



THE FROMM INSTITUTE  
FOR LIFELONG LEARNING  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

# FROMM FOCUS

*The Newsletter of the Fromm Institute*

Issue #4 • May 24, 2021

## CELEBRATING OUR COMMUNITY

It doesn't happen by itself, and yet the forces that nurture community come together with such fluidity that identifying them as motivators can often be construed as an oversimplification. Basically, community is generated from a group of people; a common purpose or sentiment; spontaneous and natural evolution; an organized social life; and a name. Sound familiar?

Composed of 'career-free' people, 50 years of age and older, the Fromm Institute was founded 45 years ago in 1976 at the University of San Francisco. Grounded in the thoughtful environment of contemporary campus life, it's a healthful place where an intergenerational atmosphere encourages activity and awareness. Three times a year, Fromm presents a stimulating curriculum that offers its enthusiastic students, the Frommies, the opportunity for intellectual discovery in a welcoming and inclusive peer setting. In doing so, the Institute creates a supportive fellowship where shared lifetime experiences elevate learning to a unique plateau of understanding. There it is.

It is my hope that the courses you take, and the limited camaraderie you encounter via Zoom, continue in that tradition that has made the Fromm Institute a San Francisco "original" that serves hundreds of older students each day, and includes thousands of retired people among its lifelong learning student body and alumni. Talk about community! You are (virtually) part of a great one. I look forward to the next time we are able to see each other in person (hopefully soon)!!

### FROMM INSTITUTE CONTRIBUTIONS AND OUR FISCAL YEAR

The Fromm Institute fiscal year ends on May 31. If you wish to be listed in this year's annual donor list (released in the Fall) and have not yet made a contribution, please consider making a gift prior to May 31 – donations received after that date will be included in the 2021-2022 fiscal year.

Fromm Institute Membership Fees cover approximately sixty percent (60%) of program costs, making fundraising a big part of our revenue. Additionally, approximately twenty percent (20%) of the student body (one of every five students) are on partial or full scholarships. The Fromm Institute prides itself on turning no one away for lack of funds. Please consider contributing to the annual fundraising campaign, or joining the Alfred and Hanna Fromm Legacy Society with an estate gift to help us "make ends meet" this year and ensure this valuable program continues well into the future. To discuss additional options such as sponsoring a specific course or professor, or offering a faculty Chair in a specific discipline, please talk with Derek ([leighnor@usfca.edu](mailto:leighnor@usfca.edu)) or Scott ([moules@usfca.edu](mailto:moules@usfca.edu)).

***Thank you for all your generosity in supporting such a worthy organization.***



**Robert Moon** has written a two part essay on the work of African American composer William Grant Still. This week, we publish part two. Submissions to **Express Yourself** are accepted on a rolling basis and can be articles, opinion pieces or notes, written by you, the students or others in the Fromm Institute family, who want to share something with the larger community. Email your submissions to **Scott Moules** in the Fromm Institute office ([moules@usfca.edu](mailto:moules@usfca.edu) or [fromm@usfca.edu](mailto:fromm@usfca.edu)).

## Musicians of Color: William Grant Still (Part 2)

*By Robert Moon*

**William Grant Still: Afro-American Symphony—London Symphony Orchestra/Paul Freeman—in The Black Composers Series-1974-78, Sony Classical, 10CDs, 19075862152.**

William Grant Still's decision to compose classical music whose roots were intimately and emotionally connected to his African-American heritage was a ground-breaking and risky venture. Classical music was a foreign and unknown commodity to his own race who looked with skepticism and unfamiliarity at white European music. To white audiences, a black musician writing classical music was a social disconnect, fueled by decades of racial discrimination and exclusion. Still, enamored by his involvement with the Harlem Renaissance, he wanted to make a statement about the African American as an individual American, apart from white and black racial stereotypes.

By fusing jazz, blues and spirituals into a symphony with traditional classical forms, his Afro-American Symphony (1931) became an expression of the African American as individual. "I knew I wanted to write a symphony; I knew that it had to be an American work; and I wanted to demonstrate how the blues, so often considered a lowly expression, could be elevated to the highest musical level," the composer wrote. It was the first symphony by a black musician to be performed by a major American orchestra (1931 by the Eastman-Rochester Symphony Orchestra) and was performed by 34 American orchestras in the 1930's.

It starts with the English horn's bluesy melody in the first movement, entitled 'longing.' The oboe intones a theme from Still's heritage, a spiritual. Both themes are developed inversely with a nostalgic patina. 'Sorrow' expresses the fate of Still's people, with the oboe plaintively soaring over strings: injured but not broken. The scherzo, 'Joke' is the most popular movement of the work. The opening 'banjo' tune is reminiscent of the minstrel shows that were part of Still's musical background. Its similarity to Gershwin's melody 'I Got Rhythm' raises questions of who was the original composer, Still or Gershwin? The movement is an infectious



dance which Still ingeniously translates into a colorful symphonic romp. ‘Aspiration’ is a more serious and transcendent finale. It summarizes the work’s themes and the emotional trials and strengths of the African-American experience. Still, who was very religious, imbues the finale with a universal spirituality that transcends his race and becomes simply American. It’s a beautiful ending to this historic work. You can listen to it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8hzFcm6HCeI>

Even though the Afro American Symphony was well received by audiences and critics of the time, conductor Leon Botstein, in a program note written for a concert “Revisiting William Grant Still” on March 22, 2009, makes the point that changing racial attitudes among whites and blacks since 1930 have clouded the reputation of the symphony. The Symphony did synthesize Still’s black musical heritage with classical symphonic form, making it a unique American work. But it was also “the perfect act of tokenism on behalf of concert promoters and audiences.” It’s not unlike the programming of black American music by symphony orchestras today, as an October 2, 2020 article in the New York Times noted. That article also asks the question, will it last? America today is in a moment of recognizing the systematic racism of policemen targeting black citizens that George Floyd’s killing has made clear to whites and blacks. Maybe Leopold Stokowski’s 1962 recording of Still’s Symphony was inspired by the uprisings of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960’s. Ultimately, conductors and audiences will decide if the historical relevancy of the Afro-American Symphony merits a rebirth in the 21st century.

**Robert Moon is author of [Copland, Gershwin & Bernstein: Celebrating American Diversity](#) and can be reached at [moon2780@comcast.net](mailto:moon2780@comcast.net).**



***William Grant Still, known as “The Dean of African-American music.”***

# JUNE'S CONVERSATORY ON RACISM WITH PROF. MARA KOLESAS



Friday, June 25 at 10am

## A Memoir of Education, Race, Justice: What Social Transformation is Necessary to Change a Life? Michelle Kuo in Conversation with Mara Kolesas

Michelle Kuo is a writer, attorney, and professor. She is the author of Reading with Patrick, a memoir of mentoring and tutoring a former student in a rural Arkansas county jail. It was a runner-up for the *Dayton Literary Peace Prize* and the *Goddard Riverside Stephan Russo Book Prize for Social Justice*. A graduate of Harvard Law School, Michelle has worked to protect the rights of undocumented immigrants, assist asylum seekers, and defend incarcerated people. She has taught in prisons in the United States, France, and Taiwan. Michelle is interested in literacy, racial and socioeconomic equality, and abolitionist approaches towards prison and detention. She has published in *The New York Review of Books*, the *New York Times*, *Public Books*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *The Point* and other outlets; recently, she and her husband Albert Wu started "A Broad and Ample Road," a weekly newsletter on culture and politics. Currently, she is an Associate Professor at the American University of Paris, where she works closely with college students on issues of social justice.

[REGISTER HERE](#) (Free and Open to the Public)

[REGISTER HERE](#) for the Discussion Group at Noon

## A NOTE ON THE FROMM INSTITUTE'S DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS

As the organization slowly shifted to a more environmentally friendly form of communications, the staff started printing fewer materials and concentrating on digital delivery of handouts, newsletters, and catalogs. The advent of the pandemic accelerated that process; virtually all of our communications are coming to you via email. Some of you are saying you are not getting these emails, and some communications are tagged as Spam. The best way to avoid this is to add our two most used email addresses to your Contacts or Address Books on your tablet, laptop, or phone. It is best to create an entry as The Fromm Institute, and aside from adding our phone number (415-422-6805), you should add [fromm@fromminstitute.org](mailto:fromm@fromminstitute.org) (webmaster) and [fromm@usfca.edu](mailto:fromm@usfca.edu). The webmaster email will send out emails concerning your enrollment, your Frommcast membership if applicable and other communications concerning your classes (handouts, links to resources, etc.) The general email box ([fromm@usfca.edu](mailto:fromm@usfca.edu)) communicates with you directly and also sends out the weekly newsletter. If at any point your mail application marks us as SPAM or JUNK, then you will not see these critical communications. The only way around this is to officially add us to your contact list and/or address book. If you ever unsubscribe from our catalog/newsleter emails, you can fill out [this form](#), to be put back on the list. You can also share that form with anyone interested in receiving future catalogs and other information from us.



*As SFCM winds down another academic year, there are still many virtual concerts and recitals to be enjoyed by all. Below is just a tiny sampling of what is on tap at the end of this month. For more events, visit the [performance calendar](#) on their website.*

**Wednesday, May 26 at 8 p.m.**

***Musical Theater Showcase:*** A semi-staged thematic revue in which SFCM Musical Theatre students will explore beloved but also lesser-known Broadway show tunes and scenes.

**Thursday, May 27 at 7 p.m.**

***Music For Hard Times:*** It's a culmination of a workshop world-renowned ensemble The Living Earth Show (guitarist Travis Andrews, MM '09, and percussionist Andy Meyerson, MM '10) held with SFCM students. Composer Danny Clay crafted a living score that students added to throughout the workshop.

**Thursday, May 27 at 7:30 p.m.**

***Brass Chamber Music Concert:*** Students in the Brass Department will live stream their performance in this end-of-the-year concert.

**Sunday, May 30 at 2 p.m.**

***Historical Performance Student Chamber Music Concert:*** Students in the Historical Performance program will put on a chamber music concert via live stream. ***Historical Performance*** at SFCM traverses all eras of music history, allowing for an environment that enables the study of period performance practice and produces contemporary performances that are relevant, vibrant, and provocative.

**Saturday, June 5 at 5 p.m.**

***Patrick Galvin, Violin Recital:*** About 50 students study violin at SFCM, learning from four world-class faculty members, including the concertmaster of the San Francisco Symphony. Violin student Patrick Galvin will perform.

FOR NEWS FROM YOUR STUDENT ASSOCIATION PLEASE VISIT <https://www.frommfisa.org/>

FROM THE FROMM INSTITUTE STUDENT ASSOCIATION  
DIVERSITY TASK FORCE



**A REMINDER: MAY IS ASIAN PACIFIC HERITAGE MONTH**

The Fromm Institute Student Association Diversity Task Force reminds you of these events which celebrate Asian Pacific American Heritage Month throughout San Francisco this May. Below is the link to the online portal of events, performances, exhibits and lectures.

**[Asian Pacific American Heritage Month - San Francisco](#)**

San Francisco Celebrates Asian Pacific American Heritage Month now - May 2021.

The Fromm Institute Diversity Task Force invites Frommies and friends to celebrate Asian Pacific American Heritage Month through the wide range of wonderful programs offered by many organizations including the SF Public Library, Asian Art Museum and other major civic organizations.

Please check out the celebration website at [www.apasf.org](http://www.apasf.org)

FISA Diversity Task Force Resources see our You Tube playlist at this link: <https://tinyurl.com/5cey97sn>

FOR NEWS FROM YOUR STUDENT ASSOCIATION PLEASE VISIT <https://www.frommfisa.org/>

## FROM THE FROMM INSTITUTE STUDENT ASSOCIATION DIVERSITY TASK FORCE

### INTRODUCING LAVERNE SIMON A MEMBER OF FISA'S DIVERSITY TASK FORCE



Born into a segregated Washington D.C., Laverne's education was less than inspiring. Her school had few resources. You had to bring your own pencil to school or pay for one, she said. Children went home for lunch each day. Reading lessons from "Dick and Jane" or "See Spot Run" came in random shuffles of mimeographed sheets – never a complete text. There was corporal punishment if you misbehaved. Her world was small – and all black. She had little contact with white people until she entered an integrated school in New York at the age of eight; she said she imagined white children as aliens from another planet.

The family move to Brooklyn in 1955 launched her love affair with learning. Her new school had all the resources her previous one lacked and she did well. Seven years after graduating from high school, she joined the Army because of its generous education benefits. She planned to stay for four years; it turned out to be 18. The Army provided experiences, education, travel and a lifestyle that suited her, as well as a full career and secure retirement.

"I loved the army way of life. Meeting new soldiers, some I liked and some I didn't," she said. "I loved moving around from the U.S. to Europe twice, traveling around within Europe, learning a new language, and just being me in a very conservative environment that was protected from the outside world and its chaos, confusion and unfairness." Neither her education nor travel stopped when she retired from the Army in 1994.

Within two years, she earned bachelor's and master's degrees. She volunteered, including as a prep

FOR NEWS FROM YOUR STUDENT ASSOCIATION PLEASE VISIT <https://www.frommfisa.org/>

## FROM THE FROMM INSTITUTE STUDENT ASSOCIATION DIVERSITY TASK FORCE

cook at Project Open Hand, worked briefly as a teacher, got certificates in coding and graphic and website design and is still taking classes, including at the Fromm Institute for Lifelong Learning in San Francisco. And, she has toured about 25 countries, covering most of Europe, the United Arab Emirates, India and South Africa.

Laverne was born in 1947, a time when Jim Crow laws ruled throughout the south and as far north as Washington, D.C. “Everything was separated by race,” she said. When her mom took her to the movies, they sat upstairs. Only whites could sit downstairs. They couldn’t sit at the lunch counter at Woolworth’s. At Georgetown Hospital, where she was born, there were two wards — one for black patients, one for white. Neither had any black nurses.

Her parents, who had grown up on a farm, ended up in Washington D.C. as part of the Great Migration of some six million African Americans who left the south for more opportunities and work. Her father worked construction in the nation’s capital, but when a better paying job as a building supervisor in New York became available, the family of three moved. Her mother would be the bookkeeper for the rental operations.

Worried the transition for Laverne would be stark, her mother patiently explained she would be attending school with white children. Not only had Laverne never been around white children, she said, “Whites never came into my neighborhood – except policemen, and I was taught to fear them. Police were nicknamed ‘Bulls’.”

Slowly, she adjusted and began to thrive. The school had adequate books and supplies, free breakfasts and friends who introduced her to the library, which in the District of Columbia was still segregated. Her summer reading helped put her in an upper-level reading class and sparked dreams of college. She never married or had children, which made it easier to care for her mother, who was often ill.

FOR NEWS FROM YOUR STUDENT ASSOCIATION PLEASE VISIT <https://www.frommfisa.org/>

## FROM THE FROMM INSTITUTE STUDENT ASSOCIATION DIVERSITY TASK FORCE

In 1970, she moved to San Francisco, worked as a secretary typist at the University of California San Francisco and the California Medical Association. In the evenings, she took college courses in French, math and economics, and in 1976 she joined the Army. Her first post was at West Point, the same year the famed academy began enrolling women cadets. She was assigned to food service at West Point, for which she had an interest but no previous experience, but learned quickly. With promotions, she eventually became a food service sergeant, overseeing the feeding of as many as 500 people a day. Her duties eventually took her to Germany and the Middle East. She cooked in the desert and Germany and with portable kitchen trailers in war zones such as in Kuwait during the Gulf War. She was never injured but remembers driving through the Iraqi desert at night with bombs being dropped into Iraq.

While in Germany, she learned the language and earned an associate degree in liberal arts from the University of Maryland's European Division. Two years after leaving the Army, she earned a bachelor's degree in Human Resources from Golden Gate University. Then, she completed a master's in Education in 2000 at Stanford University and later a master's in Human Resources from Golden Gate.

She kept her eye out for interesting jobs but didn't really have to work. The Army had been good to her providing a comfortable retirement. It recognized her talents. She won awards for her cooking and received a Bronze Star and the Kuwait Liberation Medal for her service during the Gulf War campaign. "Truth be told, it was more challenging being a woman than being black," she said.

As she reaches a milestone of 74 years, she finds comfort in continuing education classes on Zoom, taking in the politics of the day via radio and television at her Park Merced home and planning a trip to another continent.

Edited from the interview printed in [Senior Beat](#) by Myra Kriege [here](#).