

Jackson issues call for student action against racial division

By Jason Richardson
State and National Editor

DURHAM — Civil rights activist Jesse Jackson delivered a rousing wake-up call to American college students Tuesday at Duke Chapel.

"Shall we choose to live together, or shall we choose ethnic cleansing?" Jackson asked the crowd, which filled the chapel.

"Racism: This assumption that someone is superior because of race — it is unscientific. It is politically divisive,

economically exploitative, and it makes our culture awkward and uncomfortable."

In his speech, titled "America at a Crossroads: Our Hour of Decision," Jackson called on college students to take up the flag of activism and outlined problems caused by racism around the world. "We have a choice to make, and each choice has its consequences," Jackson said. "Life or death, hope or hate and hurt, the low road or the high road.

"There is a certain urgency in our country ... for us to approach a choice

between cultural diversity and ethnic cleansing.

"Therefore we say, 'Let's end racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, anti-Arabism ... to realize the best in this lesson called America.'"

Jackson warned students that racial and ethnic problems in America had reached lethal levels.

"We must choose coexistence or coannihilation," Jackson said. He blamed racism and the color line for tensions in Los Angeles, Haiti and Major League Baseball.

Jackson pointed out America's long ties to that country, including Haiti's assistance to the United States in the American Revolution.

"And yet, if a Cuban is found at sea, the orders are to let him in. If a Haitian

or black Cuban is found, the orders are to take him back.

"Why a black Cuban? Because he is not discernible from a Haitian!"

He said that the differing orders were not about numbers, but about race. "We are locking them in Haiti, not locking them out of here. And we are locking them in to be killed." He decried what he called a silence in America about the issue and asked the audience why they thought there had been no major outcry.

"Because they're black," Jackson said, answering his own question.

He berated President Clinton for reneging on his promise to reverse the Bush administration's stance on Haitian immigrants. "We simply want the covenant honored."

Another issue for which Jackson has gained public prominence is his activism in promoting minority hiring among professional athletic teams, particularly in Major League Baseball.

"Athletics ... institutional racism. There are 28 Major League Baseball

teams 46 years after Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier, and there are zero blacks" in baseball's higher positions, Jackson said.

He pointed out that blacks made up a major portion of the players in professional sports. "When the rules are fair, we do well. But when the rules are subjective ..."

He said blacks excelled at sports not because of biological reasons but because the rules were clear and public.

"But who becomes a tenured professor? The rules are not as clear," he said, leading into a discussion about Darryl Roberts, a black political science professor who was refused tenure at Duke. "Behind the closed doors, he cannot get tenure. We must say, 'Open the doors! Let's play by one set of rules.'"

He encouraged multicultural education as a method to ease racial tensions in America. "America's a great nation, but we're just one third of our hemisphere. Open up the real world order, and let the joy and the love come in."

Many of Jackson's sternest remarks were reserved for incidents in American history that he said reflected racism. "Our nation was born in contradiction. It was born with high and lofty

democratic ideals. We are all made by a common Creator with certain inalienable rights. And yet, those who wrote down these concepts set up a system wherein only white male landowners could vote," Jackson said.

"The Constitution had to be saved by the Bill of Rights," he said. "The only thing that saved our country from German-style fascism was African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans ... fighting for justice and equality."

Jackson closed his remarks with a final call to students to lead the fight in improving America. "Why is there so little student activism today? Because so much of young America has been lulled to sleep in the treacherous journey of self-gratification and instant gratification and hedonism."

He called for young Americans to reject these paths and choose activism. "When you add up at-risk sex, drug habits, at-risk family values, at-risk prayer life ... you end up with tragic, not magic, consequences.

"We must rise above our 'isms,' and just care. The best of us will be measured by how we treat the rest of us. Keep hope alive."



Jesse Jackson

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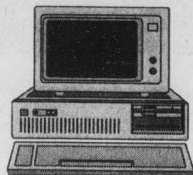
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But last year, a close friend in Burlington entered the Miss Alamance County contest. Lloyd watched her friend and decided the competition was something she could and should do.

She lost weight, polished her interview skills and practiced playing the piano. Then she won.

UNC junior Larniece McKoy wears the Miss Brunswick County crown. She says she is "gung-ho" about the Miss America program. And she doesn't like the term "beauty pageant." A beauty pageant doesn't have an interview or talent competition, she said.

"In that kind of pageant, what you look like is more important than who you are," McKoy said.

To train for the Miss Brunswick County contest, she lifted weights, practiced her song, "Orange Colored Sky," watched the news on television and read news magazines. Then she won her first title in five preliminary contests.

Stephanie Hackney, a first-year dental student, snared the second-runner-up and Miss Congeniality title in the Miss Greater Raleigh pageant in January.

She won Onslow County's Junior Miss pageant in 1987 and danced in the Miss North Carolina pageant for three years.

"I saw everything backstage and knew it was just something I wanted to do," Hackney said. She loves to perform and make people smile and said competing in the pageant was a positive experience.

Lloyd, McKoy and Hackney competed in a tradition that was undergoing a major image alteration.

Beauty pageants became scholarship pageants, and scholarship pageants will phase into scholarship programs in the near future, Lloyd said.

Hackney said pageants had changed from the stereotypical beauty pageant.

"They really are becoming scholarship pageants," she said. "They look for the well-rounded girl, but it's slow going to pull away from society's expectations."

There now is less emphasis on body and more on the whole person, McKoy said. Evening gown competition includes a brief interview on stage and counts 15 percent. Physical fitness, gauged while wearing bathing suits, also counts 15 percent. The talent portion makes up 40 percent, and an interview with the judges provides the final 30 percent.

Less emphasis on the body means fewer stereotypes about what winners should look like, McKoy said.

"I'm a curvaceous black woman, not pencil-thin, 'model' gorgeous. I don't

think pageants perpetuate the beauty myth anymore," she said.

But Boxill disagrees. "Beauty pageants sustain the stereotype that women are to be seen as sex or beauty objects," she said. She teaches a class about social and political ethics and discusses pageants while lecturing about sexism.

"Even though the interviews are present and there is an attempt to make the pageant a brain exercise, the changes do not succeed," Boxill said. "Pageants undermine the advances of women and put us back into the mindset of 'that's all we're here for.'"

Harris also thinks that despite the changes in the pageant system, they provide another avenue to turn women into objects, judged by standards decided by a faceless "they."

"Physical beauty is still fundamental, even with the aspect of scholarships and talent," Harris said. "It's positive that pageants are diversifying, but it doesn't change what is fundamentally corrupt."

The pageants reinforce a focus on the external that can "plunge women into patterns that can be physically destructive," she said.

Harris said she despaired to read the journal entries of women's studies students that express self-hatred and enormous dissatisfaction with the way the students look.

Nicole Kaufman, a senior from Winston-Salem, entered the N.C. preliminary for Miss Teen USA about seven years ago and left with extremely negative opinions about pageants. Other pageant contestants said Miss USA was a less progressive program than the Miss America network.

"Everyone backstage was taping, teasing and tucking to get that perfect look for the cattle call," Kaufman said. "I really don't see any merit in them."

The young women in the pageant stayed at a hotel in Greensboro, Kaufman said. Her roommate, coached by a former Mrs. USA, mixed a solution of Preparation H, a medicine for hemorrhoids, and Ben Gay the night before the pageant.

She rubbed it on her legs, wrapped her legs in Saran Wrap, pulled on jogging pants and went to bed. She hoped the solution would create heat and sweat the fluid from her legs to emphasize muscle definition.

Kaufman woke during the night and looked over at her roommate. "She was standing buck naked on her bed, peeling off the Saran Wrap. It was so hot she couldn't stand it," Kaufman said.

Kaufman's roommate won the pageant and currently attends UNC.

Lloyd, McKoy and Hackney emphasized that pageants were rewarding when entered for the right reasons. Good reasons mentioned were scholarship money, the experience itself and friends made during competition.

And wrong reasons? Entering only to win and making the pageant their "be-all and end-all," McKoy said.

All three women said pageants did not exploit women because contestants entered by choice. And all three disagreed that pageants dehumanize women.

Lloyd said she had decided to compete in pageants to dispel stereotypes. "I did not become a stereotype when I won — they got me, with all my opinions."

She doesn't always like wearing the crown that comes with her title. "Some people, mainly older people, treat me differently when I'm wearing my crown," she said. "It's as if I'm not a person, not able to contribute to an intelligent conversation."

The Miss America program is the largest scholarship program in the country for women, offering literally millions of dollars. The funds available make the program worthy of alteration rather than eradication, Lloyd said.

"It's not to be done away with. It is to be changed," Lloyd said. "Nothing is wrong with the pageant that is not present in every part of our society. There are so many positive aspects to pageants that it is worth sticking with and changing for good."

But Harris thinks pageants represent what is destructive to women as a group. "I mean my comments and my opinions to be a criticism of a culture that perpetuates and encourages us to internalize strict standards and external values."

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