

# Blacks on white campuses: racial education

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 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 fifth in a series on her findings.)*

(NNPA)—African-American enrollment at Historically Black Colleges and Universities after two consecutive years of decreases, showed no decline in 1998. That was a major achievement, considering white college enrollment declined by 2.2 percent from 1994 to 1998, according to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics.

Brandon Green is one of those students who chose to attend a college where the majority of students look like him.

"I went to a white high school and I'm just tired of it," says the freshman majoring in computer science at Virginia State University in Petersburg. He graduated from James River High School in Chesterfield County, and already sees the difference. "People pay attention to you (in a Black school).

People hear what you have to say. And they don't think that you're saying something just to say it."

Some African-American faculty members are moving from predominantly white universities to HBCUs.

"I still think there are some opportunities that are unique to minority institutions," says Dr. Gary H. Gibbons, director of the Morehouse School of Medicine's Cardiovascular Research Institute in Atlanta.

Gibbons, who graduated from Princeton with a degree in biology and from Harvard with a degree in medicine, established the research institute at Morehouse in 1999 after teaching at Stanford and, later, Harvard Medical School.

"I think it is a matter of personal responsibility of people of color to develop solutions to problems that affect our communities in particular rather

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than to passively accept so-called solutions that are designed for us," Gibbons explains. "With all due respect to my friends and colleagues at Harvard and Stanford, although it's trendy now to talk about ethnic disparities in health for example, this is something that Morehouse Medical School was actually founded upon and takes as its core mission, not something that is a trend or a fad."

Inasmuch as 85.8 percent of all Black college students attend predominantly white institutions, they must learn to cope with racism on campus.

Universities are being urged to increase their efforts to ease racial tension and to appoint African-Americans to significant administrative posts.

"I'm not talking about Vice President of Negroes, but I'm talking about a person who has an office, a major office with four or five people in it, at least, and a budget for programming and so forth," says Winbush.

Peggy Moss, associate director of the Center for the Prevention of Hate Violence at the University of Southern Maine in Portland and a former prosecutor for the Maine attorney general's office, says it is important for university administrators to react quickly to racist incidents. "We learned that prior to anyone getting injured, there were months and

months of time during which people heard slurs and degrading language on campus," Moss recalls.

Southern Maine holds an annual training in August for campus leaders from 10 to 15 universities on how to diffuse racism. "Students are saying to other students, 'Hey, we don't talk like that,' 'Hey, it's not alright to say that around me,' 'Don't use those words,' or 'That's not cool,'" Moss says.

The Community Relations Service, an agency of the U.S. Department of Justice, also has a staff that is trained to intervene before problems get out of hand. Director Sharee M. Freeman says, "We're looking to see where racial strife might break out next and try and do some prevention."

The University of Michigan, which is undergoing major challenges to its affirmative action program, has a crime prevention policy that calls for holding meetings between school officials and the targeted group of a hate attack. Referrals for professional counseling are made, if necessary, and public meetings are conducted on hate threats and violence. University trustees and officials are proving they are serious about diversity by adamantly defending affirmative action in court at a cost of more than \$7 million.

Rev. Robert Franklin, president of the Interdenominational Theological Center in At-

lanta, believes the Black church also has a role to play.

"It is really quite appropriate for the Black church to provide instruction on the nature of interracial cooperation and reconciliation. We certainly have the vocabulary for talking about racism as sin and social evil."

Students everywhere are talking about developing a culture of acceptance that goes beyond mere tolerance. And the church can't compensate

for universities that fail to confront racism.

"I think we have a responsibility as educational institutions to make sure that minority students have a secure environment in which to grow to their greatest potential and excel," says Dr. Gibbons of Morehouse. "At the end of the day, I think our vision is to fulfill Martin Luther King's dream to be judged by the content of our character."

Until that dream becomes re-

ality, Dr. Francis Crest Welton says, Black students must learn to cope in a hostile environment.

"This is not about hating White people. It is about having an accurate decoding of the environment in which you find yourself and moving forward and ultimately changing the environment," she says. "During segregation, our ancestors would say you have to be 10 times as good. This still applies today."