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# Lecturer discusses 'white privilege'

By Angela Flandaca  
Staff Reporter

Lecturer Tim Wise made it clear he was only at the University of Maine last Thursday night to speak about the issue of white privilege because he is Caucasian, and has been fortunate since even before he was born. Had he been an African American or of any other race, he probably would not have made it this far. This is precisely the problem, he said.

"He's an extremely passionate speaker. He's very passionate about his work. He's very passionate about equality and creating change," said Associate Dean of Students Angel Loreda, who introduced Wise.

"White Like Me - Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son," was not the first speech Wise made at UMaine. He last spoke at UMaine in 1996, and said he was glad to return to campus, but simultaneously sad that he had to return to speak to issues related to race, which still exist.

Wise introduced his talk with a description of his life thus far. He attended an expensive college that he would not have been able to attend if his grandmother had not co-signed student loans, which his grandmother would not have been able to do if her late husband not purchased a house in a "better" neighborhood. Had Wise not attended that particular college, he would not have had the connections to people, who then would not have gotten him a job as a national speaker. He might not have been as fortunate had he not been Caucasian, according to Wise.

"Had I been anything but white it would've been different," Wise said. "It means that I am here today ... entirely

because of white privilege."

Wise spoke about the different privileges people of color do not receive and about the stereotypes pertaining to each race.

"It's about who is and who is not included, and who's got the opportunity," Wise said.

He said Caucasians certainly have the opportunities. Whites have 14 times the net worth that African-American families have; 11 times the net worth that Latino families have; and the statistic is too large for how many times more net worth white families have compared with Native American families, according to Wise.

"Whites, on average, have by far more opportunities than those of color, just like those rich folks have more than poor folks," Wise said.

Caucasians are twice as likely to be put in honors classes at the high school level. African-Americans are twice as likely to be stopped for substance abuse issues, but whites are twice as likely to actually have an illegal substance in the car. Caucasians are less likely to be locked up in jails. In 1964, two-thirds of the people in jails were whites and one-third were African Americans. In 2004, two-thirds were black, while one-third were white, according to Wise.

He said African Americans have more to worry about than whites do. At job interviews, in schools, on applications, walking down the street, they are up against assumptions about their particular race based on what others in their race have done but don't necessarily represent the race as a whole, Wise said.

"They have to constantly prove their not the stereotypes," Wise said.

While this generation of Caucasians may not have owned slaves or fought against

other races for land and other resources, this generation of whites is definitely reaping the benefits of those racist acts, Wise said.

"White folks don't have to justify their presence," Wise said.

Caucasians benefit from psychological privilege in that they are not expected to answer for what other white people do, but it is extremely different for those of color, according to Wise.

Although Wise used comedy to explain how ridiculous stereotypes of certain races really are, he made sure the audience of more than 100 people knew the seriousness of the topic. While it may first appear that whites have it made and should not be concerned with white privilege, Wise assures that it does harm whites to be this privileged, he said.

"There's this idea that even if you have nothing else, at least you have white skin," Wise said.

Having white privilege oftentimes makes Caucasians let their guards down, especially with examples of tragedy like Columbine. There is an assumption that "things like that don't happen here," and, "this is a nice town," and, "white people don't commit those types of crimes so we don't have to worry about that here." All of these assumptions are ignorant, according to Wise.

"When we least expect it, that white privilege can bite us in the ass," Wise said.

White people need to take interest in challenging and ultimately changing the system, despite its benefits to them, according to Wise.

"[White privilege] is going to be there," Wise said. "The question is what white people are going to do with it."