

State of the BSM

(The following is the text of a speech that Sherrod Banks presented during Freshman Pre-Orientation.)

by Sherrod Banks

Everybody in this auditorium do me and yourself a favor right now and Stop! (My name is Sherrod Banks) Look! (I am president of UNC's Black Student Movement) Listen! (Welcome to UNC) Take the shackles off your minds and Think along with me. Think with me about 1. How you became a student at UNC. 2. Why you are a student at UNC. 3. What issues you will concern yourself with during the next four years. Alright? Let's think.

How did you become a Freshman at UNC? You are too shy to answer, so I will assume for you. I assume that most of you believe you made it because you had a good high school record. Others of you believe you made it because you did well on the S.A.T. If my assumptions are correct, then both groups' beliefs are rooted (in part) in fantasy and we need to consider the implications of those beliefs.

In light of the fact that no Blacks, few Indians, and few women were admitted here before 1951, then if the reason that you are here is because of your intelligence, then what you suggest is that prior to 1951 no Blacks, few Indians, and relatively few women had enough intelligence to be students here. Now I know you don't believe that. But if you do, you're rather naive, stupid, or helpless. Either way, people like Dubois of Fisk, King of Morehouse College, Maynard Jackson of North Carolina Central University and Jesse Jackson of North Carolina A&T would take issue with you.

You see, we need to understand how two historical events enabled you to sit and me to speak here today. First, it was in 1951 when a group of Black NCCU students challenged UNC's segregationist policies in the courts—*McKissick vs. Carmichael*. The results of this litigation ended Whites only at UNC. Second, years later when the numbers of minority students enrolled here remained relatively few, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare looked down on UNC and said, "Yo, southern school, either you increase minority enrollment or we will cut off your Federal grants." And UNC's eyes got big, flashed dollar signs, and said "No problem."

My point is this. Today, you profit from your forefathers' good sense to use the civil rights movement's legal and political strategies to pry open doors to an institution where your academic intelligence was not previously welcome. Your forefathers' struggle was primary. Your intelligence was secondary. That's how you got here.

Why are you here? Simply, you are here to get an academic and social education. Others have and will address academics. I will not.

Social Education. To understand the social dynamics of UNC, I think we all should see how, in many ways, UNC is a microcosm of America. America's people, institutions, and ideals are concentrated onto this campus. UNC's students are White, Black, Indian, Hispanic, Asian, African, etc... very much a cultural melting pot—as is America. Consequently,

there is so much to be learned from and shared with these brothers and sisters. Let's do that. Let's try to understand each other and not draw stereotypical lines of demarcation that keep us forever apart. Alright?

Institution. When we speak of UNC's or America's institutions, we simultaneously speak of their ideals because institutions are the physical manifestations of ideals and ideas. When an ideal clashes with another, that clash produces an issue, which brings us to the third question: What issues are important to the UNC student body, the minority student body in particular?

I sincerely regret that I only have time to present one issue today, but I promise it to be a revealing one.

South Africa, not the southern half of the continent, but the country of South Africa. Now your initial reaction to this issue might be one of bewilderment. You might think I'm tripping, and you're probably wondering how a country thousands of miles away could have anything to do with you and UNC. Well guess what? I'm gonna tell you; right now.

South Africa's government practices apartheid. Apartheid, according to all authorities is the systematic racial segregation and discrimination as practiced by the government of South Africa. It is analogous to the plantation/sharecropping/penal lease system of the Ole South in America. That's what it is, now the relationships. Stay with me now because the issue is complicated, but it is comprehensible if you think with me.

The United States government supports the South African government largely because U.S. based multinational corporations operate in South Africa. I mean the really big one like: G.M., which not only manufactures automobiles, but whose assembly line can also be converted into one which produces military tanks to be used against Black South Africans if they challenge the government—the apartheid regime. G.M. has that kind of relationship with the apartheid regime.

How does UNC fit in? UNC invests monies and therefore gives support to various corporations, one of which is G.M. And so the foundation is built as follows: UNC, like America, invests monies—your tuition and fees—in G.M., and G.M. supports apartheid. Therefore, UNC, albeit indirectly, supports the apartheid regime of South Africa. Those are the mechanics, now how else is it (apartheid) related to you?

Your ancestors are African. You are African-American. Your ancestor's children, descendants of those who remained in Africa, and who now live in S. Africa, suffer today from the same dehumanizing conditions as your more immediate African-American forefathers did in this country. But I've said that. So perhaps I should prove my argument more concretely.

In South Africa, the average monthly salary for a White coal miner is \$1056, for a Black it is \$175. That's apartheid. Sharecropping is the American Experience. And it's the same thing.

In South Africa, education is separate and unequal. That's apartheid. *Plessy vs. Ferguson* is the American experience. It's the same thing.

In South Africa, Blacks do not have the right to vote or to hold public office, and this is a country [that is] 85% Black. That's apartheid. Jim Crow, racial gerrymandering, and grandfather clauses are the American experiences. People, it's the same damn thing. Excuse my Swahili. But we could be nothing short of fools if we did not realize that our parents and grandparents American experiences have and continue to affect our experiences.

Listen, the single most devastatingly hideous fact about S. Africa is yet to come. In S. Africa, the infant mortality rate for White babies is 1.2%, which is better (because it's lower) than the rate of American babies, which is 1.3%. Obviously, S. Africa can provide better pre- and post-natal care for its infants than can the U.S. Yet, the infant mortality rate among Black S. African babies is an unGodly 25.2%! One out of every four Black babies born in South Africa dies because of inadequate pre- and post-natal care. That's apartheid!

Why! Why would a rich country like S. Africa allow it to go on? Why would corporations like G.M. continue to support a country which has apartheid policies for the distribution of wages, the distribution of educa-

tional opportunity, the distribution of voting rights, and apartheid policies for the distribution of life itself? And why does any university continue to invest in such a corporation? Class of 1988, if the eyes of humanity and decency are not to be totally blind, they must be color-blind.

Apparently, UNC, a microcosm of America, sees color all to will. We must change that kind of vision. We've got to make this university understand that its support of apartheid is wrong—not later, but now.

Question. What messages have I been trying desperately to get across to you?

Answer. You are who you are, we all are who we are because of from whence we have come. We have not now, nor will we ever come so far that we cannot go back. We need to know what's back there.

And; don't be so level headed and have such myopic vision that you cannot see the real world around you. Look down. Look all around. And by all means, tilt your level head up to the one from which you get your power; power to build bridges of understanding between all people, all in the name of love.

Thank you, and stay tuned for Wyatt Class. □

What You Think

Black enrollment in this year's freshman class is said to be down from last year while enrollment at area predominantly black colleges is said to be up. Do you think this is a signal indicating a trend toward lower minority enrollment on UNC's campus?



Jackie Burgess

Jackie Burgess, 20, Junior Psychology, Littleton: "No. I think it's just a phase. When I enrolled at UNC I didn't look at black enrollment. I think this year was just a matter of black students choosing a different school."



Susan Fowler

Susan Fowler, 20 Senior, Jour/Ad., Greenville, S.C.: "I hope not. I think it's just for this year. It could be a trend if black high school students are choosing to go to predominantly black institutions over here. If it has to do with admissions not receiving enough qualified applicants then it's not a trend. If that's true then next year they could receive more qualified applications and enrollment would go back up."



Angela Barbano

Angela Barbano, 25, Journalism Grad., Washington, D.C.: "Maybe. But I think because of the recent desegregation battle this school has gone through, the administration will do all it can to see that doesn't happen."



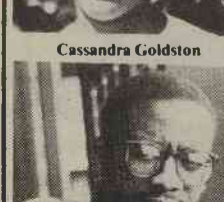
Ben Chisolm

Ben Chisolm, 19, Sophomore, Criminal Justice, Fayetteville: "No. This was the first year UNC included an essay portion to the admissions exam. The majority of black applicants may have been thrown by that. Once they get used to the essay, enrollment will pick back up."



Cassandra Goldston

Cassandra Goldston, 20 Junior, Drama, Durham: "Yes. I don't think enrollment will get any better until the University realizes it has to take a more personal approach in recruiting black students. So far I don't think it has done that."



Curtis Massey

Curtis Massey, 24, Public Administration Grad., Petersburg, Va.: "Yes. More and more minorities are being recruited by business. These companies are looking for those minorities on minority campuses. I think the need for minorities in the work force will continue, therefore minorities will continue to go to the traditionally black campuses in greater numbers." □