

"Free South Africa"...And The Rest Of The World

By Dana Clinton Lumsden
Contributor

South Africa and Southern Africa in general inspire certain images in the minds of most Americans and diverse images in the minds of a select few. Keith Haring's artwork devoted to a visual and symbolic image of the struggle entitled "Free South Africa" is an example (albeit violent) of the "white man being relinquished of his burden."

Unfortunately this image is applicable to so many situations in the world and particularly here in America. We as Americans must be wary of the way we process and view these images, for the media is potent in its ability to distort, diffuse and omit. This distortion, diffusion and omission is so powerful that we as Americans must seek out the truth.

The truth is South Africa is only one area of the world in which oppression is the dominant factor in so many people's lives. South Africa is only one area of the world where people who have the power to segregate themselves do so. South Africa is only one area of the world where a whole race of people complete a life wholly uneducated about themselves and their contribution to society. South Africa is only one area of the world where an oppressed people have turned on each other in a violent manner.

We can find similar situations in Australia (but not by watching "Crocodile Dundee), where aboriginals (any group of people who owned something before the white man took it) are treated horribly. In Quebec, where Native-Canadians are fighting to hold on to what is theirs. And certainly here in America as disapproval for having waited.

When Nelson Mandela toured the United States the media was full of "images." I remember waiting in a sweltering gymnasium in Boston's black community for five hours with several hundred "very special people" for a glimpse of Mr. Mandela. These "very special people" were content spending the majority of their time circulating the gymnasium floor to see exactly who from "their circle" was fortunate enough to attend the function. They were so caught up in their own "bougeoisiedom" that they did not make the observation that the very people who were absent from the event were those who should have been there the most. Meanwhile the media took up enough floor space for another seventy-five to a hundred people (maybe those who were just as poor but not as caught up in being a member of the black middle class) to hear the important message that Mr. Mandela was going to deliver.

To pass the time there were a few shameless displays of "traditional African culture" as some women dressed in "traditional Africa garb" (fake

Kente outfits) performed what appeared to be a mixture of urban contemporary dances with one African dance they did know. Outside there were a bevy of hawkers selling bootleg "Mandela" t-shirts with first and second place for most tacky concept going to a picture of Mandela with a Black Bart and a very Oriental, black Pat Morita-looking Mandela with the words "Keep Hope Alive" under his portrait.

Finally Mr. Mandela arrived flanked by a security detail of the politicians who had held him captive for two hours for a "private photo/chat session." The audience moaned in disapproval as Mandela told us he would only be there for five minutes because of prior obligations and that he was extremely sorry. A group of people who had not waited in a South African prison for twenty-seven years showed their disapproval for having waited for five hours for a man who had.

This is a reflection on images. As Mandela traveled around America speaking to the masses, there was a lot of popular support among African-Americans for the freedom of South Africa. There was no popular support for the freedom of African-Americans from their own ignorance. I watched in disgust as Americans of darker hues drank Coke in front of the brother's face, sported their Reebok athletic shoes (and in some cases killed each other over them), and continued to destroy the work ethic that is necessary to survive in tough economic times.

I was equally disgusted when I predicted that South Africa, Mandela and racism would again become "hot topics" at UNC with all the campus organizations and publications doing what they thought were the right things in addressing the issue.

I pictured a campus where African-American students segregate themselves in steamy highrises (some in need of pest control) rather than chose more spacious, convenient locations on campus. I pictured these same black students talk about oppression, "the power structure," and the "dominant paradigm" instead of talking about "achievement" and "action." I pictured uncomfortable white candidates speaking in front of one tenth of those who should be in the Black Student Movement. I pictured black student body presidential candidates with fiery speeches straight-out-of-the-pulpit telling "us" to vote against "them" because "they don't want me there." And then hurriedly leaving to be with "them."

I pictured liberal white groups scrambling to

fit the schedule of the campus' latest "black political heavy" in order to add diversity to their "coalition." I picture white frats (who will never be integrated) having a mixer with a black fraternity in which no one actually "mixes." I picture a so-called "integrated fraternity" taking pictures with its black servants. I picture African-Americans dismissing those who have a rainbow of friends as "pseudo-niggers", "gray" and "over-assimilators." I picture a University with a racial harassment policy that requires the judgement of a "reasonable person" in determining such a harassment. "Reasonable people" are eliminated from other harassment policies.

In short, UNC has a long way to go. We are oppressing ourselves with an illusion that hypocrisy will make the situation go away. Black students have to be so proud of their culture, so thorough in nature, so supportive of their own organizations and institutions that they can go on campus, meet other people, and not be chastised for living and learning outside of the classroom. Our predecessors did not fight to integrate the public and private institutions of America so that experts on "negritude" could hold hostage to an entire campus. Those who integrated the University were heroes and heroines. Those who integrate North Campus, the lacrosse, swimming, and crew teams are "pseudoblacks." Where is the logic here?

Black freshman be wary of those who tell "you are not wanted here". Maybe you're not. But you and your parents are paying good money to get an education and that means more than getting at least a 3.0, retreating to South Campus and maintaining insular relationships. That means getting a 3.0, living where you want, maintaining relationships with a variety of people, and learning from different experiences. Don't let anybody tell you different. If they wanted different they should have gone to a traditionally black college (and there are black colleges that rival Carolina in what they have to offer for you).

One of the more poignant messages Mandela tried to get across whenever he was dragged into the American domestic situation was that we have it made here in America..... We have opportunity. To say that we have no opportunity is to say that white people are omnipotent and I don't buy that.

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Locations TBA. All Programs 7-8:30. Call 962-9001 for more information.