"Sadly, most whites aren't sensitive to minor instances of racism which surround someone who happens to have dark skin . . ."

Endsights

By Michael Caldwell
Contributor

A few days ago I was looking through some old Yackety Yacks. For those of you who have no idea what the hell I just said, the Yackety Yack is the name of our yearbook, unfortunate as this may be. As I was thumbing through a 1979 volume, I saw some pictures of a group of black students protesting on the steps of South Building. Written on a picket sign one student held was, "We need an Afro-American Studies Department!" I was dumbfounded. It is 1991. We still do not have an Afro-American Studies *Department*. 11 years. No progress.

In the early 1980s, many students (I, sadly, can't say most or all) asked the University to provide a permanent facility for a Black Cultural Center. It is 1991. We still do not have a permanent Black Cultural Center. 10 years. No progress.

Several years ago, many students (again, I can't say most or all) asked the University to hire a full-time tenured Native American professor. It is 1991. No full-time Native American professor. Years go by. No progress.

There is a store on West Franklin Street called Lavender's. As I was walking to my car, I noticed that in its display window stood a small statue of a monkey in a butler's uniform carrying a tray of drinks. I walked in the store and told the clerk that the statue was racist because I thought it depicted a black butler as a monkey. He completely disagreed. Perhaps you disagree.

But here is an undeniable and appalling fact. There are minority students at this university who, because of all the minor, insignificant, trivial, superfluous and "isolated" instances of racism that they experience on a regular basis within this community, wish they could transfer to another university. Or worse yet, there are those who drop out. Do you have any idea whatsoever how it feels to be told by your university that you don't belong? That you aren't wanted? That you will not be fully treated as a human being, but only as an inferior semblance of one behind a dark-skinned face. I don't. I don't have to deal with "vibes." (I suppose some of you don't know what I'm talking about.) I don't have to deal with the cold stares. I don't have to deal with the fear of approaching a white person and not knowing if that person will hurt me (a certain look is all it takes) or help me. Understand this, and you will understand why many students of color choose to walk an extra 15 minutes to class each morning and why they want a home where there are "allies."

Often the biggest difference between whites and nonwhites is not skin color, but the level of sensitivity to what it is like to be African-American, or Asian, or Hispanic, or Native American. Sadly, most whites aren't sensitive to all these minor instances of racism which surround someone who happens to have dark skin and make him want to leave. Julia Balk was not sensitive to all the images and thoughts which are offensive to African-Americans. Either that or she knew "The Student Body" would offend people as racist and decided to submit the work anyway. (Excuse me, but if I remember correctly, weren't the statues supposed to be *moved*?)

In 1979, it seems that when there was an injustice, students protested to end that injustice. We could learn from that time and those who lived during it. We must try harder and protest louder when there is no department of Afro-American Studies. When there is no Black Cultural Center. When there are no Native American professors. When there is no multicultural curriculum. When people are depicted as monkeys. When campus buildings are named after racists.

You do not have the privilege to protest injustice, you have the obligation. More importantly, you have the obligation to learn about the feelings and concerns of those who are the targets of racism.

This must be done if we are to make progress toward the creation of a just university and a just world.

Express yourself about issues that concern *Black Ink* readers. Feel free to contribute. Drop articles by Suite 108-D Student Union, or mail to *Black Ink*, CB# 5210, Student Union, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC 27514.

Appreciate Education

Shortly after I graduated from high school last spring, a wonderful thing happened to me: I rediscovered my love of reading. During my high school years, I had stopped reading, painfully avoiding academic pursuits beyond what was done in the classroom and what needed to be done at home to maintain decent grades. My childhood love of reading — for pleasure — was lost. Now, for the last several months, I have been horrified to consider that I might never make up for those "lost" years. Certainly, however, I will try.

This January, I finally got around to reading two books my mother had long ago recommended: *Kaffir Boy* and *Kaffir Boy in America*, both by the black South African Mark Mathabane, who now resides in Kernersville. His first book describes his experiences growing up under South Africa's system of apartheid. Its sequel relates Mathabane's later experiences in America, often comparing and contrasting race relations in America to race relations in South Africa. The term "kaffir boy" is a term that white South Africans use in the same context as many white Americans use "nigger" in speaking about African-Americans.

Circumstances dictated that only nine days after I had finished reading his second autobiography, Mathabane would speak on this campus. As one of the two keynote speakers for Race Relations Week 1991, Mathabane spoke Feb. 19 in Hill Hall. He had spoken at N.C. A&T State University last semester, but I found out too late to attend. But having read both of his autobiographies since then, I was that much more interested and excited about hearing him speak.

Although I had read about his uncertainty toward religion, after hearing him speak, I cannot imagine that he does not have some kind of special relationship with the Creator, whether Mathabane himself is aware of that relationship or not. There is a certain calm to his soft-spoken nature that is unimaginable within a person who has had to endure the conditions of a system as oppressive as apartheid. And yet he possesses undeniable power and passion as well. To look at his small body and listen to his proper voice, you wouldn't think such an impression could be made. But for myself and several others, Mathabane does leave a definite impression. A very positive impression.

Few emphasize education, particularly reading, with such genuine sincerity and with such noticeable appreciation of its merits. In America, I know many of us are guilty of not appreciating and taking advantage of educational opportunities that many do not have at all. Besides, the goal that we all become "smart" through education, particularly through reading, has the potential to make us better able to understand and relate to others — if we are open-minded.

From my one semester completed here at UNC, I don't doubt that many students will read fewer books and attend fewer cultural events than the number of parties they will attend and the number of beers they will drink. At the same time, underprivileged people around the globe (including in South Africa and America), won't ever have a decent opportunity even to imagine attending a university, never mind actually attending one.

Our college years are a time for soul-searching, finding out whom we really are. A time for asking questions. A time for exposing ourselves to as many different ideas, experiences and perspectives as possible.

One of the most important issues for us to consider is race relations. When a person considers the state of this nation's race relations, the question arises, "Where are we going?" I believe the answer to that question is: "Backwards." Presidents Reagan and Bush have both, at best, ignored race relations. As a result, things have gotten progressively worse. And that trend shows no sign of letting up.

We must demand that racial concerns be addressed at every level, by politicians and the general public both. Kimberly Elling-

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