

FORUM

RACE ISSUES AFFECT STUDENTS

Why I applaud former Oklahoma University frat brother Levi Pettit for confronting racism

Earl O. Hutchinson
Guest Columnist

Former Oklahoma University fraternity member Levi Pettit recently stood before a bank of cameras and microphones



Former Oklahoma University fraternity member Levi Pettit

flanked by a bevy of black elected officials, ministers and civil rights leaders at a black church in Oklahoma City.

He apologized for his racially insensitive acts and ignorance. This was the act of a sincere young man who has been battered from pillar to post after the video surfaced of he, and his frat pals, carousing on a bus and shouting racist epithets.

For speaking out, he has been the butt of snickers, derision and flat out condemnation. The African-American leaders who stood with and behind him haven't been spared the vitriol, either. They've been the object of vicious name-calling and attacks for having the temerity to back him in his mea culpa.

Pettit, though, doesn't deserve condemnation; he deserves praise.

He and his fraternity were booted from the university. His name and that of his family has been dragged deep through the mud. He'll remain for some time the poster boy for offensive and disgusting frat racial antics whenever some wayward fraternity inevitably engages in them. He could have stood on the prior statement of apology and regret that he issued after the tape went viral and set off a national howl. He could have easily melted into the student woodwork somewhere, completed his studies, and gone on about his business. But he didn't. Instead, he went very public with his apology and pledge to action.

Despite the lambaste of him and the racial put downs and myopia of the detractors,

this is an important step forward. The public outing of the fraternity came the same week that a study was released on racial attitudes of the millennials. The study found that young whites under 30 are no more enlightened in their racial views especially of blacks than their parents.

For example, when respondents were asked, "How much needs to be done in order to achieve Martin Luther King's dream of racial equality?" There was a huge gap in how they answered the question as opposed to young respondents of color. Forty-two percent of whites answered that "a lot" must be done to achieve racial equality, which was almost identical to the percent that answered the same of white Gen Xers and 44 percent of white baby boomers. The survey finding conformed pretty much to an AP survey on racial attitudes toward minorities that was conducted in October, 2012.

That survey found that in the four-year

period from a prior AP survey on racial attitudes in 2008, a clear majority of whites (56 percent) expressed animus toward blacks. The jump in anti-black racial sentiment came despite nearly four years in office of an African-American president.

It's been the rare day that's passed in the now more than six years that President Obama has been in the White House that there hasn't been a racially inflammatory video, photo, a sign, or some public figure popping off on race that has made a headline somewhere.

When it does, the predictable happens. The battle lines get quickly drawn, countless individuals jam websites and chat room and boards to downplay, or worse, condemn the critics of the actions as being too sensitive, thin-skinned or slamming them for playing the race card with their denunciation of a racial dig or taunt. The Oklahoma University frat debacle was a near textbook example of that.

Levitt and his pals were properly condemned for their antics and given the boot from the campus. Yet they had legions of defenders, too, that accused the university of not giving them due process, violating their free speech, and for a rush to judgment in summarily expelling them.

Many more even expressed sympathy with them for being harshly treated. And some even commiserated with their parents for their alleged suffering and ordeal.

The fact that you have one student offender who did not play to that gate, claim victimization and accepted fully responsibility for his racial offensive action is cause for much hope; hope that someone actually got it, and is willing to lend a public face, their face, to those who express their disgust at racial bigotry.

It's even better that this comes from a young person that legions of young people can more readily identify with than all the sermons on racial tolerance from those of the older generation, and especially civil rights leaders.

Their sermons are like water off a ducks' back to many of them. We don't need more surveys on race relations to know that they haven't had much meaning so far to many young people such as Pettit.

Pettit did the right thing when he spoke out, and so did the black leaders who stood behind him, encouraged and ultimately embraced him.

For that, I applaud and will continue to applaud Pettit.

Earl Ofari Hutchinson wrote this column for New America Media. He is an author and political analyst. He is a weekly co-host of the Al Sharpton Show on American Urban Radio Network. His new book is: From King to Obama: Witness to a Turbulent History (Middle Passage Press). <http://www.amazon.com/dp/0692370714>

U.Va. student didn't deserve to be beaten up

James Ewers
Guest Columnist

If a store official told me I couldn't gain admission, my next move would be simply to walk away. When rules are presented

Martese Johnson is slammed to the ground, face first. This resulted in his face becoming a bloody mess. This incident took place outside of the bar. Now for me the questions come pouring out.

First and foremost, if the conversation was that cordial who called the beverage control guys?

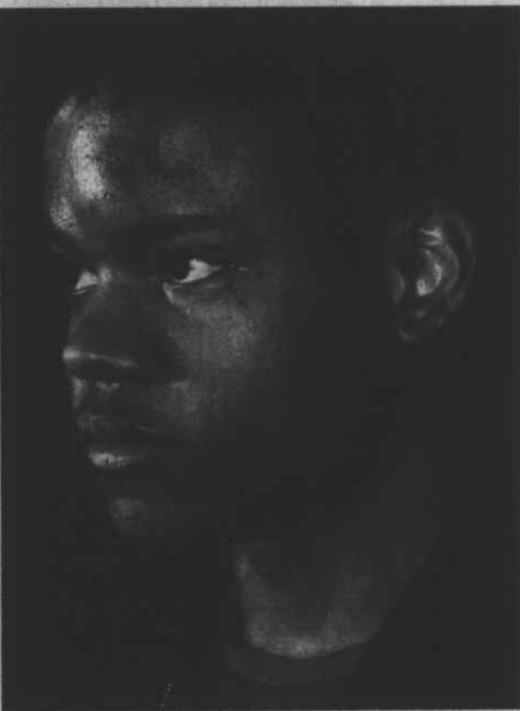
Second, why didn't the beverage control guys assess the scene before immediately letting someone's face collide with the sidewalk?

Lastly, what is the penalty for this type of behavior by the officers?

Reports say that Martese Johnson took the alcohol breath test and the results were negative. Do these tests matter or does it depend?

This type of beating is an outrage and should be condemned at the highest levels. I just wonder what these three ABC officers were thinking. It is abundantly clear to me that they were not thinking.

It appears as if every 60 days some



Martese Johnson

accident or incident happens which involves young African-American males. This for me is just sickening and outrageous. Do officers who carry guns take diversity and sensitivity training? Of course they do, and the majority of them use those tools to curtail violence. However there seems to be a growing number of officers who only pay lip service to diversity and sensitivity training.

When Martese Johnson was told by his family to work hard, stay out of trouble and you will be ok, he believed them. Young men who look like Martese Johnson are experiencing another side of America.

Because it appears unnecessary force was used against Johnson, the three officers in question have been reassigned other duties. I guess that is how the system works. You smash a young man's face into the ground even though reports say he was docile and was not causing any trouble.

Where is the justice in having them reassigned? Why not have the officers suspended until the investigation is completed. It is my opinion that Martese Johnson was victimized by those officers.

This case is receiving national attention.

The governor of the state of Virginia, Terry McAuliffe is keeping an eye on this case. In fact there will be a lot of eyes on this case. Will these officers receive some type of punishment? We will just have to wait and see.

These incidents involving young men of color just continue to happen. The circumstances, in my opinion, are all suspect. However, the results are still the same. Young black men are killed and, in this case, severely beaten and injured.

Our country is almost becoming immune to "I can't breathe" and "Black lives matter."

So what is the solution to tragedy after tragedy? We have formed councils and committees to study the issue, but the brutality keeps on happening.

We have had city, state and national officials offer apologies, but the inhumanity keeps on occurring.

The moral compass of our America is now severely skewed in the direction of hopelessness and lost lives.

Yet we cannot give up the fight for right.

Let us be advocates for right in this country. Maybe the message will spread.

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Hate and discrimination masquerading as 'religious freedom'

Rob Schofield
Guest Columnist

The Charlotte Observer was actually quite moderate and restrained in its recent editorial criticizing the latest dying gasp of the nation's pro-discrimination movement.

The editorial — "Indiana shows what not do" — highlighted the so-called "religious freedom" law enacted in Indiana. The law — which was designed by conservatives opposed to LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered] equality — has already set off a firestorm amongst more-forward looking corporate types who are rethinking their involvement with the Hoosier state.

Here's the Observer: "Given the permissive definition of 'religion' in the bills, though, the allowed discrimination would hardly

stop with the LGBT community. Even if such cases are only episodic, even one is too many and the state's image takes a hit.

[Indiana Governor Mike] Pence defended the Indiana law by saying he doesn't think it legalizes discrimination, and N.C. legislators will say it is simply about freedom of religion. But in practice the bills undeniably open the door to discrimination against almost anyone....

Does North Carolina really want to go down this road? Do we want to sanction discrimination by letting anyone deny service to whomever they please? Do we want to jeopardize conventions, job growth and the ability to recruit? Arizona was going to last year, but under pressure from the NFL and others, Gov. Jan Brewer vetoed the bill. If it reaches his desk, Gov. Pat McCrory should do the same here." [End of Observer editorial]

And here's another reason to be against the offensive, copycat legislation filed in the North Carolina Senate and House: It's morally wrong, offensive and un-American.

As Think Progress reported recently, the discrimination has already started in Indiana. And one doesn't have to be a MENSAs member to imagine the myriad forms of discrimination that some troubled souls in our state would readily engage in if given the green light by state government.

After all, it was the same talk about "religious liberty" that was frequently used as an excuse by those who refused to serve people of color and interracial couples back in the last century.

Anyone who thinks that ugly beast wouldn't re-emerge is kidding themselves.

The bottom line: Let's hope state political and business leaders nip this nonsense in the bud ASAP and that North Carolinians can avoid the ignominy of seeing their governor go on national TV to defend discrimination and hate.

Rob Schofield is policy director for N.C. Policy Watch. Find his columns at <http://pulse.ncpolicywatch.org/>.