RACE

beyond black and white...
We’re the Third World... says who!

BRYCE GUILLORY/opinion
[Note - this article is reprinted from the March 1985 issue of The Carleton Observer. It has been edited to correct spelling errors.]

Is there still much racial tension in the south? Usually, people are quite hesitant to ask me this question. Being from Louisiana, I can usually paint a pretty vivid picture of the south that isn’t too aesthetically pleasing to the average Carleton student. Unfortunate as it may seem, racism is as strong as ever back home. But how does it compare to the concept of racism here at Carleton? And what things should we keep in mind when confronted with it? The best way to answer these questions is by relating to you a few of the observations I’ve made over the years that I’ve spent in the land of cotton.

When you have lived the majority of your life in a very racially segregated society, you learn to cope with it as best as possible. This means either being very wary of or apathetic to the situation. These are the basic norms: You either rebel against the status quo, or conform to it. Although the rebels make waves, their method of operations is usually detrimental to any long term positive change. The conformists try to make their own individual portion of the world more livable. Although they may want desperately to make changes, often there is too much at stake if they try and fail. Consequently, they live a quiet, unassuming existence. It’s an all too cut-and-dried formula.

When these two types of people meet, they quickly decide where they stand as each builds their respective barriers. The rebel thinks that the conformist is an “Uncle Tom” and the conformist thinks that the rebel is a “fool.” This is the kind of intra-racial tension that interracial tension spawns before long. However, trekking to the wide open spaces of Minnesota gives a person a totally new perspective on the situation.

When you arrive at a place like Carleton, where cultural diversity is such that it’s specifically pointed out in the brochures, you soon find out that everyone is different. Race appears irrelevant. In day-to-day contact, you want to find out more about the person as an individual, not as a Black, an Oriental, a Jew, a Scandinavian, or whatever other racial or cultural persuasion to which he or she may belong. But to watch, or to listen to, some people lament on either the campus racial policies and/or the racial tension can really bring you down at times. It’s such a ready excuse, and it’s often very continued on pp. 7

A tribute to
Rosa Parks

AARON WEINER/feature

There are many today who may not understand why Dec. 1, 1955, will be remembered throughout American history. That was the day a quiet, somewhat shy 42-year-old African-American seamstress named Rosa Parks was ordered to get up and give her seat to a white passenger on a city bus in Montgomery.” -U.S. Rep. John Lewis, who represents Georgia’s 5th Congressional District, Wednesday, 26 October 2005.

Parks passed away earlier this week at the age of 92. I’m having a difficult time writing anything that... well, it’s hard to write anything at all that could capture even a small fraction of the importance of this woman’s life. Rosa Parks was a patriot, not for following laws, but for showing the country and the world that an unjust law is still unjust – and in order to combat injustice, good people must take action.

Representative Lewis concludes his elegy by noting that, “The story of Parks reminds us that we are all one people, one family – the American family, the human family. And she reminds us that the actions of one single person have power, power to inspire a generation to greatness, power to make presidents, governors and members of Congress do what is right, even if they had not intended to.”

But labeling anything related to Parks as a “conclusion” misunderstands the importance of her refusal to move in 1955; her choice in 1955 wasn’t a conclusion, it was a new beginning. She was an ordinary woman with extraordinary convictions, and it was through her actions that our nation was forced to recognize that the promise in our Declaration of Independence - that all men are created equal - was not being met. We need to learn from the lesson Rosa Parks taught us. We must stop hiding our problems or insulating ourselves against the insensitivities of the rest of the world. We need to learn to create new beginnings.

It is in this need to begin social change that the greatest part of Rosa Parks’ legacy is found, as The Atlanta Journal Constitution reported “Parks contributed to a legacy of social activism among black women that continues to this day. It shines in fiery young Cobb legislator Alisha Thomas Morgan. It lives on in Spelman College students Moya Bailey and Asha Jennings, who sparked a national movement last year to stop the degradation of women in hip-hop music. Echoes of Parks could be heard when Jennings, now a law student in New York, said, ‘We have to stop arguing that’s the way it is and ask ourselves... how do we change it?’”

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Learning from mistakes

KATIE WHILLOCK/editor

In working on this issue, I have learned a lot about myself and the people on this campus. I have had to endure countless insensitive remarks and a strong feeling of complete isolation. For once in my life, I experienced what so many people on this campus deal with every day, and it hurts. It hurts a lot. I used to be one of the students that agreed with some of the five questions posed to multicultural groups, specifically why they felt they needed “special race-based organizations to feel comfortable on this campus.” Now I know. I needed that group. I needed to get away from the snide comments and the dirty looks as I walked around campus.

But, in feeling that way, I realized something. I realized that these groups don’t provide a permanent seclusion from the rest of Carleton, just a temporary oasis. I had to return to the outside world, and I did, I left my safe place and put myself back out there asking to be accepted and to learn more. I was overwhelmed by the response I received. Students whom I had never talked to before came up to me and actually ASKED what my thoughts were on the controversy surrounding the CCU email. They wanted to know what I had to say!

The support I received from students, especially those most hurt by the email surprised me. I was amazed that so many students felt that the response to the email as a sign of racism was unjustified. They realized that I am a person too, and that I make mistakes, just like they have. They also realized that my fellow editors and I were trying to learn from our mistakes, since we all know that nothing can fix them.

This support encouraged me. I truly believe that our campus can have an open dialogue about race, which can extend beyond the Office of Multicultural Affairs.

I think we can make progress, we just have to remember that we are all people and we will make mistakes and we will probably offend each other. But, if we learn from it, and realize that we are all striving to understand each other, we can overcome the obstacles. This will work.

[editors’ note]

The much-anticipated race issue of The Observer has finally arrived. Despite several significant setbacks that threatened to hamstring the issue, we received a whopping twenty-two submissions - nineteen articles and three letters to the editor. We are proud to put this forward as one of the best issues of the Observer to date, not because we endorse the opinions that these pages contain, but because each and every article deserves careful consideration. Our mistakes notwithstanding, we believe that we accomplished our goal of spurring more open, honest, and thought-provoking dialogue.

You’ll notice that this particular issue is considerably less stylized than previous ones. You’ll probably even notice a few typos. This is because we wanted the writing to speak for itself. The graphics work for this issue is understated, and we did not change any articles without the author’s express permission. We made every conscious effort not to editorialize at any step of the process, and though it meant letting some technical errors slip through, we wanted to interfere as little as possible with the authors’ voices.

It’s unfortunate that so many decided not to write for this issue. Understandable, certainly, but still unfortunate. With any luck, their perspectives will appear in other campus publications. To be clear, we’re not trying to “take the lead” or claim that we’re the first to talk about race. And perhaps the Observer isn’t the best forum to continue a discussion of race, culture, and privilege. All we want is for there to be fresh dialogue where none may have existed before.

People have questioned our commitment to furthering dialogue in the long run. Rest assured that we don’t plan on stopping our efforts with this issue. Look for us at Chili Nights and cultural group meetings. We will continue the conversations we have had with Hudlin Wagner as well as the office of multicultural affairs. We plan to feature special issues once every term from now on - race every fall, gender and sexuality every winter, and religion every spring. All four of us are eager to learn more. We would be thrilled to discuss these and similar issues with anyone who seeks us out. This is a learning experience for us, too.

We hope that you will critically reflect on every perspective shown here, no matter how inaccessible or offensive a given piece may seem. Do justice to the authors by trying, as best you can, to understand their points of view. Think of the articles as a series of monologues that ask for a response. It’s hard and often painful to do, but only through talking about the issues raised here and elsewhere can we build better bridges and reach understandings of one another that we never before thought possible.

Let us not stay silent.

“Truth is the most sacred virtue of the human heart.”

–SENECA THE YOUNGER
Perspective on racism, no BS

ALEJANDRO MENDOZA/opinion

I am just going to say what I’ve got to say. No explanations, no BS, straight to the point. I have been in America for six years now and I haven’t felt discriminated against a single time. I have lived in the middle of white America Minnesotta and I haven’t had an incident where I have felt put down for my race or color. In Carleton, I experienced one incident as a freshman that turned out to be just one ignorant comment about international students, but I thought of that more of a lack of understanding of the other so I didn’t let it insult me. There was also a CSA Senate funding crisis two years ago. Many multicultural groups felt that there was discrimination because they didn’t get as much money as they wanted. As a Senator, I know that my fellow Senators did not discriminate. What really happened was that the Coca Cola decision (to kick them out) left us with lack of funds and there simply was not enough money to go around. Also, I have been to the middle of snob-land, rich-white America Nantucket, and the worse I could feel there were a few looks of mixed feelings and maybe of confusion (how did a Mexican get here). At worst, I have gotten some distant attitudes, but nothing that we can’t get over with some empathy, communication and understanding. I think that the majority of incidents that we call discrimination fall within the category of awkwardness, rejection and/or fear of the unknown race.

Now if you call that discrimination or Racism let me give you a friendly slap in the face. And let me do so with some facts about what Racism is in Mexico. In Mexico for example, Indians never go to restaurants, movies, to malls or supermarkets. You know why? Because they would and do get kicked out if the went. You know where they work? They are the maids, eight hours a day of serving and being treated practically like slaves. They work 6 days a week for (if they are lucky) 200 dollars a month with housing and food included (Surprise! Immigration). They work in the fields separated geographically from everyone else. They live in a limbo between the law and their own world. They never own anything they have; and their property can and is taken away violently by whoever wants it. They are an acknowledged “nothing” rejected by everyone. This racism is so powerful that most people just think of it as the way things are; they don’t think of it as racism. Therefore, the Indians are put aside by society and by themselves due to fear and to sheer reality. Worst of all, the present situation is probably the best they’ve been in since before the Conquista. Now that my dear readers, that is discrimination. That is Racism.

The “discrimination” in America is a minuscule, pathetic, display of ignorance by the person who discriminates the other; whether it is white and black, or purple and green. Let us not forget that separating ourselves from the others can be seen as (or it can be) discrimination. It is through understanding and reaching out to “the other”, by listening, by being unbiased and open-mindedly interested in the others and who they are that we can really end Racism and discrimination. There is a saying in Spanish that goes “el que busca encuentra” it basically says that if you look for something hard enough then you’ll find it. Instead of trying to find out how you are being discriminated; you should find out how you can reach out. We are all people, we all have a heart and we all breathe the same air. When I meet a person I think of him/her as a person first and everything else second. When I think of myself, I think of me as a person who happens to be from Mexico and who has (when there is sun) colored skin. This way has worked well for me to avoid discrimination and being discriminated. People are people, and as some wise Greek guy said, whether we are oranges or apples, we are all fruit. This is my experience and that’s all I have to say.

The psychology of stereotyping

GINGER PRICE/editor

We’re all prejudiced. According to the American Psychological Association, or APA, prejudice is defined as the negative judgments, opinions, beliefs, and feelings we hold about individuals because of their membership in certain groups or categories. Racism is a form of prejudice. It is a negative stereotype one forms and applies against someone based on their racial background. But we all knew that, and I’m not going to waste your time providing any further technical definitions. What I’m more concerned with is: Where do these stereotypes come from, and how do they affect us?

So, I walk up to you in a bar. I know nothing about you, except what I can see. I can see your hair, your eyes, your ethnicity, the way you dress and the way you speak, etc. In spite of the fact that we’ve only just met, these observations make me feel like I know more about you than you’ve told me. Let’s say, for instance, that you have the most perfect hair I’ve ever seen. Without any further evidence, I might be inclined to say that you are a neat and immaculate individual. Makes sense, right? But I wouldn’t stop there. I have this schema in my head about neat people – they are polite, organized, self-disciplined, and perhaps a little compulsive. At least, most neat people I’ve come across in my lifetime have been. So, without even knowing it, I have formed an opinion of your character and lifestyle – based on your hair. Stereotypes are sneaky that way. They activate automatically whenever the brain finds them salient (or relevant) to the person or group of persons at hand, and in a scenario where very little information is available, they get even stronger. I used a positive example above – let’s look at a negative one. The scenario has changed. We are each on a separate sports team. Our two teams just happen to be hardcore rivals. So, again, I walk up to you in Sayles, and we exchange pleasantries. However, in the process, I learn that you’re on “the other team.” Instantly, my perception of you changes. I know nothing about you except that you are my rival – but I dislike you right off the bat. We all have these kinds of stereotypes in our minds and, if we’re not careful, they can color our judgment right from the start.

Once a stereotype has been activated in our minds, it can guide our expectations and color the way we interpret behavior and actions. This happens in two main ways. The first involves a phenomenon called confirmation bias. People like to be right about things. It’s human nature to seek out evidence that supports our beliefs and neglect other, possibly equally valid evidence that disputes
them. But confirmation bias is not a conscious process – it’s a bit more devious than that. Let’s say I get past the fact that you’re on the Other Team, and we continue getting to know each other. As I gather information about you, I unconsciously pick out the bits that support my initial theory of your character: You are on the other team, therefore you must suck at life. Simultaneously, I don’t put as much weight on traits that don’t support my theory. Sure, you may be the school president, first violin in the orchestra, and a community volunteer – but you’re still on the Other Team.

Secondly, stereotypes can alter the way we interpret actions. A good example here might be the perception that Latin-American males are more inclined towards theft than the average male population (a stereotype cited by the APA). Assume for a moment that you, consciously or unconsciously, accept this stereotype. You’re at the rec one day when you see a man fumbling with a bike lock. He seems agitated.

Now, imagine two different scenarios: if that man is non-Hispanic, you would probably assume that he’s just having trouble with his bike lock – poor guy, he must be really annoyed. If, however, he is Hispanic, you would be much more inclined to suspect that he’s trying to steal the bike – just look at his suspicious behavior!

Studies show that we tend to emphasize the parts of stereotypes that relate most directly to our personal values. An example Carleton students can appreciate: If we value intelligence, we may be very quick to see a member of another group as stupid. Or, if a certain group values a strong work ethic above all else, that group might be more inclined to call another group “lazy” than say, “dishonest,” “small,” or “weak.” These latter characterizations, while still negative and still potentially part of the first group’s whole stereotype, spring more easily because they are out of a desire to be with others we consider “like ourselves” and partially as a security measure against those “unlike ourselves,” we unconsciously segregate ourselves into self-defined categories. In the process of categorizing ourselves, we unwittingly create a ripe environment for stereotypes to develop. From then on, we’re subject to any number of influences: rumors, cultural stigmas, media, and our own experience can all help form and strengthen a brand-new stereotype. And, due to confirmation bias, which I pointed out earlier, we’ll pick out evidence that supports our stereotype, making it even stronger. It’s a vicious cycle.

So, is there any hope? What can we do to get around these stereotypes and start treating people as individuals instead of group members? Research suggests a simple solution, and one which you’ve been hearing on TV since you were 5: Knowledge is power! Take aware of some of the concerns that a person of color might have in attending a school that is predominantly Caucasian. While listening to one of the group’s elected leaders, however, I was jarred by the flagrant insensitivity of someone who supposedly wants to fight for “an end to stereotypes.” Amidst words like “idiots” and “morons,” CCU members were called “racists,” much to the agreement of the multicultural group’s members. I, as the only conservative in the room, sat rigid and silent with both anger and disbelief.

The leaders of this discussion then proceeded to discuss the goals for their group – to increase awareness of the need for diversity and to put a stop to the blind hatred that people have for someone of a particular domination. Hold on… I think don’t think I understand… This group promotes diversity, and yet denounces anyone who dares to call themselves a Conservative… Anyone who isn’t a Liberal, isn’t acceptable to them… And they want to put a stop to the “blind hatred” that people feel for them… while in the same breath blindly calling all Conservatives heartless and perpetrators of racial disparity… I’m not sure I understand… It seems as though this multicultural group only takes issue with negative stereotyping when it continued on pp. 12
Musings from Nourse 312

LOVE ANANI | opinion

This article is being sent to every publication I could think of on this campus. If it did not reach your favorite I’m sorry and they can reprint this with my permission.

I sit at my desk in Nourse 312 knowing that nobody on this campus, at this very moment can feel the way I do. My speakers play loud Crunk music and I wonder how I shall attack the plethora of problems that lie before me. My mind can only “race” as I try to piece the reasoning to why I would take so many hours out of my schedule to write an article for people to read and it seems that they never get the point. Chili night after Chili night, questions after questions, and article after articles we always seem to come back to the same place. To put it bluntly...somebody has lost their damn minds again and that means they must be set straight.

I feel confident that at least 40% of this campus has heard of the racial controversy that has once again surrounded the infamous Observer, because I have had people email me from South Africa asking what is happening. But in a twist of surprise and in order to make some real progress, this article is in no way for those 40% that do know, but those 60% that know nothing because they are the ones that I know are going to make these same mistakes again. Mistakes that have caused more pain, tears, and controversy then cheating partners and Kerry losing the election combined.

For everybody that was not at Stimson this past Wednesday [19 October 2005] for over 2 hours like I was let me give you a couple of examples of what went down. Due to the mistakes of the Editors of the Observer, they have apologized and enough I personally don’t need anymore, fellow Carleton students and faculty felt less then human. Students felt targeted, used, and manipulated solely because of the color of their skin. Not one person sat in Stimson with a clear conscious as their own morals and the true motives of the Observer where challenged comment after comment. Students referred to the racially polarized letter from the editors as an “olive branch” or a call for some “bull-shirt dialogue.” Hands filled the air as with each passing comment the level of animosity raised in a parabola-like fashion soon to come down hours later. A lone senior of color raised the fact that in their final year they felt ashamed that their worth as a human being with the ability to think was still being called into question. After 4 years of studying side by side with other Carleton students they are still being looked at like a racial piece of property. As tears filled her eyes and people fidgeted in their seats coping with their own feelings I called for a brief moment of silence for reflection. As I sat in that completely silent room filled with people of Color and Caucasians of different political backgrounds I reminded myself that I am a junior. I only have one more year left on this beautiful campus and I asked myself if I would want to be crying on that same Stimson floor as EVERY YEAR FOR THE PAST THREE YEARS has caused some student of color to do? Would I dare let freshman enter into a place where people questioned every club they joined, why they sat with their friends that happen to be colored, and why they needed a safe space? It seemed to me that these were simple requests that I would never deny another, but every year seems to come into question when concerning people of color. As I lifted my head I noticed the entire room was not only polarized emotionally, but physically and my heart started to sink. Students of Color congregated in one area as the Caucasians sat in the other half. Students stared off into the air like why should we care,” referred to the email and this whole issue as a set up, and voiced opinions that anybody who wrote for the Observer was being set up. All these things caused me so much anguish that all I could do was write name after name to give some order to the remarks being made. My two bosses, whom I look to as mentors, sat in on the meeting looking at the faces of each student analytically and I could only think that these two have “raised me” to think for myself and make my own decision, but I couldn’t help thinking that they were withdrawing their support of the issue. I knew then and there that I wasn’t going to write...... until something that changed my life happened. I looked down to a seemingly quiet white girl as she sat in the corner of Stimson all bundled up rocking her body from side to side and I swear..... no I know...I saw tears. She was crying. For what reason I don’t know, but tears welled in her eyes as she sat and took in every comment, word, and phrase that was being said. She never once spoke or raised her hand to speak. Never even leaned in towards anybody to make a snide remark, but sat, listened, and cried. I realized at that very moment that not only were the tears of students of color staining the floor of Stimson, but the tears of Carleton students were being left behind on that floor that night and this very act could potentially change the campus as a whole. By the end of the night I counted 7 people in that room who had tears in their eyes at one point or another and I knew that my anguish was shared.

At this point every reader must be questioning where I am going with this and I shall now end your pondering. People, no matter of race or culture, should not be looked at as diseased, dehumanized, or perceived in a “childlike fashion” for any reason. My ability as a Nigerian-American to comprehend and understand any concept or idea on this campus is just as good as anybody else’s. In that manner, so is the ability of every Asian, Latino/Latina, International Student, or anybody who does not fit in with the majority to do the same. I understand that the editors made a grave mistake, but it is not totally their fault. The life in which they live grants them the privilege to not think about race on a day to day base. Hell, it might not even be a week to week or month to month basis, but they must understand, as well as the majority of this campus must, that their privilege from this point forward shall no longer be a point of ignorance. I don’t care if this article has to be read by every person on this campus or put into New Student Week, but it is time for Carleton students to wake the P***&$ up! Students of color are tired of walking into rooms and getting looks, persecuted for eating with their friends, chased after so others can realize what a real “colored person” acts like, or...
any other crazy argument or experiment that Carleton comes up with.

On that note of “passion” I shall take leave of this hour and a half long article and reintegrate myself into the bubble that is Carleton, but I would like to leave you with one final thing. This week the Biology department had a little get together in order to go over this really cheesy movie. As not only a person who loves Biology, but someone who is a Biology major I went! The second I walked into the room I stood in the back and got that feeling in my chest. I, Love Emeka Anani, one of the most social people I know got that feeling in my chest. Every student of color that has ever walked into a room/class where they were the only person of their race knows what that feeling is. My question is does the entire campus know this feeling? Once again….that damn privilege. I wish I had it…..or at least hoped the majority in this bubble realized that they had it. But in the words of Liza Lake, “You never knew until I wrote.”

Let us come together to make this the last time anyone gets that feeling in their chest.

### The third world

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easy in such meat grinder academic settings to become depressed and feel that the world is out to screw you because you’re a member of a minority ethnic group. But when you stop and think about how this situation has affected your self-esteem, you finally realize that you probably wouldn’t feel much different even if you were a member of the racial majority. Nevertheless, you still can’t help but feel for the person who uses their race as a ready cop-out. By the same token, though, what can you say about a society that has, all too often, made it necessary for people to have truly legitimate reasons for such “cop-outs?”

To be perfectly honest, there have been times that I have felt that the only reason I’m here is to satisfy someone’s quota. Then I stop and think for a moment and come to the realization that, if this is the case, I must be easing the hell out of someone’s conscience. Someone out there is pretty glad they got the crop of minority “third world” students that they did. So in that respect, I’ve never once thought that my presence at Carleton is neither felt, nor appreciated. But once we’re in, it’s up to us to take advantage of the opportunity, the situation, the College! Now isn’t the time to start looking under rocks or in dark corners for the slightest sign of prejudice. But when you have that paper due or that big midterm the next day, you worry about doing your best, not about your race, creed, or color.

Know who you are. Be proud of who you are. But don’t let that stand in the way of your development. None of us are the best that we can possibly be yet. Carleton represents a golden opportunity to exchange ideas with those very same people that know as little about you and your background as you know about theirs. There’s nothing wrong with being true to our ethnic groups, but before we get too comfortable labeling ourselves this or that, we’d best find out exactly what the products underneath the labels have to offer first.

### Hard brick walls

SARA SIROTA/opinion

We create boundaries to protect ourselves. We build hard brick walls that say, “You don’t know this part of me” written all over them. We put these walls around us to make sure that part of us that they “don’t know” stays intact. With locked gates and boarded windows, this part of us is never vulnerable.

As a Jew, I know that I do it. I come from a place with lots of Jews, and when I get around people who come from a place with no or very few Jews, I find myself hesitant when talking about my culture and background. The second something comes up regarding my Jewish culture, I assume whomever I’m talking to will not understand (unless it’s a close friend who I trust deeply) and my walls shoot up. Being at Carleton, where Jews are such a minority, I have become accustomed to doing this. I create a wall between them and me. I am Jewish and they are people who don’t understand Jews. Maybe it’s because I’m paranoid. Maybe somewhere in me, I’m terrified that they’re going to be anti-Semitic, and I’m not going to know what to do when it comes to defending myself, my family, my background, my heritage.

As a Jew, I am on the inside of these walls. As a white person, I am on the outside of other walls that don’t belong to me. It has often been my experience here that I feel like I’m scrambling up the walls that others build to keep me out and being easily brushed off since I am a white woman from an upper-middle-class background. This process of climbing and falling is exhausting. It frustrates me and makes me angry. Upon thinking about it, I realized what was so frustrating was that people assumed I did not, could not and did not want to understand before even waiting to see. Also, even if they saw I did understand or was able or willing to try to understand, they kept their walls erect.

Thinking about the anger I feel from this experience, I began thinking about the walls that I build and how, ironically, they’re probably strikingly similar to the walls that people build against me. I got to thinking, what if I tried, and what if the people that build walls against me tried, for just those few seconds before those walls go up, to see if who we’re talking to do actually understand or at least are trying to? It’s hard.

It’s nearly impossible to try and show your core to someone knowing that they might not understand it at all. The thing that we don’t realize is that when we create these walls, we block out the possibility of these “others” ever understanding. It is too easy to just leave the “others” outside that wall, but if we do that, we can never blame them for being on the outside of it. We will stay separate. Us and them. Those that understand and those that don’t.

But what if we could just breathe that one breath before putting up those walls and wait that split second to see if they understand or if they could understand? What if, if we see that they do, we opened a door in our walls, just a tiny crack? And what if, most frighteningly, when we see that they don’t understand, we put ourselves in that vulnerable position and we take on that tedious task, and we try to teach them what they don’t know? Imagine how much we could provide each other’s understanding with just a tiny crack in our solid brick walls.
You probably heard it first in elementary school. Race doesn't matter. Don't think about race. Don't judge someone by their race. Don't distribute benefits on account of race.

Be Color-Blind.

I bought into the myth once. That if we were color-blind, then all the troubles of racism would just go away. And today, when you ask conservatives what we should do about racism and racial inequality, that's their answer: be color-blind.

It is a weird metaphor though, isn't it? Color-blind. Normally, we think of color-blindness as something bad, a disorder to be cured or overcome. Few of us actually wish to be literally color-blind. And even if we do, we aren't. We don't have a lever that can switch from our current rainbow state of affairs into monochromatic bliss. The metaphor of color-blindness doesn't represent an actual state of being but a supposed ideal. Yet the vast majority of white Americans profess to have moved "beyond race," in a word, they claim to be "color-blind." The question is whether or not that ideal is possible or even makes sense. If it isn't or doesn't, the color-blindness as a racial strategy is likely to be as damaging as color-blindness as an optical condition, and should be treated accordingly.

To some extent, the theory of color-blindness is based off a lie. As Neil Gotanda notes, when making a race interaction, a "color-blind" person would first see the person's race, then pretend not to. We can't actually not see race (except, of course, those of us who actually are medically color-blind), so what is being done is a type of cognitive shift by which we flat race to be an irrelevant characteristic. Because we say it's irrelevant, it is. But with all due respect to our individual agency, saying something has been stripped of meaning doesn't make it so.

Since color-blindness doesn't eliminate the presence of race but only pushes it from the conscious mind, any sub-conscious meanings, tropes, or valences triggered by race will remain untouched. These beliefs-beneath-the-surface operate subtly, but still have tremendous impacts on our social interactions. Color-blindness prevents us from overtly using race as a factor, but it does nothing to prevent race being used sub-consciously under the outward façade of other justifications. A study by Samuel L. Gaertner and John F. Dovidio illustrates this point nicely. White test subject shown persons in distress aided both white and black victims the vast majority of the time (81% for white victims, 94% for black victims) if there was no ostensible justification for them not help. However, when led to believe that other rescuers were available, the rate of aid to black victims plummeted to 38% even as the rate of aid to white victims remained mostly constant (75%).

Race-based cues that skirt the surface of consciousness become extremely important when there are a variety of justifiable decisions within a value-laden scenario. In most complex cases, it is almost always possible to "substitute" for a non-racial warrant for a racial one. But the fact that these ostensibly neutral explanations nearly universally result in wide-spread racial disparities should be a clue that the explanations aren't neutral at all, or at the very least, there is something more lurking beneath the surface.

Conservatives love to respond that the majority of inequities are a result of class and not race. The argument runs as follows: black people were discriminated against in the past, which accounts for their disproportionate presence amongst the poor and impoverished. Now that we've made racial discrimination against the law and have moved to race-neutral thinking, these barriers will be removed and blacks will be able to compete on a fair playing field. Today we're in a transition period, but once giving a fair shot, the racial disparities will disappear and merit will win the day.

This argument is very comforting. It is also very wrong. What the argument misses is that even today, black social disadvantage transcends class. University of Pittsburgh Professor Richard Delgado notes that whereas white poverty tends to be temporary, lasting only a generation or two, black poverty tends to be perpetual. Black middle-class children are at a far higher risk than whites to be downwardly mobile—one drug conviction and the fall from grace can be quite swift.

Empirically, a white child from a family making $20,000 a year has better life prospects than a black child from a family making $50,000 a year. Studies have shown that black defendants are punished more harshly than white ones, that crimes with white victims are punished more harshly than those with black victims, and that crimes regularly associated with young black men are tagged with harsher sentences than those for virtually any other group (the wild disparity between how crack and powder cocaine are treated in the criminal justice system can almost definitely be attributed to the fact that crack is far more likely to be used by blacks than is powder cocaine). Black defendants are also apt to be charged at far higher rates than white defendants—even though 2/3 of crack users are white or Hispanic, 84% of those criminally prosecuted for simple possession are black (simple possession of crack cocaine carries a 5 year mandatory minimum sentence for first use. powder cocaine carries a maximum sentence of 1 year, but is more likely to be met with probation for a first time convict).

Finally, Marianne Bertrand and Sendhil Mullainathan conducted a study showing that a "black-sounding" name (e.g., "Jamal" or "Lakisha") negatively affected the chances of job applicants via a vis those with "white-sounding" names (e.g., "Paul" or "Emily")—even when both the "white-sounding" and "black-sounding" applicants have equal qualifications. In the face of such overwhelming evidence, to insist that it is class to blame for racial disparities is a case of willful, well, blindness. Something more is at work here. And that something is unquestionably race.

Can the color-blind framework solve these forms of (mostly unconscious) racism? I submit that it cannot. There are two reasons for this. First, the state of being "color-blind" requires one to assume race doesn't matter. Since the way unconscious racism works in an egalitarian society is to "latch" onto facially neutral policies and decisions, persons who proclaim to be color-blind will always be able to deny they have a problem by pointing to the "neutral" explanations for their acts. Second, the methodologies by which we might "find" sub-conscious bias are themselves indicted by the color-blind principle. Color-blindness is inextricably tied up within the rhetoric of individualism and anti-identity politics. However, it is impossible to find patterns of sub-

Race LASIK

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LETTER 2: The race card

ANDREW NAVRATIL/opinion

I am white. I am male. I am middle class. I am a classical liberal. I am of Czech, Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish ancestry. I am an American. I value tolerance, respect and diversity. But I am fed up with the obsession with race on this campus. And most of all, I am tired of charges of racism surfacing every time life isn’t a bed of roses for multicultural groups. Call me a racist if you must.

My decision to write this reflection was a difficult one. I determined that if I was to write I would be frank and honest, as it is the only real path to a productive discussion of the issue of race on this campus. But I hesitated to write because I did not want to offend anyone. I did not want to stir up a hothead of hatred and misunderstanding. Furthermore, I did not want to share my deepest frustrations and be misunderstood. I hope that I will not be. Read this as you would read an excerpt from the diary of a friend – with the goal of listening and trying to understand.

In my two years at Carleton, I have been overwhelmed with discussions of race. Everywhere I turned, there it was. Again and again. It seemed like more than half of the speakers at Convocation somehow incorporated race into their lecture. There were Chili Nights, Multicultural Affairs Office discussions, and last spring a student organization was created to address issues of racism. After a time the shock turned to a disgust with the overload.

But more than all of this there were CSA Spring Allocations. I was privileged to serve on the Senate when the budget was approved in both the spring of my freshman and sophomore years. Both years serious allegations of racism on the part of the budget committee and the Senate were raised. And in both years the allegations were baseless and ridiculous – furthermore, I believe they were attempts to guilt and pressure the Senate into giving more money to multicultural groups.

In both years the budget committee established clear guidelines on what was to be funded and what was not. Both years these guidelines were fairly and equitably applied. Both years the average multicultural organizations received a greater budget increase than the average organization overall. Both years a clear explanation was given as to why funding for certain items was refused. And both

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Problems with Posse

ERIC WONG/opinion

During Homecoming weekend I was back down at Carleton to attend the St. Olaf-Carleton football game. Before the game, I had lunch with an old professor of mine while I was at Carleton to talk about how things were going. While we talked about issues ranging from public funding of sports stadiums to dim sum, one subject that was of a particular interest to me is how Carleton is attempting to address the difficulties many minorities are facing academically at Carleton. Apparently, Carleton’s administration still has not found a way to successfully address this issue.

The first subject that we discussed on this issue was the status of Carleton’s Posse program, a program designed to amalgamate students from the inner-city together, mainly minorities, to form a “posse” with a faculty adviser. This “posse” was supposed to work as a support group to help its members earn their Carleton degree. Well, despite what I read in the media, this professor tells me that reports of success in the Posse program are probably exaggerated from his conversations with faculty advisers in the program. These faculty advisers told him that they did not realize the difficulty of making sure Posse students were making adequate academic progress. I was a senior at Carleton the first year the Posse program was implemented. I never understood why they wanted to effectively mandate cliques in order to reach their objectives. That seems to me as using the idea of “community” to divide groups of individuals against each other. Forming cliques simply exacerbates our differences, it does not alleviate them.

This led us to our conversation of this professor’s own experiences over his Carleton career on issues of minority academic achievement. He talked about a minority student he advised that had a 4.0 GPA in high school. That sounds great until he told me that a 4.0 GPA did

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Response to the Five Questions

May 24, 2005

A varied and diverse group of students met and discussed the questions posed in the most recent issue of The Carleton Observer. Following is a point-by-point response:

1. Do your groups detract from minorities being incorporated into the broader campus community? Why fight for separate but equal, when all men are created equal? Do you all not just reinforce difference?

We have organizations for men and women of “color.” Does that mean that everyone else is “colorless?” Shouldn’t we have an organization for this colorless group of people, or does this type of group classification exist to prevent a tyranny of the majority?

5. Why do “minority students” need special, race-based organizations to be comfortable on campus? “Men and Women of Color?” For some groups, membership is based on being “black” or “Asian.” Why do they need a “culturally-comfortable space?” Why do we reinforce the attitudes of racial division with student groups on the basis of skin color?

open questions
to carleton’s multicultural groups

RAWDUN BELQUISI, JEREMY SAIDHING/opinion

1. Do your groups detract from minorities being incorporated into the broader campus community? Why fight for separate but equal, when all men are created equal? Do you all not just reinforce difference?

2. When should a person’s ancestry count as a check for or against them in the admissions process? If we don’t object to this, is there a basis for objecting to hereditary wealth? Isn’t there an equal standard for work? What happened to being judged by the content of your character?

3. Multi means many. Doesn’t multicultural imply “many cultures?” People talk about “Black culture,” “Latino culture,” “Asian American culture.” Most of the people in this country are white. Since “white culture” is a culture, even if people think it’s evil, shouldn’t white culture be put under the umbrella of multiculturalism?

4. We have organizations for men and women of “color.” Does that mean that everyone else is “colorless?” Shouldn’t we have an organization for this colorless group of people, or does this type of group classification exist to prevent a tyranny of the majority?

5. Why do “minority students” need special, race-based organizations to be comfortable on this campus? “Men and Women of Color?” For some groups, membership is based on being “black” or “Asian.” Why do they need a “culturally-comfortable space?” Why do we reinforce the attitudes of racial division with student groups on the basis of skin color?

“Americanism is a question of principle, of purpose, of idealism, of character. Not a matter of birthplace, of creed or line of descent... There is no place for the hyphen in our citizenship... We must treat every good American as on a full and exact equality with every other good American...”

–Theodore Roosevelt

Last spring in the final issue of The Carleton Observer, a list of questions was posed to the Carleton community. These questions caused an uproar on campus. The heated response the questions provoked probably contributed to the Observer editors’ desire to continue to address the issue of race in their publication. Unfortunately, however, these questions made many people feel that the Observer was not a safe space in which to discuss this complex topic. Furthermore, recent problems with how submissions were solicited for this “race issue” have prompted some to boycott writing for this issue of the publication. What follows is the response that a group of students crafted to the “open questions” last spring. Hopefully it will help provide some background on the recent history of racial relations on campus and address racial misconceptions.

Marginalized.

We are not fighting for separate but equal. We believe that all people are created equal and for that reason we feel that everyone should feel comfortable in our campus community. It is not so much an emphasis on difference that creates divisiveness but our attitudes about differences. Among other things, multicultural groups are attempting to provide an environment where difference can be acknowledged in a constructive positive manner.

2. When should a person’s ancestry count as a check for or against them in the admissions process? If we don’t object to this, is there a basis for objecting to hereditary wealth? Isn’t there an equal standard for work? What happened to being judged by the content of your character?

People are not accepted to college based solely on one factor. But just as it adds to the discourse on campus to have professors of multiple political persuasions, having students of multiple ethnic backgrounds brings a beneficial diversity of perspective that we all learn from as students and human beings.
Yet, despite the obvious benefits of having the multiple perspectives, ethnicity is only ONE factor in a complex and multifaceted admissions process. More importantly, it is only one aspect of a person’s identity.

And to directly answer the question, no, there is not an equal standard for work in this country. It would be great if we could sincerely say that people ARE judged by the content of their character. But that is clearly not the case.

Affirmative action exists in the admission process to counteract past and present inequity in a society such as ours, where institutions do not have adequate representation of all groups.

With this said, affirmative action allows space and opportunity for individuals of different ethnic, class, and gender backgrounds to speak to one another, engage in thoughtful dialogue, and judge one another by the content of their character rather than the color of their skin.

Affirmative action is not an end in itself. It is a means to ameliorate unfortunate disparities in opportunity that exist in this society. It is a means to create opportunities, which are often taken for granted by those in the majority, for all underrepresented groups, including members of the working class, ethnic minorities, women, and men.

3. Multi means many. Doesn’t multicultural imply “many cultures?” People talk about “Black culture,” “Latino culture,” “Asian American culture.” Most of the people in this country are white. Since “White culture” is a culture, even if people think it’s evil, shouldn’t white culture be put under the umbrella of multiculturalism?

There are myriad definitions of “multicultural,” none of which has been officially adopted by Carleton College, or the Office of Multicultural Affairs.

While nothing prevents a group of white students from forming an organization dedicated to exploring issues related to “white culture,” in many ways, this group would be redundant. As an analogy, while it is possible to imagine a French cultural group in Paris, it would serve a very different purpose from a British cultural group in the same city.

At a school that is predominantly white, where white students can choose to avoid interactions with students of color but students of color cannot avoid interacting with white students, minority cultural groups are significant for many reasons. One of the most important reasons for these groups to exist is to provide venues in which minority students can address their experiences as minorities on campus. A white cultural organization would not need to address precisely these same issues.

At the same time, an organization dedicated to discussing what it means to be in the cultural or ethnic majority would not be a bad idea. In fact, such an organization would go far to increase awareness of race, and how race is lived on campus.

The authors’ classification of white culture as evil is their own choice, and we would like to stress that the existence of minority cultural groups in no way implies that “white culture” is evil.

4. We have organizations for men and women of “color.” Does that mean that everyone else is “colorless?” Shouldn’t we have an organization for this colorless group of people, or does this type of group classification exist to prevent a tyranny of the majority?

The term “people of color” while used by the whole Carleton community was not created at Carleton nor by “people of color” in general. The concept of race, and racial groups, is a white, European concept with a particular meaning in the United States.

Additionally, whiteness is not an absence of color. The impact of white skin is frequently felt as privilege, rather than discrimination. White students are therefore not forced to confront the implications of their racial identity in the same way, or as frequently, as students of color. Indeed, it is a privilege not to have to think of oneself in racial terms.

We stress, though, that whiteness is not colorlessness. It exists, and affects the lives of white people, as well as non-white people.

5. Why do “minority students” need special, race-based organizations to be comfortable on this campus? “Men and Women of Color?” “We are the Black Student Association.” For some groups, membership is based on being “black” or “Asian.” Why do they need a “culturally-comfortable space?” Why do we reinforce the attitudes of racial division with student groups on the basis of skin color?

For no CSA chartered group on campus is criteria for membership based on being “black,” “Asian,” or a member of any other ethnic, cultural, or racial group. The leadership of the Black Student Association, for example, is not composed only of black students.

Students join student groups for a wide variety of reasons. If you are looking for a student group that finds itself in the minority at Carleton, and finds value in group meetings and outreach efforts, you need look no further than the Carleton Conservative Union. The front page of the May 20th Observer, in which these questions were first published, ran the headline, “If you are a liberal at Carleton, you’re in the overwhelming majority—that’s nothing anyone didn’t know. But what then does it mean for a balanced educational experience?”

The implication of this article, even if it was not its stated conclusion, is that there is something inherently hard about being a minority at Carleton. There is clear value in the Carleton Conservative Union, both for its members, who, in it, find a safe space in which to discuss ideas that they might feel uncomfortable discussing elsewhere, and for the Carleton community at large, which is enriched by the fruits of these discussions. If you replace “liberal” with “white” in the Observer headline, the implications for campus minority cultural groups are clear. Campus minority cultural groups offer similar opportunities and have similar reasons to exist as the CCU.

We appreciate the opportunity that these questions have offered for creating a forum in which to discuss tough issues related to multiculturalism at Carleton. We hope that these discussions will continue honestly, openly, and respectfully.

Sincerely,

Alisa Sanchez, Becky Herst, Cameron Noland, Cindy Lys, Clemmy Brown, Daniel Mintz, David (dahveed) Pintor, Darius de la Cruz, Eunice Ajambo, Felix Amankona-Diawuo, Heather Jackson, Ivette Feliciano, Joy Friedman, Ketsia Theodor, Kjerstin Johnson, Leah Sipher-Mann, Marlene Cervantes, Naja Shabazz, Nataly Barrera, Rivka Burstein-Stein, Samara Winbush, Varsha Vijayakumar, Whitney Richards-Calathes, and

UpRoot
Why does heritage matter?

RAWDON BERGIQUEST/opinion

As a preface, let me say that my last piece in the Observer [The 5 Open Questions to Multi-Cultural Groups], was successful in its intention in sparking controversy, though I do apologize for the unfortunate timing in its publication in the last issue of the year. It was a poor decision with regards to timing and I regret it, though I do not regret writing the substantive content of the piece. With that, let me proceed to the central questions: Why does heritage matter and why does it play such a large role in a person’s identity? As an addition, let me ask why one would take pride in their heritage, being as they had no choice in the matter.

I hold that judgment can only justly be made on the choices one has freely made themselves, and preferably with as few restrictions as possible. The greatest number of free choices allows the greatest exercise of virtuous decisions, thus, in order to maximize the desirable virtue, then we must maximize the number of free decisions that an individual can make. This entails removing restrictions on choice, whether they are social, economic, political, etc, and thus it is our goal—the greatest amount of freedom of choice possible to allow for the greatest exercise of virtue and thus the greatest opportunity for self and social actualization.

This holds true for pride as well; self pride, self satisfaction, self actualization should be based upon the individual’s accomplishments and personal decisions, not those that they had no say in whatsoever. Ethnicity, birthplace, parentage, ancestry, none of these are choices an individual can make, they have been decided for him and he has no say in the matter. As such, it is unjust to judge a person on any of these conditions. Of course, there are outside factors beyond an individual’s control which may restrict their freedom of choice: social norms, economic conditions, political decisions, etc. Hopefully the individual will have some opportunity to affect these restrictions and limit their effect on his choices, but there are some factors that are out of any present human control, such as the laws of physics, death and taxes, but most certainly ancestry. Not having exercised free choice for one’s ancestry, why then identify with them? Why take pride in being of a particular ethnicity? Why even take pride in one’s own parents?

The parent chooses to have the child, the child does not choose the parent.

Thus I ask why the persistent identification with such immutable and imposed characteristics, and some more personal choice, such as one’s own principles, values and beliefs, indeed the person that they are with regards to their character. Of course one can adopt the parents’ beliefs and values, or that of even more distant ancestors. But I reject any assertion that there is a set of common beliefs according to one’s ethnicity. Lest future genetics proves to me otherwise, an ethnic group shares only a few superficial characteristics. Any notion of ‘race’ is entirely socially constructed, unfortunate as it may be, but that means we have the opportunity to tear it down and throw it away.

I did not choose my ancestors or my ethnicity. But why should I care about where my ancestors came from or who they were? They are not me, and I am not them. With this self-centered statement, let me state that I also do not particularly care what other people’s heritage or ethnicity is or where they came from. If I ask them, it is out of curiosity to see how small this world really is, or how worldly Carleton actually is, or if I might know anyone else from that area. I find it very hard to distinguish ethnicities, but I find it impossible to predict something about a person based on their ethnicity. Someone’s ethnicity tells me nothing about that person, other than perhaps a vague notion of where their ancestors came from, which is irrelevant in the context. One’s ethnicity tells me nothing about their character, their values, and their beliefs. That is your choice. You are here now, and I shall deal with you. I shall deal with the living and leave the dead to history.

One can argue that a person’s character is not entirely up to them, certainly we can not rule out genetics entirely, and I regret knowing little about modern neuroscience, but I do not doubt that the nurture and education of an individual plays a critical role in the formation of one’s principles and beliefs, indeed one’s character. For this perhaps a person can be proud of their parents, or at least those who nurtured and educated them, if they are proud of themselves for who they have become, based on the choices they have made and the principles they hold dear.

Therefore be proud of who you are, as an individual, and the things you have done. You’re at Carleton and surviving here, as a result of your hard work, intellectual curiosity, and determination to succeed. I reject the notion that ethnic heritage plays the determining role in a person’s character, and so I also reject any notion that those of a particular ancestry or ethnicity should be granted preferential treatment at any time. Let a person be judged on their own free decisions and actions, in particular their beliefs, values and principles, for upon reaching a mature age, they should have full control over these things; let us take care in any judgment, for we must remember the log in our own eye.

Stereotypes continued from pp. 5

affects them specifically.

Another experience of mine, in which I was treated differently because of my political beliefs, occurred last year. I remember setting my political affiliation on my Facebook profile to Conservative, instead of the more acceptable “Moderate.” Within a few days, I was accosted by three people, all demanding to know why I was a Conservative. I was so surprised by this flagrant disregard for a person’s right to their own beliefs that, without thinking, I began to explain myself. Since then, it seems like I’m on trial nearly every time a political issue is discussed. I am constantly defending my position, even when I try to avoid being sucked into one of these pointless discussions—I say ‘pointless’ because everyone is so adamant about their own views, these discussions never lead anywhere. It seems like I am constantly explaining my choice to be a conservative to people, and that isn’t right.

The bottom line is this: Discrimination against anyone is wrong—whether it is due to skin color, ethnicity, political beliefs or whatever. It is wrong. And if you only advocate against stereotypes when they affect you, then you are wrong. Plain and simple. So please stop attacking conservatives because of our views. You aren’t going to change us with rants and name-calling. Instead, you are merely proving yourselves to be hypocritical. Carleton is supposed to be a place where everyone can express themselves freely and without derision. Let’s try to keep it that way.
Email to the CCU

Date: Mon, 17 Oct 2005 11:05:23 -0500
From: Peter Fritz <fritzp@carleton.edu>
To: ccu@lists.carleton.edu
Subject: [CCU] Observer Notice

CCU Members,

For years, the Carleton Observer has maintained a strong connection with the CCU. Our mission statement is to promote independent thought on campus and, as we all know, the best of the independent thinkers are conservatives.

Our next issue, as you hopefully noticed, is going to be exclusively about race relations, with a strong focus on Carleton specifically. For the last several weeks, the editors have been meeting with multicultural groups to prompt their members to write articles. The enthusiasm we have received from them is truly staggering.

But, since our goal is to feature a broad spectrum of opinions, we don’t believe that this will be enough. The Observer is also dedicated to printing conservative opinions, and it’s highly unlikely we’re going to get them from the multicultural organizations on campus. Last spring, these organizations were putting together protests of articles we printed. If you want to see that kind of response again, we need you to write, too.

As we’ve been talking to the multicultural groups, we’ve told them to write the kind of article they would if they knew that only people of their race/ethnicity would read it. We want you to do the same. Write it as if Ann Coulter would be the only one to see it; God knows you aren’t going to offend her.

When the issue goes to print, we anticipate having dozens of pages of just the multi-cultural group submissions. It will probably include articles that point plenty a finger at white people and conservatives. The only way to keep these perspectives from dominating the paper is for you to write.

Our deadline for submissions is this coming Thursday evening. Email me (weineraa@carleton.edu) ASAP to let me know that you are writing for us. If you want to write, but don’t know what to write about, we can help with that. The Observer is your paper, don’t let it go.

Aaron Weiner
Executive Editor

Our Apology

From: Wells Harrell [mailto:harrellj@carleton.edu]
Sent: Tuesday, October 18, 2005 4:56 PM
To: ‘kaskelan@acs.carleton.edu’
Subject: From the Observer

Hi Kristen,

Could you forward this to the students of color email list? Thanks!

Wells

On behalf of the Observer, we apologize for any damage that our recent email to the CCU list has caused. It wasn’t our intention to offend anyone, and we certainly did not want that email to prompt students of color to withhold writing for us. In trying to reach out to multicultural groups on campus, we also tried to motivate conservatives to write. We did our best to keep the core message – a desire for honest opinions – consistent. We recognize now the importance of venue and language on an audience, and we’re sorry for the unintentionally offensive nature of some of the language we used to appeal to conservatives.

Andrew Williams told me last week that one of the biggest obstacles to meaningful dialogue on race is how quickly the dialogue stops after a participant is accused of racial insensitivity. We hope that our mistake won’t stop the dialogue now. We want there to be more honest dialogue about race, ethnicity, and culture. We want people to muster the courage to put their true views on the table. And we want to feature the most diverse perspectives possible. That’s it.

That’s our agenda. That’s what we’ve been trying to express all along.

At Vani’s suggestion, we’re organizing a discussion to take place this Wednesday at 9pm in Stimson lounge. All are invited to attend and share their views on this issue and how opinions should be presented in the upcoming publication. We will also bring copies of the email to the meeting. PLEASE JOIN US. We are determined to press on with this edition of the Observer, and we still need your help to make it happen. Please feel free to email or call either of us (Wells – harrelj, 507-301-9675; Aaron – weineraa, 704-965-0470) if you would like a copy of the email, or if you would like to talk about anything else.

Again, we are truly sorry for the insensitivity that was seen in the email to the CCU. We hope that our misstep will not prevent what can be a huge event in improving race relations at Carleton from going forward.

Wells Harrell
Editor-in-chief

Aaron Weiner
Executive Editor
Starting to think about White Privilege

REBECCA HERST & RIVKA BURNSTEIN-STERN/opinion

This issue of the Observer has been much anticipated, and before even going to press has caused more than its fair share of controversy. There were many different problems associated with how the editors of the Observer solicited articles, including the fact that they only actively sought submissions from either cultural and ethnic groups on campus or the Carleton Conservative Union. These missteps were clearly unintentional, but in many ways not surprising. They are indicative of a larger trend, a trend in which fundamental pieces of the race puzzle are missed by white people because they are not forced to talk about, or even think about, their race. This phenomenon is not limited to the editors of the Observer, nor to the Carleton campus. Nationally, white people need to understand the implications of their whiteness before they can begin to understand and dismantle the complex systems of racism.

White privilege can be defined as, “A right, advantage, or immunity granted to or enjoyed by white persons beyond the common advantage of all others; an exemption in many particular cases from certain burdens or liabilities.” (whiteprivilege.com/definition) In short, this means that the system inherently advantages white people simply because they are white. We are bestowed with privileges that we have done nothing to deserve. At Carleton, in practically any situation we are faced with, we, as white people, are in the majority. This means that we are never expected to speak for our entire race, we never feel singled out based on our skin color, we can assume that authority figures will look like us and understand our backgrounds, and we are very rarely forced to step outside of our comfort zone.

Even the simple act of writing and submitting this article was, in some ways, afforded by our white privilege. No one will read this article and immediately write it off as just another unfounded complaint from “those angry white people.” Simply because we are white, other white people are willing to listen to us when we speak out against racism. Maybe this is because it’s a novelty, maybe it’s because they can identify with our backgrounds, or maybe it’s because we are not the ones directly benefiting from anti-racist work. But regardless of the reason, the fact that the white voice is given undue credibility in the national discourse is a manifestation of white privilege.

When we heard that the Observer was putting together an issue on race, we were excited because it’s a complex and loaded topic that deserves the attention of a widely read Carleton publication. One of the problems, however, is that it was presented as the beginning of an “open, honest dialogue on race.” The fact of the matter is that an open, honest dialogue on race has been going on for years at Carleton. It’s just that most white people haven’t been participating in it. That doesn’t mean, however, that white perspectives aren’t valued. While not on a campus-wide scale, inter-racial dialogue is happening. By not participating, you are only denying yourself a deeper understanding of your white (or other) identity and closing yourself off to a more nuanced appreciation of the community in which we all live.

So if you truly want to confront issues of racism, go to chili night, participate in events put on by the Multicultural Affairs Office, take more than one RAD, start thinking about how your race plays a role in every single thing that you do, and begin to understand and take responsibility for your privilege. Most importantly, step out of your comfort zone; students of color at Carleton don’t have the option not to.

If you’re interested in learning more about white privilege, visit <www.whiteprivilege.com>, <www.timwise.org> or <www.mollysecours.com> we also highly recommend the Peggy McIntosh article “Unpacking the White Privilege Knapsack” that can be found at <http://seammonkey.ed.asu.edu/~mcisaac/emc598ge/Unpacking.html>.

A true discourse

PAUL KANG/opinion

After reading a trail of e-mails that was sent to me by the KSA (Korean Students Association) concerning a situation between Carleton’s multicultural groups and The Observer, the first impression I get is what a big mistake the people at The Observer have made by sending an insensitive e-mail. Upon further thought, I’m not so sure that my first impressions (and undoubtedly most people’s current opinions) were right. Granted, I’m no longer present at Carleton and I haven’t heard many other opinions of what people make out of this whole situation, but something still makes me more than just a bit uncomfortable with the latest developments (i.e. the recission of Multi-Cultural Activities leader’s interview and KSA leaders’ “boycott” of writing articles for publication).

As far as I can tell, the statements at issue in the e-mail from The Observer to Carleton Conservatives would be these:

“Our mission statement is to promote independent thought on campus and, as we all know, the best of the independent thinkers are conservatives.”

“The Observer is also dedicated to printing conservative opinions, and it’s highly unlikely we’re going to get them from the multi-cultural organizations on campus.”

[The upcoming issue] will probably include articles that point plenty a finger at white people and conservatives. The only way to keep these perspectives from dominating the paper is for you to write.”

“The Observer is your paper, don’t let it go.”

At first blush, these statements are insensitive to the multicultural community. However, it’s important to think about the context in which this e-mail was written. The point of this e-mail to Carleton Conservatives was to solicit their submissions to the upcoming issue.

As was expressed by Aaron Weiner, there was a concern at The Observer that the upcoming issue would be overwhelmingly biased for multicultural viewpoints. I don’t think anyone would argue that this is a valid concern for a publication that is (at least for this one month) concerned with “feature[ing] a broad spectrum of opinions.”
Admittedly, the persuasive techniques that were used by Mr. Weiner in trying to solicit those submissions ended up including some potentially insensitive sentences, but given his intentions, which should be read into his e-mail, he is completely innocent. Mr. Weiner calls conservatives “the best of the independent thinkers” merely to try and convince them that their opinion is needed [or, as he has repeatedly admitted, to make a tongue-in-cheek joke]. He correctly deduces that “it’s highly unlikely” that The Observer will get a well-rounded perspective from the multi-cultural organizations. From that, he tries to persuade Carleton Conservatives to write in order to “keep [multicultural] perspectives from dominating the paper”. He makes a final effort to convince Carleton Conservatives by urging that “The Observer is [their] paper, don’t let it go.” That last quote should be not construed to mean that the Observer is exclusively Carleton Conservatives’ paper, but that the Observer is shared with them, as well as with other groups.

Apparently, Andrew Williams, the Director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs, has rescinded his interview with The Observer and, thus, set the stage for more “boycott”-like responses from other multicultural groups (i.e. KSA). What’s disturbing is that such a response to Mr. Weiner’s e-mail implies that he has to be careful of his persuasive techniques just because his e-mail might reach people beyond its intended audience.

This is not a healthy response from the multicultural community. Wells Harrell noted that “Andrew Williams told [him] last week that one of the biggest obstacles to meaningful dialogue on race is how quickly the dialogue stops after a participant is accused of racial insensitivity.” Mr. Williams’ own actions exemplify that obstacle. Mr. Williams said, “My reading of the email lead me to seriously question the Observer’s desire for honest, open, and civil dialogue,” and, “As a result, I made a personal decision to ask them not to print their interview with me.” It seems (and I may be wrong about this), that Mr. Williams had not taken any steps to find out whether The Observer did have a desire for “honest, open, and civil dialogue,” but instead rescinded his interview merely “as a result” of his reading of the e-mail.

Of the many results we can foresee from Mr. Williams’ initiative of rescinding his interview, I am struggling to find one that is beneficial to any person or group on campus.

Given his leadership status in the multicultural community and his position as an administrator of the college, he may persuade other multicultural groups not to submit articles to The Observer. This is surely not in the interest of the multicultural community because it nullifies an excellent chance at getting multicultural issues published to a wider community. Moreover, if the rest of the Carleton community notices a multicultural “boycott” of The Observer, the stigma of multicultural groups’ self-segregation will only grow. Lastly, whatever does end up printed on the Observer will not represent enough of the opinions in the multicultural community.

To be sure, Mr. Weiner could have been more tactful and sensitive when he wrote to Carleton Conservatives; I am not trying to make some kind of “First Amendment” type of argument to protect him. My message is simply that the multicultural community can be more forgiving. After all, an underlying theme behind multiculturalism is “understanding.”

The example-setters in the multicultural community should try harder to understand that The Observer wanted a balanced opinion not an anti-multicultural opinion. If The Observer was genuinely concerned about multicultural domination, why would they even ask multicultural groups to make submissions?

It is unfortunate that The Observer’s plan to create discourse with the multicultural community has backfired on them. Somehow the multicultural community must show that The Observer shouldn’t have to regret that plan. If they do choose to “boycott”, a simple boycott cannot be the solution. The groups should supplement it with a public response with their reasons for doing so. Then, the job of explanation will be back on The Observer. That is real discourse, silence is not.

Race card
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years the race card – which trumps all others – was slapped on the table.

When allegations of racism are leveled against an individual or institution such as the Senate the terms of the debate are radically altered. No longer is the appeals process a rational discussion of what ought and ought not be funded. It becomes a shouting match in which the campus divides against itself, with emotion and passion on one side and rationality on another. Students throw the label “racist” around liberally and administrators overstep their bounds as advisors. It is no longer fiscally responsible to balance the CSA budget by upholding the recommendations of budget committee: it is racist and discriminatory. To resist the tide of emotion is to become the enemy, the hated one.

The abuse – and it is an abuse to trivialize a matter as serious as racism – of race as a trump card must stop. Crying (or suggesting) “racism” every time something doesn’t go their way is not the path multicultural organizations should follow. This tactic is counterproductive to the agenda these groups claim to be advancing. If we are really striving to create a diverse and welcoming environment for all students, the first step is mutual respect – for ideas and for people. The race card hurts those on the receiving end of allegations and never fosters productive dialogue.

Furthermore, it damages the image of the organization using it. Claiming that Senate is a racist institution does not impress those on campus who know the real truth. Crying foul and receiving money for activities no other organizations could claim as legitimate expenses does not endear the student body to multicultural groups. Accusing respected students of possessing a deep-seeded character flaw that clouds their judgment is wrong – as most people know. Engaging in what others would call blackmail by reminding the budget committee of the fiasco resulting from funding decisions the previous year only breeds resentment.

Sometimes we forget what a bubble we live in. Compared to the world at large, Carleton is a sheltered haven of tolerance. Anyone who seriously thinks there are issues of institutional racism on campus is out of touch and needs to experience life in the real world. What’s more, I’m sure I could count the number of racists on campus with one hand; I probably don’t even need 5 fingers. It’s time that multicultural organization and the campus at-large wake up to those realizations. It’s time to talk about a social problem other than race every now and then. And it’s time to throw down, tear up, and burn the race card.
Don’t Ask Me Questions:
by Love Anani

What does one do when asked a question

“Of what is the difference between you and I

And why do you continue to fight,

In this game I’ve lain

that you possibly can’t win

but yet you continue to stand again.

This question will never go away, but yet continue to rise

The more it is ignored the higher it goes and the more my strength continues to die.

You can’t look at them crazy because they THINK they have the right,

To continue asking these questions and constructing an unfair fight.

So once again my race is on the line in this race of my time

As they continue to “understand me” in their minds.

So I question their motivation as I continue to search for my own

But first I must find the strength in which to be stoned,

By which side it doesn’t matter......

Because I shall bare this “burden” in which you have put upon some

But watch your privilege because you may be loading your own gun.
A safe space

PETER FRITZ/opinion

What constitutes a “safe space?” I have heard this phrase frequently in the context of the debate over the appropriateness of submitting to this issue of the Observer. The conclusion that I have come to is disturbing, to say the least. “Safe space” does not connote simply a venue of free discourse; rather it connotes freedom from criticism and freedom from confronting views other than one’s own.

To really consider the idea of “safe space” one needs to consider both the stated goals and the practical standards of those who are concerned with creating such a space. What I have gathered from conversations and listening to the strongest proponents of this concept is the following. A “safe space” is a venue that welcomes the expression of one’s own views. A venue that predominantly disagrees or even entertains disagreement with one’s views is not a “safe space.” This standard espoused particularly by those multicultural group leaders who desired to dissuade individuals from writing about race in this issue of the Observer. Often, the publication in the Observer last year of “Five Questions” addressed to multicultural groups by Jeremy Sairsingh and Rawdon Bergquist is given as prima facie evidence that the Observer is not a “safe space.”

This simple disqualification raises some serious questions about the concept of “safe space.” “Five Questions” certainly challenged the conventional wisdom surrounding multicultural groups and many individuals from those groups disagreed with the authors’ assertions. Nothing that was written in the “Five Questions” was libelous or intended by the authors to cause personal affront. The essay was the personal opinion of the authors (one of whom is considered a multi-cultural student by the college and the other an international student), asking rhetorical questions to express their skepticism toward certain aspects of the actions of multi-cultural groups. It appears, then, that the most objectionable aspect of this supposedly objectionable article is that individuals disagreed with it. Do the proponents of “safe space” really intend for such spaces to only include views that are friendly and harmonious with the views of a perspective author? Is intolerance for opposing views, even views that seem egregiously faulty, the best way to encourage constructive dialogue on campus?

The concept of “safe space,” as practically applied by its proponents, is inimical to the very basic tasks of the college. A liberal arts education is not about staying safely within our own assumptions and ideas. I know that I could not attend Hillsdale College, a famously (or perhaps notoriously) conservative liberal arts school, because I am convinced that a person cannot grow if their thinking and beliefs are not challenged. Liberals arts education is about training the mind through challenging previous belief. Sometimes previous belief comes out on top and sometimes it doesn’t. The conviction may have been proven true and thus strengthened or proven false, and refined. Really, what’s the absolute worst that could happen? A submission about one’s experience as a minority juxtaposed with a submission wistfully yearning for the days of Jim Crow? Are we afraid that Carleton students are simply so shallow in their conviction that there would suddenly appear lynching mobs on the Bald Spot? If that is the underlying fear, those who vigilantly work to extend racial equality have far larger problems than emails that could be interpreted as less than inclusive.

A more productive approach would be to cast caution into the wind. Why ought we care if someone criticizes our views? Such criticism can only make one’s own skin thicker, one’s reflection upon the issue deeper and one’s arguments stronger. We don’t grow as people by submitting our views to an echo chamber; rather we grow when our views are subjected to the strongest, most rigorous criticism. Liberal arts colleges exist to provide an environment where that strong, rigorous criticism can occur without making such criticism personal. We do a disservice to ourselves, looking only for “safe” environments to express our opinions. “Safety” in that context is no more than insularity and does no benefit to the individual or the wider community.

Posse’s problems

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not even rank her in the top fifth of her high school class. Nevertheless, this student struggled to earn her Carleton degree. The professor expressed his frustration to me about College administration policies to have a certain percentage of students be minorities, but no policies relating to these students being academically prepared for Carleton. He tells me that he does not understand why the College continues to exercise what President Bush called “the soft bigotry of low expectations.” Admitting students out of apparent pity and for self-congratulatory satisfaction instead of helping these students become prepared for Carleton at the K-12 level.

In my opinion, the professor was right to be frustrated. Dealing with ill-prepared students once they are admitted at Carleton is not helpful to the student or to Carleton. If we want to address the issues of lacking academic preparedness not just of minority students, but also students from different socioeconomic classes and backgrounds, we need to start at the K-12 level, not when they step on the Carleton campus. I do believe as public citizens Carleton does have a responsibility to address that issue and I have a suggestion of how Carleton can do so. I propose that Carleton have a 6-credit class where Carleton students go out to inner-city schools in the Twin Cities or if they choose other inner-cities to mentor and tutor students from all different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds in able to help them to sufficiently prepare them academically to attend schools such as Carleton. Such a program would not only address the issue of academic preparation from the K-12 level, but also allow the Carleton students to grow as public citizens because they would have to work in environments that many of them are not familiar with and work with individuals from different backgrounds they would generally not work with otherwise. In conclusion, Carleton needs a new approach to address issues of academic achievement of these students that helps everyone grow together, not a continuation of the current strategies that encourage division.
I'll admit that part of me was very optimistic when the Editor-in-Chief of the Observer came to a BSA meeting and asked for article submissions about race. After all, it did demonstrate a degree of commitment to broadening the perspectives published in this very white publication. I hadn't expected. I wrote an article about the need for multicultural organizations at Carleton, hoping that it would be part of an enlightening and sensitive discussion of racial issues. I have since realized that such a discussion cannot take place in this publication and retracted my article.

There are several key factors that led me to conclude that Observer is simply incapable of being a forum for a productive and sensitive discussion on race. The first is that I have serious questions about whether you are actually committed to improving race relations or multicultural discussion on campus. Prior to the request for submissions from multicultural organizations, I cannot recall ever seeing an editor from the Observer at any of the Chili Nights or multicultural meetings I've attended. That indicates a lack of genuine interest in the welfare of multicultural organizations and multicultural communication at Carleton that makes me skeptical about whether you are actually concerned with the state of race relations here. Since there is no evidence to indicate that you are at all interested in fostering productive racial discussion, and since racially offensive articles have been published in the Observer in the past, I have no reason to expect that this will be anything more than an exceedingly poor forum for a discussion of race.

Then there is the issue of the email that the you sent to the Carleton Conservative Union requesting submissions to this issue. The most disturbing portion of that mail was the following few sentences: “Last spring, [multicultural] organizations were putting together protests of articles we printed. If you want to see that kind of response again, we need you to write, too.” This makes it immediately evident that the Observer is not dedicated to sensitive or productive discussion of racial issues. Multicultural organizations protested some Observer articles last year because a number of students found those articles very hurtful. For the Observer to encourage students to submit more insensitive and offensive articles clearly indicates that it is not committed to bettering race relations on campus and is willing to damage those relations if it results in more publicity.

Another troubling quote from the email speaks to the same point: “Write it as if Ann Coulter would be the only one to see it; God know you aren’t going to offend her.” Though it is important for people to be open when discussing race, writing an article without any consideration of how it might offend others is an exceptionally bad idea. The fact that the Observer posed a similar prompt to multicultural organizations only makes matters worse; rather than promoting a racial dialogue, submissions written under these guidelines are likely to be polarized and to worsen race relations on campus if they do anything. It is possible, though not easy, to be simultaneously honest, open, and sensitive. A good discussion on race requires participants who make an effort to have all of those attributes. By specifically requesting that contributors not be concerned with sensitivity, the Observer is encouraging racial strife on campus. We don't need more hurtful and offensive articles. There have already been enough.

The email also stated, “When the issue goes to print, we anticipate having dozens of pages of just the multi-cultural group submissions. It will probably include articles that point plenty a finger at white people and conservatives.” This is offensive for reasons that should be obvious. Among other things, it makes the assumption that some members of multicultural organizations are going to engage in racist and simplistic discourse. There are also undertones of racial stereotypes in this comment (“angry black man,” anybody?). Though I don’t believe they were intentional on your part, they suggest that you lack the ability to provide a productive discussion on race. Furthermore, this comment was particularly bizarre for me to read because I’m a white student who received an invitation to write during a multicultural group meeting. Any white students who belong to multicultural organizations can tell you that the organizations have nothing to doing with finger-pointing at white people or at conservatives. Actually, any member of any multicultural organization at all could tell you that. But I guess you didn’t ask.

The email convinced a number of students, myself included, that there was a duplicitous nature to the Observer's request for submissions. You did ask for submissions from members multicultural groups, but then you went on to suggest to the CCU that our writing will be of very limited value. I understand that your ultimate purpose in this was to provoke conservative students to contribute to this issue, but the way in which you sought contributions was both fatally flawed and deeply offensive to some students.

To the credit of your staff, you did arrange at meeting in which students who wanted to discuss the race issue and your email to the CCU could talk to you face to face. That was the right thing to do, and the grievances that I’ve expressed in this article have all been presented to you in much more emotional and immediate terms.

Though I appreciate that you made an effort to let those of us with complaints voice them, it does not change the fact that the Observer is not nearly ready to host the “honest and open” discussion of race that you claim to want. I do believe that the offensive email you sent out was produced in ignorance, but that very ignorance makes me confident that you are nowhere near ready to host a productive and sensitive dialogue. Combined with the fact that you have worsened race relations in the past and may well do so again with this issue (judging by the polarizing prompts you sent to conservatives and multicultural groups), I am not comfortable contributing to your discussion of race. For that to happen, your publication will need to earn my trust and respect. Right now it has neither. I sincerely hope that changes, though this past week has taught me not to be so optimistic.

–REID MONROE-SHERIDAN, ’06
CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

My experience of racial differences is relatively small compared to my experience of differences of cultural, language and values. I have traveled, worked and lived with various people of numerous races. Race, primarily in the form of appearance, is a relatively small factor when I meet someone compared to differences of culture, language and values. These three factors combined have a larger impact on both my first impressions and long term relationships.

For example, I find it much easier to begin a relationship with someone who is “like me,” in terms of language, culture and values. If these are similar I take little notice of their appearance, i.e. race. As a Midwesterner I have sometimes had a more difficult time establishing a relationship with someone in the South, than someone living in or from a different country. Whereas someone adopted as an infant and raised in the US is often someone whose race I take almost no notice of.

Another example I have found very interesting is that as I travel as a management consultant from nation to nation, working with various corporations, I find that the difference between people in two different corporations is sometimes greater than the difference between people in two different nations. In some ways there is a greater difference between people working at Honda and Toyota in one country, than between people working at Ford and either of the former two companies, regardless of country.

I wish you well in your exploration of race, and look forward to the results.

–CHARLES SKINNER, ‘67

RACE AND KATRINA

Although written under the guise of philosophical inquiry, Peter Fritz’s Op-Ed in last week’s [30 September 2005] Carleton Observer (“Katrina shows need for society”) fails to shed light on any “innate” human qualities, but further underlines the egregiously classist and racist nature of media coverage in America. He writes that the “looting and horrors that plagued New Orleans” are symptomatic of a societal breakdown, a loss of civilization, and ultimately a reminder of why we idealize these norms. He illustrates a model that, on the surface, is quite easy to follow: civilization exists; natural disaster occurs; people act uncivilized, and thus chaos ensues.

What Fritz fails to realize is that it was precisely the limitations of his romanticized notion of civilization that led to the tragedy in the first place. Looting did not plague the city of New Orleans. Racism, ambivalence toward the poor, and the lack of a sustainable economic infrastructure to support the latter is what plagues New Orleans and countless other urban epicenters across the nation. Before the hurricane, 30% of the city lived below the poverty line. To clarify, in 2004 the US Census Bureau defined poverty as a family of four (two adults, two children) with a yearly household income at or below $19,157. More likely than not, these problems will continue unabated. Lesson unlearned. These are realities of our civilization. And while thousands suffered without potable water, sufficient food, or sewage, Condi was shopping at Ferragamo and Bush prematurely congratulated his appointed cronies at FEMA who clearly know very little about disaster relief.

Considering these realities, it is deeply offensive that a fellow Carleton student would equate the magnitude of human spirit evident in those who suffered the most with behavior befitting of “savages in nature.” He cites the lootings and carjacking as unvirtuous acts, evidence of a failed society, yet chooses not to recognize that many of these illegal activities saved people’s lives. While the National Guard came to restore order, it was the so-called criminals who brought juice for children and food for suffering people. These criminals commandeered water supply trucks and hydrated the public. Is this not virtuosity?

On the other hand, the Gretna, LA Sheriff’s Department prevented citizens from entering the dry and coincidentally whiter West Bank, shooting at civilians to avoid such intrusion. When Lorrie Beth Slonsky, a paramedic from California and hurricane survivor, questioned an armed official on the matter, the officer replied, “We are not turning the West Bank into another Superdome.” Being one of very few whites among a crowd of hundreds of black hurricane survivors she understood this to mean, “these were code words for if you’re poor, if you’re black you are not getting out of New Orleans; you are not coming to our territory.” This occurred on Thursday, five days after our President declared a state of emergency. Meanwhile, the national guard instructed those at the convention center to line up every four hours for buses that wouldn’t arrive for days, an effective psychological conditioning technique used to solicit compliance. Forsaking American lives on the basis of color and in the name of order and protection of material property, is this not the ultimate savagery?

So upon a more introspective look into what society truly values, the implications of Fritz’s criticism are evident: If only those poor black folks followed directions, waited patiently (ankle deep in their own fecal matter), and resisted their savage nature everything would be okay. This is problematic. But we live in systematically racist and classist society where the former education secretary can comfortably and publicly suggest that aborting black babies would significantly lower crime. So while problematic, Fritz’s implications certainly are not surprising. The next time that you’d like to apply a Rousseau or Golding-esque theory of social behavior to the plight of those who you clearly know so little about, I suggest you contextualize your argument with some semblance of reality.

–JOHN SMITH-RICCO, ’07
Bumps, bruises and broken bones

WELLS HARRELL/Editor

I had no idea what I was getting myself into. Putting together this issue of The Observer has been one of the most taxing experiences of my life. It was hard enough trying to generate interest among groups that consider each other ideological enemies. It was even more difficult reaching out to students who see the Observer as a “white man’s journal.” Then, with a single email to the CCU, it all blew up in my face. In an instant, the other editors and I saw what we had poured so much energy into crumble before our eyes.

We did almost everything we could to make things right. We spent hours talking with Andrew and Vani in the Office of Multicultural Affairs. We talked with students of color individually about what they had heard. We sent an apology email. We even organized a discussion session to talk with Carls about the issues that the CCU email raised and how we should deal with them. I thought we would apologize upfront, talk about why we made the mistake we did, and engage others on how we can move beyond these problems and still host a meaningful discussion on race and privilege. Stimson lounge was packed with upwards of fifty people.

I had no idea what I was getting myself into.

Remember that childhood rhyme, “sticks and stones may break my bones but words may never hurt me?” Don’t believe it. It’s bullshit. Many of the words I heard that night will live with me for the rest of my days. Every point that someone “really hit home” felt like a fist pounding against my chest. Every cheer at my expense was one more punch across my face. “How could you do this to another human being,” I thought. “I’m not just a representative of a journal. I’m not a punching bag. I’m a person!” I knew that people were just upset about feeling betrayed and needed an opportunity to vent. Many attendees articulated positive, constructive points of criticism. But it still disgusted me that so many in the audience seemed less interested in fostering understanding and more interested in landing the best blow. From my point of view, it was less like a dialogue and more like an inquisition. I was struck by how few people were willing to hear me out.

Maybe, in those moments, I caught a glimpse of what it was like to be a victim of white privilege instead of a beneficiary of it. I heard so many say that talking about issues of race and privilege is painful. As I sat there, I began to understand why.

Yet, I never grew weary. Not once did I desire to retreat to close friends who would tell me “it’s all right.” I was determined to remain still, listen to what people had to say, respond when I saw fit, and ultimately, take whatever punishment people wanted to dole out. I was there to listen. I was there to learn. I didn’t care that my own voice may have been drowned out amongst a sea of angry ones. It just didn’t matter to me. Because even if it meant bearing all of the outrage that our mistake had spawned, I was determined to do good. I wanted honest dialogue, and by God, I got it.

It’s a shame that so many chose to leave before the discussion ended. It took almost two and a half hours, but the fifteen or so people that stayed reached newfound understandings of one another. I was vindicated – it took weathering one hell of a storm, but after saying exactly what was on their minds, people truly began to listen. The conversations I had with people one-on-one afterwards helped assure me that I was doing the right thing.

After it ended, I couldn’t sleep. I talked for hours to some of my closest friends trying to sort everything out. Even now, it’s hard to put the experience into words.

Some of the attendees told me afterwards, “Wells, that was the most honest interracial dialogue I’ve ever seen at Carleton. Thanks for going through all that.” As much as I appreciate the sentiment, I don’t want sympathy. I don’t even want thanks. And if you want to demonize me and the things you think I stand for, you have every right to do so. All I want is to know that the things I went through were somehow worth it, that this whole thing has produced some good.

Even if it meant bearing all of the outrage that our mistake had spawned, I was determined to do good.

The dialogue may have been honest, but I realized that if we really are going to get where David Schraub said we all want to go – better cross-cultural understanding and a more equal playing field – it’ll take more than just being honest with one another. It begins with everyone coming to the table, day after day, with an earnest desire to understand one another. We must saddle in for the long haul. Hundreds of years of racism, and even the racial prejudices we invariably carry with us to campus, cannot be eradicated in a single evening. It will require us to look at the bumps, bruises, and broken bones we endure – both through racism’s effects and through the dialogue that is supposed to heal us – as necessary parts of a larger struggle. To hunker down in our own comfort zones, choosing to engage the other sides in combat and not in meaningful discussion, would only reinforce everyone’s preconceived notions. We must not falter. We must not waver. For us to begin rectifying racial inequities, we must be willing to genuinely listen, even if… no, especially when it hurts.

I want to understand. It may take enduring verbalized beatings, over and over again, but I’ll still be standing here, ready to talk and willing to listen. Where will you be?