

Understanding and to the Center

By Dr. Jon Michael Spencer
Ink Contributor

The rhetoric of opposition to the building of a free-standing black cultural center on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill illustrates that there is substantial misunderstanding among some whites as to what is meant by black culture.

The worst of this misunderstanding was illustrated by a prominent North Carolinian named John W. Pope, who took out a full page ad in *The Chapel Hill News* on September 12, 1993. The ad called on residents, parents and students to unite against the project to build a center for black culture because it would stand as a monument to racial separatism.

This very same rhetoric was heard in the state's 1992 gubernatorial campaign. Republican candidate Jim Gardner, during the last weeks of his failing campaign, similarly criticized the plans to build a free-standing center for black culture, claiming that it would undo 20 years of work toward racial integration.

Speaking to about 50 supporters gathered at his Republican headquarters in Chapel Hill, Gardner's exact words were: "Imagine, we spent 20 years trying to bring the races together in North Carolina. Why do we want to go back and destroy 20 years of hard work? If we do that, what are we going to do, have an Indian center next year and Asian Center the next year?"

Similarly, when Dinesh D'Souza spoke at UNC in a debate on March 30, 1993, he said that building a free-standing center for black culture would be an act of black separatism and black supremacy.

This view that a free-standing center for black culture would be segregative is not only held by the likes of John Pope, Jim Gardener and Dinesh D'Souza,

but also by a few confused blacks such as Shelby Steele, who spoke at Duke University recently.

But contrary to the claims of

about the black tenor Roland Hayes in a newspaper article of 1929 titled "Collapsible Color Line," published in *The Boston Globe* on March 11, 1929. The

for creating community, which has always tended to include whites who were willing to integrate on the black side of the color line (the color line that was always enforced by whites).

In a *Time* magazine article of April 6, 1970, titled "What America Would Be Like Without Blacks," Ralph Ellison identifies black culture on the foregoing respect — as the silent conqueror of those who have wronged us. He says that despite the harsh reality visited

upon us, these injustices have failed to keep us from being one of the major tributaries to mainstream American culture.

"On this level the melting pot did indeed melt, creating such deceptive metamorphoses and

blending of identities, values and lifestyles that most American whites are culturally part Negro American without even realizing it."

While the reason given to deny the legitimacy of a black cultural center at UNC is that it will be segregative, the fact is that Americans are simply denying that black culture has always been integrative; they are denying the fact that black culture is, as Ellison has indicated, the basis of a significant segment of American culture.

In this denial, there seems to be manifested a significant amount of the fear. The fear is not that a free-standing center for black culture will be a place of separatism, but that it will be a place of interracial mixing on the black side of the color line.

We will understand this if we simply remind ourselves that this has been a longstanding source of

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Pope, Gardner, D'Souza and Steele, black culture has never been segregative. More than any other culture found in this country, black culture has been integrative.

Unlike such prestigious centers of white culture like UNC, which would not even permit blacks to attend undergraduate school until the 1960s, the black colleges (centers of black culture) were the locations of racial integration.

In 1925 the wife of Walter Scott Copeland, editor for the Hampton, *Virginia Daily Press*, went to a show at Hampton Institute and found to her dismay that blacks and whites were allowed to sit together. The incident led her husband to campaign successfully for the state legislature to pass a law, which they did in 1926, requiring segregation in public places throughout the state.

But since Hampton was a private institution, the integration, on the black side of the color line, continued up to and beyond 1963 when the law was ruled unconstitutional by the Virginia Supreme Court. Thus, for the greater part of the 20th century, Hampton Institute was an Oasis of integration in a desert of segregation.

This very point was made

journalist writing on Hayes commented:

"At the recitals of Mr. Roland Hayes the color line dissolves. White and black sit elbow to elbow. And there will be more of this before there is less. What is the meaning of it? Just what happened here? Something quite simple and very profound.... This people that we have wronged has found a way to conquer us; not by violence, but by melody. In the face of a cultural triumph in this magnitude by the Negro, the pretense of white superiority will become more difficult to maintain."

Indeed, African-American culture has always had an ethical impulse

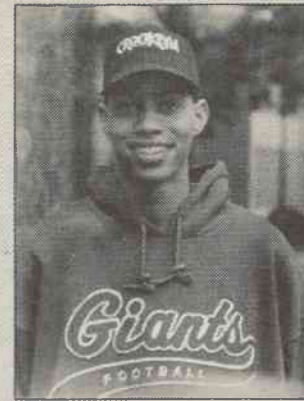
Arguments Against

By Ricky Weaver
Ink Contributor

The struggle for the BCC will not be over until a free-standing Sonja H. Stone center is constructed on this university's campus. The arguments raised in opposition to such a center are not original.

You've heard them before. "The BCC would have no relevance," or my personal favorite, "It shouldn't be built because blacks shouldn't try to separate themselves from the rest of the community."

First of all, the center will educate the masses about the contributions that blacks have made to this country in all aspects including medicine, engineering and art.



Ricky Weaver

Why is there such a need for such education? There are too many people walking around who think that African-American ancestry started under the system of slavery. To the contrary, more people should be aware that Africans were founders of culture and civilization.

All were not the savages portrayed by movies and television, because kings and queens ruled over such nations such as Ethiopia, the Christian empire, Egypt, Buganda. Cities such as Timbuktu established their own systems, universities and developed eye surgery.

But our history books mention such facts. We call them the three ships. Columbus set sail on his search for a trading route to India.

But how many of us know about the city-states of Mogadishu and Malindi, which traded with India, China, Greece and Rome in the Indian Ocean Trading System, which lasted over 4,000 years?