

# Whites Owe Blacks Public Recognition of Racism

As a history graduate student, I was surprised by the lack of historical insight demonstrated in fellow graduate student James Jennings' recent column on the BCC ("University Doesn't Owe BCC to Black Students," Aug. 26). With a sweep of his hand, Jennings is willing to wave aside the historical reality that the benefits reaped by white slave holders did not stop with their generation or class.

Slave holders' children inherited the wealth created by the labor of black Americans, and they, in turn, passed it on to their own children. We live in a society where wealth is inherited as much as earned, and I have no doubt a large proportion of UNC's student body attends school on money in one way or another connected to this country's previous slave economy, whether they are aware of the direct links or not. Do a little digging into your family tree.

Even those white Americans who inherited no wealth — descendants of poor nonslaveholders who worked hard to survive and suffered poverty alongside blacks — benefited from slavery and the social myths that sprang from it. Since Emancipation, whites who have prospered by virtue of their labor have done so in an environment of lessened competition. White workers did not have to compete with black workers in most of the country's professions and trades.

In fact, in many places in the South during and after Reconstruction, it was made illegal for blacks to ply certain skilled trades. White workers also received different responses to their prosperity. Few stood in the way of a white man on the rise, but blacks who made good were met with lynching, segregation and disenfranchisement.

When Thomas Moss and his two business partners became a bit too successful in competing with a white merchant in Memphis, Tenn., in 1892, they found their store

burned to the ground and their lives hanging from the branch of a tree.

JILL SNIDER  
GUEST COLUMNIST

The descendants of the majority of black Americans still live in poverty not because their ancestors did not work hard enough, but because they were not allowed to succeed. Those blacks whose great-grandparents and grandparents did do well did so usually in segregated economies in cities or in isolated rural areas free from white interference. Limited to small markets, however, they faced limits to their prosperity.

It has not been until the latter part of this century that blacks have enjoyed more than a modicum of access to job opportunities, and those opportunities still remain smaller than those for white Americans.

To say, "OK, start competing with whites from ground zero," without recognizing the historical ramifications of slavery is a bit like, as my friend Tom Robinson once said to me, "giving all the equipment and practice fields to a white football team, letting them play with no opposing defense for the first half, running up a huge score, and then inviting the black team into the stadium." Guess which team is going to be better off at the end?

Aside from economics, as important in American society is the psychological power white Americans have derived and continue to derive from the myths of white supremacy fostered by slavery and segregation. No one can put a price on the emotional pain and anger caused by whites who have historically attacked black peoples' psyches, and few whites understand the drain of energy it takes to combat those attacks.

When I was a child I had the luxury of reading in my textbooks about the exploits of Betsy Ross and George Washington,

Daniel Boone and Calamity Jane, Amelia Earhart and Charles Lindbergh. I saw my features reflected back to me in them, and I had my self-worth strengthened by knowing that people who looked like me could and were expected to thrive. But neither I nor the black children my age found Benjamin Banneker and Phillis Wheatley, Mary Ellen Pleasant and Bill Pickett, John Robinson and Bessie Coleman in those textbooks. Instead, we read about "happy" slaves and got the message that people who looked like them could not do great things, and did not care that they couldn't.

I never witnessed the inevitable looks of pain and confusion on my black peers' faces at the absence of their heroes, because black children were barred from the public school I attended. Not legally, of course, but by circumstances created by whites who did not want their school integrated. They simply let it be known through their words and deeds that if black people prized their safety, they would stay out of town.

Isolation from blacks made it all the easier for the pernicious racial lies I heard daily as a child to flourish. Blacks were subhuman, monkeys, lazy, dirty and dumb. I rejected those beliefs as I grew older and more independent, but like all white people wrestling with a poisoned cultural legacy, I, to my dismay, still feel them lurk in my gut and subconscious.

No, James Jennings is right. I am not guilty of what white individuals in the past did to black individuals, but as the long-term recipient of the social benefits of their actions, I am not absolved of any present responsibility. I must be aware that my success today has much to do with the economic and social advantages of being born white.

Though I grew up poor, with no slave holders in my ancestry that I am aware of, and though I have worked very hard to get

where I am, I did not do it alone. Many people encouraged and helped me (some with money) along the way who would have turned their backs had I been black. I never had to fear that my working hard would bring about anger and reprisals. It instead has brought me praise and admiration. Even more important, the very sense of self I derived from a racist school system, which told me I was superior because I was white, contributed to the self-confidence needed to undertake my career.

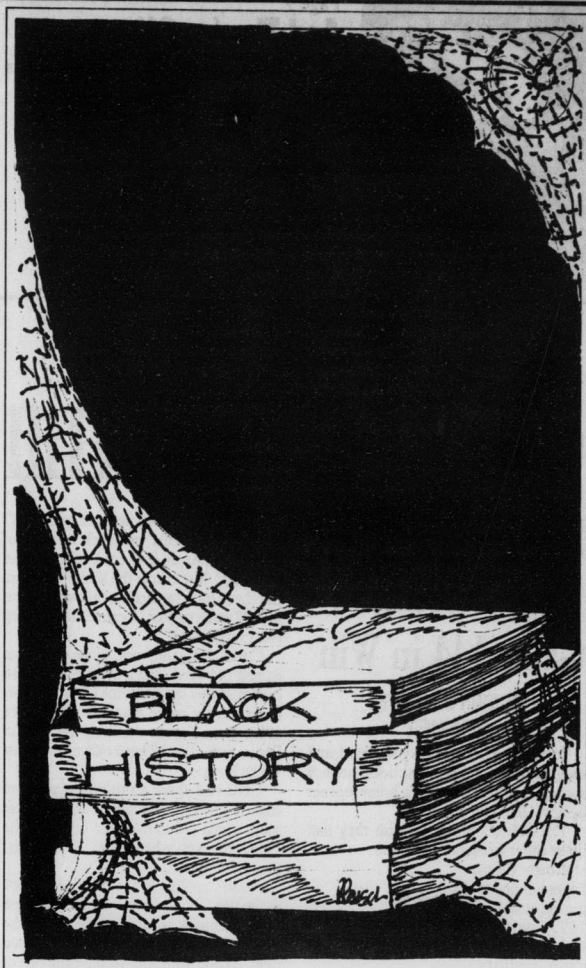
We are not all individuals divorced from the past or from each other. We live in relation to past events and to other people. I support the BCC, hoping that it can serve as a symbolic acknowledgment to black students of the wrongs in America's history, and that it can lead to some tangible change in the future.

I feel we do owe blacks public recognition of racism. Wallowing in guilt for others' sins helps no one, but owning up to the truth of our own ingrained racism and admitting the benefits that we have derived from a racist system are our responsibility.

I think white students can acknowledge the effects of slavery and the mentality it created without negating the fact that there were parts of the white past to be proud of and that there are more differences and structures of power that divide us than just race.

Our economic and social status, where we worship, our gender, our sexuality, our ethnic identities, physical handicaps and barriers, and a myriad of other factors make our experiences and needs different, but none of us, white or black, can solve the conflicts between and among ourselves created by our diversity until we are willing to face the truth of the past and its relation to the present and to the future.

Jill Snider is a graduate student in the history department.



## Handgun Ban Worth A Try, May End Random Violence

TO THE EDITOR:

I'm writing in response to Alan Martin's column, "Handgun Ban Would Not End Crime or Violence" (Sept. 2). Mr. Martin asserts that "anyone who believes that a handgun ban will cause those who use guns in anger or aggression to set them aside and become nonviolent are plain crazy." Well, I agree. However, even though domestic violence isn't going to decrease in proportion to the number of guns in existence, this doesn't mean guns aren't a major part of the problem. Though I realize that handguns will still exist even if a ban is enacted, it is only logical that fatalities from violent crimes would be much more likely to decrease if guns weren't so easily obtainable than if the system remains as it is.

As Mr. Martin points out, the people who would be most likely not to possess a gun if a ban were enacted are the same type of citizens that would not commit a violent crime anyway. Yet if an attacker looking for material goods thought his victim did not have a gun, what need would they have for committing murder unless they just liked the idea of the death penalty? The only reason why they might shoot their victim is if they felt threatened, and they would feel much more threatened if they thought a gun might be used on them first. Furthermore, an attacker has thought out and planned his actions, whereas the victim is caught by surprise. More than likely a victim's gun would be used against him in his lack of preparation than as a weapon of defense.

If a person is sick enough to kill just for fun then we move into the realm of random violence, and even if, Mr. Martin, you carried your shotgun with you on every outing, unless you can read minds, you more than likely would not be the person to pull the trigger first. The only way to protect yourself against random shootings is if would-be criminals didn't own guns, and a handgun ban would be the most logical way to attempt this state.

Guns serve one purpose: to kill. Why do we even need guns to exist at all, with the possible exception of hunting, and what kind of animal are going to hunt with a handgun? We might as well try a handgun ban. What do we have to lose except our lives?



Dawn Striggle  
SENIOR  
ENGLISH

## Gun Control Does Not Guarantee Personal Safety

TO THE EDITOR:

I am writing in response to Gerri Baer's editorial "Gun Ban Guarantees Citizens Right to Feel Safe" in the Sept. 1 DTH. As the title of her column suggests, Baer argues that a restrictive handgun ban would allow her and other honest citizens of Chapel Hill to feel safe from armed attack. Although Baer's intentions are good, I believe that naivete has clouded her judgment.

Consider this: Washington, D.C., enacted similar handgun bans in 1977. Since then, gun-related crimes have only increased drastically. Washington, D.C., is now the murder capital of the world. Despite handgun bans, I doubt that the citizens in this city feel "safe." How can this obvious contradiction be, Baer? The answer is quite simple.

Do you honestly believe that the rob-

bers, rapists and gang members of Washington, D.C., and New York City have a hard time obtaining handguns or that they often pause to consider that they are breaking the law by doing so? Of course not. They are, after all, criminals. They obtain the tools of their trade illegally and would do the same in Chapel Hill. It is already impossible in Orange County for anyone with a criminal record to legally acquire and use a handgun, but they do so anyway. It is plainly obvious that people who use handguns to commit crimes rarely pay heed to handgun laws. Baer would have us believe that if Chapel Hill enacted laws which made civilian possession of any handgun a crime, the individuals given to criminal activities would sigh, shrug their shoulders in defeat and deposit their firearms in the nearest trash can. Then everyone in Chapel Hill would be "safe." Prior

examples indicate that this is unlikely. The only person affected by such a handgun ban would be honest law-abiding citizens. Such people would be unable to legally exercise their constitutional right to purchase firearms and, if they wanted to remain law-abiding, they would be forced to get rid of any handguns in their homes.

Baer argues that this would be good, and asks, "Why would an average citizen need to own a handgun after all?" It is unfortunate that Baer believes that she can justly decide what other honest citizens "need."

It is an imperfect world we live in, full of bad people who commit crimes. Subsequently, it is almost impossible to guarantee anyone "the right to feel safe." A handgun ban in Chapel Hill certainly won't do it.

M. Wayne Parrow  
CLASS OF 1992

## Citizens Lose Self-Defense Option Under Gun Ban

TO THE EDITOR:

This is in response to Gerri Baer's column "Gun Ban Guarantees Citizens Right to Feel Safe" (Sept. 1).

Like Gerri Baer I am also from Fayetteville, and I am also terrified. Terrified, because I can't believe someone from Fayetteville (or more affectionately referred to as "The Ville" or "Fayetteville") believes in the can't-we-all-get-along-give-peace-a-chance approach to curbing violent crime.

Like other large, transit, military towns, Fayetteville has a reputation for being a rough place. Growing up there, I've seen that reputation affirmed many times. Besides your complementary drive-by shootings, a former basketball star from my high school was arrested for shooting a state trooper. A guy I played neighborhood football with slit a girl's throat while at the local college. And I can only watch as my old neighborhood transforms into an up-and-coming New Jack City. That's why it's hard to understand how the author, who, like me, is from a place like Fayetteville, can be so naive.

Baer holds the very popular contention that gun control will deter crime and make our streets safer from the like of Anthony Simpson and Kenneth French Jr. In an ideal society, where everyone adheres to the rules and regulations, this is a very noble and valid position. However, when you step off of Planet Reebok and back into reality, this is not practical measure.

This is due to the fact that criminals by definition do not and will never abide by the law. Passing a law which bans guns (even for seven days) will be as effective as a mute Pit preacher. Criminals will not replace their AK-47s and sawed-off shot-

guns with water balloons and slingshots because of law.

Look at the public school system. While it's forbidden to possess a firearm at school, guns, not to mention drugs, continue to permeate not just Fayetteville's, but the entire country's school systems. I can't remember how many times I've heard about how some kid blew away another in school because something was said about his mama. Yes, that's right folks! It's illegal, but people continue to do it anyway. Imagine that!

Not only will it not deter crime, but in many instances it could increase it. Picture this if you will. While criminals engulf the streets with violence, the average gun control law-abiding citizen is left defenseless. But what's scary is that the criminal knows this. Instead of thinking twice before acting, the criminal can now rape and pillage with new confidence, knowing their victims, in accordance with law, have no firearms to effectively defend themselves.

I sincerely wish that gun control laws could make Chapel Hill, Fayetteville and the rest of the country a safer place. Like Baer, I think we should be free "to roam, to learn, to experience life." And then I think about the author's question:

"If no one owns a gun, why must Joe or Jane need a gun to feel safe?"

Answer: Anthony Simpson, Kenneth French, ...

Eric Bryant  
SOPHOMORE  
POLITICAL SCIENCE

## Welfare Not Responsible For Criminal Behavior

TO THE EDITOR:

I am getting tired of hearing welfare romanticized by critics who seem to think it keeps people in the lap of luxury. Alan Martin writes in his Sept. 2 column that "the welfare state ... gives people what they want and need rather than what they earn and deserve." This summer I worked at an organization whose clients are meant-tested, so I got to know in detail the financial situation of everyone I talked to, including many people on welfare.

Mr. Martin may not know that under AFDC (Aid To Families with Dependent Children — the technical term for "welfare"), a household of three people receives less than \$300 per month. Some of these families get government housing, but others are stuck on waiting lists and have to pay rent out of that tiny budget. We all know that a mother with two kids and less than \$300 will barely be able to pay for power and phone bills, clothing, transportation, household supplies and some food (food stamps aren't necessarily enough), let alone rent. In fact, many of the people I worked with this summer had to call me from neighbors' homes because they couldn't afford phone service. Even the federal government admits that welfare income is inadequate: families receiving AFDC are at about 33 percent of the government-defined poverty level.

Mr. Martin should have thought about the special predicament of children before he claimed that welfare makes kids into criminals. Children are not self-supporting



## READERS' FORUM

The Daily Tar Heel welcomes reader comments and criticism. Letters to the editor should be no longer than 400 words and must be typed, double-spaced, dated and signed by no more than two people. Students should include their year, major and phone number. Faculty and staff should include their title, department and phone number. The DTH reserves the right to edit letters for space, clarity and vulgarity.

in any class of society, and I doubt Mr. Martin's parents demanded that he "earn" or "deserve" his Gerber's baby food. Does he suggest that the government end welfare and let the kids starve, which is what would happen? Of course children are desperately angry and often violent when their entire family lives off less than half the salary of a UNC graduate student, and most of America begrudges them even that.

Liza Reynolds  
GRADUATE  
CLASSICS

## Columnist Not Informed About Native Americans

TO THE EDITOR:

This letter is in response to "Everyman's" column on team names. OK, "Everyman," here's why ethnic team names are offensive. When you cartoonize an entire race, use them as mascots and then market them as a commodity, it's an insult.

Your own references to Native-American culture (scalping, rain dance and smoke signals) indicate that your only exposure to them has been through moronic Popeye and Bugs Bunny cartoons.

But I guess your excuse is every man's excuse: "Hey, I love the Braves! It's tradition. What's the big deal?"

The big deal is that you have no knowledge of Native Americans or their culture. You have deeply insulted and trivialized a race of people by advocating their use as mascots (read "animals") for what is nothing more than recreation. Defending such an insult in your column only compounds your ignorance.

Do you think women, Jews or blacks or any other segment of the human population ought to be used as team mascots?

It is unthinkable that a colonial power would use its subjects as team mascots, and the relationship between whites and Native Americans should be no exception.

Media portrayal is just as hurtful to minorities as other forms of injustice.

Using them as mascots is holding them up to the ridicule of others. Such public ridicule in media law is called libel and is open to legal prosecution. It's a shame we don't apply the libel principle to a race maligned by stupid stereotypes.

I think most of us just don't take Native Americans as a race seriously, as you so aptly illustrated in your column. And we Americans tend to justify ourselves based on the legality of our actions.

No, the Constitution does not mention how to name teams; the Supreme Court doesn't say it's illegal for a team to be called the Redskins. But other codes of ethics do exist.

How could mascot and cartoon-status possibly convey the emotion, humanity, strength and beauty embodied by any race?

It takes a lot of wisdom and compassion to understand complex social issues, Everyman — not a thinking cap from Disney World.

Anubha Anand  
SENIOR  
JOURNALISM

## NAFTA Doesn't Mandate Equitable or Fair Trade

TO THE EDITOR:

This letter is a refutation of "NAFTA Would Promote Trade, Increase Jobs, Lower Prices" (Sept. 1) by Nicole Fatseas; as well as supporting Jeff Saviano's column "NAFTA Would Take Advantage of U.S. Workers" (Aug. 27).

Mr. Saviano states that "... after its (North American Free Trade Agreement) approval, citizens will not be able to interfere with the decisions of business panels by appealing to their elected governments." In other words, Congress, specifically the Senate, would have no power to ratify any treaty between Canada, Mexico and the United States that would fall under NAFTA's authority.

This would give the executive branch and business leaders free rein to move capital (thus jobs) wherever they could find lower wages and less stringent worker-safety and environmental regulations. Advances achieved and maintained by labor unions and the environmental community would continue to be eroded. In return, Mexico would continue to be the recipient of environmental devastation. The cost of cleaning up the region of the Maquiladora (free trade) zone is already estimated at \$5 billion.

Don't be fooled by Ms. Fatseas' light claim that the job market could conceivably change here. It is already changing. Not all the jobs now moving to Mexico involve low-skilled labor. In the Maquiladora zone, many are in the electronics and transportation equipment field. A Mexican Ford engine plant is 80 percent as efficient as a U.S. plant, but pays its workers only 6 percent of U.S. wages.

How many more U.S. jobs do you think will move to Mexico? If you have any doubts, watch Michael Moore's movie "Roger and Me." If you think that trend wouldn't happen in this part of the country, what about the large textile industry based here in the South? If NAFTA passes, the standard of living for many Americans will decline.

As far as the "side agreements" on labor and the environment that the Clinton administration is negotiating, the enforcement provisions are very weak. These provisions will not fix NAFTA. It might be interesting to note that varying political figures from Jesse Jackson, Ross Perot and Pat Buchanan are opposed to NAFTA. I have no desire to be accused of taking a protectionist stance on this issue but free trade is not synonymous with fair or equitable trade.



Richard Cunningham  
CONTINUING STUDIES  
GEOGRAPHY

## Businesses Don't Move to Mexico for Lower Wages

TO THE EDITOR:

In light of the much-heated North American Free Trade Agreement debate, Ross Perot prepares to stir the pot with another "save the country" master plan. Perot's book, entitled "Save Your Job, Save Our Country — Why NAFTA Must Be Stopped — Now!," was due in your local bookstore on Labor Day. According to Perot, if NAFTA is passed, America's industries and jobs will be sucked south to Mexico because of lower wages. This is misleading.

The question of lower wages was confronted during the development of the European Community. People argued that

there would be a rush of manufacturing jobs to Spain and Portugal because of lower wages. This failed to occur. In fact, Spain and Portugal now have the highest unemployment rate (22 percent) in Europe. Instead of simply looking for the cheapest labor, when trade barriers were removed, manufacturers looked to produce their products in the most efficient sites. These two countries have a history of small plants and poor quality goods (similar to Mexico) and therefore did not sway jobs away from other European countries. At the same time, when the Spanish and Portuguese markets opened, opportunities for their European partners increased substantially.

Perot states that because Mexicans are paid "58 cents an hour" American jobs will go south. If total cost and production of a good were based solely on labor costs, then he would have a valid point. However, by examining the cost of production of goods one notices that labor only contributes to about 15 percent of total costs (this number differs slightly from product to product, but tends to hold true for businesses that provide higher-paying jobs).

When manufacturers choose whether to move a plant to Mexico, labor and material costs will not be the deciding factors. What will be more important is obtaining the lowest total cost with the highest quality of product, and these are two factors that America still leads.

Matt Sherman  
SENIOR  
HISTORY/ECONOMICS

## Not All Black South Africans Murder Whites

TO THE EDITOR:

In response to Jonathan Hart's letter of Aug. 30 ("U.S. Should Drop Sanctions Against South Africa"), I must say that I am disappointed in the senseless manner with which he judges the issue.

While nothing can condone the brutal murder of Ms. Biehl, and her murderers should definitely pay for their act, Mr. Hart would not so glibly draw such facile and infantile conclusions from this tragic event if he were up-to-date with current affairs in South Africa.

After all, several foreign tourists are murdered each year in America. Is the conclusion one should draw from this that Americans do not want tourism? Of course not, and in the same vein Mr. Hart should not so ignorantly assume that all black South Africans feel the same way as those men who murdered Ms. Biehl.

There are many South Africans, blacks, and otherwise, who are actively seeking a peaceful integration of all races, and to have someone of small intellect and no critical thinking, like Mr. Hart, lump them all together as murderous savages who ought once again to feel the whip of apartheid so that they can learn to appreciate all that is been done for them, well, that is an insult that surely needs apology.

As to Mr. Hart's response of "Let's just nuke them and get it over with." If that was the traditional American response of dealing with countries in which Americans have been killed, let's face it, half the world would by now be a nuclear wasteland. If this is the standard of journalism that we can expect from Mr. Hart, I truly hope that he considers changing his chosen field of study to something less demanding of objectivity and realism, unless of course he is considering for one of the less salubrious tabloids in circulation.

Tom Kazungu  
CHAPEL HILL