

Are We Tokens?

2 MLK Oratorical Contestants Debate the Issue

The MLK Oratorical contest was held February 11 in the Student Union Cabaret, and participants addressed this question: "Are you a token black at UNC?" Michelle Thomas was the winner. Below is the text of her speech and that of Terrence Garrison, another participant. Angela Ray and Annice Hood also participated in the contest.

By Michelle Thomas
Oratorical Contest Winner

May the work that I've done speak for me.
May the work that I've done speak for me.
When I've done the best I can,
And my friends don't understand,
May the work that I've done speak for me.

A Token Black.
The Man's Man.
An Oreo
Gray Boy
Uncle Tom
Sell Out.
Do these terms define me because I am a Black student at UNC?

The debate over whether African Americans should attend predominantly white or historically black institutions is one that has

been going on since the days of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois. In their day, there wasn't much choice. The majority of African Americans who were given the opportunity to acquire a post-secondary education were only

allowed to attend historically black institutions, but today things are somewhat different. Now African Americans have the right to choose

between the two. This is not a freedom that was easy to come by. Many fought and died so that we would be given the opportunity to make a choice. As African-American students at a predominantly-white institution,

African Americans and the African-American community are being recognized and addressed; then we are not selling out, but are reaching for the realization of Dr. King's Dream.

In 1895, at his famous Atlanta Cotton Exposition speech, Booker T. Washington set the stage for separatism by saying "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand, in all that pertains to our mutual interests." This speech was followed by the passing of *Plessy V. Ferguson* in 1896 that said that separate but equal would be the law of the land.

Most Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) were founded with monies donated by white philanthropists because teachers were needed for the black community and skilled and semi-skilled workers were needed for the white community. Many of these schools were created as mechanical and technical institutes, such as Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, founded in 1881 by Booker T. Washington. Washington wanted to build an institution in Tuskegee where African Americans could attend and gain an industrial

education which would lead them to economic empowerment. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) have come a long way since that time. Xavier University, a historically black university in New Orleans, Louisiana, boasts that it has more African-American students to enter medical school than any other school in the country. Spelman and Morehouse colleges and Howard and Atlanta Universities have graduated some of the most successful African Americans that this country has ever seen; among these being Spike Lee, James Weldon Johnson, Mary Frances Berry, Thurgood Marshall and Patricia Roberts Harris. It was people such as these, who went into schools which white philanthropists thought would provide them with laborers, and turned them into long-standing institutions rooted in the black community.

HBCU's were created out of a basic need from the Black community but in recent times have had to compete with predominantly-white institutions. With the passage of Civil Rights legislation, especially



Myron Pitts/Black Ink

Thomas says we must check ourselves and evaluate our role in the community.

we must remember the struggle that was fought to gain for us this opportunity. But further we must fight to ensure that the interests of

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By Terrence Garrison
Oratorical Contest Participant

Am I a token? Yes I am. I am a token student. I was a token in my 90% white advanced high school classes, and I am a token student here at "my" 90% white advanced university. In fact, I stay on a token part of campus with the other 1200 or so tokens. And when I graduate, something tokens aren't supposed to do, I'll be a lean, mean token machine, ready for the working world of racism and sexism. I'll take with me on graduation day a wealth of knowledge accumulated from days of hanging out in the token closet space called the BCC, named after a woman, a role model, who dedicated her career to a

curriculum at a university with a closet space for tokens and no black studies department. Now when I become successful, some thing tokens aren't supposed to do, and my kids ask me, what was it like at UNC, I'll close my eyes and say in retrospect, thinking logically and analytically, something tokens aren't supposed to do, I'll say:

"Now son, I knew I was a token cause when they erected a

statue of the student body, I noticed I was not a part of it. I had no basketball in my hand and no book

on my head and people always told me I was there because of affirmative action and that we black students should not have a black

studies department like the (East) Asians, the Latin Americans and the Europeans. I came to the conclusion that like a I I tokens, I was to be seen (except for in statues of the student body) and not heard (except

for tonight). But the fact of the matter is that there are 20 thousand plus white folks here at UNC? Where are they tonight? Don't they

want to hear what these tokens have to say about hypocrisy and the hoax called "reverse discrimination"-NOT.

And then I got mad and militant- "I am a black man at a predominately white university and quite frankly I'm mad. I chose UNC because of its reputation as a liberal university, prestige and its social life. What I found out when I got here was that the term liberal means that we group African Americans together with homosexuals, handicaps and white women and then give them all our token of appreciation. With all due respect to these groups, I resent being placed in the same category

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