

NORTH CAROLINA CENTRAL UNIVERSITY

The underground sound is the heart beat of hip-hop. It's the part that keeps it alive. And alive it was on Oct. 16 when backpackers, mcs, and poets packed the Cat's Cradle in Chapel Hill.

Once again it was time for the Duel of the Iron Mics when the area's best underground mcs come to battle for the title, "Lord Over All Mics I Survey."

It was billed as the WWF of hip-hop, but forget the people's elbow it's about the people's mic. The atmosphere was primed for a battle of the local heavyweights. The smell of weed wafted in the air and Coronas were raised in celebration. Graffiti was the wallpaper. DJs Skaz Daddy and Bro Rabb supplied beats for the mcs to rock over.

But before we could witness the titans' battle for the \$175 prize, a Dreamcast, and most

importantly, respect from their peers, there was a pre-show of local artist. Campus Hills, Ti-Fu, Flawless, Taj-Mahal and Xtended Family gave the crowd a spoonful of that good ole' Bull City hip-hop.

There were judges and hosts as usual. DJ Madd of Madd Waxx and DJ Samps of WXDU along with the "Chosen One" Courtney C. hosted. There were five judges doing their



Olomatade stares down the competition.



Jive artist, Truck Turner, showed his face at the battle.

... and the last shall be first.

Story & photos by Rashaun Rucker



Chapel Hill's Ti-Fu flex their muscles at the Duel of the Iron Mics.



The underground sound at its finest.



NCCU's DJ 9th Wonder and Phonte Coleman were among the local stars.

thing. Two were NCCU's own Truitt Avery O'Neal, of WNCU, and DJ Ninth Wonder (Pat Douthit), and the all-seeing DJ Daddy Rich of Duke's WXDU.

The 16 mcs went head-to-head and topic to topic. The topics weeded out the Vanilla Ice-Young MC-Hammer types. Only real mcs can battle on random topics. It worked. Mcs came and went faster than Michael Jackson's skin tones. In the end only four were

left: Olomatade, Lovejoy, J-Gun and Central's Phonte Coleman. Punch-lines flew faster than the Tyson-Norris fight. Coleman and J-Gun were the punch lines kings. Coleman delivered several severe verbal assaults:

"Are y'all really feeling him/he so wack/he make Master P sound like Eminem/A fake ass Common Sense without the confidence."

In the first battle of the final four,

Olomatade defeated Coleman in a controversial battle.

In the second battle, Lovejoy of Ti-Fu was put to rest quickly by 15-year-old J-Gun. J-Gun won the battle by taking a jab at Lovejoy's association with Ti-Fu: "Ti-Fu baby/you do-do baby/is your name really Lovejoy/cause I think you love boys."

The crowd went crazy. I was sweating because I'm fat and I was feverishly

awaiting the battle of Olomatade and J-Gun. The final battle was not as exciting as I expected.

Instead of Martin against Chris Tucker, punch-line for punch-line, it was more like Rodney Dangerfield vs. George Burns. With Olomatade getting no respect, the Duel of the Iron Mics lived up to the WWF billing giving the crowd more smack-downs on mcs than WWF Raw, minus the Rock.

Six Students React

When "Coal to Cream" author, Eugene Robinson, assistant managing editor at the Washington Post, was appointed bureau chief to South America, he was immediately perplexed by the country's focus on color, rather than race.

The book's liner reads:

At first Robinson saw Brazil as a racial paradise, where people of all hues and colors mingled together on the beaches ... but ... his most basic assumptions were shattered when he was told he didn't have to be black in Brazil if he didn't want to be. The society looked at people through a broad spectrum of colors,

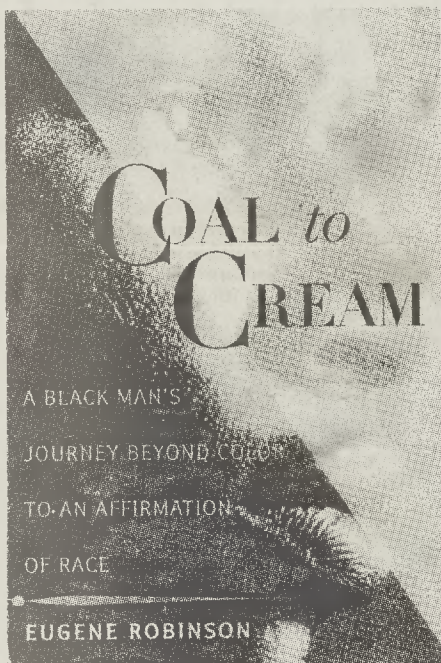
ranging from "white" to "coffee with milk" to "after midnight," and not as a member of two rigidly defined races. Like most African Americans, Robinson always recognized the existence of color gradations within the black community—the members of his own family span the entire range from coal to cream—but he never looked at color the same way after that encounter at Ipanema.

"Coal to Cream" is the story of Robinson's personal exploration of race, color, identity, culture, and heritage. As he immersed himself in Brazilian culture, Robinson began to see that its focus on color and class—as opposed to race—presents problems of its own.

Discrimination and inequality still exist, but without a sense of racial identity. The Brazilians lack the anger and vocabulary they need to attack or even describe such ills.

Ultimately, Robinson came to realize that racial identity, what makes him ... a black American, is a gift of great value—a shared language of history and experience—rather than the burden it had sometimes seemed.

The Campus Echo asked six students to respond to the book's Prologue and to review "Coal to Cream."



"Coal to Cream"

sees racism from a point of view that is different from what most Americans have experienced. The author, Eugene Robinson, thought he had found the racial "promise land" in Brazil where there was no racism. However, his beliefs were crushed because he found the worse kind of racism, one that separates members of the same group.

The lighter-skinned blacks have the most advantages, while darker-skinned blacks are considered to be of a lower class. Although Robinson sees this as different from the U.S., I see

parallels. During slavery in the U.S., lighter-skinned blacks typically had the "softer" jobs like working in the main house or driving the owner around. The darker-skinned slaves tended to work in the fields and do the "harder" work around the plantation.

This division of the black race in the U.S. has continued to the present. Although this division is not imposed on our race by whites, we, African-Americans, impose this division on ourselves because we have been taught indirectly through older people and media that "bright is right."

—Vicki McLean

"The breeze"

blew balmy ... the gritty warmth of the sand between my toes." Eugene Robinson seems to be describing paradise in the prologue to his book "Coal to Cream." Why then is that serpent called Race winding its way through this paradise of beauty and innocence as he progresses through the story? As a visitor to the American culture this seemingly obsession with race continues to perplex me.

As he described the picturesque city of Rio de Janeiro, his focus continued to be the racial mix of the country. This scenario brought me back to a typical day at school at this historical black college. Of the four classes in my day, three of them will have discussions centered on race. I have tried and failed to understand why race relations play such a significant role

in the life of the average American that I have encountered.

My country is a lot like Brazil with a diverse cultural mix and the majority race being black. Perhaps that makes it easier to take for granted the fact that the leaders of my country are black. But these leaders got there because of their qualifications. They put no limitations on their capabilities because of injustices against their race in the system.

Eugene Robinson became enlightened about his own problems with racial identity while staying among the Brazilians. He learned that he did not have to run from his blackness but rather he needed to embrace it.

—Marissa Williams

Who

exactly is considered black? Who's white? Who's something else? These are a few of many questions that author Eugene Robinson asked himself after his experience in South America.

"She was a small woman with jet black hair, flaring nostrils, high cheekbones, and brown skin at least a couple of shades darker than mine." This woman was trying to tell Robinson that she was not black, but white. Somebody needs to wake her up and give her a couple of

'black lessons.' It is clear that the Brazilians look at race very differently than Americans.

I am what you call a thick boned, with medium length hair, high cheekbones, dark brown woman. There is no doubt in my mind that I am black. No matter what career field that I'm in or position that I hold, I will always be black. Robinson stated in his prologue that "Race was important; race was trivial." The world is taking color and race to the extreme. I would be a fool to actually think I could be considered white

because I am not literally the color of black. Even white people are not really white. They are in close proximity to white like black people are to black.

This whole race thing was just made up to make it easier for every one to keep up with each other. It is no big deal. So, just let it be. The way I look at it is, the world has so many different nationalities and so many mixed marriages that sooner or later this race thing is not going to matter.

—Marsha Perry

I never thought about how we index—or categorize, that is—people in Sweden until I came to NCCU. One day we were discussing "The Bluest Eye" by Toni Morrison, somebody asked me how he would be treated if he went to Sweden.

I answered that Americans are considered "cool" in Sweden, and that he would be treated very well. He seemed content and we left it at that, but I spent the rest of the day thinking about this exchange. I wondered what my answer would have been if it had been someone who planned to immigrate to Sweden from Poland, Turkey, or Albania asking me the same question. One-fifth of Sweden's population consist of immigrants and their descendants. I would like to think that everyone is considered equal, or "cool," as in the case of Americans, but I know that that is not the case.

In Sweden people are not seen as different and foreign based only on the color of their skin. It also depends on how well you speak the Swedish language, what country you come from, and how different your last name is. I speak flawless Swedish, and nothing about my appearance suggest that I am anything but a native Swede, yet there is one thing that might present a problem for me when I return and start applying for jobs—my last name.

My father is from Bosnia. I have an Arabic last name. Recent surveys have shown that job applications with foreign sounding last names are often ignored in favor of applicants with Swedish sounding names. I might actually have a better chance getting the job if my name sounded American.

—Jennie Alabasic

Whether the topic is interracial adoption, affirmative action, or fair housing—all rest on a common-sense assumption: race as we know it (for better or worse) is real.

In America, Eugene Robinson could not pass for white, but in Brazil he discovered he did not have to call himself black because "black" was more of a description than a group designation.

Brazilians look at the color of your skin vs. the one-drop rule in the United States—if you have one drop of African blood then you are black. In Brazil your color—"black or brown, tan, taupe, copper, cinnamon or at least a dozen shades of beige"—determines your racial landscape.

In the United States, African-Americans embrace the idea of black solidarity or blackness. So what is blackness? Does it make you more "black" to attend a black school vs. a white school? Or are you "black" based on how 'hard and cruel' your world was as a child?

Can either question speak for your color? Can one or a group speak for the whole? No. But unfortunately the majority is spoken for by a word: Black.

—Tomeika Bowden

The book, "Coal to Cream," makes one wonder why so many Americans have a color complex issue to deal with and why are we, as Americans, so focused on race? We should just be able to see a person for who he or she is, not according to the color of their skin or race.

—DeShella Hall