

OPINION

# Free-standing black cultural center debate splits campus

## Chancellor must recognize coalition's demands

## Multicultural center would serve all minorities

*Editor's note: The authors are the president-elect of the Black Student Movement and the co-president of the Campus Y.*

The demand for a free-standing Sonja Haynes Stone Black Cultural Center has been widely reported in the media in the last two weeks, but this demand is anything but recent. In fact, students have been demanding a free-standing BCC for more than a decade. The purpose of this column is to clarify the issues surrounding this demand.

Perhaps the most important consideration is the history behind the struggle for a free-standing BCC. More than 14 years ago, students first approached the University administration with the idea of a black cultural center. This issue was brushed aside by the administration, and no progress was made until a decade later, in 1988. In that year, the UNC Board of Trustees recognized the beginning of the black cultural center. The room in the Student Union was intended to be a temporary site, and the Board of Trustees stated its support for the construction of a permanent BCC. It is now four years later, and it seems that this temporary site has become permanent.

Clearly, the current BCC is inadequate. In September 1989, the Facilities, Planning and Design Committee of the University conducted a feasibility study for the construction of a free-standing black cultural center. The committee determined that the minimum space required to house the programs of the black cultural center would be 23,000 square feet. This space would include offices, performance space, a library and an art/reception gallery. This proposal may seem extravagant to some students, and we would like to respond to this viewpoint by explaining why we feel that a free-standing black cultural center is urgently needed.

Some members of the University community have misinterpreted the purpose and effect of a free-standing

**Thomas/Wilkens**  
Guest Writers

BCC. The BCC is not a "fortress" as Chancellor Paul Hardin stated. Its mission, as stated in its by-laws, is "to serve the cultural, intellectual, psychological and sociological needs of both the black and the non-black community at UNC-CH as those needs relate to the Black experience in America." We all know that the contributions of African Americans historically have been omitted from American culture.

The BCC is designed to restore a true sense of cultural awareness by re-centering the contributions of African Americans in our society.

The accusation that a free-standing black cultural center would segregate our campus by excluding non-black students is unfair. As we examine this issue, let us take into account a few of the features of this campus that might be considered non-inclusive for black students. In a study released in 1988 from the Office of Institutional Research, a black student was quoted as saying, "The cold, hard facts are that you will frequently be the only black in the class and asking questions and interacting can be very intimidating."

Each day on this campus, African-American students must go into buildings built by their forefathers, but named after plantation owners and Klansmen. We are not suggesting that buildings be renamed, we merely wish to describe the atmosphere in which black students find themselves.

Thus it is true that a free-standing BCC would give African-American students a place to celebrate their culture in an atmosphere free of the intimidation found elsewhere on campus. However, the BCC simultaneously invites every member of the University community to take part in this celebration. In effect, a free-standing black cultural center will begin breaking down the mental

segregation that currently exists on our campus.

The demand for a free-standing black cultural center is not a demand for millions of dollars that the University does not have. As we have made clear to the administration, we are prepared to work with the Development Office in raising the funds necessary to build a free-standing Sonja Haynes Stone Black Cultural Center. However, the administration has made it very clear to us that we cannot raise funds outside of the Bicentennial campaign. In other words, not only do they refuse to help us, but they refuse to let us help ourselves. This type of response combined with the racial atmosphere on campus justifies the label "plantation."

One can clearly see slave labor in the form of the work of UNC housekeepers, who are paid sub-poverty level wages while facing abuse and degradation from their employers. In addition, the administration completely ignores the concerns of students, just as the master ignored the slaves.

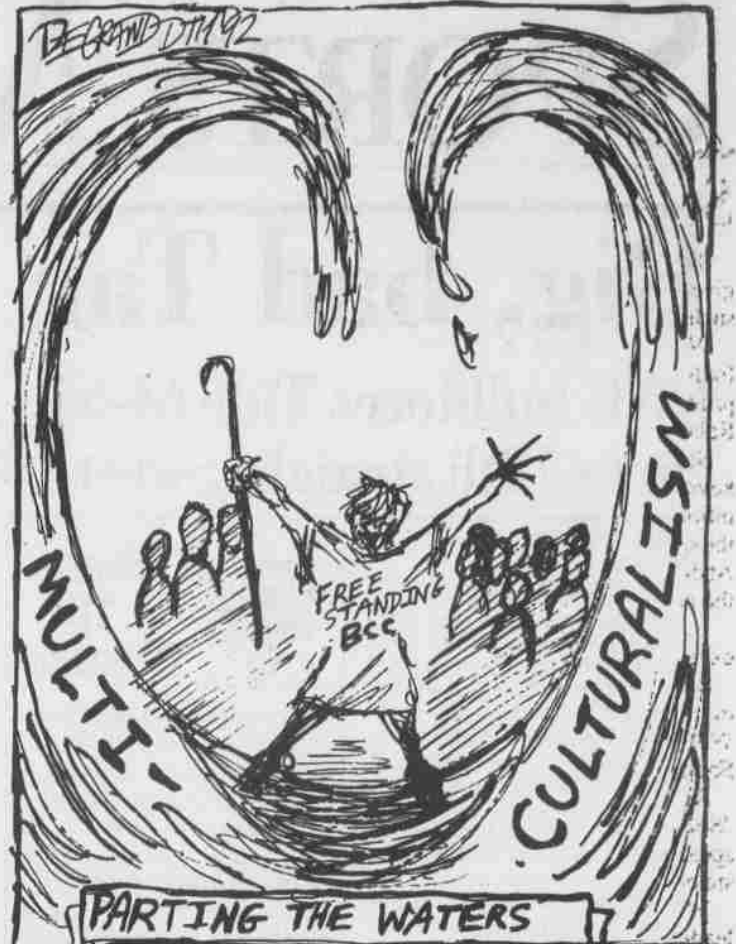
We firmly believe that the administration of the University should work in the interest of the students. This movement is defining what is in our interests. The administration must take responsibility for setting the tone of race relations on our campus. The Chancellor's Committee on Community and Diversity described the atmosphere on campus as "chilly." Despite such negative characterization of race relations, the University administration continues to do nothing to improve the racial climate. This complete lack of response to the needs of the students, especially those who have been ignored for the past 198 years, constitutes the perpetuation of a Plantation on the campus of a supposedly liberal institution.

*Michelle Thomas is a senior African-American studies major from Laurinburg. Scott Wilkens is a junior political science/economics major from St. Louis.*

Multiculturalism. During the last few years it has become the watchword of the campus. The endeavors that we have taken to bring it into our curriculum and into our everyday lives deserve praise. Race Relation Week was a celebration of this diversity. There is, however, one area that we have no place to be proud, namely when it comes to the idea of a free-standing BCC. The idea of a black cultural center is a good one, but it fails to celebrate the diversity that exists on this campus, which would be served by a multicultural center. Also, a black cultural center tends to separate minority groups rather than bring them together by stating that one minority group's existence is more vital than another.

A multicultural center would better serve the needs of all campus minorities. First, it could serve as a unifying force. Next, it could increase the knowledge of all members of the campus in terms of our rich heritage and diversity. Also, by giving space to some of the struggling minority groups, who come to Student Congress just to get enough money to survive, you give them the opportunity to grow and to expose the campus to their culture. Finally, there is simply the practical aspect of the issue. As room in the Union becomes scarce, it becomes harder for small groups to fight for space, and in some instances they even risk being forced out.

I have heard several arguments against this idea. The most often repeated and possibly the stupidest of these arguments is that it should be a black cultural center because it is the black student population that has fought for the center. Well congratulations! The entire evolution of civil rights in this country has stemmed from minority groups that have received some degree of power helping out other minority groups. The abolitionist movement would never have succeeded if it had not been for women beating their husbands over the head until they realized that slavery was wrong. The voter reg-



**Elliott Zenick**

Guest Writer

stration of blacks would have never occurred if it had not been for Jews risking their lives to register black voters. (Remember Mississippi Burning?) These groups that have not fought for a cultural center have not done so for one reason; namely, they lack the organiza-

tion, manpower and clout that the Black Student Movement has. It is time that the BSM helps other minority groups as their ancestors were helped. By doing so, not only will the campus be truly enriched culturally, but also the minority groups will be united in a purpose that the BSM has long worked for — equality of all on this campus.

*Elliott Zenick is a sophomore public policy major from Cary.*

### READERS' FORUM

#### Coalition takes 'selfish and stubborn' stance

To the editor:  
Let me introduce myself. I am one of the "ignorant" persons who has never stepped foot into the black cultural center located in the Student Union. Therefore, please be patient with me as I struggle to find the words to adequately express my opinions.

First, I believe that the multicultural center proposed by Chancellor Paul Hardin meets the objectives and wishes for minority representation that the Black Student Movement has called for since its existence. This proposal was immediately rejected by the BSM and the protest "coalition." The protesters outside of South Building chastised Hardin for being unresponsive to their demands, while some called him a racist. Hardin produced a fair compromise that the BSM should have taken for the benefit of its organization, and the protesters damaged the support they could have received from the rest of the student body by refusing a logical, just proposal.

Second, this selfish and stubborn stance on the building of a free-standing BCC that the BSM is taking proves very counterproductive to the entire movement which is attempting to improve race relations. In a recent DTH article, leaders of minority organizations other than the BSM expressed their displeasure with the denial of a multicultural center by the BSM, which claims to best "address all minority issues." It is unfair for other minority groups to be denied a center where their respective organizations could organize with greater ability. The center would also provide a place where all students of every race could learn to communicate and understand one another.

When you think about it, BSM members, people with green eyes reside in the minority on this campus, and could easily form an organization. But I am willing to be that if the Green Eyed Movement tried to claim that it represented the causes of all minority groups at UNC, including the BSM, you would be outraged. For, GEM would have nothing in common with your organization, and your goals would be completely different. Although this is a crazy, hypothetical situation, it shows how things can become clearer when you place yourselves in the shoes of the minority organizations for whom you have chosen to speak.

Third, I wish to state that not all white UNC students are either racist or ignorant. Granted this racism accusation has never been directly stated, but I can attest that it has been implied throughout this school year. Close your eyes, pick up any DTH, open your eyes, and I wager that an article or editorial will appear in front of you concerning the mistreatment of blacks by the students, the administration, etc. at UNC. I am not disagreeing with the complaints of black students, but the whining appeals of the BSM leaders along with the blunt insinuations of racism alienates its cause and defeats its purpose. I would feel completely comfortable walking into the BCC, thereby losing my "ignorance," if the tone of the BSM this year had not been so full of hostility. I wel-

come the establishment of a multicultural center for the use of all minority groups and the improvement of race relations on this campus. I hope the BSM will join this cause, opposed to its current mission, which places their objectives above the good of the entire student body.

**JEFF HOWLE**  
Senior  
English/Political Science

#### Complaining is poor way to achieve BCC goal

To the editor:  
I would like to take this opportunity to make some demands of the individuals involved with the protest over Chancellor Paul Hardin's refusal to meet their demands. First, I demand that they act like responsible adults rather than whining children! Second, I demand that they infuse some logic, practicality, maturity and reality into their arguments and actions! If my demands are not met, I will have no choice but to label their actions as irresponsible and racist. I will then take my toys and go home.

Sarcasm aside, I find the basic message of the protesters and follow up comments made by Charles McNair in his letter (March 17) to be absurd. I am no Jean Dixon, but I predict that none of their goals will be realized until someone comes up with the money — that is the bottom line. Arnie Epps should know that the "old-fashioned way" to achieve something is not to whine but to put hard work and effort into the root cause of the problem (which appears in this case to be a lack of funds for a free-standing building and an endowed chair). Protests, name-calling and a harassment campaign will do nothing to solve this basic problem. Their time and effort would be better spent raising funds for these goals. Granted, a private effort will take time. But the amount of time needed to realize a dream does not affect its worthiness. If the protesters believe in these issues so strongly, then I challenge them to continue to pursue their goals (through more constructive and effective means) even after they graduate and leave school. The methods these people have demonstrated thus far are the behavioral equivalent of throwing a tantrum or holding one's breath (and are probably as effective). Labeling others racist because they disagree with you or ignore you is irresponsible and can undermine your cause by alienating otherwise sympathetic people who are embarrassed by public displays of colossal stupidity and gross ignorance. Negative comments from others may indeed have racial motives. But the protesters must also learn and understand that, in some cases, they will be ignored simply because their actions do not merit a response. Learn the difference! Complaining loudly is an excellent device for getting attention, but hard work and self-help can be more effective when actual results are desired. So please, shut up and get busy!

**WILLIAM C. GREEN**  
Master's Program  
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#### Rally changes student's mind, garners support

To the editor:  
A weird thing happened to me the other day that I now think I should share with my peers. On Tuesday there was a press-attended question and answer session with Chancellor Paul Hardin in front of the South Building. I didn't even know that such a session was going on, yet I was immediately drawn into the heated debate about the push for a free-standing black cultural center. As the questions continued, I realized that the cool confident young woman who had marched right up to the debate was now challenged and rather confused.

As I listened, I learned about a promise made 14 years ago. This promise from administrators was for a free-standing BCC. I also learned that the students supporting this center aren't asking for any money from the administration — just support, cooperation and land. The students who support this center plan to raise the money to fund construction.

At the session, I made a comment that a majority of the student population — including myself — would oppose this free-standing center if put to a vote. However, now, after speaking to several informed members of the Black Student Movement, I would support a BCC. I have come to this conclusion only after learning the real facts and after trying to understand the desire of black students on campus to have an adequate place to congregate and feel comfortable.

I don't feel as though I have been "talked into" supporting the center. I feel that only now do I know all the facts and only now can I form an opinion based on more than partial knowledge. I still have concerns about the situation: Is a free-standing center really necessary or realistic? Doesn't giving land mean giving money? Is it realistic that a promise made 14 years ago by a former chancellor will be kept today? Will the center really become a multicultural meeting place where all feel comfortable?

These are questions that I cannot answer. I appeal to other students to learn from my mistake. It is important to understand that everyone is entitled to their own opinion. However, when you do form an opinion about the BCC, pro or con, please make sure that your decision is based on full knowledge — not partial truths — as was mine.

**MIRANDA MORGAN**  
Sophomore  
Biology

#### Misdirected hostility by BSM promotes racism

To the editor:  
I am compelled to write this letter by several recent campus and world events that continue to incite trouble. Virtually everyday I read something in The Daily Tar Heel that disturbs me and makes me wonder if there can possibly be an end to racism, any racism. I do not simply mean racism directed at blacks. I mean racism directed at any race by another.

The treatment of many blacks by many whites in this country has been

indisputably disgraceful. It is a national opprobrium. However, when did racism toward whites of today become so acceptable? I realize that many politically correct people live in constant fear of being labeled a racist, but I do not. I harbor no hatred for any race; and isn't that what it's really all about? Racism is not about a 23,000-square-foot black cultural center, nor is it about ending interracial dating as Sister Soulah suggests, nor is it about labeling our chancellor a racist, nor is it about removing art from in front of Davis Library, nor is it about using the appropriate name for each minority group, nor is it about quotas. Racism is about hatred.

The only way to stop racism is to stop hating other races. That means everybody, not merely whites. I have noticed, however, a distinct trend toward black supremacy. For example, the insistence of the BSM on having an enormous black cultural center smacks of segregation and exclusivism. The Black Student Movement seems unresponsive and even hostile to the notion of including other races in their center. Surely blacks are not the only race to suffer discrimination. Native Americans, Jews, Asians and Hispanics have suffered terrible eras of racism. I certainly hope that blacks do not believe that they are more important because they comprise a higher percentage of the student body than other minorities. And if that is so, doesn't that sound awfully familiar? (and I do mean awfully).

I do not offer these observations in anger or in fear. I write this as a concerned human being witnessing the perpetuation of hatred. Some may argue that I am a racist because I didn't refer to blacks as African Americans, and, if that is the limit of their vision, so be it. I would argue that if I hated blacks, I would be a racist. Furthermore, it is virtually impossible to hide hatred. It can be disguised with sensitive labels, special classes and buildings, but it cannot be hidden for long. Hatred must be confronted.

If you are black, I urge you to fight for equality while, at the same time, remembering that many whites of today do not hate you, and do not appreciate being told that they do. This often-times misdirected hostility only fuels the fire of the equally shameful white supremacists. Equality of all races extends beyond civil rights — it also encompasses each race's capacity to hate another. Finally, the only way to stop racism is to stop hating. This is true of all races. And if we are prepared to stop blaming, hating and exacting revenge, then God help us all.

**PETER ASHLEY**  
Senior  
Political Science/Speech

#### Hillel, Newman Center not labeled segregationist

To the editor:  
In all my years living in Chapel Hill, I have never once heard Jewish students denounced as "segregationist" because our campus has a free-standing Jewish cultural center (the Hillel). Nor has the existence of a free-standing Catholic cultural center (the Newman Center) been taken as evidence that Catholic students are "segregationist." Why then

do so many seemingly reasonable people assert that to advocate a free-standing black cultural center on the UNC campus is to somehow be "segregationist?"

Could someone please explain this to me? I am very confused.

**JOEL M. SIPRESS**  
Graduate  
History

#### Discrimination against Asian Americans ignored

To the editor:  
The support The Daily Tar Heel gave Thursday for a free-standing black cultural center as opposed to a multicultural center rests on the false assumption that other minorities "haven't been encountering the institutionalized racism that is undeniably a part of this university" ("Howell Hall should house free-standing BCC").

This is a view engendered by an East Coast perspective on American history, wherein the story of American history is defined mostly on the battlefields of the Civil War and the freedom marches of the civil rights movement. Yet the largely West Coast Asian-American experience is one littered with as much hatred and racism as that of the African-American one. Asians were denied naturalized citizenship from as far back as 1790. Some Asian Americans were brought to this country against their will and enslaved as prostitutes, despite the Civil War. Clearly my Anglo-American ancestors were equal opportunity racists. But the South's black and white East Coast world marginalizes other minorities, banishing Asians, for example, to a land where they are all presumed wealthy and intelligent.

It is in this mythical world that the University administration lives when it decrees that Asian Americans are ineligible for scholarship moneys based on minority status. Asians thus enjoy none of the positive discrimination that helps some members of the African-American community come to college. That the course offerings on South and Southeast Asian studies are slim here — much less sizable than the African and Afro-American curriculum — further means that the significance of 1-2 billion people on this planet has been entirely distorted. To my knowledge, the University doesn't offer even one course on any Asian-American experience. Because the academic leadership of this university chooses to allocate their scarce resources in a way that trivializes a culture so central to human history, and one so crucial to the development of this country, it is guilty of institutionalized racism viz a viz those of Asian descent.

This institutionalized racism is in part a fallout of the attempt to redress educational grievances with African Americans. By giving increased attention to African-American studies — in itself a good and necessary thing — funds cannot be given to the studies of other cultures. Quite intentionally, African-American numerical dominance has become a route to fiscal power that other minorities have so far been unable to match. In the honorable attempt to destroy institutionalized racism, African Americans have themselves become agents of that racism.

This, it seems to me, is the biggest problem with an African-American-oriented cultural center. Others maintain that the problem is that it will cause segregation or the entrenchment of hatred between the races. I disagree. The celebration of one's own culture is a fundamental human right. But by giving African Americans a building of their own, the message is that black culture is somehow more significant than that of any other ethnicity. Even if the BCC leaders do allow other cultural groups to use their facility, it will be precisely that: an allowance. What happens when an African-American group and a Korean-American group want to use the same part of that building at the same time? Who gets to use that space? My guess is that it would be the building's caretakers, the ones who have been given institutionalized power over the facility. To me the threat is that, despite perfectly good intentions, one form of racism will simply be supplanted by another. Clearly, our energies must be dedicated to the elimination of racism in all its forms, and thus, the need for a truly multicultural center becomes apparent.

**SHAWN FULLER**  
Senior  
Geography/Int'l Studies

#### Hardin's support needed here, not at ACC tourney

To the editor:  
Excuse me? Zane Carden states in the letter "Hardin does not deserve student charges of racism" (March 17) that Chancellor Paul Hardin is "a very active chancellor" and that "we also appreciate (him) showing (his) support of our outstanding basketball team at the ACC Tournament." Excuse me? I would also have liked to show my support of our outstanding basketball team at the ACC Tournament, but as a student at this university, I had classes to attend and other campus obligations. But I bet the chancellor was just so eager to show his support of our outstanding basketball team that he felt it was part of his duty as an "active chancellor" to toss other, more pertinent issues (like getting a free-standing BCC) to the wayside and get down to the nitty-gritty. I certainly hope you stood up when you cheered, Paul, so people could really see your support as an "active chancellor."

**WALT BOST**  
Sophomore  
RTVMP

#### Guest column policy

The Daily Tar Heel welcomes reader input in the form of guest columns. Interested persons are encouraged to submit well-researched columns ranging from 600 to 1,000 words to the editorial page editor, Shea Riggsbee, or the editor-in-chief, Peter Wallsten. Guest columns may also be dropped in the letters to the editor box located outside the DTH office, Suite 104, Student Union. Columns will be published at the discretion of the editorial page editor with consideration of timeliness and available space.