

THE OPINION PAGE

THE COMPASS

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The Compass is published by Elizabeth City State University students under the direction of the Department of Language, Literature and Communication, Dr. Anne Henderson, Chairperson, and Mr. Stephen March, faculty advisor.

The Compass welcomes letters to the editor. Letters should be sent to ECSU Box 815, Elizabeth City, NC 27809. 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.

Spring Sports Fiasco

The failure of the tennis team and the softball team to go to the CIAA Spring Tournament in Winston Salem is inexcusable.

It makes no sense that these two talented teams, after competing all season, will not get the chance to participate in the tournament.

Students who play spring sports look forward to the CIAA Tournament all season. As one team member put it, "You work all season, and when that trip that you look forward to is snatched away from you, it's just disappointing."

CIAA rules state that the win-loss record of all teams participating in intercollegiate sports must be reported. But no stats, no win-loss records were turned in to the Sports Information Director, for either the softball or the tennis teams.

The responsibility for this failure lies clearly with the coaches of these teams. The coaches should either be keeping accurate records of these games. Or they should be responsible for having someone else to keep the records.

A larger problem here lies in the University's indifference to spring sports. After basketball season, the Athletic Department seems to lose interest in spring sports. For two years in a row, the track team has attended less than half of the meets scheduled. The tennis team is coached by an individual who lacks any experience in competitive tennis. And few, if any, administrators and faculty members show up at the games.

The unfortunate thing about this problem is that the students who play spring sports end up being the victims.

We believe these students deserve better treatment.

Front Line Warrior

The death of Ralph Abernathy marks the end of a chapter in the history of the American Civil Rights movement.

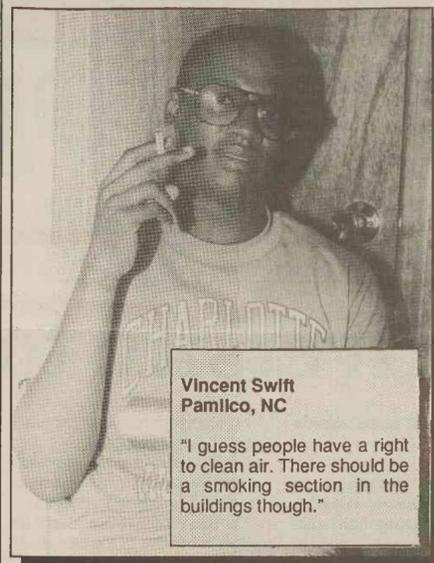
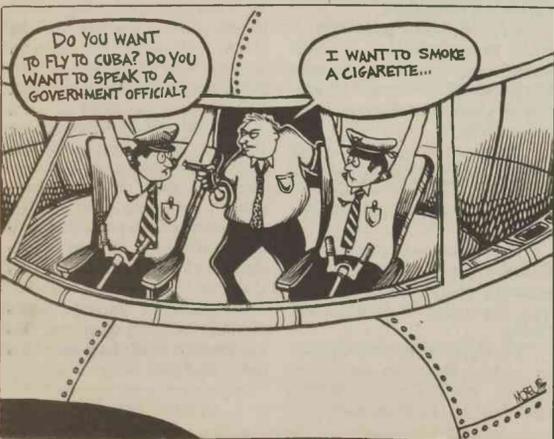
Abernathy stood in the forefront of this immensely tense and moving period in our nation's history; he helped organize and lead the Montgomery bus boycott of 1956, and along with Martin Luther King Jr., he founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Abernathy was a front line warrior in the battle for social justice. He was cursed, beaten and jailed; his home was dynamited, and his property confiscated. And he lived in fear for his life. Yet he never gave up his battle for equality. His struggle led to sweeping social and legal changes which benefit many of us today.

Sadly, the last year of Abernathy's life was marred by controversy over his biography, *And The Walls Came Tumbling Down*, in which he alleged instances of King's sexual infidelities. Abernathy—who defended his revelations by saying he wasn't reporting anything that wasn't already known—was vilified by many people, including some of his closest friends.

We are not choosing sides in that controversy; however, we believe Ralph David Abernathy was a man of enormous courage, devotion, and compassion.

And we join his family and friends in mourning his passing.



Vincent Swift Pamlico, NC

"I guess people have a right to clean air. There should be a smoking section in the buildings though."

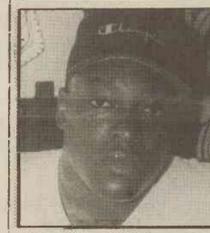
Liz Washington Long Island, NY

"I think it's fair. I smoke, and I can't stand the smell myself. It's for this reason that I often go outside to smoke."



Talk of ECSU:

What are your feelings about the new campus-wide policy against smoking?



Landon Miales, III Murrresboro, NC

"I feel it's good because, like the Surgeon General says, second hand smoke is just as bad as if you smoked. Smokers take away our right to clean air."

Erica Price Wilmington, NC

"They should have a designated place to smoke, but you really can't tell someone not to smoke."



Guest Columnists

'African-American' affirms history

By Angela Lightfoot

To say I am an African-American means that I am an American who not only has ties to this country, but who also has ties and, yes, roots, in Africa. Since we as blacks possess a bi-cultural heritage, labeling ourselves "Black" denies a significant part of our heritage.

Although as a race we have long been known for our endurance, the time has arrived for us to also be known for our cultural and historical identity. The term that best sums up those things is "African-American," not "Black."

An increasing number of black leaders are saying the same thing.

"To be called black is baseless," proclaims the Reverend Jesse Jackson. "To be called African-American has cultural integrity. Black is not a proper way to classify a race of people."

"African-American, like other ethnic descriptions, is an accurate identification that places black Americans firmly with an ethnic, cultural and historical concept," says John E. Jacobs, President of the National Urban League.

"The term Afro-American connotes a more positive image," says Mary Futrell, President of the National Education Association.

When other minorities came to the United States, they kept their cultural names. Jews became Jewish-Americans and Italians became Italian-Americans. Why should we be any different?

I do not believe we should sacrifice our cultural identity in order to be accepted. America has conditioned us to try to adapt to the prevailing culture; however, if this continues, we will be in danger of becoming a race unaware of our own unique and rich

culture.

Opponents of the name change feel that the issue is exhausted, and is unimportant. They also claim that the issue diverts attention from more important black issues.

I disagree.

In my opinion the term "African-American" directs our attention to our status, and creates and preserves our cultural heritage.

By using the term "African-American" we can raise our awareness of our cultural heritage, and even help improve our political and even economic status. A race of people conscious of its identity and interests tend to maintain upward mobility.

Also, our name change would promote greater unity. It would encourage all African descendants to join together and be an effective force for finding solutions to problems we face—like widespread drug abuse,

homelessness, and poverty.

In a random poll of 100 ECSU students, 70% viewed the name change from Black to Afro-American positively. Forty-six percent of the respondents agreed that the name change would reinforce cultural pride and/or add a sense of identity. And 24% felt that if the change were taken seriously, it could improve our political and economic status.

"There is an inner need in all of us for belonging," said ECSU student Melvin Hall. "Therefore, if someone can identify himself as an Afro-American and use this identification in a positive, motivating way, good for them."

The term "Black" should only be an adjective that describes the absence of light and not a name for us.

African-American—by popular demand. This is an idea whose time has come.

Gang violence, drugs: a national nightmare

By Jeff Vinson

Gangs are taking over the streets of Los Angeles and other cities around the country; and no one seems to be able to stop them from killing and selling drugs.

These gangs operate very differently from the gangs of the 1950's, with their brass knuckles, zip guns and switchblades. Today's urban gangs use automatic weapons, including Uzis, sawed-off shotguns and high powered automatics—all bought with their drug money.

The two problems, of gangs and drugs, are interrelated. The crack problem has turned the streets of LA and other cities into a war zone. Drug dealers as young as 15 years old roam the streets in customized BMW's and Mercedes Benze's. Some carry Uzis and AK-47 assault rifles. It's not surprising to learn there were 5,000 gang-related violent crimes in Los Angeles in 1988.

The lure of fast and easy money from drugs attracts children as young as nine into the trade—to stand on street corners selling nickel and dime bags of crack. Some of them can make \$400 a day.

Drugs dealers are also using kids in school to deliver drugs. And the big money gangs make from drugs—as high as one billion dollars annually according to official estimates—also corrupts law-enforcement officials, with more and more reports of police on gang payrolls.

The police lack the weapons and manpower to effectively combat gangs on their own territory, which has become a killing zone.

Gang members have a twisted sense of values. For example, drive-by kill-

ings—shooting innocent people in cold blood—is considered an admirable act among gang members. Gang members say they get a feeling of power from killing one or more of their rivals. Their ideas and values are driven by hatred. For example, the Bloods and Crips hate each other so much that the Bloods have eliminated the "c" from their graffiti, replacing it with "k." Some Crips members avoid using the letter "b" in their speech.

The release of the movie *Colors* has raised public awareness about this problem. The film was based on the gangs of Los Angeles, concentrating on the Bloods and Crips, the two most powerful rival gangs.

The Bloods and Crips gangs alone accounted for 400 killings in Los Angeles during 1987.

Not all of the victims were gang members; tragically, as with any war, there are many innocent victims.

One gang member, Michael Hagan, was convicted of first degree murder in 1986 for shooting a girl in the back during a drive-by shooting. Hagan, who had been drinking and smoking PCP with his "home boys" went into a rival gang's turf, and fired 15 shots into a group of young people, killing the girl.

Hagan showed no remorse for the murder during his trial. His only comment was "I'll be known for what I did on the streets."

Although killings like these are common in Los Angeles, and other big cities, the problem of gang violence is invading smaller areas as well. Using their cities as a power base, gang members are going into smaller cities and towns, to expand their drug operations.

Gangs are becoming an increasingly dangerous blight on the nation's life; the problem is made all the more alarming by the lack of a concerted national policy to deal with the threat of gangs, and their destructive corollary, drugs.

The government and private citizen's groups should unite forces to solve this national nightmare, which is claiming so many young victims. But the solution does not necessarily lie in tougher laws and harsher penalties for crimes. The real problem is the poverty, hopelessness and despair that

ghetto residents must face each day. Gang members say they join gangs out of a need to belong, and a feeling of power. Many of these young people are from single-parent homes, and gangs provide them with a convenient sense of family.

Addressing the deeper, underlying problems that breeds the gangs and their corollary problem of drugs, should be our new national mission. The cold war is over, but there is even more dangerous war at home. We must act to solve this problem before we are destroyed from within.

Letters

Thanks, Sphinxmen!

To the Editor:

Thank God for the Sphinxmen, a group of young ECSU men who volunteered to help at the Albemarle Food Bank on Thursday, April 5.

We are always in need of help. This particular day a delivery from Norfolk was late. We called one of our stand-by volunteers who was not home. We proceeded to do the best we could. Talk about the calvary coming to the rescue! In walked twelve young men in their black shirts and trousers to save us.

My first cry was, "Can anyone operate a fork lift?" My spirits uplifted when I heard a "yes" and we were off.

The truck was unloaded. The guys helped us open boxes and load our freezers; they did everything we asked,

even to helping us get the trash out of the building.

It is this spirit of cooperation that gives us the inspiration and ability to continue our ministry to feed the hungry in Northeastern North Carolina.

Again, I say, "Thank God for the Sphinxmen."

Joan Heichert
 Special Events Coordinator
 Albemarle Food Bank
 Elizabeth City, N.C.

(Editor's note: The Sphinxmen are Darnell Barnes, Dorteo Davis, Ernest Caldwell, James Hargett, Dennis Blount, Jeff Moore, Alphonso Gibson, Ellis Freeman, Harvey Bullock, Chibito Swain, Jeff Vinson, Reginald Wilkins, and Tim Harrell.)