

Blacks on white campuses: Racist attacks increase

Hazel Trice Edney For New Pittsburgh Courier

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by Hazel Trice Edney

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(Last fall, white fraternity members at Auburn University in Alabama and the University of Mississippi demonstrated brazen racial insensitivity. Were these just isolated pranks or were the incidents indicative of deeper problems? NNPA Washington correspondent Hazel Trice Edney embarked on a three-month investigation.

This is the first in a series on her findings.)

(STATE COLLEGE, Pa. (NNPA)—LaToya Carson, now a junior at Penn State University, was just a freshman when she was pelted with more than just the n-word at a party.

"There were some drunk Caucasian fellows across the street yelling through the window at me and they started making catcalls," she recounts. "And then when I wouldn't

look, they said 'Hey, are you a nigger?' And then all of a sudden a bottle, a glass bottle, crashed against the window. And they started calling me, 'Nigger! Nigger! Nigger!'"

That's not the kind of reception one would expect on a college campus at the beginning of the 21st century. Expected or not, it is an ugly reality. Racist incidents have been on the rise for the past three years, according to Federal

Bureau of Investigation and Department of Education statistics.

Nowhere was that made more vivid than on the campuses of Auburn University in Alabama and the University of Mississippi, where white students in blackface simulated a KKK lynching and a police shooting of what was depicted as a Black man on his knees picking cotton.

Auburn and Ole Miss got the

adverse national publicity, but by no means are they the only offenders. The Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery, Ala., has compiled a list of campus hate incidents over the past five years. Among them:

•In Fresno, Calif., a Black college student was beaten with a metal pipe. A white man, said to have been a mem-

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ber of a skinhead group called the Peckerwoods, was convicted of the crime;

- At Stanford University in California, racist e-mails were sent to 25,000 computer users;

- An employee at the University of Illinois at Chicago sent a poem with racial slurs to six faculty members and several students;

- A racist note was left on the dorm door of a Black student at Kalamazoo College in Michigan. The student's bed was later set on fire;

- At St. Cloud State University in Minnesota, a swastika and racist graffiti were scrawled on the dorm room door of an African-American student;

- A fraternity and a sorority at Dartmouth College in Hanover, N.H., held a "ghetto party," where white Greeks were encouraged to dress as inner-city Blacks;

- One of the most liberal insti-

tutions of higher education, Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, expelled four students after a Black mannequin with a noose around its head was found hanging from a tree; and

- At Washington State University, swastikas were etched on a Black History Month display.

Most racist incidents tend to be more subtle, even on the same campus where white students assaulted LaToya Carson with the n-word and an airborne bottle. Even subtle incidents can crush the dreams of some students, who expect their first time away from home for an extended period to mean their first taste of personal freedom, social independence and a receptive, open academic environment. To their surprise, many encounter experiences similar to those of Mark Washington and Charles Dennis.

After Washington graduated from high school in Pittsburgh,

he headed for Penn State. Dennis, who grew up on the opposite side of the state in Philadelphia, also knew he wanted to be a Nittany Lion. When each arrived in Happy Valley—the nickname for Penn State—they were shaken by unhappy experiences.

Washington, now a junior, was doing poorly in a course he needed to maintain a high grade point average to remain on track to major in computer science.

The lanky youth says he tried repeatedly to meet with his white female professor to notify her that family problems were distracting him from his class work. But she refused to meet with him until he complained to the dean, who then insisted that the professor meet with Washington.

"I actually had to change majors because of that situation. It happened because of who I was, me being Black on cam-

pus. I didn't think it was fair at all," says Washington, who switched his major to electrical engineering.

Dennis, confronted with a similar situation, reacted differently. He arrived at Penn State eager to become an accountant. But when his white, female academic advisor urged him to pursue another career, he balked.

"It was almost like a slap in the face. She said, 'Are you sure you can do business? That's going to be a very difficult major. Do you really have what it takes to be an accountant?' She went on for 20 minutes, stating why I could not do what I wanted to do," Dennis remembers.

By now, Dennis' former advisor has a definitive answer to her questions. He is a financial analyst for Nextell Corporation, a Fortune 500 company. Evidently, he had what it takes to be a first-rate accountant.