

Tuesday, April 22, 1969

In The Black Community

Hawkins, Alexander Debate: Is The Dream Alive? In Black Symposium

Black Culture Viewed In 3-Dimensional World

The two were so similar and yet they were as far apart as Stokely Carmichael and Ralph Abernathy.

Both were black (though one would argue that point). Both were from Charlotte. Both were juniors in name and in class. Both have fathers who are prominent in state politics. Both are leaders of civil rights groups. Both are eloquently bitter. And both wear political buttons.

One look at the buttons and you begin to spot the differences.

Kelly Alexander (his father is head of the state NAACP) was sporting a "Vote 18" button—advertising the local NAACP's national voter drive. Kelly has led the Chapel Hill chapter of the NAACP since last year.

Reggie Hawkins (his father is a former gubernatorial candidate) button displayed the menacing figure of the Black Panther—symbol of the more militant Black Student Movement. Reggie is vice-chairman of that group.

DTH Associate Editor Steve Enfield sought the opinions of these two students last week concerning the position of the black community today—one year after the violent slaying of Martin Luther King.

One look at the times we live in and you begin to understand why two people so alike have become polar opposites:

ENFIELD: A year ago, Preston Dobbins and others got together and formed the BSM. It is clear, judging by the events of the past year, that the BSM does have a viable role to play and that it has achieved a permanent status on campus. What problems (leadership or organizational) do you foresee for the future?

HAWKINS: As far as I'm concerned there is no problem; every person in the BSM is a potential leader. There is no one leader and the matter is just voting in whoever you want to be the leader of the group. We have various decision-making bodies and no one person has any more power. There is really no leadership problem in the BSM.

ENFIELD: Kelly, a year ago you stated that "the conditions would determine" how militant the NAACP would become. Do you think that any new problems could arise that would bring your policies more in line with those of the BSM?

ALEXANDER: I still stick by the "conditions" statement. It depends on what the crisis situation is going to be—if it's something that's extremely threatening, then obviously you've got to change the stance of your organization.

ENFIELD: What would you number among the really significant gains made by the black community in Chapel Hill over the past year?

ALEXANDER: (Howard) Lee's (mayoral) candidacy for me is very significant. I understand he has a very good chance to be elected.

ENFIELD: Reggie's father a year ago ran for governor. Do you think a black could have run from mayor of Chapel Hill back then?

ALEXANDER: Not realistically. From reading some of his campaign material, it appears that he has established himself as a respected figure in both the black and white communities; that takes a little time. Also, I've been told that most campaigns have been issueless. Lee has decided to bring up issues and this new thrust gives him a very good chance of election.

HAWKINS: As far as I can see, really

there have been no gains between last year and now. Issues don't mean thing. My father spoke on issues, and it didn't mean a thing. He carried Chapel Hill, but he carried it because of the instructors on campus who could see he did have a viable campaign. As far as Lee winning, he does have a good chance. This does not say for the community. I'd say it says alot for the university in its teachers and that's it.

ENFIELD: What about the community outside university?

HAWKINS: None of the Chapel Hill or Carrboro community blacks, I'd say, have gotten anything. In fact, conditions are alot worse in that police have been patrolling far more since last year in the black community and have done nothing but enchain these people and have turned the black community in Carrboro into a police state.

ENFIELD: Now that we've differentiated between the two communities, what, if anything, has been accomplished within the university: blacks on the faculty, blacks in student legislature, etc.

HAWKINS: Really nothing. If anything, it's token. Everything that anybody or any black has reaped around here has been because the BSM has pressured someone into doing something.

ALEXANDER: I would have to disagree with that. For instance, in Morrison a black was elected to student legislature not because the BSM or anyone else pressured people but because he was an astute politician and the electorate happened to like him. Those are some of the same skills that any politician in the district would have to have in order to win the election. Much the same thing had to be the case for the gentleman from James who was elected to the MRC simply because both districts have an extremely small black minority. In Morrison, at one time, if you had ten black students that would be just a fantastic number.

HAWKINS: This brings into focus what I think are two very major details. When you run for office who are you representing? Now the legislator from Morrison ran for legislature but is he running for black people, you see, or is he himself black? Who will benefit from him being in legislature? I'm willing to say that if a black, note I say BLACK, candidate runs for office, I'm almost willing to say that he will not win because all of his interests will be focused toward black people and what they can get and be liberated at this school. I wouldn't classify the person we are talking about as black, I'd classify him as a Negro.

ALEXANDER: This to me is utterly ridiculous. Obviously the man's racial classification stands out, he is black or Negro, and Negro comes from this or that source...

HAWKINS: When you call someone black he has very characteristic ideas and means of thinking and acting and when you have a Negro you have someone with different characteristics. I think it's very important that you call a person what he is.

ALEXANDER: That is a completely unacceptable dichotomy. All right, if the gentleman from Morrison or anywhere else for that matter considers the political process viable and wants to run that process and wants to represent the



One year later
...have blacks progressed?

interests of his district, then according to his (Hawkins') dichotomy, if the district happens to be predominantly white, then the guy has to be a "Negro," whether he has the bush, the Afro, or whether he's the local Planter leader—he's a Negro. That's ridiculous. You're breaking down the political process along the lines of race as opposed to what the process is supposed to do. It's supposed to represent the general welfare of everybody, I realize it hasn't—to a tremendous degree. But the Kerner Commission Report and the Year After Report point out that unless certain things are done, your dichotomy and your polarization is going to go to such a point that society is going to just erupt.

ENFIELD: In speeches here during the past year Howard Fuller told UNC students that "American society is a racist society and the system is a racist system." Stokely Carmichael also said that he wanted to see a society "free of racism." How close are we to achieving that goal?

ALEXANDER: We're a damn long way far from it. It's a tremendous distance away.

HAWKINS: I definitely agree with that.

ENFIELD: Are we any closer now than we were at this time last year?

HAWKINS: We're living in it, so it's hard to say. As long as you have people who were here last year, and the year before that and so on—then attitudes will not change. Now what I'm saying is, once you're a racist, you're always a racist and the only way you're going to change is you're going to have to die out.

ENFIELD: We talked about the black within the community and within the school. Now is the same situation true throughout the state; can we use Chapel Hill as an example and elaborate from there?

HAWKINS: As far as I'm concerned the situation is the same.

ALEXANDER: It's basically true. People are just now deciding to admit hunger and poverty, racism and oppression. You've known that this has

been going on for a long time. A public admissions stage is what we're going through now. In all actuality, conditions somewhat have improved, but looking at it as a whole conditions are still in the Dark Ages stage. A tremendous amount of effort has got to be extended NOW to straighten things out.

ENFIELD: A drastic change from former BSM tactics was demonstrated during the recent Lenoir crisis. Namely, that the BSM has no fear of alienating white supporters who they think might stand in their way. Do you think this policy will continue?

HAWKINS: It depends on who stands to benefit and on who stands to be hurt by what goes on. Now if the issues are directed toward black people, then black people should run what they are going to do. As far as white support is concerned, if they want to follow, that's all well and good; when they have their own thing then we might follow. But as far as black people are concerned and who stands to benefit or to lose most by what is going on in a current situation, whites would have to take a back-seat role with no back-seat driving.

ENFIELD: Is the NAACP afraid of alienating whites?

ALEXANDER: No, and it never has been afraid to, not historically or in the things we're doing now. I see the basic difference between "militant organizations and radical organizations" and more moderate groups as just simply tactical things, the goals for the most part seem to be about the same.

ENFIELD: Five years ago, Martin Luther King delivered his famous "I have a dream..." speech. Is that dream still alive today and if not does it ever have a chance of being realized?

HAWKINS: Well, you see you can dream a whole lot of things but only when that dream starts coming true do things seem to work out. I never have had a dream to come true, so as far as I'm concerned, you can dream on as long as you want to but until something tangible starts coming that dream is really in a ghostly stage.

ALEXANDER: All the latest survey research and delvings into the problem by social and political scientists, and the civil rights organizations themselves seem to lead one to conclude that most Black Americans still want a mainstream, they want an equalitarian society—you know, this whole equal opportunity thing. They want to be able to go anywhere, to do anything without any problems whatsoever as far as legal bars are concerned. They want a fuller share of the economic potential of this country. They want to be homeowners and entrepreneurs. This is growing and expanding to all-out proportion, I think, beyond even what King thought. The only problem is that as more and more people are beginning to accept it they're beginning to find out that it's hard as hell to achieve—that alot of whites just don't want to let them in.

Editor's Note: For several years, sociologists, political scientists, and others thought that the distinguishing mark of black people was their definite lack of any real culture—outside of the singing of spirituals and the tales of cotton picking. These people associated this dearth of any past with the minority status of blacks. As this excellent article explains, only recently has black culture been discovered.

Reprinted from
The Michigan Daily

White scholars have lately shown as intense, almost potential interest in black culture. They have endeavored to isolate and examine it with the same singleness of purpose of that a frantic biologist might apply to a suddenly important microbe which science has ignored for two hundred years.

Commendable as such post factum zeal may be, its perspective is too narrow. Most white scholars and black intellectuals see black culture in only one or two dimensions and seem unable to visualize it as a three-dimensional structure.

The one-dimensional view studies black culture strictly within the context of black society. Black history courses that emphasize the African past and black writers who tell of their reactions to the black experience are looking "one-dimensionally."

This black-on-black perspective does have its merits. It helps to make black people aware that they have a unique history and art and a non-white way of life. It gives them a reason for saying "Black is beautiful."

The narrow focus of a one-dimensional view is necessary to build up a heritage that has been systematically discredited for centuries. It is not, however, sufficient to give a full picture of black culture.

The two-dimensional view is extends the study of black culture to the context of a black-white society. This approach analyzes the effects of white culture on black culture.

Next to the black-on-black and the white-on-black dimensions of black culture is the often ignored black-on-white third dimension. This view studies the fragments of black culture that have either been assimilated into white culture or used to influence the direction of its development.

Black culture cannot be fully appreciated until the parts of it that have been absorbed in white culture are rescued from oblivion. For a while at least, it appeared that the Michigan American Studies Association's recent conference, optimistically titled

Young Blacks Seek To Shatter Bonds Between 'Negro' Culture

Reprinted from
the Duke HARAMBEE

There is a current drive, especially by young Black people to do away with the term "Negro" in reference to themselves and to replace it with either the term Black or Afro-American. Beneath this wish is also the desire to reunite our present day culture with our heritage. The term "Negro" has prevented us from doing this simply by face value. It implies no link with our descent from an African heritage and culture and, moreover, stands for nothing at all.

There has long been a type of "name game" that has been played most fervently during times of racial stress when the Black man became more cognizant that not only was there a struggle going on for his civil rights but also for his identity. Through the years that identity has become less clouded by prejudices and repression, and pride has led the Black man back to what he really is—Black, an American of African descent, or Afro-American.

What place does the name "Negro" take in all this? It has no place whatsoever except the place that the white man made for it.

The term originated four hundred years ago with the Spanish and Portuguese slave traders who transported Africans to the West Indies and to South Africa. They referred to them as "negroes" which was the Spanish word for black.

BLACK WHITE CULTURE IN AMERICA," would contribute to this goal.

Surely a black/white perspective would be three-dimensional. Unfortunately, it was not.

The papers which were read, the black attitudes discussed, and the poetry, movies and music presented as part of the conference dealt with black culture almost exclusively in terms of isolated cultural products and black reactions to white culture.

The papers on literature, focused on James Baldwin whose main themes involve finding self-identity that does not debase himself or his race and facing a reality of hate and fear without being destroyed by it.

Baldwin writes about himself, and his responses to his particular experiences are fundamentally human rather than racial.

Millions of white Americans have read James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, and LeRoi Jones, but apparently neither white scholars nor black authors believe that this input of black literature has had any effect on white culture.

Perhaps they are right and there has been no effect, or perhaps it is only beginning to be observable, but at least its potential should be recognized.

In the field of history, too, there is a seeming reluctance of black intellectuals to look for their mark on white culture. One paper pointed out that it is the intellectuals who demand black, "as opposed to Negro, history.

If black history rejects, as the paper said, "all things white whether they be ideas of genes," it is not likely to present the black past as a catalyst of white cultural reactions.

And if the black intellectuals refuse to investigate this third dimension of black culture, white scholars are not likely to do so either. Yet it is precisely black insistence on a unique history that is causing a slow but meaningful change in white attitudes toward the black experience.

In contrast, to this separatist position, the samples of black art presented at the American studies conference concentrated on bridging the racial gap with universalities.

Because black and white cultural contacts are increasing, it is more necessary than ever for both blacks and whites to "broaden their sights" and look at black culture as an active and influential motive in the cultural patterns being created in America.

The slave traders and owners used the same term.

The slaves at that time seemed to resent the term. It was used for goods, not for people with a heritage; they preferred being called Africans. With the remaining dignity of their African forefathers, they named their institutions "The Free African Societies."

Americans of African descent made a quick switch in the early nineteenth century. At this time children who were uprooted from their homelands to be sent to American had become adults. They reacted to this decision by abandoning the word African in favor of the word "color." Colored Americans was an empty, but accepted, term.

During and immediately following the Civil War, militant Black Americans seized upon the word Negro, with a capital "N" rather than colored. After reconstruction "colored" was still predominant, but men such as Booker T. Washington used the term word Negro.

The current controversy over just what Black Americans prefer to be called has sprung up after the failure of America to follow up the promise of a solution in the 1950's with a successful conclusion in the 1960's.

A recent poll of it's readers by Ebony magazine revealed that 48% preferred Afro-American; 23.3% Black; 12% African American; 8.1% Negro; and 3% Colored.

Introducing EMPHASIS

This centerfold you are now holding is the introductory edition of EMPHASIS, the weekly news-feature section of the Daily Tar Heel.

EMPHASIS will appear on Tuesdays and contain in-depth reports of education, politics, science, religion, and other topics of interest in the university community. In addition, features on campus organizations, life in Chapel Hill, and news of events on other colleges campuses is planned for coming editions.

EMPHASIS writers will be drawn from the regular pool of DTH staffers with articles by contributing writers appearing periodically.