Editorial

OPINIONS

The Pendulum seeks to inspire, entertain and inform the Elon community by providing a voice for students and faculty as well as a forum for the meaningful exchange of ideas.

When justice fails, human spirit proves resilient

Startling blunders in the justice system reveal trust, hope and faith

In 1984, Elon student Jennifer Thompson-Cannino was raped in her Burlington apartment. She made a composite of the rapist, and a busboy in the area named Ronald Cotton was soon named a suspect. His alibi was flawed, and a lineup was presented before Thompson-Cannino to resolve the confusion. She picked Cotton. Sentenced to two life sentences, plus 54 years, it took more than a decade for DNA evidence to prove he was an innocent man.

After being raped following classes in Chicago in 1994, Loretta Zillinger helped Chicago police incriminate a man in a local meat market and label him as her sexual assailant. She testified, and he was sentenced to 40 years in prison. Four appeals and 14 years later, Dean Cage was released.

It should pain the U.S. community to think of the justice we were expected to grant American citizens before we were capable of utilizing DNA evidence. Our history paints a bleak portrait of fairness and equality in the gray areas of a criminal act. Though it is now a common procedure in justice cases all over the country, there are innocent people behind bars with no way of getting freedom. In present-day crime

investigations, it should be protocol to exhaust every possible option before putting a suspect behind bars. In the case of traumatic events such as these cases, mere physical resemblance should not be the chief identifying factor. That sentiment is shared with attorneys involved in the **Innocence Project. Since** its inception in 1992, the organization has overturned 244 inmate convictions with the use of DNA evidence.

CNN.com states witness misidentifications are responsible for over three-fourths of wrongful¹ convictions. Over 70 percent of those cases involve minorities.

Crimes are committed. Time passes. Emotions blur memories. Mistakes are made.

But there are decades and decades of mistakes. Fathers miss the childhoods of their children and wives start to doubt the integrity of the men they married. Mistrust of the justice system infiltrates the hearts of those betrayed by its blunders.

Imagine the emotions that develop and fester in the mind and soul of an innocent man behind bars. The loss of life, the restlessness and the truth lay hidden and unproven in the core of his being. Like many brought to false testimony by way of incredible pressure in the interrogation process, one begins to believe that their fate is deserved.

And the victim has to realize what was initially stripped from her was ripped from another by her own testimony. That is gnawing, incapacitating — to know that you are responsible for eradicating years of the life of a fellow human. Despite all this, some victims still writhe with the knowledge that their assailant continues to go unpunished, unfound.

Both of the aforementioned pairs now identify as friends intimately involved in each other's lives and inextricably bound by the most distressing of circumstances.

What began as a violent, cruel act soon transformed into an unanticipated progression toward forgiveness. Against all odds, these cases show that reconciliation can emerge from fissures of pain and anger and extend past gender and racial boundaries.

These stories are true testaments to the willingness of humans to show compassion in the most heart-wrenching of situations. If there is anything we can learn from this, it is that resolution is always possible.

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Letter to the Editor: Shades of acceptance

To the Editor,

On Wednesday nights, I turn the television on in my dorm room to FOX in order to watch "Glee" instead of watching "106 and Park" or "The Game" on Black Entertainment Television. Any day, I prefer to listen to alternative rock over rap or R&B. This is a lifestyle I have chosen for myself, yet some African-Americans would label me as "acting white." Not a fan of Weezy's latest rhythms or Jay-Z's multi-million dollar enterprise, I chose to decorate the walls of my room with poster of artists that many African-Americans do not know or are not fans of: Aiden, My Chemical Romance and Green Day.

First discussed in the 1980s by Dr. John Ogbu and Dr. Signithia Fordham of University of California at Berkeley, the "burden of acting white" rests on black youth. In the study they conducted, it was discovered that African-American students with slightly higher GPAs than their fellow minorities are shunned and accused of "acting white." Race is not a factor of success and it should not be, yet being Caucasian is synonymous with success. If an African-American were a modern day Steve Urkel minus the thick eyeglasses in favor of horn rimmed glasses, they would have fewer African-American friends. African-American that are considered to be "acting white" are also known as "Oreos, " a disparaging term meaning they are, like the Oreo cookie, black on the outside and white on the inside.

Furthermore, these "Oreos" are judged if they live lifestyles that are different that the "traditional" African-American said, "Parents have to teach that children can't achieve unless we eradicate the slander than says a black youth with a book is acting white."

The practice of African-Americans accusing other African-Americans of "acting white" for the simple reason that they do not listen to hip-hop or do not wear FUFBU or Phat Farm must stop, because it is detrimental to the accused as well as to the African-American community as an entity. If one person in the community speaks out against the practice, them everyone else will see the physical impacts of identifying black students who wish to achieve their goals as "acting white" and bring about change.

The African-American community has been dealt several bad cards over the course of history. That is not an excuse to perpetuate discrimination within the community. If changes are to be made, we must start on a smaller scale. Students must become more open-minded to other lifestyles that may appear "abnormal" or "deviant" than theirs. 50 Cent's lashing out episode epitomizes the rise of social stereotyping in the black communities. If we wish to be respected and taken seriously by others, must we not begin by respecting our peers in our community? Furthermore, the term "Oreo" must not be used to describe people. Oreos are delicious cookies manufactured by Nabisco and I doubt that anyone would like to be compared to a mere processed snack. If nothing is done, we will remain holding each other back.

As students we must work to get have to

lifestyles portrayed on BET or in rap videos. If African-Americans use standard English instead of the common vernacular of "foshizzle" and do not sport Baby Phat or Apple Bottom Jeans, they are thought to be "fake" African-Americans. A common trend in educated African-Americans is to adapt their English to their circumstances simply for approval from their counterparts. If they are among other educated people that speak standard English, the African-American will do the same. However, in crowds of people that do not speak conventional English and let their trousers droop, African-Americans will use vernacular like "aks" or an English major's worst nightmare — double negatives. One must remain who they are, regardless of the situation they find themselves in.

There are several successful African-Americans, who exhibit model behavior for youth. Two of those celebrities are President Barack Obama and Oprah Winfrey. Both have been accused of "acting white" by the Rev. Jesse Jackson and rapper 50 Cent, respectively. Rapper 50 Cent said TV superstar Winfrey is a "middle-aged white woman" because she refuses to encourage hip-hop artists and will not have them appear on her show. Incidences like that caused Obama to speak out against them in his 2004 Democratic National Convention speech, in which he As students, we must work together to move forward instead of staying in the present. Being labeled an "Oreo" limits one from achieving their potential. It gets in the way of one's personal growth, because it does not allow one to experience new things. The two sides of the cookie must collaborate in order to let "Oreo" out of the package society has placed it in.

African-Americans should allow their peers to be more individualistic and accept that not everyone will jump on the bandwagon of sporting dorags or blasting T.I. Some will choose that road, while others will pave their own roads, with different tastes in music and clothing. African-Americans must realize that being different doesn't make one seem as if they were "acting white." In fact, people embrace individuality. Choosing to wear American Eagle or attending AFI or Seether concerts doesn't make a person any less of an African-American than another African-American that prefers Apple Bottoms or rap music. What makes one person "black" and another an "Oreo?" Is it their behavior and personality? Since when has being different been a "white" thing? The terms "Oreos" and "Uh-Oh Oreos," referring to a white person who exhibits African-American behavior, should remain where they belong - on the shelves of supermarket aisles or in television commercials.

Edith Veremu, Class of 2013

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