

OPINION

From the Editor

Ugly side of humanity shouldn't keep students from obtaining their goals

By Lisa R. Boone
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

"At every critical junction, American civilization has decided that black people are not human."

Dr. Darlene Clark, interim chair of the WSSU African American Studies Department and a history professor at Northwestern University, made this statement during a recent humanities lecture. Her comment came in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, which exposed the ugly side of racial and class differences in America to the world.

Many people are outraged, and justifiably so. CBS News Sunday Morning contributing commentator Nancy Giles ended her Sept. 4 piece with these words: "The president has put himself at risk by visiting the troops in Iraq, but didn't venture anywhere near the Superdome or the Convention Center

where thousands of victims, mostly black and poor, needed to see that he gave a d—n."

What should African Americans do?

Get angry? Vent?

Let me suggest that we, students here at WSSU, do just what we're doing, which is to get an education. Our school motto "Enter to learn, Depart to Serve" should not be taken lightly. Instead, consider the words a demand, an order, a lifelong mission. We are our peoples' best hope.

We must commit ourselves to the long struggle for self-improvement and advancement because, as we've seen so clearly, when the proverbial creek rises, we perish.



Boone

Where to go when you need to know

The News Argus
'Always Watching'

Are we living the examined lives we said we would after Sept. 11?

By Bill Tammeus
KRT WIRE SERVICE

The promises we made to ourselves because of Sept. 11 embarrass us now four years later.

Our shocked and bereaved hearts whispered pledges to live more focused lives. After religious fanatics used passenger planes as guided missiles, killing 3,000 people in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania — including my own nephew — we said over and over that from now on we would concentrate on "what's really important."

Maybe some of us did concentrate on that for a while. I've heard about a few people who altered their lives because of Sept. 11. But there were two problems: First, the routine of daily life eventually returned, so we lost the focus that always comes with a crisis. And second, some people had no idea "what's really important." They had lived what Socrates called an "unexamined life," which he said is not worth living.

So as each painful Sept. 11 anniversary comes around, the question worth asking is what, in fact, really is important. In other words, what constitutes an examined life?

In "Saviours of God," author Nikos Kazantzakis puts it this way: "Where do we come from? Where are we going? What is the meaning of this life? That is what every heart is shouting, what every head is asking as it beats on chaos."

I've recently been asking people I know what it takes to live an examined life. Oh, I have my own views about that, but part of living an examined life is seeking the wisdom of others.

I won't quote these people by name. What matters is the content of their words. But they include clergy and laity from Christianity,

Judaism and other religions, as well as scientists, musicians, teachers, even a retired engineer and a lawyer for the IRS.

The answers I got contained common themes: Ask hard questions, be honest about the answers and don't depend on yourself alone to examine your life, even though much of this work requires

"Crises," he said, "are our best friends. We do well to regard everything in life as attempting to teach us something."

As we examine our lives we also begin to understand that the process isn't simply navel gazing. Done well, it's a communal act. And it's an examination of both thoughts and behavior.

Some aspects of the examination can be pretty simple. One woman told me that how you spend your time "is a pretty good reflection of who you are at the moment. If you are not spending time doing what you value, then you need to reassess and redirect."

What might be the best results we could expect from a self-examination?

There are many good answers, but I especially liked the one that came from an old friend: "The results of an examined life are patience, clarity, vision, joy and hope." A young woman added this: "Living an examined life is one scary task ... but it can also lead to joy after joy."

What results can we expect if we fail to ask ourselves such questions? A scientist I know put it well: "The unexamined life often results in the self-centered, arrogant, self-important egoists we see all too often in positions of power."

Nobody wants another crisis of Sept. 11 proportions to stab our hearts with the realization that we've become distracted again from what's really important, especially those of us who lost family members that day. Without trauma, however, staying on course may require someone else willing to hold us accountable.

Newspaper columnists have lots of those someones. They're called readers.

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solitude.

"The best way to see oneself is through the eyes of another," one respondent said. "It takes two, buddy. At least a small community is required."

Several also suggested that examining one's life should not be thought of as a horrific task to be dreaded, though it may produce some nasty surprises.

One person said, "remorse and self-flagellation seldom help develop moral character." It may be counterintuitive, he said, but we should learn to welcome troubling times.

Black college students find themselves in awkward position

ARGUS REPORTER

Our community tells us to embrace and express our identity as African-Americans and as individuals in the way we walk, talk and present ourselves. However, tattoos, body piercing, dreadlocks, full beards, gold teeth, blonde hair, skimpy clothes and other unique ways that some individuals choose to express themselves are not always considered acceptable or appropriate by those in authority.

So then our individuality takes a back seat to fitting in, getting along, doing the right thing, as defined by others. In exchange, we are then allowed to progress, whether that's in the workplace, at school, in clubs and organizations, and in other sectors of life.

But should advancement and success be predicated on giving up all traces of uniqueness and plunging headlong into so-called conformity?

Not necessarily.

If you are clear on the image that you are trying to portray, why not decorate yourself with tattoos, or feel comfortable wearing large pieces of jewelry, or put on an African outfit. On the other hand, we shouldn't take offense when one of our own, especially one of our elders, sets us straight about how we will be perceived in the professional world if our grooming choices are not within the bounds of what's considered "mainstream."

We may or may not choose to take their advice, but we should realize that the messenger and his or her message are

born from a place of wisdom tested by experience.

Be true to your own self-image. Your identity is what you make it, and a quick walk around Winston-Salem State University reveals the diversity of tastes on campus.

Success in the "real world" is not about losing your identity. Rather, it is about growing into your own true self and becoming more versatile, realizing that a solid self-image, however that is expressed, involves the age-old qualities of a sound mind, strength, discipline and discernment.

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