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Media Advisory : Lecture by Alex Kotlowitz

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Oct. 18, 1999

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News Media Advisory

"Of all the many books written about race in America in the past couple of years, none has been quite like 'The Other Side of the River.' It is the difference between the two towns, one white, one black, that anchors the story, gives it its soul, and makes it important, essential even, for the rest of us to contemplate."

New York Times comment
on "The Other Side of the River:
A Story of Two Towns,
a Death and America's Dilemma" by Alex Kotlowitz

- Event:** Lecture by award-winning author-journalist Alex Kotlowitz
- Former staff writer at the Wall Street Journal, contributor to PBS' MacNeil-Lehrer NewsHour, best-selling author*
- Topic:** The Other Side of the River: Writing About Race
- Date:** Nov. 1 (Monday)
- Time:** 8 p.m.
- Location:** C-101 Anderson Auditorium, First Floor, Center for Natural Sciences, 201 E. Beecher St., Bloomington
- Admission:** Open to the public, free of charge
- Sponsors:** IWU Division of Social Science, Office of Multi-Cultural Programs, and the Educational Studies and Sociology departments

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Editor's Note: On Nov. 2 (Tuesday), Kotlowitz will be visiting three IWU
(more)

Kotlowitz to Visit IWU/2

classes:

- Racism and Anthropology; Charles Springwood, assistant professor of anthropology, teaches the class; 9:25 a.m.-10:40 a.m.; 205 Center for Liberal Arts.

- Foundations of Education; Monica Noraian, adjunct instructor in educational studies, teaches the class; 10:50 a.m.-12:05 p.m.; 105 Center for Liberal Arts.

- Childhood Experiences and Understanding; Robin Leavitt, associate professor and chair of educational studies, teaches the class; 2:35 p.m.-3:50 p.m.; 305 Center for Liberal Arts.

News media wishing to cover any of these classes should call IWU Office of University Communications at 309/556-3181 ahead of time for clearance.

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Background:

Last fall, IWU students enrolled in a course, Childhood Experiences and Understanding, taught by Robin Leavitt, associate professor and chair of educational studies, read Alex Kotlowitz's book, "There Are No Children Here: The Story of Two Boys Growing Up in the Other America." The book focuses on two brothers who live in a Chicago housing project. Subsequently, the students asked Leavitt to invite Kotlowitz to campus as a guest speaker.

"He is a very moving storyteller," Leavitt said of Kotlowitz, explaining his affect on her students. "He brings to life these children's lives and my students became involved in those lives."

The students, according to Leavitt, wanted to meet Kotlowitz and find out how he became involved with the brothers, what's happened to them, what Kotlowitz learned from the experience, and if the experience changed him.

Commenting on "There Are No Children Here," the *New York Times* wrote: "Alex Kotlowitz's story informs the heart. His meticulous portrait of the two boys in a Chicago housing project shows how much heroism is required to survive, let alone escape."

(more)

Kotlowitz to Visit IWU/3

Kotlowitz also is the author of the recently published, "The Other Side of the River: A Story of Two Towns, a Death and America's Dilemma" (Nan A. Talese/Doubleday). The book received the *Chicago Tribune's* Heartland Prize for Non-Fiction.

"The Other Side of the River" compares and contrasts two adjacent communities on the Lake Michigan shore: Benton Harbor, Mich., a predominantly African-American community, and St. Joseph, Mich., a predominantly white community.

The 1991 best-seller, "There Are No Children Here" has won numerous awards, including the Helen B. Bernstein Award for Excellence in Journalism, the Carl Sandburg Award, and a Christopher Award. "There Are No Children" was named one of the 150 most important books of the century by the New York Public Library. In the fall of 1993, it was adapted for television as an ABC Movie-of-the-Week, starring Oprah Winfrey.

Kotlowitz continues to write on race and poverty in articles for the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, *Rolling Stone*, and the *New Yorker*.

Recently, Kotlowitz was a writer-in-residence, at Northwestern University. He also has been a Distinguished Visitor at the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

From 1984-93, he worked as a staff writer at the *Wall Street Journal*, writing on urban affairs and social policy. Prior to joining the Journal, he freelanced for five years, contributing to the MacNeil-Lehrer NewsHour, National Public Radio, and various magazines.

His journalism honors include the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award and the George Polk Award. He is the recipient of two honorary degrees and the John LaFarge Memorial Award for Interracial Justice given by New York's Catholic Interracial Council.

Kotlowitz began his journalism career on the *Lansing Star*, a weekly in Lansing, Mich. In the 1970s, Kotlowitz worked as a community organizer in Atlanta.

A graduate of Wesleyan University in Middletown, Conn., Kotlowitz grew up in New York City. He currently lives with his family outside of Chicago.