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Director’s Dialogue on Art and Social Change: Culture, Ethics and Controversy

Exploring issues and events in connection with preview screening and release of “The Birth of a Nation”

September 13, 2016

On Monday, September 19 from 4-6 p.m. in Mershon Auditorium, the Wexner Center for the Arts will host a **Director’s Dialogue on Art and Social Change: Culture, Ethics and Controversy**. The latest in a series of events advancing the role of the arts in sparking meaningful dialogue about contemporary issues, the panel discussion will focus on the intense and contentious debate surrounding the upcoming release of *The Birth of a Nation*, an account of Nat Turner’s Rebellion directed, written by, and starring Nate Parker. The film will be screened at the Wex the following night.

Prompted by extensive media coverage and commentary about *The Birth of a Nation* related—but not limited to—sexual assault charges filed in 1999 against Parker and his former college roommate (Jean McGianni Celestin, who shares a story credit on the film), the Wexner Center has invited esteemed colleagues from across The Ohio State University to engage in an informed dialogue about the multiple issues in the spotlight.

Topics ranging from the culturally charged climate surrounding gender, race, and sexual consent to the impact that artists’ personal lives can have on the reception of their work will be discussed by panelists Sharon L. Davies, OSU’s Vice Provost for Diversity and Inclusion and Chief Diversity Officer; Wendy G. Smooth, associate professor in the Department of Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies; Dr. Joni Boyd Acuff, assistant professor of Art Education in the Department of Arts Administration; and Leslie Alexander, associate professor in African American and African Studies. Jennifer Beard, director of The Women’s Place at The Ohio State University, will serve as moderator. Representatives from OSU’s Sexual Civility and Empowerment Office will be on hand in Mershon to provide resources to anyone seeking to address related experiences one-on-one.

Notes Wexner Center Director Sherri Geldin, “When we committed to a screening of the film a few months back, we expected its subject matter—Nat Turner’s 1831 slave rebellion—to be inherently complex and layered. But we could not have anticipated the controversies that would soon surround its filmmaker, which injected new and pressing dimensions into this program that could not be ignored. It became immediately clear that, as a contemporary art center located on a university campus, the Wex could provide an ideal forum for such a critical conversation.”

Admission for the Director's Dialogue on Art and Social Change on September 19 is free, and the event is open to the public.

***The Birth of a Nation* will be presented at a free (and sold-out) preview screening on Tuesday, September 20** in the Wex Film/Video Theater before opening in theaters nationwide October 7. Immediately following the film, audience members are invited to stay for a moderated Q&A with Michael Gillespie, associate professor at the City College of New York and visiting professor at Princeton University. Before the screening, Gillespie will be at the Wexner Center Store signing copies of his new book, *Film Blackness: American Cinema and the Idea of Black Film*.

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR'S DIALOGUE

The annual Director's Dialogue, made possible by a lead endowment gift from an anonymous donor, is designed to explore the crucial role of the arts as a springboard for discourse on contemporary issues and as a catalyst for social change. Building on a loose definition of "dialogue," each year's program convenes a conversation among multiple voices, drawing on the expertise of artists, academics, and opinion leaders in a variety of fields to address the most significant social issues of the day. Previous Director's Dialogues have elicited insightful conversations about gender bias, racial inequity, health care in America, climate change, and urban unrest.

VISITOR INFORMATION

The Wexner Center and Mershon Auditorium are located at 1871 N. High St. at 15th Ave. at The Ohio State University (wexarts.org). Parking is available in the Ohio Union Garage, entered from High Street, and at the South Campus Gateway parking garage, located one block east of North High Street between 9th and 11th Avenues. The center is also on several COTA bus lines.

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