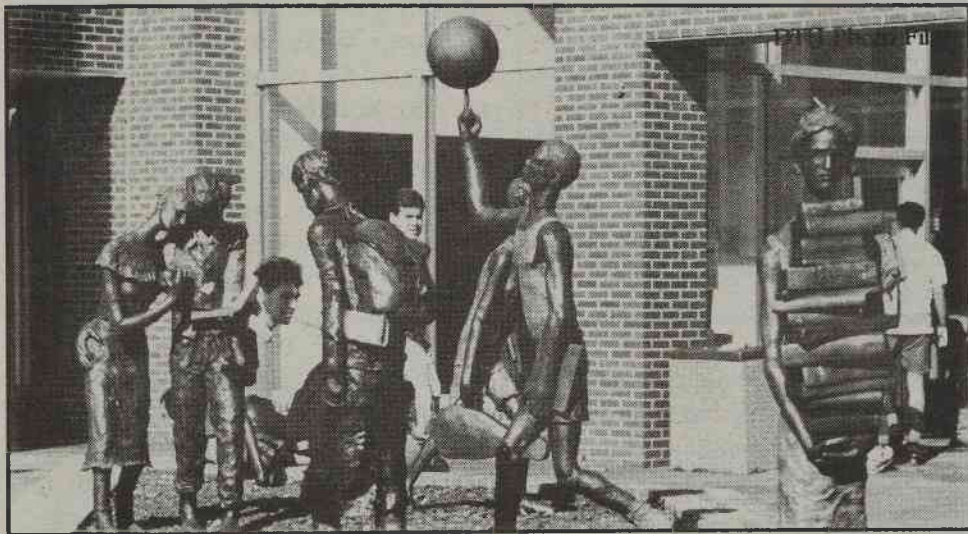


Oversensitivity Does Not Apply To Racism



By Chris Bracey
Contributor

They say we are just too damn sensitive. "It's just a statue. What's the big deal?" They call us overly critical. "It's just an honest mistake. It doesn't just happen to you guys." They say we are too judgmental. "I don't think this incident ('KKK' being painted on a vehicle) can be attributed to racism."

Please! Brothers and Sisters, once again I am here to shed some light on a very important issue. Everyday white students approach me asking me why am I so vocal about the removal of the statue, why I wrote such a vicious letter to the *Daily Tar Heel*, and why am I so overly sensitive to racism. These questions, taken for face value, are

relatively innocent—indicative of an ignorant, eurocentric perspective, but nonetheless innocent. Yet if one looks deeper, these questions reveal a sinister thought process which, frighteningly enough, is not limited to one segment of the campus population, but pervasive throughout the entire white community.

To begin, whites cannot wholly deny what a racist doctrine consists of simply because they are not within the oppressed group. On the contrary, I maintain that most, if not all whites have one base knowledge of the racist doctrine naturally because either they possess some racist qualities themselves, or they know someone else who does. Whites come in contact with racism frequently, just not on the receiving end. It has been incorporated into the university system, asserting its strength across the

campus, and making its presence felt everyday to everyone on campus. Therefore, I refuse to buy into the argument that white people have no fundamental knowledge of racism, racist acts or offensive, commentary simply because they are not African-American. This excuse does not suffice. Thus, I find it awfully difficult to believe a white person who says that he does not understand how something (a statue for instance) could offend somebody else. Rather, I believe that white people are cognizant of the offensive nature of a racist act, but fundamentally believe that there exists a form of racism which blacks should lower their sensitivity to and accept because of its triviality. In other words, white people seem to believe that there are certain forms of racism which are less damaging and thus, do not merit such a grand response.

This is a frightening thought, for we as African-Americans know that the day we allow racism to continue unchallenged is the day which we initiate our own demise. I am sorry, but I refuse to subscribe to this evil thought process. There is no such thing as oversensitivity when it comes to racism. Racism should not be tolerated in any form no matter how trivial it may seem because, in reality, there is no such thing as a trivial racist act. Any form of racism, however minute, is damaging and therefore must be eradicated before its destruction is felt. It is ludicrous to believe that any

racially offensive act or object is immune to this strict scrutiny. Any person who believes otherwise either lacks a true understanding of racism and its many faces, or lacks respect for African-Americans and their continuing struggle for equality in America.

Gone are the days of the doddering Negro. Gone are the days of accommodation, where we have always had to give a lot just to get a little. Brothers and Sisters, understand that it is time for us to take a firm stance on these issues of racism. My blood boils whenever I think of how institutionalized racism in the white family and community causes African-Americans to forsake their own instinctual urge for liberation. The next time one of your white friends ask you "Why the big fuss?", you tell them it is because you are tired. Tired of all the "honest" mistakes when reporting minority issues. Tired of being treated "differently." Tired of the sarcasm in their voice. Tired of the ignorance. Tired of it all. For God's sake, this is an institution of higher learning. We are here to be educated and enlightened. Perpetuation of racism and racial bigotry has no place on this campus. This community is as much ours as anybody else's. Let us dig in and make this campus friendly to all people. Take a stand, black man, because as we have seen these last few weeks, if you do not take it, no one else will take it for you.

"Student Body," can't from p. 9

vision is to compromise *all* of art. A crucial theme of much of twentieth century art (and art of other times, for that matter) is that the artist should have the right to disagree with his or her audience. It is a disservice to the artist and to other viewers to impose one's personal interpretation on others, or even worse, to attempt to keep the work from being seen as the artist intended it to be seen.

This means that even moving the sculpture to another (less-visible) part of campus may be a compromise just as bad as removing the statues completely. The controversy is reminiscent of Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc*, a 12-foot high, 120-foot long rusted steel wall placed in the center of the plaza of a Manhattan federal office building in 1981. People who worked in the building complained that the work was an obstruction (not to mention just plain ugly) and plans were made in 1985 to move the sculpture to a local countryside. The artist tried to sue for \$3,000,000, protesting that

moving his work would destroy the whole reason it was built. Serra lost his lawsuit in 1989 and the artwork was finally removed, much to the chagrin of the New York art community.

Serra, then, was commissioned to do a public artwork, fulfilled every requirement in his contract, and had his plans approved by the federal agency which hired him, only to have the same agency remove his sculpture six years later. Balk's experiences have so far been similar. Although we can't be sure of the details of Balk's commission, it is safe to assume that her plans were approved by someone, sometime before the sculpture was installed. To suddenly change the rules would be an insult on the professional level.

Serra lost his lawsuit because there was no clause in his contract which stated that the sculpture *couldn't* be moved. If this is true in Balk's case, then the university does have the legal option to move *The Student Body* to another location (and the fact that the artwork was donated makes it even easier). This

solution seems like a fair compromise, but it comes with a heavy cost to the rights of the creator. It must now be decided by the university administration whether this cost is worth it.

Since the *Tilted Arc* fiasco, many public-art programs have been soliciting more input from the communities which will benefit from the artwork. It has so far proved an effective way of keeping the public involved and in touch with the artist's intentions, and many artists have had positive experiences with these programs. Perhaps in the case of *The Student Body*, the real student body should have been consulted at some point.

However, what's done is done. This campus has been presented with a sculpture which was meant to bring us together, but has torn us apart. A decision will be made sometime soon concerning the artwork, and the only solutions available to us will demand sacrifices too difficult to accept. Whatever the fate of *The Student Body*, the real student body will have plenty to discuss for

years to come.

(Note: For more information on *Tilted Arc* and the public art controversy, I recommend these articles: Don Hawthorne, "Does the Public Want Public Sculpture?" *Art News* (May, 1982), pp. 56-67; and Harriet Senie, "Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc*: Art and Non-Art Issues" *Art Journal* (Winter, 1989), pp. 298-302.)

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