



## Center Stage: The Newsletter of the Center for Organizational Dynamics

April 2007

Becky Collins, Editor

### Spotlight on Center Members: Christopher Rabb

The challenge in writing about Christopher Rabb has always been in figuring out where to begin. With his scholarship as a student at Yale and Penn? With his marriage to Law Professor [Imani Perry](#), now blessed with two children? With his entrepreneurial website-cum-blog, [Afro-Netizen](#)? With his coverage, as a credentialed blogger, of the last Democratic convention? With his published articles? With his work as a “consultant, social commentator, and [‘Netroots’](#) activist,” as his own [website](#) describes him?



This time, however, I knew just where to start, as Chris is currently writing a book that has grown out of his search for his ancestors, the subject of his recent article for [ColorLines](#) magazine, “Written in the Blood.” It is a search that was almost thwarted by the rage he often felt when he confronted the fact of rape perpetrated on his black female ancestors by his white male ancestors. In *ColorLines* he writes that such thoughts “filled me with so much rage and frustration that I nearly lost the will to learn more . . . [until] I learned the distinction between ancestry and heritage.” And that, as Frost once said, has made all the difference.

Ancestry, he determined, is uncontrollable, scientifically explicable inheritance through the bloodline. Heritage, on the other hand, is “who we choose to be.” During a recent interview on National Public Radio’s [“Radio Times”](#) with Marty Moss-Coane, he remarked that his “White ancestors weren’t stakeholders in my family’s cultural development. There is no known consensual relationship between blacks and whites [in my family]. Hence, white culture wasn’t passed down.”

By now, Rabb suspects that he is the most “genetically well documented Black person to date.” While his search for roots got off to a smashing start (“In the first day, I found information back to those born in Africa,” it came to an equally smashing halt (“It took 10 years for me to get deeper than I got that first day.”) He narrowed down the search through DNA testing which led him, ultimately, to learn that no fewer than 11 bloodlines are represented in his body, with 10 of those converging in the village whence his slave ancestors were abducted.

His book promises to be a bit of a “how to” as well as an irresistible look at the Rabb family, past and present, at the ancestors who contributed the genes and those who contributed the heritage. With forebears from such locales as Cameroon, Morocco, and Pakistan, that heritage cannot be other than rich, and deep, and colorful.

Don’t worry; I’ll let you know the publication date. In the meantime, if you want to get lost on the web for several engaging and educational hours, start at <http://www.chrisrabb.com/> and click on as many links as you can. Plan to spend some time there, as Chris has messages for everyone.

### Spotlight on the Center Advisory Board

“People on a mission” is certainly an apt description of the group currently serving on the Center Advisory Board, and they have adopted a new mission statement to prove it:

*The mission of the Center is to extend the Penn Experience and provide continuing education and professional development through academic and intellectual exchanges, networking activities, and social events for the students, alumni, and corporate partners of the Organizational Dynamics Program.*

This new Board has been quite active, having met three times and planned two events in its short tenure. The first event, Happy Hour in March, was a great success; the second, a Network Night in April, had to be cancelled because of low registration. As a result, the Board has decided to implement the following suggestions to increase participation in Center-sponsored events: offer activities on weekends as well as weekdays; offer some activities in the suburbs; allow sufficient time between events/activities; and set dates for the entire semester or year, so that people can plan in advance.

Board members are: Alan Barstow; Michael Boyer; Ali Castellini; Karen Chance; Linda DeLuca; Michael Farmer; Steve Hart; Janis Martin-Hughes; Ritwik Mishra; and Kim Perry. They all welcome your suggestions and comments which can be sent to me at [collinsb@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:collinsb@sas.upenn.edu).

### Spotlight on Organizational Dynamics Faculty: Ivar Berg to be Honored ~ Former Students Welcome



For nearly 49 years, Professor of Sociology Ivar Berg has educated and informed legions of students and business leaders. Known for his wit, his sense of humor, and his sincere dedication to his students he is always both entertaining and inspiring, Dr. Berg is never at a loss

for words [he did not learn English until he was in first grade, and some say he hasn’t stopped “practicing” since!]. His courses were among the most popular here in Organizational Dynamics; those who studied under him will remember the experience, fondly and forever!

In 2003, he was honored by the Eastern Sociological Society at its conference here in Philadelphia. During the proceedings, Douglas Massey, then chair of Sociology at Penn, said of Dr. Berg, “He is one of the seminal figures in the sociological study of the labor market and the founder of Economic Sociology.” Also in 2003 Berg’s landmark study of how to measure productivity directly, *Education and Jobs: The Great Training Robbery*, was revised and updated. His work influenced the 1971 Supreme Court decision that made it “illegal to use formal education for hires and promotions if the results were discriminating toward ‘political groups,’ unless employers could prove that their educational requirements were demonstrable predictors of work performance.”

He published in the areas of human resource policies, public policy and business, and industrial relations. He was, and is, interested in absolutely everything and everyone.

Though not officially retired, last fall Dr. Berg taught his last class, and in appreciation of his many years of outstanding teaching in Organizational Dynamics, we will honor him at our Commencement ceremonies on Monday, May 14.

Center members who took courses with Dr. Berg are cordially invited to attend the Commencement luncheon and ceremony and/or to share “Ivar stories” with us. Please RSVP to Becky Collins at [collinsb@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:collinsb@sas.upenn.edu), or 215-898-1059.

### Calendar

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| May 9  | <a href="#">Information Session</a> for prospective students, including those interested in the new <a href="#">P3</a> concentration, 6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m. |
| May 14 | 251st Annual <a href="#">Commencement</a> Ceremonies  |
| May 21 | Organizational Dynamics <a href="#">Summer 2007</a> term begins   |