

## Campus Voice: Black Women Must Practice Sisterhood

*Editor's note: Campus Voice features writers from campuses around the nation. This week's issue was written by Stacy Walker, a junior at Duke University.*

*Before reading this article, I would just like to thank the many beautiful, intelligent, proud, independent and strong black women I came in contact with this summer for enriching my experience and befriending me. I also thank those who treated me with contempt and disrespect and jealousy for giving me the material for this piece...*

When first approached about writing an editorial for the Black Ink, I was fairly reluctant. I felt that my short introduction to UNC was not sufficient enough to comprise an entire article. (For those of you

who don't know, I attended both summer sessions at Carolina.) Deeper scrutiny, however, revealed one prevalent theme, one *unfortunate* prevalent theme, that exists—that is the lack of true sisterhood.

I am hardly suggesting that this trend originated on your campus, nor am I saying that it is confined to UNC. On the contrary, my black sisters show this incohesiveness here at Duke, on other campuses, in the workplace, and in the world at large. What I am suggesting is that it has gone on for far too long and its presence must be erased.

The extent to which we, as black women, are antagonists to ourselves is amazing to me. I was forewarned on the eve of my first day of classes that because of my long hair, I would make few female friends but have

many male admirers. Then, my advisor continued, I would lose the friends I had already made because of these male admirers. Her tone was playful but experienced. I am saddened to report that there was some validity to her remarks.

This had happened to me before, and again, it embittered me. I wondered why something as trivial as hair made me the enemy to my own sisters. After all, I couldn't control the growth of it. My mother has long hair and her mother before her. Besides, I thought angrily, how many black women have told me that they used to have long hair before they cut it? Whose fault is that? Furthermore, why should I lose the "friends" I had already made because of men? Any man who is simple-minded and tired enough to want a woman solely

because of the length of her hair doesn't deserve me...or any black sister with half a brain in her head.

But I am digressing from my original point. Sisters, we are a self-opposing group. But this opposition is not always based on jealousy or other such negative attributes. Sometimes we self-defeat via our unselfishness. Take, for example, our relationship with our men. We have for so long catered to, cared for, and carried on our backs, our brothers to the point where they now spit in our faces and treat us with disrespect. We give and give and get nothing in return. And in the process, we, BLACK WOMEN, have been blamed for the black man's lack of success in today's society. The (1965) Moynihan report on the status of Black America declared, "Ours is a society which

presumes male leadership in private and public affairs...a subculture, such as that of the Negro American, in which this is not the pattern, is placed at a distinct disadvantage."

By no means am I trying to turn this piece into a male-bashing chapter. I only want the sisters to realize (and then to accept) that we must start loving ourselves, first and foremost, before we can ever truly hope to be loved by anyone else. Consequently, our love for others will follow and be enriched. Sisters, we descend from a line of women too strong and too proud to let trivial matters such as hair and skin color and other such silliness bring us down. We must unite, my sisters. Our success as a people depends on it.

## DON'T SWEAT THE TECHNIQUE Unity Begins With Speaking...

Well, if there's one thing I can say I've learned in the past few weeks, it is that Black people can come together on this campus in the name of unity. Okay, what I want to know is, where is all this unity on a day to day basis? Where is it when people are walking across this yard day in and day out? Tell me, 'cause I fail to see it.

I realize that the BCC is important enough to bring us together, but as soon as the rallies and marches are over, so is all that togetherness. Maybe some of you don't know this, but a speakout isn't the only time you would want to say... speak to somebody.

What is the big deal about acknowledging another brother or sister when you pass by? I'm sorry, but you can't tell me that you are just too academically pressed to say "Hello," or "Hi ya doin'," or even give that little nod that those of us who are too smooth to move our mouths use to say "Wha's up."

Some people would rather look at the ground, a squirrel, the time—oops! You ain't wearin' a watch!—or look straight through a brother or sister rather than look them in the eye and say something. If this isn't



Karen Greene

a negative attitude toward your own culture, tell me what is.

Now don't get me wrong. I don't mean for you to seek out every black person on this Yard, get all up in their face and be all "As-salaam alaikum my fellow Nubian, afro-centric soul..." Nah. I mean, if that's your thang, go wit' it—but don't fake it.

I realize that some of us have legitimate beefs with people that would make any attempt at conversation—a severe case of fakin' the funk. However, most of it is just

petty. Get over it. If you can't, get help. Trust me, if I worried about everybody who thinks I'm a b\*#@%, I'd never leave my room.

Now I know what y'all are sayin', "Karen, I see you every day on the Yard. You don't be all speakin' to everybody." Call me out. My policy is that if I make eye contact with someone I should at least acknowledge the fact that they're there. And if I feel like someone would really hate to have to say "hello" to me I make sure I speak to them. In general, I feel particularly compelled to speak to any fellow black student struggling to make a place for him or herself in this white supremacist power structure they call a liberal university. But that's just me.

Basically, some people need to put those egos in check. Some of us walk around so scared that somebody's gonna think they're sweatin'. Why? Unless, of course, you are. In that case, play that mess off! And for anybody who thinks they are too much of that to be civil, I'm laughin' atcha 'cause guess what—you're not.

## Free Your Mind... And The Rest Will Follow

Well, two weeks have gone by, and here we are yet again bringing you another issue of the Black Ink. This issue is a little different than the first for various reasons. First of all, a dense crowd of [600 on average] students were not infiltrating the confines of South Building, the occupancy of Chancellor Paul Hardin, two weeks ago.

Second of all, I don't believe that the overall attitudes of the African-American community were as strong and fueled with certainty as they are now, two weeks later. Yes, I understand that a majority of African Americans on campus had a firm belief that this campus most definitely *does* need a free-standing BCC, but at the South Building demonstration, these beliefs were unleashed and converted into action. Any feelings that were suppressed in the minds and hearts of students favoring a free-standing building were "let loose" on this particular day.

I observed brothers and sisters who freed their minds, chanting "BLACK POWER" to the point of

hoarseness. I viewed white students who also shared in the movement, chanting this same theme until their faces were red. Anyone who felt that he/she could not show the intensity of their feelings before this demonstration is definitely humming a different tune now.

I was late for my class that same day after the march, and a white student approached me after class and offered me her notes, saying, "I was at the march, and it was great. You had good reason for missing class, and if there is anything else I can do in the future, please let me know." It was not the fact that she offered me her notes that made me begin to see a change in attitudes on campus, but it was the fact that more students are willing to view the issue of a free-standing BCC as an important matter and not as something petty. See what happens—no matter what your race or background—when you FREE YOUR MIND?

Peace,  
Chandra McLean