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Deadline Reporting

Mohammed Bilal, the 24-year-old poet and hip-hop musician known from his appearance on MTV's "The Real World", presented his 12-step program designed to increase diversity to approximately 100 students Monday at 8 p.m. in Olin Auditorium.

Clad in red sneakers, jeans and a navy T-shirt, the dread-locked Bilal appeared as if he could have been a student himself. Indeed, his manner was relaxed, and his method of presentation elicited many smiles and laughs from the audience.

"Everybody put up your right hand ... and say with me 'I am an Inverse,'" Bilal said, with a grin. This was the first step in the 12-step program which Bilal said he patterned after the Alcoholics Anonymous program.

After the crowd chanted this three times, Bilal explained that "Inverse" was a term he invented to describe someone who tends to only associate with people who are the same.

"There is nothing wrong with being proud of who you are ... but if that's all you ever want to do and know, then it is a problem," Bilal said.

Bilal said that society is responsible for teaching people to stick to "their own kind." He said one way people can combat this problem is by "knowing yourself and being comfortable with yourself" (Step Two).

Indeed, the African-American Bilal said that he has done just that. He said that he researched his heritage and discovered he had Native American and Welsh ancestors. He said that the process of researching one's heritage makes a person aware of the differences within him- or herself, and this awareness of diversity makes the individual more open to others.

Bilal also said it is important to look for similarities among people, no matter how different they appear to be (Step Three). He assured the audience that similarities are everywhere. As an example, he pointed out that the Ku Klux Klan and the Nation of Islam are similar because they both believe in segregation.

As the fourth step in his program, Bilal said that people should look at every meeting as an opportunity to learn and teach. Bilal said that he recently did this on a plane headed for Montana.

"[A guy wearing a cowboy hat] turns to me ... and goes 'How'd you get your hair like that?'" Bilal said. According to Bilal, the conversation that resulted from this man's curiosity allowed both of them to learn something new. The man in the cowboy hat learned about dreadlocks, and Bilal learned about Montana.

Thus, because he unexpectedly learned something from this man, Bilal said it is important not to judge people initially (Step Five).

Bilal also recommended that people should try something different once a month, travel as much as possible, read and make attempts to learn other languages (Steps Six, Eight, Nine and Ten, respectively).

However, Bilal warned the audience that they are bound to make mistakes when learning about other cultures. When this occurs, he said the best thing to do is to apologize (Step Seven).

In addition to these instructions, Bilal said that people should try to distinguish their prejudices from their dislikes (Step 11).

Finally, Bilal stressed that people should turn toward their respective God in order to gain strength and to learn about love (Step 12).

As a capstone to his hour-long presentation, Bilal provided the audience with an opportunity to experience diversity by hearing about his own life as expressed through poetry.

His poems ranged from the sensual to the sentimental to the comical. In addition to reading some recently penned poems, Bilal also shared some of his better known poems such as "My Mama" -- a poem he read on MTV.

Indeed, when the forum was opened for questions, most students were curious about Bilal's MTV experience.

"Were you upset MTV set you up knowing that Pedro was going to die [from AIDS]?" one young man in a baseball cap asked. Without any hesitation, Bilal said he harbored no resentment.

"He couldn't have had a better vehicle [to teach and educate]," Bilal said, with a smile.