

Blacks on white campuses: racial education

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by Hazel Trice Edney

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(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 fourth of a series on her findings.)

WASHINGTON (NNPA)—If racism on college campuses is

ever to be curtailed, actions must be taken long before white students enroll in their first freshman classes, many educators and scholars believe.

"It's not as if they come to the university with a clean slate and then the university can print anything it wants to on them," explains U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Chairwoman Mary Frances Berry, who also was chancellor of the University of Colorado and provost at the University of Maryland. "Students come to the university well acculturated by their families and by the

schools they've gone to and by the contacts that they've made before they ever arrive on campus. By that time, it's too late." Getting to students before it is too late requires some innovative and concentrated approaches.

The Southern Poverty Law Center publishes "101 Tools for Tolerance" on its web site, www.tolerance.org. To foster more sensitivity in the home, the center recommends inviting someone from a different background to join the family for a meal or holiday, point out stereotypes and cultural misinformation depicted in TV

shows and computer games and reading books with multicultural themes.

High schools can broaden students by using race-sensitive books, films and magazines; discouraging the use of divisive school emblems and developing a rich multicultural curriculum.

Colleges should be even more aggressive in seeking to foster an open environment. "The response should be direct training and cultural sensitivity," says Dr. Carl C. Bell, chief executive officer of the Commu-

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nity Mental Health Council and professor of psychology and public health at the University of Illinois at Chicago. "Campuses must be made to look like a tossed salad instead of a melting pot. With a tossed salad, people are encouraged to be themselves. With a melting pot, Black people end up acting like white people."

A different approach to scholarship is frequently proposed.

"If you don't change your curriculum, if you've got the same curriculum that you've had for the last 30 years and the same campus and the same values and your population changes dramatically, then don't be surprised when there's conflict," warns Terrell Jones, vice provost for educational equity at Penn State University.

In a speech at Penn State, Yolanda King made the same point earlier this year during a campus celebration of the birthday of her father, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

"I advocate that any univer-

sity that's really serious about moving their student body, as well as helping to move the country forward in terms of race relations, should really institute a required course for all students to take that focuses on diversity," she told the audience of about 700 students, faculty and administrators.

Raymond A. Winbush, director of the Race Relations Institute at Fisk University in Nashville and former assistant provost at Vanderbilt University, says an increasing number of African-Americans are not interested in trying to change opinions that some whites hold of them.

"Essentially, campuses are far more conservative now. And this is why you're seeing an increase in attendance at Black colleges because a lot of these Black parents are saying, 'I don't want my child to be going through that. I'll send them to Fisk. I'll send them to Tennessee State or Howard or some place like that,'" Winbush says.