

Where Are Our Representations On Campus?

By Joel Winful
Staff

Hello, my fellow American brothers and sisters of African descent. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is credited as being the first state university in the United States. As the flagship university of the UNC system, Carolina is a center of southern culture. We have representations of many great southern traditions that have been institutionalized on this campus. Among those: Silent Sam, for the memory of rebel soldiers; and Saunders Hall named for William Saunders, whose many achievements include being an officer of the Ku Klux Klan. We should have positive images for African-Americans as well. I would like to take the opportunity to establish our right as African-Americans to have our heritage officially recognized on this southern campus.

African-Americans did not journey to this land after the Civil War, hoping to take advantage of economic and religious freedoms and opportunities that, by then, were America. We were here throughout. This country was built on our backs. The African-American is no "Johnny-come-lately" minority on the scene; we were the cultiva-

tations such as The Student Body.

When you have gained your footing or equal ground in an environment, you can take it easy. You might be content with the knowledge that you are heard and understood by at least your college peers; even if you are not accepted by the society at large. You can poke fun at the images of your former limitations, and/or suppression. It may even be possible to have those stereotypes embodied in art work for all to see, knowing that they no longer exist or have an effect.

Where is this equity-- socially, politically, educationally or otherwise? Where exists this understanding of the oppressed by the privileged majority? The necessary climate for erecting negative statues of African-Americans does not exist here. Intolerance of African-Americans by others has already been shown on several occasions. Some examples are the hate crimes around the campus this fall. These statues are not helping to improve race relations. Their shock value is gone. Now they still stand as misrepresentations, offensive to the African-American students on campus, a point that we have definitely gotten across to the majority by this time.

The majority should not dismiss our

"The responsibility of determining what is allowed on the campus grounds is not censorship, just official policy at a public university...UNC has the right to accept and decline gifts and to decide where to put them-- regardless of their monetary worth."

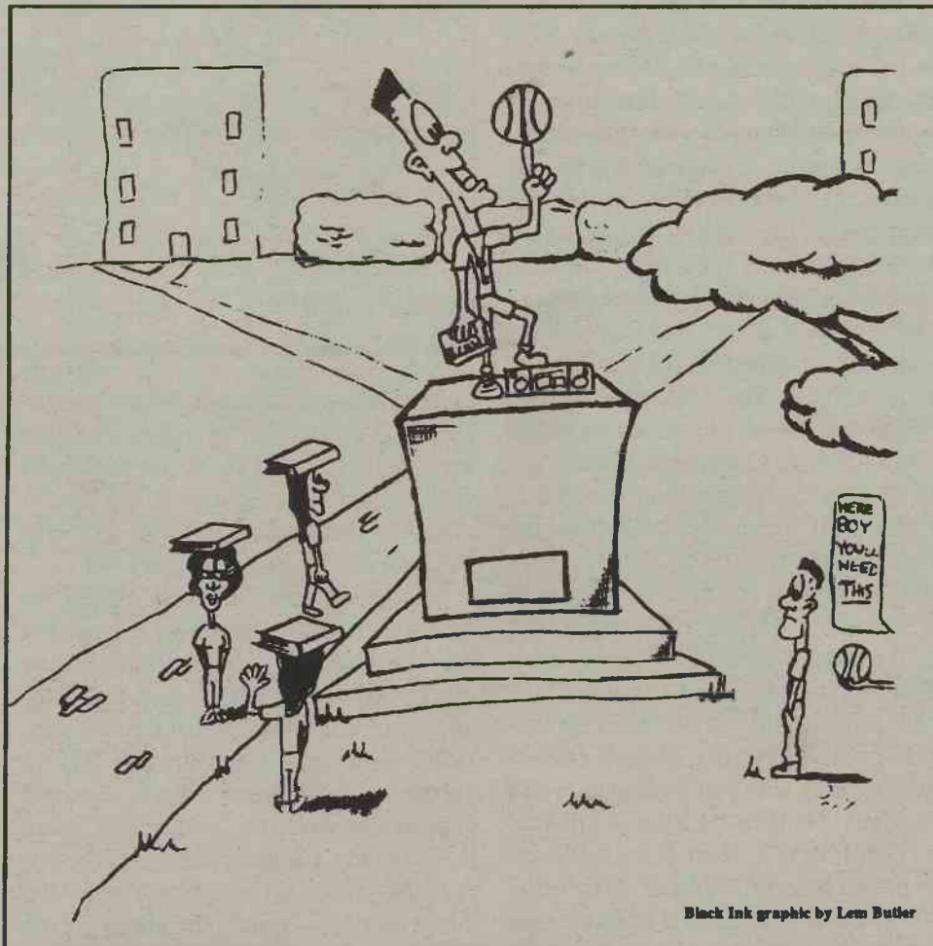
tors that grew the original vegetables and potatoes that went into the "American melting pot." For those who crave, revere and uplift southern history, we are the backbone of your cherished aristocratic, antebellum anecdotes.

African-Americans, along with the privileged majority of whites and the nearly exterminated Native Americans, are American history — not a brief addendum. We didn't come to the south to build railroads or canals. We didn't come fleeing famine or genocidal empires. We didn't come here for religious freedom. We didn't even come as exchange students to this wonderful land of ours. No indeed, because we were already here.

African-Americans were the laborers used, not partially, but intensively, in building this great land of ours. Where is our Silent Sam? After we get some positive representations in art work — not even of the huge prominence of Silent Sam — or something more beneficial, such as a real Black Cultural Center, then maybe we can afford stereotypical and negative represen-

speaking out, as "walking on eggshells." If you are hurt you say ouch! African-American students on campus have been saying it since October 22. We cannot pretend, nor should we be made to pretend that we are not bothered by the statues. It would be interesting to see the Student Body replaced with a new sculpture that includes African-American students portrayed in a more acceptable way. Well, on the other hand, what an outrageously unthinkable contribution to this campus that would be.

The UNC College Republicans have tried to make the statues a political issue, but it is a non-political and bipartisan issue. They claim to represent the conservative point of view on campus; and as their chairman, Charlton Allen said, "We hope to support the camp of leaving the statues exactly where they are and to influence the people who are unsure." The College Republicans are demonstrating reactionary behavior on this issue. The College Republican's position on supporting offensive new artwork is not a traditionally conservative one as evidenced by the positions of their political



icon Jesse Helms, and his attempts to suppress and censor offensive art and music. Why the sudden break from current traditions? It seems that after some evaluation, the College Republicans decided that maintaining a consistent stand on suppressing offensive artistic expression was not that important. On the other hand, they thought it was more important to maintain another current tradition of their political party — the tradition of always coming out in opposition to minority concerns. This is a tradition of their political party as evidenced by President Bush's veto of the Civil Rights Bill of 1990.

Since The Student Body is not going to be taken off campus, I would personally prefer that the statues were moved to the Ackland Art Museum where they can be seen in an artistic context. For people who want to see The Student Body, it would be there. For those who make accusations of Jesse Helms, like censorship, if the statues are moved. I'd like to point out that neither Davis Library nor the pathways to classes are art galleries.

Something that people seem to have forgotten is that this campus is not an art gallery. The statues do not have some inherent right to be displayed on campus that we are infringing on. This is not a private university, it is a public one. No group, regardless of how wealthy they are, can put art or any other structure on this campus just because they think it would make a nice gift. Not without approval of a UNC com-

mittee. That's right, not even the alumni.

The responsibility of determining what is allowed on the campus grounds is not censorship, just official policy at a public university. John Wilson, an UNC graduate, wanted to donate \$100,000 worth of television equipment for the RTVMP department in November. This was a very gracious gift to the campus, similar in worth to the \$60,000 statues given by the Class of 1985. The outcome of Wilson's attempted donation — rejected by UNC. Why was it rejected? UNC had certain reasons for their decision. I am not trying to say that the university should follow suit with The Student Body, I am merely showing that UNC has the right to accept and decline gifts, and to decide where to put them — regardless of their monetary worth.

The Student Body would be right at home in a museum or art gallery. It is not an abstract sculpture or neutral piece of art. It has definite sexual and racial distinctions, as well as a theme. Unlike Jesse Helms, I don't want to censor the work of Julia Balk, Robert Mapplethorpe or the 2 Live Crew. Just as one must choose to listen to the 2 Live Crew or view Mapplethorpe's art, the same standard should apply in this case. Just have The Student Body placed somewhere that people can exercise their freedom of choice to see it, just as others can use their freedom of choice to avoid it. In front of the only public entrance and exit to Davis Library is definitely not the place.
