

Ring the Alarm: The Meaning of Student Activism

We are in the midst of a revolution. Change is taking place amongst us. Everywhere we turn, we see a difference. We see the masses of Black people coming out at a moment's notice. We see Brothers and Sisters speaking to each other on the yard. We see more and more white people coming into the Black Cultural Center office to inquire about the importance of a free-standing facility. This is all revolutionary. The most beautiful aspect of this movement will come in the spring when each of us who is involved in the movement, find our names printed individually in the Daily Tar Heel. We will show true commitment to the struggle. We will show the world the true meaning

of revolution when we open up the pages of a "newspaper" that many of us regard with malice and find the names of the many students dedicated to the struggle for a free-standing Sonja Haynes Stone Black Cultural Center printed under the heading of "Deans List."

One might ask, "How can I go to class, attend meetings, work on committees, work at my job and make the dean's list. Well, we have the answer. In the spirit of Umoja (unity) and Ujima (collective work and responsibility), the Black Student Movement and the Black Awareness Council will sponsor weekly study sessions. These sessions will be held in Great Hall. The purpose of this component of

the movement is to come together in the spirit unity and with the realization of our purpose for being at this institution. This is a serious endeavor and not a social gathering. We must work in every aspect of this struggle and for many, making time to study seems to be a hardship. There will be monitors in place to ensure that the atmosphere is conducive to studying, and we hope that we can once again show the seriousness of everyone involved in this movement.

We must in this time of change continue in the way in which we have started. We have recognized the importance of unity. Now we must realize the importance of education. Many struggled so that

we may be here, just as we are struggling to leave this campus better for our predecessors. In order to make things better, though, we must excel academically. We must redefine student activism to ensure that we keep the words in this term in the correct order. We are here, first and foremost, as students. Just as with most things that Black people must endure, we must ensure that we do well above average academically. We must challenge ourselves to excel in the classroom. The fight for a free-standing Black Cultural Center is a struggle for empowerment and the recognition of our culture. But further, it is the need to educate the community about the accomplishments and

contributions that Black people have made throughout the world. Once all of the controversy as to whether our culture warrants the right to a facility of its own is over, what we will have is an educational resource. This facility will serve the entire community with the wealth of knowledge about the experiences of people of African descent throughout the diaspora. We must educate ourselves and our community about our past, while at the same time, prepare for the future. *Ring the Alarm* is the column of BSM President Michelle Thomas.

Stone Position Filled by AFAM, Music Expert

Professor John Michael Spencer is an Associate Professor in the African and Afro-American Studies Curriculum filling the position of the late Dr. Sonja Haynes Stone. Although Spencer possesses four degrees, 30 published articles, 17 published book reviews, two compositional awards, and nine research grants, to name a few, he found time to "shoot the breeze" with Co-Editor Chandra McLean regarding a number of issues.

BLACK INK: How does it feel to take Sonja Stone's place after hearing so much about her and knowing what a powerful impact she had upon students?

SPENCER: I feel a certain sense of responsibility not to be Sonja Stone because I'm a different person, but I think that Sonja Stone and I think a lot alike about certain things in terms of our cultural critiques. Also, Sonja Stone was involved with trying to get me hired by the University before I left Duke University for a position in Ohio, and I understand that she was trying to get me hired by the University when I was in Ohio; I didn't know that at the time. So I feel a sense of gratitude and I feel also, I suppose, a sense of reverence that I'm sitting where she sat; I'm teaching students that she taught and to a degree, I'm involved in the social concerns she was involved with.

INK: I hear you are a minister as

well as a professor. Do you feel that these two occupations interrelate?

SPENCER: I've always viewed my teaching as a kind of ministry, and I think that when certain kinds of information is made available to African students and non-African students, African-American students, that I'm engaging in a kind of salvational work in changing the minds and leading students to new insights, new abilities so that they can go out and engage in the life of the mind, either in the academy or among the masses.

INK: What motivated you to become a professor in African-American Studies?

SPENCER: Well, I have always taught in, for the most part, interdisciplinary fields such as African-American studies. I first taught at the Department of Music for four years at North Carolina Central University; then at the Divinity School at Duke University; then two years at the Department of Popular Culture at Bowling Green State University. So, to move into another field I hadn't taught in yet, to move in a field that was interdisciplinary like the last two that I taught in and to teach in African-American studies seems like it had all been in the works all in the plan. My work in the Department of Music, in the

Divinity School and the Department of Popular Culture was basically in the Department of African-American Studies anyway. I taught a course on slave culture. I did a reading here for the University staff,



Spencer Kickin' Knowledge

faculty and students titled "Readings in Egyptology," and I taught a course on the blues entitled "American Blues Music." I taught a course on rap music entitled "Rap and Race," and so this kind of work in the Department of Popular Culture seems to have appointed me to the African-American Studies Department. So it made sense; this is home for me; there is a lot of re-educating that needs to be done. Look at Carter G. Woodson's relevance today in his message with *The Mis-Education of the Negro*.

INK: How do you feel about the actions and demonstrations presently taking place on campus?

SPENCER: Well, I feel a sense of this campus being very much alive, and it's exciting to see students

being concerned and being involved in many aspects of campus life. This campus is so much alive that I don't regret being here, compared to from whence I came. In terms of the students demonstrating, I think there's always a place for demonstration, and we cannot forget that many of the advances that were looked down upon at the time of the Civil Rights Movement were brought about because of demonstrations. We wouldn't have black studies or African-American studies curriculums today if

students hadn't demonstrated on campuses across the country during the late 1960s and 1970s. And so I'm sitting where I sit- here in the African-American Studies department- because students do a lot of student demonstrating. Also, students have demonstrated throughout the world. In Tiananmen Square students demonstrated for democracy. I think we give significance to these things when they are at a distance, and it may be that with some hindsight- with some retrospective distance- that the things that seem threatening today to those that oppose the students' wants might be appreciated tomorrow.

INK: How do you feel about a free-standing Black Cultural

Center?

SPENCER: I don't know all the rationale for a free-standing building or against a free-standing building. My own interpretation of potential hesitance on the part of the administration is that there is a symbolic relevance to having a free-standing building. It means you're taking what stands on that land seriously. It also means that you're giving up land, and we know that land, in a capitalistic western society, is of significance in terms of power. Wars have been fought over land. Classism, sexism and, to a degree, racism have -to some extent- their rootage in land ownership. Even in the first four dynasties in Egypt, prior to land ownership, there was an egalitarian society- more egalitarian than you've ever seen. But with the coming of land ownership following the fourth dynasty, we have then the need for slavery, the need for someone to work the land that's now owned. We then have the coming of sexism or patriarchy because the male wants to pass on the land to the male offspring, and we have class strata- the land owners versus the landless. So when we trace the history of land and the fact that students are demanding land on which to build their building, we can see the hesitance to give up the land because land is of political, economic, social and ideological significance.