

# 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 had demonstrated brazen racial insensitivity. Were these just isolated pranks that got out of hand or were the incidents indicative of deeper problems? NNPA Washington Correspondent Hazel Trice Edney embarked on a three-month investigation. This is the third*

*of a series on her findings.)*

NNPA—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."

Farther south, other Black students tell similar stories.

Van Turner and Dumaka Shabazz, both law students at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, are among them.

"There were 12 nooses that were hung from a tree such as were done back in the time of lynching," says Turner. "We thought it was very offensive." Inside a dormitory, a wall was spray-painted with "KKK" and "Nigger Go Home." Someone even painted a rock on campus with the Rebel flag and posted a nearby sign that read, "Niggers go home to your masters."

Blacks stayed, but never looked at the University of Tennessee the same way.

"Of course it makes us feel a little down and a little concerned," says Shabazz. "But, at the same time, it kind of brings up a new sense of urgency with this and makes us press on even more strongly and harder than we did before to make sure that those wrongs are righted."

Royster Harper, UM's vice president of student affairs, says that dealing with hate in-

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idents is complicated.

"Sometimes what students want is really for the hater to be punished. We balance that with the need (for them) to be educated because we have both the short-term objective and the long-term objective," Harper explains.

She notes that as part of that effort, UM held a week-long seminar in February that was designed to help white student leaders recognize the advantages of white privilege.

"We know that these are students that are going to go out and be in charge of major organizations, major corporations, other people's lives. And we want our values of inclusion, of appreciation, of tolerance to be inside of them when they leave so they won't create, quite frankly, this on a much larger scale," Harper says.

Part of the problem is that university faculties and ad-

ministrations are not sufficiently diverse.

Black faculty members are roughly 5 percent of all full-time faculty in higher education, according to American Council on Education.

In 1998, African-Americans were nearly 11 percent of all college students, up from 10.1 percent in 1994, according to the council.

Although total enrollment of Black college students has increased by 9.4 percent since 1994, it is still the smallest gain among the nation's four major ethnic groups, according to the American Council on Education.

Just as there is a problem getting African-Americans into predominantly white universities, there is also difficulty successfully getting them out.

"The graduation rate for African-Americans declined by 3 percent from 1997 to 1998,"

the ACE reports. The decline went from 40 percent in 1997 to 37 percent in 1998, reversing an upward trend between 1993 and 1995. During that same period, the white graduation rate increased from 58 percent to 59 percent after a steady rate of 59 percent from 1993 through 1996.

In the midst of recurring Black protests and complaints of racism at Penn State, the university leads the six-year graduation rates for Black students among the Big Ten Conference schools with 62 percent, according to the National Collegiate Athletic Association. The graduation rate for white students at Penn State is 82.5 percent—20 percent higher than that for African-Americans.

It is difficult to fully document the number of racial incidents on and off college campuses, which often go unreported.