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OPINION

Dreadlocks, braids and cornrows

Hampton University rules on hairstyles reveal truth in corporate world

There has been an increase in the number of black people opting to sport these natural hairstyles, and they are slowly becoming more accepted by mainstream society. But one place where they will no longer be accepted is at Hampton University—that is, if you are a business administration student.

Apparently the school feels the natural styles are not being accepted quickly enough in the business world, so, in an attempt to better prepare their students for the real world, the private, historically black school in Virginia has banned cornrows and flowing dreadlocks for students enrolled in a combined program which allows them to obtain both a bachelor's degree and master's degree in business administration in just five years.

The hair code, which does allow "nicely tapered" afros, is just part of a strict academic and dress doctrine for these students, according to business Dean Sid Credle. Credle said that the dress, grooming and behavior rules are intended to prepare students for the "starched business world."

As expected, the university has received its share of criticism for implementing the rule, including references to the institution and the hair code as being "oppressive." Some may feel that Hampton's policy only perpetuates the cycle of discrimination and stereotyping. As unfortunate as this rule may be for those wishing to don these natural styles, the condemnation being expressed toward the school is misplaced. The problem is not Hampton University. The problem is society.

As an institution of higher learning, Hampton should be dedicated to preparing its students to succeed in the real, and not always kind, world that awaits them. Credle further justified the policy by pointing out that of the top 75 African Americans in corporate America, none of them have "extreme hairdos." Apparently recognizing the fact that the particularly image-laden, good ol' boy field of business may disapprove of potential job candidates with such locks, the school seems to be trying to best prepare their students in every way possible for obstacles that will most surely face them.

We all long for the day when we will be judged on our ability versus our appearance. But in many arenas, image is still everything. People often attach certain pre-conceived notions and stereotypes to a person based on his or her outward appearance, not the least of which includes his or her choice of hairstyle. Unfortunately, black people with natural styles are often viewed as being militant, rebellious, or even intimidating—traits that do not translate well in corporate America. I attended the screening of a documentary about black hair titled "Twists, Dreds, Perms & Fro's" that was shown in Charlotte last year and after which an open forum followed. During the discussion, one woman sadly reported that a policy forbidding natural hairstyles was actually written into the guidelines of the company for which she worked. Others in attendance relayed various stories of how they were treated differently by others at work and by society in general, including other blacks, based on their decision to grow their hair out into natural styles.

Given that such barriers exist and are imposed by the outside world, I understand how students at Hampton may feel offended that a historically black institution of higher learning, of all places, would implement such a policy dictating what is acceptable. If nowhere else, students should feel free to express themselves fully on a black college campus and be accepted regardless. However, there is a certain expectation in the world of business which still defines what acceptable is.

Therefore, it would behoove the students to become accustomed to looking the part of business professionals now while they are, essentially, in training because it could ultimately make the actual transition into the working world easier. The effects of such practices could particularly be seen here in Charlotte, the second largest banking and finance center in the nation after New York City, where a good number of black business professionals have come from all over the nation to fill positions here.

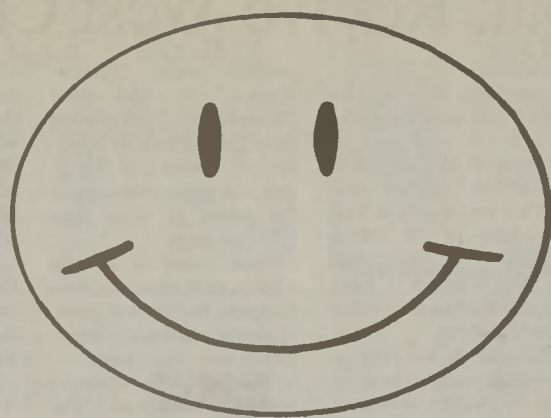
There are those traditionally conservative industries that are beginning to tolerate differences. I have, for instance, seen several law offices with lawyers and staff members who have locks and twists—the law being a predominately white male dominated profession.

Other companies even recruit employees who are diverse in some way, particularly in light of the ubiquitous hip hop culture. Advertisers, for instance, are seeking more and more those individuals whom they perceive to represent the urban youth, the demographic off of which they greatly capitalize today. They want employees who reflect their target market. By the same token, corporate America wants employees who reflect their business clients and customers, and that image is still pretty rigid and slow to change.

Having said that, there is something to be said for taking a stand and wanting to change the way in which society, in general, operates and the way the business world, in particular, views certain things. However, it would help to get your foot in the door and your body in the office chair first before you can be in a position hopefully to begin to enact change.

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CARTOONIST'S DISCLAIMER: I APOLOGIZE IN ADVANCE
IF THIS IMAGE OFFENDS PESSIMISTS WORLDWIDE...

'Reverse Robin Hood' on the poor

Both Congress and President Bush have come up with their budget proposals and both sets of figures do the same thing—

cut domestic programs that would assist the poor while extending tax cuts to rich people who need them the least. In other words, they are pulling a reverse Robin Hood by taking from the needy and giving to the greedy.

GEORGE E. CURRY

This is done under the guise that the federal government has gone on a "spending spree" and that domestic programs are the culprit. That might make for good propaganda, but it is far from the truth.

"Overall funding for defense, homeland security, and international affairs (which includes funding for post-war operations and reconstruction in Iraq and Afghanistan) rose from 3.4 percent of the GDP [Gross Domestic Product] in 2001 to 4.2 percent of GDP in 2006," an analysis by the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities notes. "By contrast, funding for domestic discretionary programs shrank during this period, declining from 3.4 percent of GDP in 2002 to 3.1 percent in 2006."

Bush is taking some heat, even from some moderate Republicans, for mismanaging the federal deficit. When he took office, Bush inherited a record \$236 billion surplus. By 2000, a \$158 billion deficit had developed and the White House estimates that this year, the figure will reach \$400 billion. Some of the deficits can be attributed to Bush's decision to wage war in Iraq and Afghanistan. To a much lesser degree, there was also the unexpected federal expenditures associated with Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. But a large—and avoidable—reason the federal government is sinking deeper into the hole is because Congress and the Bush administration have enacted a series of tax cuts that favor the wealthy.

The president defends the tax cuts, the first to be enacted by a U.S. president during wartime.

"American families all across this country have benefited from the tax cuts on dividends and capital gains," he said in a Jan. 6 speech to the Economic Club of Chicago. "Half of American households—that's more than 50 million households—now have some investment in the stock market."

As is often the case with politicians, it's what is not said that you'd better examine.

"What this statistic ignores, however, is that nearly two-fifths of this stock is held in retirement accounts, such as

401 (k)s and IRAs," the Center on Budget and Priorities points out. "This distinction is crucial, because capital gains and dividend income accruing inside these retirement accounts are not subject to taxation, and thus would not receive a tax benefit from the reduction in the tax rates on capital gains and dividend income."

So what's the real deal? More than half—54 percent—of all capital gains and dividend income go to the 0.2 percent of households with annual incomes of more than \$1 million. By contrast, only 4 percent of this income reaches the 64 percent of households that have annual incomes of less than \$50,000, according to the Center.

An analysis by the Urban Institute-Brookings Institution Tax Policy Center shows that tax legislation that has gone in effect since 2001 has exacerbated the gap between rich and poor. The middle fifth of households received an average after-tax reduction of \$742 or 2.6 percent. Households with annual incomes of more than \$1 million received an average reduction of \$103,000 or 5.4 percent, more than double the rate for middle-class families.

Yet, Bush brags that "tax cuts are working" by reinvigorating the economy.

The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office disagrees. It observes:

"increases [in the revenue projections] occur mainly because of a rise in projected GDP, which derives from higher prices in the economy, not real economic activity."

Finally, the wealthiest sector of the U.S. population is being showered with favoritism.

"Some of the tax cuts that were enacted in 2001 are still being phased in," stated the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. "These taxes are heavily tilted to those at the top of the income scale. These tax cuts include the elimination of the tax on the nation's largest estates, as well as two tax cuts that started to take effect on January 1, 2006 and will go almost entirely to high-income households."

"The Tax Policy Center reports that 97 percent of the tax cuts from these two measures will go to people with incomes above \$200,000. As a result, the tax cuts ultimately will be even more skewed toward high-income households than they were in 2005."

As usual, that leaves poor and middle-class citizens out in the cold.

GEORGE E. CURRY is editor-in-chief of the National Newspaper Publishers Association News Service and BlackPressUSA.com. He appears on National Public Radio three times a week as part of "News and Notes with Ed Gordon."



ANGELA LINDSAY



GEORGE E. CURRY



MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

Coretta King said that even as a child, she felt she was going to lead an extraordinary life. Many people might not have expected that from a little Black girl who grew up in very rural Alabama during the Depression, picking cotton and walking several miles each way every day to attend a segregated one-room school. But from the start, she was exceptional. She attended a semi-private high school in Marion, Ala., where she, a gifted young musician, was able to study piano and

voice and graduated valedictorian of her class. She got a chance to leave the segregated South when she won a scholarship to join her older sister as one of the few Black students at Antioch College in Ohio.

Coretta King was already politically active. She joined the college's NAACP chapter and Race Relations and Civil Liberties committees, and was a delegate to the founding convention of the Young Progressives organization. She first majored in early education but was inspired to change her plans after she sang on a program with Paul Robeson at an NAACP event. He encouraged her to study voice full-time and she dreamed of having a career like his that combined music performance with social activism. After college she pursued that dream with a scholarship to the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, where a friend set her up on a date with a theology doctoral student at Boston University named Martin Luther King, Jr.

Coretta King wrote that at first she was reluctant to get married because she knew it would change her career dreams. As it turned out, of course, becoming that young minister's wife gave her the opportunity to serve on an entirely different national

and world stage. Less than three years into their marriage, Dr. King was thrust into the national spotlight with the Montgomery bus boycott. Her own activism and deep commitment to civil rights made her an ideal partner as he became the international symbol for the Civil Rights Movement. She often took on a behind-the-scenes role, staying at home with their four children while Dr. King traveled as a public leader. But in the most important battles of the Civil Rights Movement, she was always right by her husband's side.

After Dr. King's death, instead of retreating with her young children or into her grief, Coretta Scott King stepped out into the forefront to continue her husband's legacy. She began this the day before his funeral, leading the sanitation workers' march he had gone to Memphis to support. She continued standing up for social justice all the rest of her life. She was devoted to preserving Dr. King's legacy and fought successfully to establish the King Center and the national holiday recognizing his birthday and became an internationally recognized human rights leader in her own right.

A strong antiwar and anti-apartheid activist, she spoke to audiences around the world, calling for racial equality and economic and social justice and received many honors and awards for her tireless work. Mrs. King was especially passionate about women's rights, and urged women to take their rightful place at the table to create a better nation and world. She once said, "If American women would increase their voting turnout by 10 percent, I think we would see an end to all of the budget cuts in programs benefiting women and children." How true this remains in this era where a Congress of the United States, aided and abetted by a callous administration, has just cut \$39 billion from the budget from programs low-income children and families need in order to give tens of billions of new tax cuts to powerful special interests that don't need it.

Throughout her life, Mrs. King was a lantern for freedom and justice. We will all miss Coretta Scott King's presence but carry her and Dr. King's spirits as we continue the struggle. May she rest in peace and may we work for peace with justice with renewed vigor.

Bennettsville, S.C., native MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN is president and founder of the Children's Defense Fund.

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