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EMERGING LEADER

Northeastern's African-American studies chief sees Challenges, and opportunities

By Keith Regan | Special to the Journal



W. MARC BERNSAU | BUSINESS JOURNAL

EMMETT G. PRICE III

Title: Chairman, department of African-American Studies, and associate professor of music and African-American studies, Northeastern University
Age: 36

Hometown: Los Angeles
Education: Doctorate, University of Pittsburgh, 2000; master's University of Pittsburgh, 1999; bachelor's, University of California, Berkeley, 1996

When Northeastern University offered Emmett Price the chance to head its department of African-American studies in 2008, he immediately recognized both the challenge and opportunity being presented.

"Having been part of the department I saw it was an interesting time of potential growth, but that the department was in need of re-visioning as well at that moment," said Price, who has served as guest lecturer at dozens of universities and was a research fellow at Harvard's W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African and African-American Research.

"The challenge was to take a unit that was looking toward a slow death and revive it and breathe new life into it."

Price has set out to do that by infusing the department with new talent, bringing in scholars who work in a range of specialities, from music and popular culture — his own research and teaching focuses on the role of music in African-American culture as well as in sports — to public health and international studies. He now hopes to continue to build the department by attracting more students and more resources from both inside and outside Northeastern.

When he's not teaching or building the department's profile, Price works as associate minister at the Greater Framingham Community Church, does frequent speaking and music-ministry guest appearances and still finds time to perform music on occasion, such as at a recent benefit event at Sculler's.

What are your top three goals for the year?

To increase the number of students served by our department by 50 percent, to increase departmental development efforts by the same amount and to aid in the national re-visioning and re-imaging of studies of the African Experience, the African-American Experience, and the Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Latin Experience.

What are your guiding principles for good management?

People first. Then money. Then things. Suze Orman said it.

What is the best business decision you've made?

Enrolling in graduate school. That decision has led me to a rewarding and challenging career path.

What is the toughest business decision you've made?

Figuring out a strategy to revive a declining department without the possibility of expulsion or the immediate infusion of new talent or significant resources. The good news is we were successful.

Who were or are your mentors?

Olly Wilson, Nathan Davis, Charlotte Nelson, Leonard Brown, Joe Warren, J. Keith Motley — and numerous others.

What is your overall view of the Boston area as a place to do business?

In the business of education there is no greater place than Boston. That can create a challenge of its own when it comes to attracting the best scholars and teaching talent.

What are your civic passions and how do you give back?

Young people, music and ministry. I sit on the boards of the MetroWest YMCA, JazzBoston and the Black Church Music Ministry Project Inc., a music ministry consultancy firm I founded in 2006.

For more with Emmett G. Price III visit bostonbusinessjournal.com

