

Blacks on white campuses: racist attacks increase

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by Hazel Trice Edney

For New Pittsburgh Courier

(Last fall, white frat 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 second

in a series on her findings.)

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. (NNPA)—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 diffi-

cult 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 Corp., a Fortune 500 company. Evidently, he had what it takes to be a first-rate accountant.

Despite all of the purported

support for "diversity," "multiculturalism," Black History Month and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. holiday programs, racism is alive and well on college campuses.

In a report to Congress last year, the Department of Education revealed that hate crimes on college campuses steadily increased between 1997 and 1999, the most recent years statistics are available.

In 1997, the number of hate

crimes reported to the DOE was 1,312. The number rose slightly to 1,374 in 1998 and jumped to 2,067 in 1999. The department's numbers are not broken down by race- or gender-related motives.

That's not the case with the FBI. The number of race-related hate crimes on college campuses compiled by the agency are lower, but still show a sig-

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nificant increase in recent years. There were 392 such incidents reported in 1998, 460 in 1999 and 518 in 2000.

"Based on our work experience, there is no place where hate crimes are occurring with increasing frequency, more visibility and hostility than in institutions of higher education," says Rose Ochi, director of the community relations service at the U.S. Department of Justice.

The gradual increase has been taking place over several years. But it took glaring incidents at Auburn and Mississippi universities to refocus the public's attention on the problem.

Last Halloween, members of two of Auburn's fraternities, Beta Theta Pi and Delta Sigma Phi, wore blackface and simulated lynchings while dressed in Ku Klux Klan robes.

Pictures of the students in blackface circulated widely through the Internet. In one photo, two white students wore baseball caps and T-shirts displaying the Greek letters of Omega Psi Phi, a historically Black fraternity. Others were dressed as Klan members. One wore a rope around his neck as if a lynch victim, as another student dressed as a Klansman held

the end of the rope. The Confederate flag was displayed in the background.

Photos of the incident at the University of Mississippi, which received less attention, showed an Alpha Tau Omega fraternity member kneeling on the ground and pretending to pick cotton, while another student dressed as a police officer pointed a gun at his head. At Mississippi, both students were expelled from Alpha Tau Omega, and the university indefinitely suspended all fraternity activities.

Auburn administrators say they must limit their public comments because of a \$300 million lawsuit against the university. The suit was filed on behalf of 10 Beta students who were suspended because of the Halloween incident. The suit has yet to come to trial but a judge reinstated the students, who claim that their free speech and rights to privacy were violated by the suspensions. Auburn administrators dispute the allegations.

FBI stats show that Black students are victims of hate crimes three times more often than their white counterparts. In 2000, African-Americans were 36 percent of all victims of racially motivated hate crimes. Two thirds of the time, the attackers are white males,

McDevitt says.

Many of the attacks on African-Americans are fueled by either fear or resentment.

"If young (white) people are concerned that they can't get into a graduate school or they're not going to get a job when they get out of school, then they—whether in college or not—some young people then look for people to blame, and they scapegoat people who are different," McDevitt says. "It's hard to tell if somebody's gay or if somebody's Jewish, but it's real easy to tell if somebody's Black."

Alex Robinson returned to his University of Michigan dorm room one evening only to be told by neighbors and a resident manager that they had just removed an "I hate niggers" note and a swastika that was scrawled on his dorm room door.

That jolted Robinson back to reality.

"I was thinking of all those people that I've gone out of my way to be nice to. Everybody in that dorm, I've tried to greet people with a smile and this is what you get in return," says Robinson, a literature, science and arts major also from Detroit. "So, I was kind of hurt by that. If they are brave enough to go to my door, what else? So, I was scared and, of course, offended."