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Monday, April 6, 1998

The Gamecock

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Festival names music acts

staff writer JAMIE BOWMAN

Music Midtown, an Atlanta festival, is set to kick off its fifth anniversary May 1 to May 3.

The festival is organized by Alex Cooley and Peter Conlon who organize events from talent buying to marketing.

It began as an attempt to unite culturally and demographically diverse people in celebration of the arts. Since Music Midtown's debut in 1994, attendance has nearly tripled with a turnout of 200,668 in 1997.

New this year is a tent-covered main stage to allow for a more intimate setting for folk, jazz and Cajun artists.

This year's line-up includes such artists as 2 Skinnee Jays, Blue Mountain, Boys Choir of Harlem, Paula Cole, Foo Fighters, Fuel, God Lives Underwater, Indigo Girls, Etta James, Jolene, Letters to Cleo, Morphine, Pain, Sqwzbx, Tonic, Violent Femmes and many more.

Other festivities include an Artist's Market featuring handcrafted items by Southeast artisans and a children's area.

There will also be food and beverages available on-site from Atlanta restaurants such as Ben & Jerry's and Taste of New Orleans.

Tickets cost \$20 for a one day pass or \$30 for a three day pass and can be purchased through TicketMaster outlets or charged by phone at (404) 249-6400.

Anyone interested in volunteering should call the volunteer hotline at (770) 723-6572 or visit the Music Midtown website at www.musicmidtown.com.



SEAN RAYFORD Ass. Photo Editor
(Above) 2 Skinnee Jays, frequent performers at Columbia's Elbow Room Music Hall in Five Points, will join Jolene (left), Morphine, Sqwzbx, the Indigo Girls, Paula Cole and other acts at Atlanta's Music Midtown Festival May 1 to May 3.

SPECIAL TO THE GAMECOCK

Woman petitions to change dictionary's offensive entries

college press EXCHANGE

YPSILANTI, Mich. — In a second-floor flat in Ypsilanti, Mich., lives a woman named Delphine Abraham who has provoked the biggest dictionary in America to make a significant change, redefining hundreds of offensive words.

Among them: "nigger."

That's the word Delphine looked up late one night last spring, just curious, during a break in her overnight shift as a computer technician.

Delphine paged through the dictionary on her desk, Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, which sells hundreds of thousands of copies each year, second only to the Bible.

That it was there at all surprised her. But the first eight words of the 12-line definition stunned her even more:

"1: a black person, usu. taken to be offensive."

It took a second to think it through: A black person is not a nigger. Therefore, a nigger is not a black person.

Why would a dictionary print such a thing?

Countless other people have checked the same definition in the same dictionary.

If they were shocked, they didn't call home at 2 a.m. to say so, as Delphine did, rousing her mother from sleep to check her own dictionary.

They didn't start a petition drive as Delphine did, paying Kinko's to

print 1,250 petitions and 1,250 full-color fliers — calling for removal or redefinition of "nigger."

They didn't call the publisher of the dictionary time and again to discuss the problem, as Delphine did, until he no longer returns calls.

They didn't spend close to \$4,000, as Delphine did, on long-distance telephone calls and mailings, and fat faxes at \$1 a page.

If they were shocked, they probably didn't think there was anything they could do about it.

But Delphine did.

That first Sunday, she carried her petitions to a Detroit church, one of several where she regularly plays the drums to accompany the choir.

Everybody signed.

"That's when I knew I was onto something. Most people had never seen that definition, and were stunned."

She left petitions at churches, nightclubs, beauty shops and convenience stores. She handed them to college students, who made their own copies and passed out more.

Thousands of people joined, including more white people than Delphine expected. She's guessing she has passed on 10,000 signatures to Merriam Webster.

Since it began last spring, Delphine has done 26 radio interviews, including talk shows. Every big-name black columnist, and several white ones, has taken on the issue. So have black magazines like *Jet*, *Emerge* and *Essence*.

The NAACP joined the campaign last fall, threatening to launch a boycott, and printed on its Web site Merriam Webster's E-mail address www.suggest@m-w.com.

With every mention, Merriam Webster got more calls and letters — hundreds of them. Some demanded the word be removed altogether. A few liked it defined just as it is.

But most asked for some new definition that makes clear "nigger" is a slur — not a person.

Delphine's suggestion: "a derogatory term used to describe a black person."

In just a few months, Delphine's campaign came to define who she is. Every day someone calls about it. Each day's mail includes a petition or two, signed by 20 or 30 more people. All of it has changed her.

And now it looks like it will change a dictionary.

Merriam Webster this month conceded a new definition of nigger is "very, very likely" in its 1999 edition.

"We learned something significant," said marketing director Deborah W. Burns. "We learned our definition is not clear, or not clear enough."

The Massachusetts company is paying about a dozen outside consultants — lexicographers and linguists, some of them black — to work with its all-white senior editors to come up with new format for defining not just the N-word, but hundreds of offensive and vulgar words.

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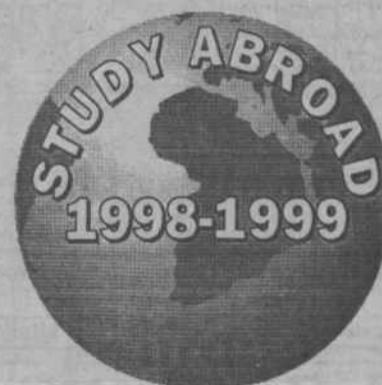
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