

THE OPINION PAGE

THE COMPASS

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 The Compass welcomes Letters to the editor. Letters should be sent to ECSU Box 815, Elizabeth City, NC 27509. All letters must be signed and include the writer's address and telephone number. They may be edited for length, clarity, and taste, as well as accuracy and grammar. Because of limited space, not all letters can be published.

Empty Seats

When approached for this issue's "Viewpoint" question, one ECSU student responded with a blank look and this question: "Who is Nelson Mandela?"

That question, along with the low student turn-out for the University's Black History Month Assembly, is symptomatic of a deeper problem at ECSU.

Campus apathy. Far too many students seem to be living in a state of psychic withdrawal from the world; far too many students seem more concerned with their social lives, or with just getting by with the least amount of effort, than with the real business at hand. The business of education, the business of gaining the skills and knowledge needed to become young professionals—and ultimately, we hope, to join the ranks of the leaders of American society.

During the Black History Month Assembly, Ronald Penny delivered an eloquent speech praising all Americans—black and white—who suffered and died in the struggle for racial equality—a struggle, we might add, that is still going on. Penny spoke not just of the struggle for racial justice, but also of the value of history, and the importance of knowing what has come before us. He called on ECSU students to get involved in the political process, and to exercise their right to vote, a right that was bought and paid for by others' blood.

Unfortunately, Penny's eloquence and insight were lost to much of the student body, since more than half of the seats in Moore Hall were empty.

Some of those students who did attend drifted in late, a discourtesy to the speaker, choir, and platform guests.

In commenting on the empty seats, Chancellor Jenkins clearly touched on the larger issue of campus apathy.

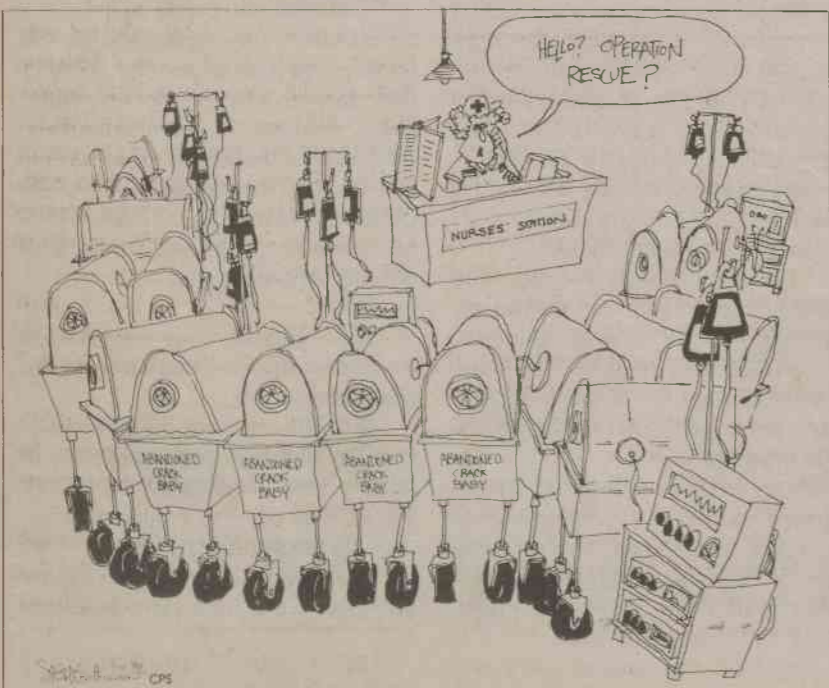
"We must have Black History Month until the true history of America is written," he said. "To let us know that our fathers were sharecroppers and our mothers scrubbed floors so we can stand here today. Are you going to idle that time away? That is immoral."

The real business of college is truly not "fun and games," as the Chancellor so aptly pointed out, but the business of learning, the business of growing, the business of becoming an adult.

And a cornerstone of that process is a knowledge and appreciation of history. Only by arming ourselves with that knowledge can we fully comprehend the present.

Those ECSU students who are indifferent to history and to the larger world beyond their petty concerns would do well to linger over these words of Tyrone Crider, speaker at the Founder's Day Program:

"Remember somebody gave his life to be where you are."



Samantha Epps
Roanoke Rapids, NC

"I don't think it's necessarily the beginning of the end of apartheid, they've still got a lot of struggling to do. It's one of the many steps that need to be taken."

Ricky Adams
LaGrange, NC

"I feel it is like Martin Luther King's jailings. Mandela's cause is the same. By his release things will be overturned. He'll rally his people and change won't be too far off."



Talk of ECSU:

Mandella released—but what's next in South Africa?
 Is this the beginning of the end of Apartheid?

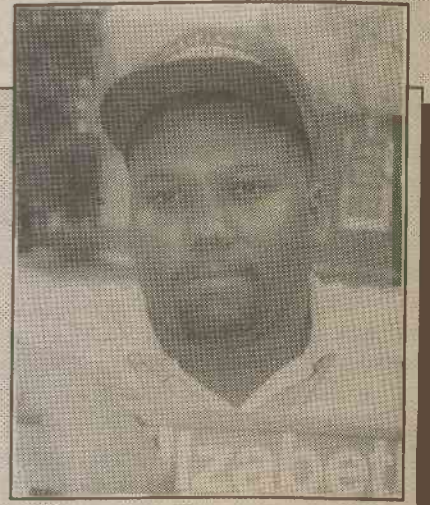


Nelson Stephens
Elizabeth City, NC

"It's possibly a sign of reform, but the US shouldn't end its economic sanctions against South Africa until more is done to end apartheid. Before real change is accomplished, violence will probably be unavoidable."

Therndon Brown
Kings Mountain, NC

"It's not a symbol of the beginning of the end of apartheid. There's going to have to be a movement similar to the one that occurred in the US in the sixties—a violent as well as a non-violent side."



Guest Columnists

Coping with autism takes love

By Sheila Lowrey

My brother, who is autistic, used to love to watch birds outside of his window. Then when he became excited about anything, he would flap his arms rapidly like a bird would do its wings. Although people would ask, "What's wrong with him?" I saw that what he did was just a way of expressing his feelings.

For autistic children, language can be a problem. As they grow older they may fail to learn to speak normally. Because of their social inaccessibility, and apparent unresponsiveness to noises, the child may be considered deaf.

My brother had problems with sound communication. In order for him to respond to what we were saying to him, we had to make sure he was looking at us when we called his name. Using eye to eye contact made him react quicker.

During the first years of life an autistic child may have difficulties

feeding. They may become preoccupied with one object or toy, or spend hours looking at their fingers. They may bang their heads against the crib repeatedly.

An autistic child's sleeping patterns are often abnormal, permitting both the child and his family only three to four hours sleep a night. My brother was usually the last one to go to sleep, but always the first to wake up—at five a.m. each day. When he woke up, he would be very hyperactive.

Coping with autism is difficult for the victim, but the family members have a difficult time, too. They have to deal with the behavioral problems of the child, the ridicule from others, and the expenses. This can be devastating to the family of the victim.

The autistic child and his family may experience ridicule from people outside the home.

If the autistic child attends school with normal children, he or she may be teased, and this makes the child

even more withdrawn.

At the day care centers my brother attended, other children made fun of him. Some of the kids would take his lunch money my mother had given him. John, wanting to make friends, would allow the boys to take his money.

Sometimes when I would bring my friends home, they would ask me if my brother had mental problems. My mother's co-workers noticed that there was something wrong with John. My mom is a teacher, and she felt as if she could help everyone except her own son.

The ridicule we experienced only made the problem worse.

Having an autistic child can be quite expensive. When we first discovered that John had this problem we had his eyes and hearing examined.

We found that most of the troubles he was having came from his inability to see. His vision was so poor that he saw letters, shapes and lines in a different order than the average person. The

type of glasses he needed were strong and expensive. Furthermore, he had to get a new pair every six months.

The public school system in Virginia Beach, where we lived, does not have a special program for autistic children, so school officials wanted to place John in a classroom for the mentally retarded. An autistic child is not retarded however, and placing John in that class would have harmed him. So my mother took John out of the public school and placed him in a private school that would provide the help he needed.

Tuition: \$1,324 a year. The school is about twenty miles from our house. Since the school does not provide transportation, my mother has to get up at six every morning to get John there at 7:15.

My mother has also taken John to see a psychologist for help.

With love, patience and determination, we are coping, as family, with John's autism. But it has not been easy.

Student recounts the nightmare of crack

(ECSU student's name withheld)

Growing up as an inner city youth I have always witnessed drug trafficking. As a teen in the late 70's and early 80's the major drugs were heroin, speed, and marijuana. Cocaine was thought of as a drug for rich whites.

My first experience with drugs was at age fourteen with my first joint. I didn't think it was addictive, but I smoked marijuana for eight years. I experimented with opium, hashish, and different pills. I was not hooked and these drugs turned out to only be experiments.

When speaking of drugs I must include alcohol. I actually believe this is the most addictive drug. I believe that most people won't admit this because it is legal. Most drinkers, even casual drinkers, say that it's O.K., and that it doesn't affect you as much as other drugs. However the death statistics related to alcohol speak for themselves. I'm not just talking about traffic related fatalities, but also coronary problems and homicides, which are aggravated by drinking.

In high school I smoked joints and drank frequently. My smoking turned into a daily habit. I know now that this is the major reason for my poor performance in high school—and the same holds true for many others. After getting frustrated with school, I decided to drop out.

I opted for the military. I scored excellent on the pretest and the recruiter talked me into going in the reserves, and going back to finish school. I went to basic training, and for the first time in years I took a spell from drugs. I thought I'd had it licked.

When I returned to school I started smoking again. I couldn't tell if I was weak or if peer pressure was strong, but most of my friends smoked, so I joined them. I was then introduced to cocaine, just two snorts. It was okay, but I wasn't impressed. I again gave in to my bad attitude and dropped out of school.

Three years had passed since I dropped out of school. I was doing okay. I had a good government job cooking. I had saved enough money to buy a nice car. Immediately after I bought the car my girlfriend got pregnant and my hours at work were cut back.

During the past few years I continued to smoke marijuana and drink alcohol, but nothing else. This was now 1985 and really the beginning of the cocaine epidemic. My best friends were selling cocaine and heroin. I never got involved because of fear and because my family morals were higher. Then I was approached with my first package of cocaine. The dealer offered me \$750 worth of pre-packaged \$20's and I was to pay him \$360 once I sold it all. Facing my situation and knowing that I could sell that much cocaine within three days, I accepted. I didn't know then that was something I could become addicted to.

After selling that package and several more I was ready to buy my own. A friend and I decided to combine our finances in a sort of "partnership." At this time prices were \$1600 for an ounce. We would buy two at a time; package it and double our investment. We soon expanded and hired people to package and sell it.

My friend went to New York and discovered a whole new ballgame. The abusers were doing what you call "freebase." That is cooking the cocaine with baking soda and water until it turns into a pure hard "rock." We already knew this but now the dealers were cooking it themselves and selling A-B-C (already been cooked.) This name was later changed by the white media to "crack."

Crack hit the city faster and harder than anything I had ever seen, including AIDS. Everyone was being affected: young, old, black, white, rich, and poor. Many of my friends and family members fell victim to this new sensation. I tried it once but did not like it and never did it again. So many people that I knew and respected were doing it and doing anything for it.

I really felt bad for selling it. I attempted many times to stop, but failed. I saw many of my friends arrested, shot, killed and strung out because of crack. And I realized that I had to get away from it.

My mother's influence on me was the biggest reason that I didn't get hooked, and wanted to get out. I went to the community college and took classes to obtain my G.E.D. After receiving it, I applied to ECSU, quit my job, and got away from drugs.

Drugs are affecting everyone. I know this because I have been there. They are destroying some of the most intelligent young black minds. I am not referring to drug abusers; I mean the dealers. After coming to college and learning what it takes to make it in business, I know that most drug dealers take their trade seriously—like a

business. By no means is dealing easy. You have to know your product market it, set up a budget, pay salaries, take inventory, watch out for hostile takeovers, and look out for the police, DEA and other criminals.

I am in no way defending them. For the most part we are destroying our own race. But it is very hard to tell a young teen to turn down a job making three or four times as much as his parents.

Why all the concern to stop it now? Is it really concern or is it media hype? There has always been a drug problem in Black America. No other drug has ever affected the nation in as great a proportion as crack. It has added costs in terms of medical treatment and is directly related to the increased spread of AIDS. Had it not touched white America in these dramatic ways, would it even be considered a problem?

In summary, is there a solution to the problem? I don't know. Some say legalize drugs. I can't say that I agree with that proposal. Prohibition didn't work with alcohol. Why legalize death again? Legalizing cocaine would affect the lower classes most because they are the worst educated; and the upperclass would educate their children to know that it's legal but that it kills.

I feel that the biggest defense we have against drugs is to reinstitute the family structure back into American society. People also have to be dedicated to helping one another. I realize what has to be done and I am dedicated to my people, and society as a whole. We have a long way to go, step by step.