

# Redrawing the color lines

The issue of race has recently appeared in massive proportions across the country. Various discrimination lawsuits, as well as the protests against them, have caused people to question just how much racism has gone unnoticed.

## America: in black and white

Blacks have lodged many complaints against police departments and businesses. Escalating claims of these institutions' racist actions in recent months suggest an increased focus on race in America.

■ **October 1996 (St. Petersburg, Fla.)** — A white police officer shoots and kills a black motorist. Blacks riot claiming the man was shot because of his race.

■ **November 1996 (St. Petersburg, Fla.)** — A second riot erupts after a grand jury refused to indict the officer.

■ **November 1996 (New York)** — Texaco Oil Co. Inc. settled a \$176 million class-action suit for discrimination for its minority hiring and promotion practices. The settlement followed the release of an audio tape of company executives referring to black employees as "niggers" and "black jelly beans."

■ **November 1996 (Wilmington)** — A lawsuit was filed against the Avis car rental company for discrimination against black customers. The company refused rentals to blacks based on "safety concerns" that did not apply to white customers.

■ **November 1996 (Greensboro)** — The U.S. Department of Labor and Triad International Maintenance Co. reached a \$240,000 settlement after evidence of employees raffing a Ku Klux Klan knife and wearing KKK hoods to work.

■ **November 1996 (Pittsburgh)** — After an all-white jury acquitted a white police officer for the death of a black motorist, residents said the legal system was discriminatory.

■ **November 1996 (Charlotte)** — Residents protested after a white officer shot a black motorist while his 4-year-old daughter looked on.

SOURCE: THE NEWS AND OBSERVER

DTH/ELISE ALLEY

## Racism exists, but not in all aspects of life

Racism is one of the ugliest words in the English language. It conjures up images of brutal slaveholders, segregated schools and mob lynchings. Luckily, these once-commonplace evils are now, for the most part, extinct. Most people realize, however, that although society has largely eliminated the most overt forms of racism, the problems of racial prejudice are still with us.

The past few years have been marked by a high incidence of racially charged controversy. Alarming, this trend has become even more pronounced in recent months. Examples include accusations of racial discrimination against companies such as Avis, Texaco and Denny's as well as charges of racism in some police departments. In light of this exposition of racism in many of society's most respected positions, it is easy to come to the conclusion that all of our nation's institutions, public and private, have been fatally infected by the plague of racial discrimination. In such a climate, situations in which skin color plays little or no role become charged with racial overtones and allegations of racism are bandied about with reckless abandon.

Again, it is necessary to stress that racism still exists in this country, nor can one deny that it is a very real problem whose continued existence threatens the credibility of our dedication to freedom. If, as the evidence seems to indicate, Texaco executives did extend their obvious personal racial biases into company policies, they should absolutely be punished to the fullest extent of the law.

It is also clear that racism has found a home in some police departments. The Rodney King incident and subsequent acquittals of the police officers involved were an affront to almost everyone's sense of justice, and it is probably but one of many examples of racially motivated actions on the part of police forces.

An understandable response to these and other examples is to come to the

conclusion that every white-owned company and white person in a position of power is motivated by racial bias. This is simply not the case. Two recent events show the problems that can arise when the charge of racism becomes the reflex response to a racial situation.

For several years, Domino's Pizza has had a code system to determine its delivery policies with respect to certain neighborhoods. A neighborhood is assigned a color based on its crime rate. For "green" neighborhoods, the driver delivers the pizza to the door. The policy in "yellow" neighborhoods is that the caller must come to the car to get the pizza. Areas designated "red" do not get delivery service.

Over the summer, a resident of one of San Francisco's "red" neighborhoods called to order a pizza and was informed of the policy. The would-be customer, like most other residents of the neighborhood, was black. Soon afterward, the policy was brought to the attention of San Francisco's city council.

Immediately, Domino's policy was deemed as racist. The city's decision in the matter was that any company wishing to deliver pizza in the San Francisco area would have to deliver to all neighborhoods. Rather than risk the safety of their drivers, Domino's and other chains in the area discontinued their delivery services.

The immediate question raised here is whether the behavior of Domino's constituted racial discrimination. The answer is an unequivocal no. Rather

than being an example of racism, this policy is actually an instance of simple pragmatism. It makes sense not to deliver to high-crime areas, and the racial makeup of the area was never a consideration. By charging Domino's with racism, one lumps the company in with representatives of Texaco and Avis. Not only is this unfair to a company whose only crime was protecting the safety of its employees, it dilutes the seriousness of allegations of racial bias.

A second example in which charges of racism have been levied in an irresponsible manner is the entire privatization debate. Opponents of privatization have posted fliers around campus which read "Fight Privatization. Fight Racism." The clear implication is that proponents of contracting out housekeeping services are motivated by racial bias.

The point these folks seem to be missing is that housekeepers are not being singled for privatization because they are predominantly black. Rather, the Outsourcing Steering Committee has focused on housekeeping because it is a nonacademic department in which savings might be found. The issue of whether the impact of privatization on University employees is worth the possible savings is a question for another day. What I wish to take issue with here is the charge that privatization is motivated by racism.

Allegations of racism are of the utmost seriousness, and they should not be levied lightly. There are many strong arguments for outsourcing, and they can be made entirely independently of the racial composition of the workers in the department to be privatized. Essentially, those who accuse the administration of racism are seeking to do one thing: limit debate on the subject. Should they be successful in their attempt to equate racism with privatization, those who posted the fliers would silence their opponents, as no one would want to defend racism.

This phenomenon extends to several

other public debates. Many of those who support affirmative action or the Black Cultural Center have a knee-jerk label for those who oppose such things: racist. Such a charge ignores the fact that there are also many valid arguments against affirmative action and the BCC that do not rely on racism and are, in fact, used by minorities who are themselves opposed to such programs.

It is no coincidence that an increase in publicized instances of real racism is often accompanied by an increase in unfounded charges of the same sin. Great care, must be taken, however, to judge every incident in which race plays a part on its own specifics. When a company acts in a way that has adverse effects on blacks, it is important to ask if the actors were motivated by racism.

If the answer is yes, as appears to be the case with Texaco, society and individuals must respond by condemning and punishing those responsible in the appropriate manner. But, if it is apparent the business in question acted out of concerns not associated with race, as Domino's appears to have been, allegations of racism are reckless. Careful consideration must also be considered when charges of racism are made in an academic or policy debate. The basis of our University, not to mention our entire system of government, is based upon the free exchange of ideas. Such an environment cannot exist when arguments which challenge the current campus orthodoxy are, instead of being rationally discussed, decried as bigotry. Indeed, society must also refrain from silencing those who do espouse racist views.

Only when such viewpoints are allowed to be aired can they be discussed in a rational manner and subsequently debunked. The direct confrontation of racism is the best way to solve it.

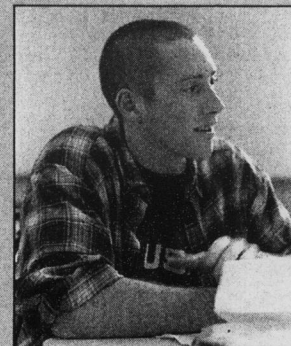
Matthew Crawford is a junior political science major from Greensboro.

## STUDENT VOICES

Views on race relations and racism

*"Race relations are a whole lot better than they used to be, but now it's like undercover racism. It's not cool to be racist anymore."*

**LEKISHA MORINGS**  
Freshman  
Communication studies

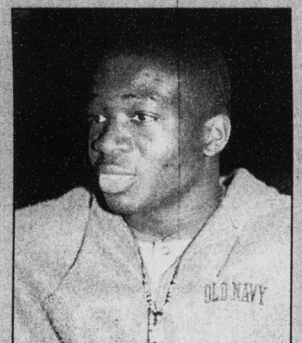


*"(Racism) is more concentrated in certain areas. It spreads throughout everything and affects everybody."*

**JERRY WALTERICK**  
Freshman  
Biology

*"People often say racism doesn't exist. It's just more covert now. We're better off in certain circumstances, but white America still dominates politically and economically"*

**ADEBOWALE ODULANA**  
Freshman  
Biology



*"More and more people are becoming open-minded. I don't think there's much racism at all on UNC's campus."*

**JULIANNE DAVIS**  
Sophomore  
Biology

## Whether you realize it or not, racism plays a part in everything

Does racism still exist? To mainstream America it might not, but to African Americans, it most certainly does. Racism exists everywhere, even at this prestigious university.

Since the beginning of American history, African Americans have been the subject of many cruel and degrading acts which dehumanized them to the point of becoming mere beasts of burden. That burden has been to shoulder the load of the manpower that has made this country what it is today. I'm not saying that it was just them, but African Americans rarely receive the credit due to them — unless it is in a negative spotlight.

Why is this? The main reason is the ignorance and the misunderstanding of the American people. Such misinformation about African Americans have led to stereotypes of the African-American community.

The main culprit is the media, which have distorted the image of African Americans, portraying them as negative and brutal people. It sends a message

saying African-American males are illiterate and violent, while labeling African-American women as sex-crazed bitches who are all trying to exhale. The press fumbles statistics and skews findings in order to make African Americans symbols of the "anti-American dream" of being totally lazy and having no desire to work but willing to take handouts. For example, I was at the Million Man March and I KNEW there were more people than the number reported by the media.

Even The Daily Tar Heel leaves something to be desired. The DTH ran a photograph of an African-American male being body searched by the police, though

the picture had nothing to do with the article beside it. So why was it there?

The one thing that the media rarely does is focus on issues pertaining to African Americans. The main issue they seem to stray away from is racism.

African Americans have, on numerous occasions, tried to publicize the abuse they receive. Recent riots in St. Petersburg, Fla., and reactions to the racial slurs from Circuit City and Texaco executives are evidence. Some argue that these instances are more examples of African Americans trying to "get over on the American people" and that "there is no proof of such claims."

People always want proof. African Americans have had witnesses, audio tapes and even video tapes. What more do we need to convince people that racism still exists and that justice must be served? And as far as justice, the law only pertains to just-us (African Americans). In America, it's supposed to be innocent until proven guilty. In reality, it's guilty until proven innocent.

For example, Susan Smith blamed a nonexistent African-American male for the cruel carjacking, kidnapping and murder of her two boys, though she drowned the boys herself. What was so shocking was almost got away with it. The American public was willing to find an African-American male to take the fall. Susan Smith had no evidence to support her claim, yet an innocent man could have suffered because of it.

When African Americans go out to find work, they usually get the lower-paying, less-glamorous jobs. When some are able to get higher-profile jobs, some Americans scream that affirmative action is the cause, and claim reverse racism. In such jobs, African Americans are placed in offices with a view of opportunities only to appease and silence them. These seemingly glamorous jobs lie beneath glass ceilings that contain and pigeonhole African Americans into that job. Ask any member of the Black Public Works Association in Orange County.

Racism also occurs on this campus,

too. When people see an African American student, the first question that comes to mind is, "Why are they here?" They think African Americans have to play a sport to come here. That is just ignorant.

Another issue of racism in the way the University handled the Greek Freak step show last semester. A shooting occurred down the street from Carmichael Auditorium, where the show took place. The parties involved were not students and had no connection to UNC. They also were rounded up quickly after the incident. As if African-American students on campus were at fault, the University canceled all Great Hall parties for the remainder of the semester.

When there was an actual murder in Fraternity Court, where one member shot and killed one of his fraternity brothers three years ago, nothing happened — no investigation, no trial, nothing. The DTH barely covered the incident but continued to mention the step show shooting the week after it occurred.

No matter what people say, things

have not changed a bit, or have they? Some say things are better than they've ever been.

Slavery has been abolished, no more lynching nor African Americans getting sprayed with hoses. From what I see, things have gotten better. But that's only from what I see. Racism has now taken on new forms and identities.

Blatant racism has been removed in many cases, yet institutionalized racism remains. Racial slurs have become code words, night riders who would lynch African Americans are now Ku Klux Klan members and neo-nazis. Police brutality... well, not everything has changed.

Racism today has kept itself hidden enough that many believe it no longer exists. It does, however, in all facets of society — from UNC to the national level. For those still believing racism is a thing of the past, it time to wake up from the dream world into reality.

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