

Black entertainment on the Hill?

L O O K H A R D

By Amber Nimocks

Five black women talk jovially around a table in Chase Dining Hall.

"What's black entertainment like at UNC?" they're asked.

"You're looking at it," they respond, laughing.

According to at least 15 other black undergraduates, that assessment is not far from the truth.

Representing 8.7 percent of the student population, UNC's

2,078 black students are likely to spend their leisure time in different ways and in different places than their white counterparts. Many of them would agree that their entertainment choices on campus and in Chapel Hill are limited.

Think about it. Pick a bar on Franklin Street or Rosemary Street. Walk in there on just about any Tuesday, Thursday, Friday or Saturday. You're likely to find it full of white students, standing

(or sitting, depending on the size of the crowd) drinking beer, listening to rock'n'roll music.

Chandra Bennett, a 20-year-old sophomore, said that this was not her scene.

"Black people don't have a good time at those clubs because they're for white people," she said.

Reggie Taylor, a 25-year-old senior, dee-jays black Greek and other parties. He agreed with Bennett.

"I've gone to Players before

and it's a different type of social scene than what I'm accustomed to seeing," Taylor said. "To me, standing around drinking all day long is not a party."

Taylor said he doesn't go to bars downtown because he doesn't drink and doesn't like the music the bars play.

William Hawkins, a 22-year-old senior, said he liked music that is "danceable."

"It has to have a hard beat," Hawkins said. "It makes you want to move. If it was a good DJ, he would play music that would make you want to stay on the floor all night."

Few Chapel Hill bars have dance floors and none of them regularly play bass-line driven dance music.

"A lot of clubs won't say it, but a lot of them fear having events that will cater to African Americans because they fear violence (often associated with black events)," Hawkins said. "A lot of merchants decide that it's really not worth it. It's kind of sad."

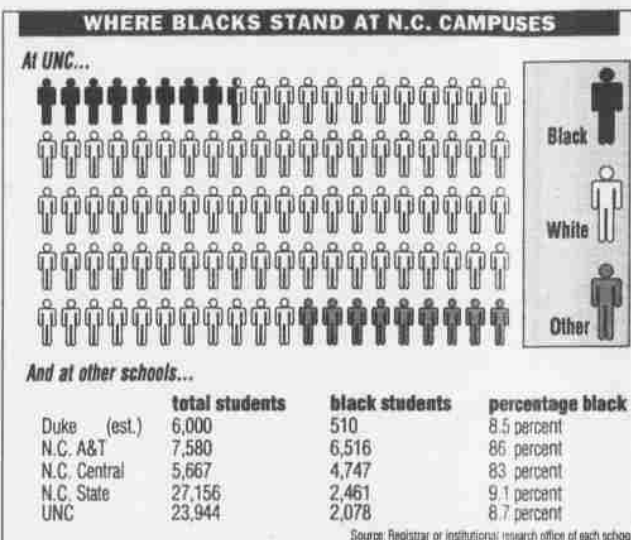
Cat's Cradle hosted dances that catered to black audiences in the spring and summer of 1991, but Chapel Hill police encouraged Cradle owner Frank Heath to discontinue the events when shootings occurred downtown near the club after a dance. Heath

had to cancel a dance at the time and hasn't held another since.

"Basically, we were told that if we had anymore black DJ parties, that (the police) would get an order to prevent us from opening that night," Heath said. "People were just coming in from all over the place and it was getting to be an ugly scene ... It was too bad because it was popular and people really enjoyed it."

Heath said he had no plans to hold the dances again.

"I found that it just draws too many people from varying groups



that may or may not like each other," he said. "There were a lot of people coming from Durham and Raleigh that weren't quite as friendly as the (UNC) students who were actually attending the event."

Many black students in the Triangle area travel to other campuses to party on weekends. Black Greek parties — those at UNC as well as those at N.C. State in Raleigh, Duke and N.C. Central in Durham, and N.C. A & T in Greensboro — are big social events. For many black

undergraduates, a Greek party anywhere within driving distance makes the weekend.

Funke Moses, a 20-year-old junior, said that if there wasn't a Great Hall party scheduled, black UNC students were left with few options.

"It's not a problem with meeting people, because through going to classes or being on the yard (the area between the Undergrad, Greenlaw and Lenior), you meet people," she said. "We hang pretty close. The problem is having something to do in Chapel Hill."

Moses also said that movie theaters in Chapel Hill don't cater to black audiences.

"It's rare that you have theaters, that are easily accessible to black (UNC) students, that show movies with major black actors and actresses," she said.

Moses said she usually goes to Durham to see those movies.

Many black freshmen have discovered the same thing — that a lot of what's happening is happening out of town.

"It was easy to meet upperclassmen with cars," said Jamika Warren, a 18-year-old freshman.

Kenya Windley agreed: "You meet one friend and then you meet all their friends."

Like many other freshmen, Warren and Windley occasionally

drink in dorm rooms and spend a lot of time just hanging out on South Campus, where they live.

"If you live on North Campus, most of your friends would be down here," Windley said.

While they agreed that finding entertainment was a challenge, Warren and Windley said they weren't disappointed by Carolina's entertainment scene.

"It was better than I expected," Warren said. "I was expecting that I wouldn't be around as many blacks as I am."

Stormie Forte, a 22-year-old senior, said that she anticipated the lack of black entertainment options before she came to Chapel Hill, but that conditions had worsened during her four years here.

Dorm parties have been eliminated and restrictions have tightened on Great Hall parties. Forte said small business could help solve the problem.

"A group of black people who are out of school should come and buy a piece of land in Chapel Hill and build a place for black students," she said, adding that the club could feature diverse music each night.

This would provide more black entertainment choices at UNC, which Forte dubbed, "the place where black students have the least to do."

Leaders of campus theater groups say they want to present more black plays, but they often have trouble finding people who are interested in staging them.

Mary Dail, a LAB!Theatre producer, said the group relied on students to present proposals for directing plays. "We have to go with what's presented to us," she said.

The LAB! presented a play, *BLK Love Song*, written by a black playwright last year. The group has been trying to improve minority involvement this year, Dail said.

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tried to solicit minority participation.

"We try to trigger a lot of involvement," Clay said. "It's just a matter of people wanting to go out and join."

Herman LaVell Jones, a UNC alumnus, said he had discussed ways to boost black theater involvement in a meeting this fall with Milly Barranger, chairwoman of the Department of Dramatic Art.

A 1983 graduate of the University's master's program in dramatic art, Jones acted in PlayMakers Repertory Company's production of *Little Foxes* this fall.

Jones said he and Barranger discussed workshops and classes about black theater and PRC performances of plays by black authors.

"I thought it would certainly improve the cultural aspect of campus, particularly for black students," he said. "There has been a constant concern with blacks that there has not been much theater to do that represents them," he said.

The program could operate in conjunction with the proposed new Black Cultural Center, Jones said.

"A cultural center has to have real programming for the people who use it," he said. "With the Black Cultural Center

Curtain rarely rises on plays by blacks

THEATRE

Forget about budget cuts for a minute. There's a shortage of black playwrights and plays about black life at UNC.

"If anyone wanted to see a play about African Americans or by an African-American playwright, they'd be hard pressed to find it," said April C. Turner, director of Ebony Readers/Onyx Theater, a campus black performance group.

Larry Poston, a drama major who is black, agreed.

"There are not a lot of black-oriented shows out there," he said.

A look at the playbills of campus theater groups reveals few plays by black authors. PlayMakers Repertory Company, the Pauper Players and the Department of Dramatic Art theater series have no such plays planned for this year. The LAB!Theatre, a student-run experimental theater group, presented one play by a black author last year, and tentatively plans another black-authored play for next semester.

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"A cultural center has to have real programming for the people who use it," he said. "With the Black Cultural Center

being an issue that has brought the African-American community together, a program that would have black theater could be explored to a great degree."

Barranger said she was open to possibilities for more black theater on campus, but she added that a lack of black actors could hinder casting efforts for plays with several black parts.

"We have had problems with the audition pool," she said. "We don't see many minorities auditioning for the department productions."

Jones said PlayMakers would have a difficult time staging a play with several black roles because the company draws many of its actors from UNC's dramatic art graduate program. There are no black students currently enrolled in the graduate program. PlayMakers could

produce such a play, but they would have to hire professional actors for all of the black roles, Jones said.

"I think ... takers could afford to do it, if that was part of their agenda," he said.

Barranger said the LAB!Theatre has recently selected a text by a black playwright that includes several black parts. The number of students auditioning for that play could be an indication of how many black students are interested in acting, she said.

"The LAB!Theatre tells me that they have selected a text by a black playwright (for next semester)," Barranger said. LAB! Producer Meg Dyer would not confirm that the play had been selected.

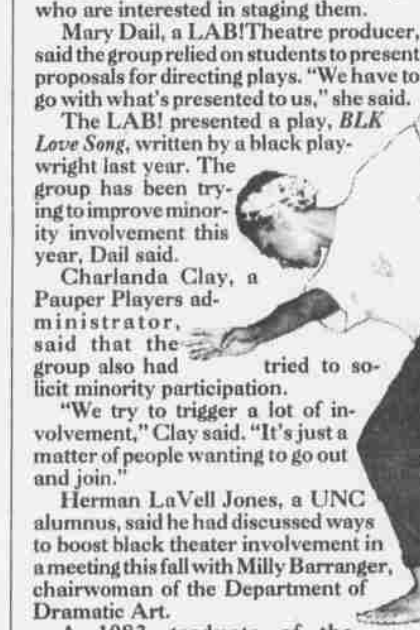
Turner said a demand for black-oriented plays does exist. Organizations like the Carolina Union Activities Board and the Campus Y ask the Ebony Readers/Onyx Theater to produce plays, short skits and readings, but the group sometimes has to turn down their requests.

"The demand is there, but there are not enough groups on campus to do (African-American theater)," Turner said.

Poston said that the lack of black roles had created an uncomfortable situation. "Usually we get put into roles made for white actors or no roles at all," he said.

Jones said the situation is regrettable, especially since black authors have written several critically acclaimed plays.

"The people that have the knowledge of what is going on in the world of literature realize that African-American playwrights have made a significant contribution over the last 30 years," Jones said. "That contribution is not represented on stages in Chapel Hill." —Mike Workman



To drink or to dance: the differences between black and white frats

GREEK

If you want to get drunk this weekend, head uptown or to a white fraternity party. If you want to dance, head to a black fraternity party.

That's the advice of some black fraternity members who believe the emphasis of black and white frat parties are as different as, well, black and white.

"White culture and black culture are different," said Lem Butler, a member of Phi Beta Sigma fraternity. "And their parties are different."

While the thrust of white fraternity parties is usually drinking, black fraternity parties are fund raisers by design, Butler said.

"Black frat parties originally are set up to raise money for programs we have through the year," he said. "They're designed for people to come out and have a good time and make some money."

The predominance of blacks at black frat

parties and whites at white frat parties reflects society, Butler said.

"Carolina is set up so the majority of blacks stick together," he said. "In society, and at Carolina, it's important for blacks to have a place to go where they can identify."

Blacks already feel alienated at Carolina, Butler said. Going to white fraternity parties would make them feel even more alienated.

"There's really limited options for black people in Chapel Hill," he said. "Black fraternity parties give black students something to do on campus."

Entertainment options for black students have decreased in the last four years, Butler said.

"When I first got here, in 1988, you could usually find a party every weekend," he said. "Now, in 1992, you can't find anything."

"There used to be dorm parties for the black sororities and fraternities, but they've been cut out because of some violence that just happened to happen."

Last semester, fights broke out at a Great Hall fraternity party, prompting Carolyn Elliland, Associate Vice Chancellor for Business and then-UNC Police Chief, to ban Great Hall parties for fear of future violence. Fraternities now

are limited to one party per semester, and must follow guidelines.

The Carolina Union guidelines specify that organizations may not give away beer or wine, and maximum capacity is 800. If an organization chooses to extend its party past the Union's closing hours on Friday or Saturday, it must pay a minimum of two UNC security officers \$30/hour for each hour past midnight. Parties must end by 1:30 a.m.

Parties must present their UNC student

IDs. Carolina students can bring one guest, who must also present a college ID.

Union supervisor Jessica Guzek said the guidelines were changed last spring as a result of the violence at black fraternity parties, but all organizations that use Great Hall must follow the guidelines.

The restrictions further limit entertainment options for blacks, Butler added.

Maurice Bennett, the president of Kappa Al-

pha Psi fraternity, said the entire black community traditionally looked forward to black fraternity parties, whereas white fraternity parties were mainly just for members of that frat.

"There have been some bridges made," Bennett said. "White fraternities ask us about step shows, and we are interested in houses like they have."

But black and white frat parties continue to be separated, he said.

"At Great Hall, where most of the parties are held, there's no alcohol allowed," Bennett said. "At white fraternity parties, drinking is the main thing. That's one major difference."

William Hawkins, a Kappa Alpha Psi member, said that while black parties may drink, the centerpiece of the night is the party itself.

"When people come to parties and clubs, they are dressed," Hawkins said. "Your attire is sort of a personal statement of yourself. There's a lot of high fashion, from hip-hop to very trendy."

"People come because they want to dance and they want to socialize," he added.

Black Greek Council spokesman Anthony Peay said the inherent differences in black and white fraternities resulted in the different party atmospheres. Because white fraternities typi-

PARTY

cally add more pledges each semester than black fraternities, they lack the closeness of smaller black fraternity pledge classes.

"The tightness in a black fraternity is a big difference," Peay said. "They make sure everyone knows about the frat and each other so they can be strong in the brotherhood. When you bring in such a large number of people, it's hard to make that attachment."

Reggie Taylor, a Phi Beta Sigma member, said he had been to one white fraternity party, but he didn't have much fun.

"Everyone was just standing around drinking," Taylor said. "No one was really dancing, and if they were, they were too drunk to know what they were doing."

"Basically, if you want to dance, go to a black fraternity party," he continued. "If you just want to get drunk, go to a white fraternity party."

—Jennifer Brett

SCENE