

# **Nominees for the 2014 Robert C. Vance Distinguished Lecture**

**Prepared by**

**The Ad Hoc Committee of the Faculty Senate  
on the Vance Lecture Series**

**Candace Barrington  
Briann Greenfield  
Ernie Pancsofar**

**To**

**Christopher Galligan  
Vice President for Institutional Advancement**

**and**

**Nicholas Pettinico  
Associate Vice President  
Institutional Advancement**

**On behalf of the Faculty Senate, the Ad Hoc Committee on the Vance Lecture Series nominates the following seven individuals to be considered for the 2014 Robert C. Vance Distinguished Lecture. Please convey this list to the Trustees of the Robert C. Vance Charitable Foundation for their review.**

**The Ad Hoc Committee members thank the Trustees for their consideration of our nominees, whose names have been brought forth from the faculty.**

**The seven nominees are not presented in any order of preference by the ad hoc committee members.**



**Alice Walker** is an internationally celebrated author, poet and activist whose books include seven novels, four collections of short stories, four children's books, and volumes of essays and poetry. She's best known for *The Color Purple*, the 1983 novel for which she won the Pulitzer Prize—the first African American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction—and the National Book Award. The award-winning novel served as the inspiration for Steven Spielberg's 1985 film and was adapted for the stage, opening at New York City's Broadway Theatre in 2005, and capturing a Tony Award for best leading actress in a musical in 2006.

Recent works are: *Overcoming Speechlessness: A Poet Encounters the Horror in Rwanda, Eastern Congo and Palestine/Israel*; *Hard Times Require Furious Dancing*; *The World Has Changed: Conversations with Alice Walker*; and *The Chicken Chronicles: Sitting With the Angels Who Have Returned With My Memories*, a Memoir. She also writes regularly on her blog site at [www.alicewalkersgarden.com](http://www.alicewalkersgarden.com).

(Taken from <http://alicewalkersgarden.com/about-2/> )



**Dr. Maya Angelou** is one of the most renowned and influential voices of our time. Hailed as a global renaissance woman, Dr. Angelou is a celebrated poet, memoirist, novelist, educator, dramatist, producer, actress, historian, filmmaker, and civil rights activist.

In 1960, Dr. Angelou served as editor of the English language weekly *The Arab Observer* in Cairo, Egypt. The next year, she moved to Ghana where she taught at the University of Ghana's School of Music and Drama, worked as feature editor for *The African Review* and wrote for *The Ghanaian Times*. In 1970, she published *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, a novel that received international acclaim and enormous popular success. The list of her published verse, non-fiction, and fiction now includes more than 30 bestselling titles.

Dr. Angelou has served on two presidential committees, was awarded the Presidential Medal of Arts in 2000, the Lincoln Medal in 2008, and has received 3 Grammy Awards. President Clinton requested that she compose a poem to read at his inauguration in 1993. Dr. Angelou's reading of her poem "[On the Pulse of the Morning](#)" was broadcast live around the world.

(Taken from <http://mayaangelou.com/bio/> )



**Michelle Alexander** is a highly acclaimed civil rights lawyer, advocate, and legal scholar. In recent years, she has taught at a number of universities, including Stanford Law School, where she was an associate professor of law and directed the Civil Rights Clinics. In 2005, she won a Soros Justice Fellowship and that same year she accepted a joint appointment at the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity and the Moritz College of Law at The Ohio State University. Prior to entering academia, Alexander served as the director of the Racial Justice Project for the ACLU of Northern California, where she coordinated the Project's media advocacy, grassroots organizing, coalition building, and litigation. Alexander is a graduate of Stanford Law School and Vanderbilt University. Following law school, she clerked for Justice Harry A. Blackmun on the U.S. Supreme Court and for Chief Judge Abner Mikva on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit.

Her book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* has received rave reviews and has been featured in national radio and television media outlets, including MSNBC, NPR, Bill Moyers Journal, Tavis Smiley, C-SPAN, and Washington Journal, among others. In March, the book won the 2011 NAACP Image Award for best nonfiction.

"Now and then a book comes along that might in time touch the public and educate social commentators, policymakers, and politicians about a glaring wrong that we have been living with that we also somehow don't know how to face. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander is such a work"

— The New York Review of Books

(Adapted from <http://newjimcrow.com/>)



**Diane Ravitch** is a research professor of education at New York University and a prolific writer, who has published more than 500 articles and reviews for scholarly and popular publications on the subject. Ravitch is internationally acclaimed for her expertise on past and present education. In her most recent book, *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America's Public Schools*, Ravitch argues that the crisis in American education is not a crisis of academic achievement, but of the destruction of public schools across the country. *Reign of Error* experienced immediate success, landing in the number ten spot on the *York Times* bestseller list.

Drawing on her over 40 years of research and experience, Ravitch has become the champion for public schools across the country. She offers critiques of today's most popular ideas for restructuring schools, including privatization, standardized testing, punitive accountability, and the multiplication of charter schools, and offers a clear prescription for improving American public schools.

She currently shares a blog called Bridging Differences with Deborah Meier, hosted by *Education Week*, and also blogs for Politico.com and *The Huffington Post*.

Beyond academia, Ravitch has made a name for herself in politics as well. As Assistant Secretary of Education and Counselor to Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander in the administration of President George H.W. Bush, she led the federal effort to promote the creation of voluntary state and national academic standards. Appointed a member of the National Assessment Governing Board in 1997 and reappointed in 2001, she oversaw the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the federal testing program.

Having lectured around the world, from Poland and the former Czechoslovakia to Japan and Nicaragua, Ravitch is a seasoned speaker whose keynotes on democracy and civic education have been translated by the USIA into many languages, including Polish, Spanish, Lithuanian, Latvian, Russian, Belarussian, and Ukrainian

In 1989, she advised Teachers Solidarity and the Ministry of Education in Poland. In 1991, the Polish Government awarded her a medal for her work on behalf of Solidarity.

A native of Houston, she is a graduate of the Houston public schools. She received a B.A. from Wellesley College in 1960 and a Ph.D. in history from Columbia University's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences in 1975.

(Adapted from <http://www.apbspeakers.com/resources/speakerpdf/1001644.pdf>)



**Cornel West** is a prominent and provocative democratic intellectual. He is the Class of 1943 University Professor at Princeton University. He graduated Magna Cum Laude from Harvard in three years and obtained his M.A. and Ph.D. in Philosophy at Princeton. He has taught at Union Theological Seminary, Yale, Harvard and the University of Paris.

He has written 19 books and edited 13 books. He is best known for his classic *Race Matters*, *Democracy Matters*, and his new memoir, *Brother West: Living and Loving Out Loud*. He appears frequently on the Bill Maher Show, Colbert Report, CNN and C-Span as well as on his dear Brother, Tavis Smiley's PBS TV Show. He can be heard weekly with Tavis Smiley on "Smiley & West", the national public radio program distributed by Public Radio International (PRI). He made his film debut in the Matrix – and was the commentator (with Ken Wilbur) on the official trilogy released in 2004. He also has appeared in over 25 documentaries and films including Examined Life, Call & Response, Sidewalk and Stand. Last, he has made three spoken word albums including Never Forget, collaborating with Prince, Jill Scott, Andre 3000, Talib Kweli, KRS-One and the late Gerald Levert.

(Taken from <http://www.cornelwest.com/bio.html> )



**Melissa V. Harris-Perry** is host of MSNBC's "Melissa Harris-Perry." The show airs on Saturdays and Sundays from 10AM to noon ET. Harris-Perry is also professor of political science at Tulane University, where she is founding director of the [Anna Julia Cooper Project](#) on Gender, Race, and Politics in the South. She previously served on the faculties of the University of Chicago and Princeton University.

Professor Harris-Perry is a columnist for *The Nation* magazine, where she writes a monthly column also titled Sister Citizen. In addition to hosting her own show on MSNBC she provides expert commentary on U.S. elections, racial issues, religious questions and gender concerns for a variety of other media outlets.

Her academic research is inspired by a desire to investigate the challenges facing contemporary black Americans and to better understand the multiple, creative ways that African Americans respond to these challenges. Her work is published in scholarly journals and edited volumes and her interests include the study of African American political thought, black religious ideas and practice, and social and clinical psychology.

(Taken from <http://melissaharrisperry.com/about.html>)



About **Valerie Strauss** from the Washington Post:

*I've been covering education for at least as long as I went to school – from kindergarten through graduate school – and The Answer Sheet gives me the opportunity to keep learning (and get paid for it).*

*I research my own pieces that reflect the (often unfortunate) historic changes under way in the American public education system, and I publish the work of teachers, parents, researchers and others, some people with whom I disagree. I take a wide view of what constitutes an education topic: Anything that I happen to be interested in (and I try to mention the Beatles or Bruce Springsteen whenever it makes even the slightest bit of sense to include). I like to laugh, so sometimes, I run pieces that make me do that.*

The thoroughness of Ms. Strauss' work can perhaps be best seen in her commemoration of Veterans Day by posting the following Answer Sheet blog: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2013/11/11/americas-veterans-who-they-are/>

Based on the following quote, it would be most appropriate to have Valerie Strauss present from a stage at CCSU where teacher education in Connecticut has its roots: “Most studies show that teachers are the ones that make change in schools,” she said. “Not parents, not administrators. It’s the teachers. They are on the front lines, and you have to put a lot of time and money into teachers.” (excerpt from news article from September 10, 2007, The Washington Post, Center Focuses on Teachers, Not Test Scores.)

(Taken from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/pb/page/valerie-strauss>)