and other universities to continue doing so.

"At an event like this, even among people you would think are homogeneous, they disagreed," Iheka said. "And there are people who will disagree with even the principle or philosophy of an event like this. That's why it's a university. It's a place where we should be able to do different events, different kinds of programs that advance thought."

Megan O'Donnell, the center's communications director, said in an interview that the Whitney Center hosts symposiums throughout the year. Some symposiums are recurring, such as the Tanner Lectures, while others are one-offs based on faculty interest. This symposium was the latter.

O'Donnell said that 60 people registered for the day-long symposium, but the final panel discussion was open to anyone without registration. The symposium centered on Terry's book, which West and Griffin both praised as "magisterial." The panel featuring West was moved to Battell Chapel to accommodate a larger audience, according to the event's website.

During the panel, Terry explained one of the central premises of his book's argument about the Civil Rights Movement.

"One consequence of the romantic story that we've been telling about the Civil Rights Movement for a very long time is that our present settlements, the settlements that are being unravelled by the current administration and the surge of forcible authoritarianism, that those settlements are treated as unadulterated triumphs," Terry said.

Terry said those consequences are present in discourse about race today.

"If the idea of biological racism becomes fully government policy or the reigning idea in American institutions, I suspect that is one of the few ideas that would produce near universal Black solidarity," Terry said.

The panelists took questions from the audience at the end of the conversation. Some audience members asked about Afropessimism and nihilism. West said he was skeptical of "-ism" labels and distinguished between his type of pessimism and nihilism.

He said his pessimism was about acknowledging historical and current "catastrophes" for Black people, while continuing to fight for justice. He ended the conversation by saying that no one — even people who commit suicide — are true nihilists, a philosophy he claims is impossible to fully practice.

He concluded by saying that he wanted to end on a "good note," which elicited laughter from the crowd.

In an interview after the discussion, Iheka emphasized optimism amid dark times and crisis.

"What is more striking about these events is that, as you heard, despite our challenges there is room for hope," Iheka said. "As thinkers we need to keep that hope."

Battell Chapel is located at 400 College St.

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LEO NYBERG / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
As a part of a symposium on a new book about how accounts of the Civil Rights era often romanticize the movement, Cornel West spoke at a panel with the author, Harvard professor Brandon Terry, as well as Columbia professor Farah Jasmine Griffin.

Restaurant Week ends Sunday after two weeks of special menus

BY NICOLAS CIMINIELLO, CHANTAL EULENSTEIN AND QAMAR AL TAMEEMI
STAFF AND CONTRIBUTING REPORTERS

Twenty-three restaurants across eight neighborhoods are offering fixed price menus at affordable prices during New Haven's Restaurant Week, which will end Sunday after two weeks.

The event, run by Market New Haven, also takes place in November. Patrons can get a two-course lunch for $25 at select restaurants and a three-course dinner for either $45 or $55. The event expanded to two weeks in the fall due to diner and restaurant feedback, according to a November email from Bruno Baggetta, director of Market New Haven.

"The Spring Restaurant Week menus feature chef-driven dishes that range from traditional classics to inventive small plates and fondue, offering diners the flexibility to curate a unique dining experience," Baggetta said in a press release.

Six participants said the event offered opportunities to eat at fine dining establishments at relatively affordable prices.

Heirloom, the restaurant located on the ground floor of The Study at Yale hotel, has participated in the event since its 2008 launch.

"We've always found it to be a great opportunity to invite people in that probably aren't too familiar with the restaurant," Anthony Moir, Heirloom's general manager, said.

During Restaurant Week, Heirloom is always much busier, according to Moir.

Heirloom's Restaurant Week menu offers dishes that are not on its usual menu.

"It's a nice opportunity to try something different," Moir added.

Sonia Salazar, executive chef and co-owner of 80 Proof American Kitchen & Bar, said in a phone interview that her restaurant has participated in the event for the past four years.

"It brings people to the city," Salazar, who also co-owns Barracuda Bistro & Bar and Te Amo Tequila Bar & Tacos, said. "We have people from Milford, Shelton, Hamden, and that makes it a lot of fun."

Salazar described the event as "a taste of four different items for the cost of one."

She estimated that 80 Proof experienced an 18 to 20 percent increase in business during the event.

Stacey Porrello, the general manager of Caffe Bravo, said its special options included sweet-and-sour calamari and burrata with maple-roasted carrots and pistachios.

"We try to pick items that we don't have on our regular menu, try to get a little more creative," Porrello said in a phone interview.

Joseph Iannaccone, the head chef and co-owner at Casanova, said in a phone interview that Restaurant Week is important for introducing new patrons to the city's fine dining scene.

"It's all about getting new guests in and having new people try a restaurant," Iannaccone said, "and it also gives the guests a little bit of an edge when it comes to payment."

He added that Casanova sees an increase in business, particularly on weekdays, during the two-week event.

Joshua Krewall, a server at Villa Lulu, spoke with pride about the restaurant's food.

"We've always been happy to participate, and I think we do things really high quality here, and so it's a way for us to kind of showcase that," Krewall said of Restaurant Week.

Andrea Coppola, an owner of Encore by Goodfellas, said in a phone interview that the restaurant has participated in the event since its launch.

"We always say Restaurant Week is the best week," Coppola said. Preparation for the event begins about a month in advance, she said, adding that the event requires extra staff.

"It's a lot of preparation, but it's definitely worth it," Coppola said.

This year's event marks the first year of participation for the Wooster Square Italian restaurant Gioia Cafe and Bar.

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The twice-a-year program features low-priced fine dining across nearly two dozen New Haven restaurants.