

Black Ink: a short but illustrious

Allen Johnson
Editor-in-chief

Nine years ago, amid the turmoil of the sixties, it began.

During a period when the Black campus community had gained a foothold as a South Campus colony... when Angela Davis and giant 'fros and Vietnam and Richard Nixon were the rage... when Charlie Scott waged periodic hardcourt battles with John Roche and an indignant, lily-white South Carolina basketball team... when the spectre of the draft sent many of us scurrying to ROTC detachments... when demonstrations were more rule than expectation...

... Black Ink was born.

The "official newspaper of the Black Student Movement" began in 1969 as the tabloid offspring of an earlier BSM newsletter (very similar to our Weekly Ink). Its editor was Cureton Johnson, a dynamic leader and worker who not only directed the paper's operations, but wrote most of its articles and even took some of its photographs.



Valerie Batts, Ink editor 1972-73.

In addition, between his studies and Black Ink duties, Johnson somehow found the time to serve as chairperson of the BSM.

In an editorial prospectus for the fledgling newsletter, Johnson noted that while an ideal vehicle would be Black ink on Black paper, an acceptable alternative would be "Black ink expressing Black ideas."

Thus began the era of an enigmatic cultural entity, which like Black folks themselves, has experienced more than its share of "dem changes."

In its early stages, the pages of Black Ink were filled with revolutionary ardor, launching verbal barbs, at "The Man" with few holds barred. Such words as "shit" and "motherfucker" regularly graced the Ink's articles. Although the Ink did offer some news and feature stories, much of its content was concerned primarily with telling "The Man" where to go and how to get there and much of it admirably fulfilled that task.

Ink articles also regularly criticized Blacks who refused to speak to other Blacks, Blacks who had shunned the Black community in favor of white friends, and Black men who mistreated Black women. In an anonymous, 1973 letter to

the editor, for example, one irate female berated women who allow men to become "king for a day." She wrote: "Females have to DEMAND respect. Do not subject yourself to any 'slap-happy' form of attention. 'Hey baby,' (feel of the ass) 'What's happening,' (feel of the breast). I ask you, is your body not more to you than some handy object of male manipulation?"

Another article by '73 Editor-in-chief Emma Pullen, reported on an incident in which a Black coed was denied access to a campus bus. Describing the argument which occurred after the coed was accused of not paying by the bus driver, Pullen wrote:

"There is a disagreement as to who started the profane verbal assault. Linda (the coed) says that the bus driver did. Jackson (the driver) maintains that he was provoked into responding after Linda called him every white S.O.B. that she could think of."

As early as 1972, Blacks expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of Black representation in the campus yearbook, *Yackety Yack*. The subsequent push for a Black yearbook began in 1973 when Staff Writer Flora Campbell editorially observed:

"Black students, aren't you tired of the lack of representation the Blacks receive in the *Yackety Yack*? The BSM is represented on one page with a picture of the chairman and one or two other Blacks. Except for class pictures, this is the only place Blacks can be seen.

"Doesn't it disturb you to realize the disillusionment this can cause about the amount of Black activities present on campus? If it does, are you willing to help counteract it?"

As the years progressed, Black Ink became increasingly professional, staffing more and more journalism majors. Professionalism did not muffle the Ink's ardent editorial voice, however, and up to 1973, and the editorship of Emma Pullen, the publication still regularly told "The Man" where to go.

The engineer of the drastic improvement in the Ink's technical and physical renaissance was Valerie Batts, a psychology major from Rocky Mount under whose editorship the publication first achieved regular distribution dates. Batts' successor as editor, Emma Pullen, says, "Valerie set standards for Black Ink. She made the Ink come out so often that the people in Student Graphics couldn't get used to it. They were so used to us coming out every blue moon."

Batts and legitimacy

Batts not only established a certain amount of legitimacy for Black Ink, but she also founded the Weekly Ink newsletter.

"The Ink had evolved into a general Black newspaper but it wasn't practical as a BSM newsletter (it's original purpose)," says Pullen, "because it came out only monthly. So Val started the Weekly Ink."

Batts, who now works in a Tennessee psychiatric clinic, later

served as BSM Minister of Information.

Pullen, in the meantime, built on the foundation started by her predecessor. When she became editor in 1973, she headed perhaps the most impressive year in the Ink's history. Mixing magazine lay-outs with traditional newspaper lay-outs and artwork, Pullen's staff produced seven diverse and highly informative issues of Black Ink.

The spectrum of topics covered by those issues included Black inmates in state prisons, the racism of Senator Sam Ervin, the need for an Afro-American studies department, the Earth, Wind and Fire concert in Carmichael Auditorium, the *Daily Tarheel's* systematic attempt to avoid hiring Black writers, poetess Gwendolyn Brooks, Angela Davis, the area Black Panther Party, the institution of pre-dawn hours for Black campus maintenance workers, and "The Wedding," (a play written by Carolina student Karen Dacons).

One of the most talked-about articles of that year was an editorial reprinted from the *UNC Journalist*. Written by a Black journalism student named Blain Macke, the article accused the BSM of intimidating Black freshmen to join the organi-

zation, of making Black students vote in BSM elections, and of trying to brainwash Blacks through Black Ink and the Weekly Ink.

The first magazine-style Ink was published in December, 1973. Interestingly, however, it was not published so much as an innovation as it was a necessity.

"We had only 7 pages of copy (for an 8-page issue)," Pullen explains. "We tried about four different layouts but we just didn't have enough copy. Finally, we decided to have one page of artwork but we couldn't find anything."

Then Lay-out-Editor Linda Williams suggested that Pullen, who had just been crowned Miss BSM, be placed on the cover.

"We went through a heated debate," Pullen continues, "and I tried to make them see my side. After all, it would look mighty egotistical for me, editor of Black Ink, to put myself on the cover. I didn't want any hate mail coming in."

This time, however, the editor did not have her way.

"We had a vote," she says, "and I was the only opponent. Staff members said they'd explain the situation to the students."



Era of militance: this early '70's cartoon reflects the vocally militant stance of the Ink during that period.