

# Ring the Alarm: Knowledge Is Power

By Michelle Thomas

Many questions have been raised as to why so much activism. There are many people involved in this movement who trust the leadership but are not equipped with a whole knowledge of the facts. This is an attempt to give a little history and clarify some of the issues.

*Superficially, the disagreement is over whether the facility should be free-standing or an expansion of an existing facility.*

We do not understand what Chancellor Hardin means by architectural. This could allude to a disagreement as simple as whether there should be a glass atrium or a marble floor. The chancellor seems to have a problem understanding why the students feel that a free-standing facility is important. In a Sept. 10 letter from James Peacock, chair of the faculty, it is evident that others can comprehend this simple request. Peacock states: "We have to privilege black culture partly on historical grounds—that blacks were more integrally involved in the two hundred years of building this university and state than other group, except whites—therefore as a part of our own heritage and history we recognize the black contribution and identity... at the present, the free-standing symbolism is important."

*Deeper down, the problem is that the university administration does not take into consideration the concerns and views of the students.*

The Chancellor has stated that we don't understand how the decisions are made at our university. Students should be the focal point of a learning institution. How are the decisions made on this campus? Are they based on the needs of the students or the wants of the administration? Or even still, are the administrators who are making decisions under the impression that we, the students, are not able to make competent and rational decisions?

*Still deeper down, the problem is that the university has not effectively sought to destroy the institutional racism that exists on this campus.*

The struggle for a free-standing black cultural center has to be validated in the eyes of the administration by the participation of white

students. Are not the needs of the masses of black students on this campus enough to make the University concerned? Just as during slavery, any deed undertaken by a black person had to be validated or authenticated by a white person before it would be taken with any merit. Read any prominent slave narrative.

*Through the programming of the Sonja Haynes Stone Black Cultural Center, we want to build a model for all universities in living, learning, and working together across racial lines.*

But because of the hesitation on the part of the University administration, we must first, create the model for dismantling racism. We must show black students across the country and across the world that the time has come for black people to quit allowing others to make decisions for us and tell us what we need. It is time for us to quit "Uncle Tomming" and be the proud people of African descent that we are.

The chancellor claims to have consulted and been advised by many friends of diverse views. He has failed to realize that the Black Cultural Center Advisory Board has been in place since the opening of the current facility. The members of this board are to be considered the experts on this campus as to the black cultural center issue. This Board has not been called upon by the chancellor, nor has the Coalition for a Free-Standing Black Cultural Center been consulted by the Chancellor. One must ask, who are these "friends" and what do they know about Black Culture? What do they know about the needs and wants of the students? What do they know about the programming in the current center? What do they know about the future programming planned for the center? How are these people supposed to make decisions about the future of the cultural center if they do not even understand the existing and future programming needs?

The Chancellor claims that "The exact form a new center will take depends on a host of considerations that had not until recently even begun to be discussed."

This shows blatant ignorance on the part of our University's leader.

This issue has been discussed in-depth for, at least, the past eight years. In 1984, the BCC Planning Committee was formed and in 1985 it issued its first proposal for a BCC. Since that time, this document has been reviewed, revised and disregarded. The work and efforts of the Black Cultural Center Advisory Board have been, once again, marginalized by the admin-



istration.

Furthermore, in March of 1989, the BCC Advisory Board met and Vice Chancellor Donald Boulton proposed (just as he continues to propose) that they devise a plan of what they would like to see in a center. Vice Chancellor Boulton said at that time (taken from the minutes of that meeting) "We are saying that we want to build a building with several purposes...the BCC should plan, the union should plan and we will give these plans to the architect. We give him our needs and he/she comes up with a blueprint." Boulton also proposed that he "would like for a committee to sit down and agree on what space we want. The longer we stay hung up on free-standing facility vs. other, we will not get anywhere. Let us get together the list we want. Then we can have sketches made of what this space would look like...You have been modest in the planning. North Carolina State is building a new Union and BCC. We need to look at all of the building plans in their new building and not just the plans for the BCC." As we can see, in 1989, Vice Chancellor Boulton was pushing for a Union expansion. He encouraged the BCC Advisory Board to come up with a plan and the

union would also come up with one. He tried to co-opt our movement. In an attempt to make some progress on this issue, we complied with his wishes. We worked up a plan with the Facilities Planning and Design Committee of the University. In September of 1989, "A Feasibility Study for the Construction of the Black Cultural Center" was released. This study was based on the needs of the BCC at that time. The amount of space and cost of construction were estimated and the request of the administration was fulfilled. But what ever happened to the next steps? A committee was formed to come up with a plan but the Chancellor had not approved such a building. The work of this committee proved futile. We will not be pawns for prolongation again. In order for us to sit down and draw up plans again, there must be approval on the part of the administration.

In whatever growth the black cultural center takes should include "clear programmatic and architectural commitment to openness; attention to the needs of all students while striving to meet the special needs of the members of the Stone Center and all who will partake of its programs." Once again, this statement shows that the chancellor knows nothing of the programming that takes place in the Black Cultural Center. Over the summer we received a grant from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation for the institutionalization of our Cross Cultural Communications workshops. These workshops (now called the Cross Cultural Communications Institute or CCCI) are held to bring students, faculty and staff from diverse cultural backgrounds together to learn how to effectively communicate across cultural lines. It is a six week program that begins on Oct. 5 and runs through Nov. 16. One key to this program is that it is student run. Students interested in facilitating workshops are intensively trained by cross cultural communications experts from across the campus and community and go on to work with a small group for the six week session. Although I refuse to belittle the work of other programs on campus that I may have no knowledge of, this program is the most comprehensive race rela-

tions program that I've been made aware of at the student level.

Throughout the year, the Black Cultural Center co-sponsors events with several campus organizations. This year's plans are in the works for co-sponsorship with organizations such as Carolina Union Activities Board, Asian Students Association, Carolina Indian Circle and many other organizations, both black and non-black. This shows a diversity in programming and an openness to work with students from all cultures. What other department is doing that? And this is not to say that no other is, but I wonder if those who are making attempts to improve race relations on this campus are being treated as if their programming is unimportant.

What we have in the struggle for a free-standing black cultural center is a whole lot more than the fight over building a building. It is a fight over institutional racism and the empowerment of black people. The chancellor was so arrogant as to think that we think so much of him as to hate him. In a meeting last week, he told student leaders of the Coalition and faculty and staff members that the problem is that we hate him. What we hate is racism and the system of oppression of which he is a part. He has said in the past that there are people larger than he that would not approve of such a building. We conclude from this that there is a power structure in place that seeks to ensure a maintenance of the status quo. Chancellor Hardin is merely a pawn being used by more powerful men to hold back any people (not just Black people who want to make any advance). The larger issue is not just a race one, but also one of student empowerment. One of the many accomplishments that will be the outcome of our victory will be making the University understand that it is accountable to the students.

This issue has many aspects to be addressed, but in order to understand student leaders, I decided this article to focus on the press statement issued by the Chancellor. Look for more to be covered in future editorials.