

The Meredith Herald

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The African American Experience at Meredith College

M'Beyanna Robinson, Staff Writer

As an African American student at Meredith College, you stand out in the classroom and on campus. Sometimes you might get so overjoyed to see another person of color, just to know you're not alone. With hair that defies gravity and a persona so radiant, it's hard to ignore us. Also, not to mention it's stressful feeling like you always have to prove your worth. We always feel obligated to answer a question in class about race relations or have the best presentation, because somehow we've been elected as the spokesperson for African Americans nationwide. You have to constantly argue the idea that you can be an intellectual and also use colloquial euphemisms to express yourself. Also, the annoying pain caused by explaining to your peers that your name is not "ghetto," it's authentic. These are just some of the things included in the experience of being a black woman. The pressure to be successful can be overwhelming when you know what others before you had to overcome, just so you can sit in a classroom.

Most of us would go to the ends of the Earth to meet Gwendolyn Hilliard, the first African American to graduate

from Meredith in 1971, because to us she's legendary. However, the most amazing part about the Meredith experience is what that means to each student, professor and staff member. Here's what a few people had to say about diversity over the years:

Deborah Davis, Food Services
18 years employed at Meredith College

"There are definitely more international students! Also, Meredith students have the opportunity to study abroad is definitely a good thing. Mainly because studying abroad helps broaden their outlook on life and how they view people. That is very important, especially during this time!"

Del Crudup, Food Services, 15 years
"When I first started working, there was not many minorities attending the college. The college feels more comfortable now and the school has more spirit. The few minorities that attend, I believe they feel more comfortable now."

Lahoma Smith, Food Services
13 years

"I have seen a development in leadership in a positive way."

Dr. Wetonah Parker, 23 years
"The faculty in the Department of

Education hope to continue to recruit a more diverse student population in education. Our schools are becoming more diverse and need a more diverse population to teach them!"

Dr. Cameron Johnson, 8 years

"The biggest thing for me is the college is more stable as far as the faculty and the leadership. Also, I think there is push for more international students and diversity within the school. The recognition Meredith is getting on a regional and national level has been great over the years too."

Mary Massenburg, Food Services
45 years

"When I first started working here at Meredith, the girls would go through the kitchen and get separate bowls for the food. Only 8 girls could sit at a table and one girl would serve all the food. On Sunday back then the dining hall closed at 5 and we would the girls bag lunches. Sometimes they would have an apple, sandwich and a bag of chips and that was dinner! Also, when I started there was only one black girl and her name was Gwendolyn. She was very friendly! We talked all the time and I would ask her about her day and just her experience here. She told me the girls were very nice to her

for the most part, she had one or two problems with other girls but that was it! I just really love what I do and I love the girls!"

Raven Gregory, Class of 2016

"You definitely stand out and it's difficult because college is a time where you're trying to get to know yourself and figure out what you want to do with your future. So, it's hard to be surrounded by things that you fail to identify with, but it forces you to go and find those things that you're missing. Mainly because it's not a part of your everyday Meredith College experience. It kind of empowers you because with us being such a small population here, we represent African Americans to our peers. I think it's a big responsibility and I don't feel like I meet up to those expectations. Especially when you think all the great African Americans in the media, like The President and his wife, Oprah and Shonda Rhimes! We are their black impression. So, we have to know ourselves and we have to carry ourselves well, so essentially we can educate them."

The "Problem" with Black Power

Brooke Mayo, Staff Writer

An excerpt from "Black Power" Philosophy Explained, Discussed Here" by Jeannie Sams on October 26, 1967.

"Dr. Hedgeman was making Meredith students think. They were misinformed, as are most whites, of the meaning of black power. 'Black power is not something to be afraid of; black power,' as Dr. Hedgeman says, 'is pushing America towards her best self. Three hundred some years is a lot of free labor. It's a great debt this country owes.'

'What do Negroes want?' she is often asked. Her reply, 'We want everything - The things Americans want. When? Yesterday.'

There is no doubt that she provoked thought. 'Black power isn't something to be afraid of, though it does make us feel little guilty. What we must do is get on in the task of freeing ourselves, getting man back into the center of things, whether he be Negro, poor white, or Oriental.'

One would have to be living under a rock to not know about the revolution that has occurred within the black community these last couple of years, and it is arguable that the #BlackLivesMatter movement is stronger than it has ever been. Here at Meredith College, we have had a Diversity Week and an Awareness Week to highlight minorities at our

institution this year alone. Our idols, including "Queen" Beyoncé, are making political statements every time they enter the spotlight. However, why is this movement still causing so much controversy?

Some may argue that the problem with the #BlackLivesMatter movement is that it only highlights one race, and that it's not fair to the other races. In fact, it could cause anybody outside of the black community to feel a bit uncomfortable. The alternative #AllLivesMatter movement was formed as a rebuttal, as it expresses the Humanitarian principle that no race is more important than another. However, the #BlackLivesMatter movement was never formed to make the black population the superior race, nor was it formed to discriminate against others. Rather, it was created to recognize the injustice that this particular race tends to feel and experience in the United States.

One of the main problem that arises is when other populations feel that they are being targeted through the uplifting of another group. The white community may feel like the finger is being pointed at them and that they're at fault for the circumstances that the black community endures. Or, rather, what about the police community? The #BlackLivesMatter movement was formed as a direct result of too

many unjust police brutalities against the black community. However, it is unfair to claim that the police force as a whole is a problem in our nation. More than likely, the #BlackLivesMatter movement never wanted to make these two particular populations feel like they were being targeted, but that is what has happened.

Just like the hesitancy towards Black Power in the late 60's, not much has changed within our nation. However, it is important to recognize the foundation of why something exists in the first place. The problem with Black Power is not Black Power itself, but rather the ignorance that other groups tend to confuse it with.

At our small college, we encourage and embrace diversity, and we recognize the importance of understanding one another. Sania Laraib, '19, says that, "Being an ethnic minority myself, I stand to represent the Black Power movement. I believe Meredith College to be culturally diverse in every aspect and that we should definitely continue expanding our mindsets." By doing that, we all must stand together to fight social injustice, no matter who we are or where we have come from.

The #BlackLivesMatter movement may be making some people uncomfortable, but that is not necessarily a bad thing. Whether one agrees with the movement or not,

it is difficult to ignore that there is a problem, and that's improvement and a step in the right direction. While this movement particularly highlights the black community, people of all races and backgrounds are beginning to join the cause, especially other minorities.

Amanda Lee Oakes-Foalima, '18, states that she thinks that "empowering our black community is very beneficial to the school," and she is appreciative that the Meredith College Black Student Union is "inclusive of all students and supportive of all students."

Lisa Jones, '16, recognizes the importance of accepting the social problems that we have in our nation, and she emphasizes the need for our country to continue improving. "It is important to recognize the wrongdoings that the black community is experiencing," Jones says, "but other minorities have experienced some terrible things too, so I think that in order to progress as a society, we need to recognize that people of all race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. need to be treated equally while still embracing our differences that make us all unique." Dielle McMillan, '17, agrees, and says that "You do not always have to agree with someone -- just respect who they are and what they represent."

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