

## **BEING BLACK IN A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE UNIVERSITY**

Harper, Frederick D., "Black Student Revolt on the White Campus" Journal of College Student Personnel September, 1969, p. 29.

If you can listen with an accepting ear and try to get into my frame of reference, I will attempt to articulate what it means to be black in a white university.

Being Black means to walk across campus on your first day of class and not see one black student.

Being Black means to have all white teachers and to be surrounded in class by all white or nearly all white students.

Being Black means to open my text-books and see pictures of white folks and to read white-washed theory, philosophy and history which are not relevant to me.

Being Black means to go to a white counselor whom - I don't trust, and who doesn't know how to handle my presence or problem.

Being Black is trying to get administrators to understand my needs and do something about them, or trying to convince a campus policeman that he should not arrest me out of prejudice.

Being Black is tolerating "Nigra" or "Negro" and favoring neither.

Being Black is watching whites look upon my natural hair, mustache, my African garments, my black music, and literature, my black community language, and other symbols of black pride as being deviant.

Being Black is seeing a soul sister or brother slaving overtime on a dirty menial job and being underpaid.

Being Black is to go into a class disadvantaged and find that I have a teacher who believes it is impossible for a black student to make an "A" or "B" grade.

Being Black is not having a penny in my pocket and seeing white students visit Europe and Mexico, driving fancy sports cars, and at the same time knowing that their parents and ancestors got rich off the sweat and pain of my parents and ancestors.

Being Black is to be a resource person for curious white folks who after being answered, are not willing to accept my expertise.

Being Black is to know that my great, grandmother was raped and labeled promiscuous, that my great grand father was worked from dawn to dusk and labeled lazy. that my father was denied a job and labeled shiftless, that my sister was "busted" upside the head by racists with an ax handle, while policemen laughed, and then labeled her as a trouble-maker, and finally, that I was denied an equal opportunity and labeled as "culturally deprived".

Being Black means to be in an ocean of white stimuli, to be angry consciously or unconsciously, to continuously struggle with oneself to deny hostile feelings, angry feelings. I might add that there is no

difference between the anger of a black rioter and that of a black Ph.D. but rather a difference in the way this feeling comes out.

Finally being black means to be lonely, hyperalienated, depressed, displayed, ignored, and harassed. Just the fact of being black is to be at the brink of revolt.

I hope that these perceptions will give you a better view in understanding, accepting, and respecting the black student; in becoming more involved in his world. My view is only a fragment of the big picture; however, I hope that this small fragment can help you to help some black student before he is forced to take other action, possibly action of revolt and disruption.

## **BEING WHITE AT INDIANA UNIVERSITY**

Adapted from: Conley and Davidoff, "Being White at the University of Maryland, " 1971.

Being white at Indiana University means:

..... not having to think in negative-terms (This is what I'm not...) about my race or my culture, for being white means that my culture is the yardstick for what's around me here: our skin, our history, our music, our society.

And so, paradoxically, in order to express what it means to be white on this campus, I must use negative terms, perhaps for the first time in my life, about my race, really never considered (for I've never had to consider it) that I was part of a race, really - they were always the "race": the blacks, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, Japanese, etc. I was simply part of the overwhelming majority, wherever I was, and being a member of the "white race" was "Yeah, well sure:" then going on about my business. It simply wasn't important to my life. In order to try to understand what it means to be white, I've had to ask the question to myself, "what if I weren't white?" and try from there to list white advantages. They almost always seem to hate the form of, "Being white at Indiana University means not this or not that..." So, as a starter, being white at Indiana University means...

..... never having asked the question, "What does it mean to be white?"

..... not having to worry that if I drop out of school I won't be able to find a job.

..... not feeling threatened as I walk across campus, for all around me are my people my music, my slang.

..... never worrying that when I enter a room of strangers, I will be looked at with hostility-- the worst that can happen is that I'll be ignored.

..... never having to doubt that this or that course will have some material in it concerning my race-- after all, I assume that the course will be about my history, my art, my literature, my national heroes, my race's philosophers, painters and generals.

..... not having to worry that when I go to see my professor he will misunderstand by speech or my expressions or my silent communication signals.

..... feeling a tinge of envy (and resentment?) at seeing the table of blacks sitting together at the table in the dining hall or commons.

..... complaining to my staff member that there is a group of black men in the lounge, and feeling threatened by that, knowing he will get the message for after all, he's white too.

..... getting my feelings hurt when the black man down the hall refuses to have anything to do with me.

..... not understanding why he laughs when I say I treat everyone the same, regardless of whether they are black, brown, yellow or green or when I say that some of my best friends are colored.

..... hearing the Doors in the room next door, the Stones in the room across the hall, Three Dog Night upstairs--thinking that the dude who plays soul on the first floor is too loud.

..... looking down on manual labor of any kind, making little jokes about the housekeepers, the maintenance man, and the electrician.

..... two hours later, telling my friends how I'm really into black people and black culture, how poor people are so cool because they are so earthy and work with their hands, about how I'm going to fight for the revolution, because we need to redistribute the wealth.

..... telling everyone about my trip through Mississippi and Alabama especially about how everyone down there is racist.

..... then going back to the all-white suburb where I grew up, passing the 95% white high school I attended, driving the quiet streets where I never saw a black man walking nor anyone ever questioned by the cops, much less arrested.

..... being comfortable.

..... being confused by words like "institutional racism"....that's not me is it?

..... being afraid everything I do or say will be called "racist."

..... is not feeling "white" unless around blacks.

..... makes me wonder why a black who is friendly in the hall, refuses to recognize my existence when he's in a group of blacks.

..... makes me feel guilty over the black condition but either unwilling or unable to transfer this feeling into constructive action.

..... not knowing what blacks want or why they want to be different.

..... feeling frustrated that blacks hate me because I'm white and questioning black intolerance, prejudice and stereotyping of white.

..... Being white in a predominantly white university means many things if we only will examine it. How's it with you? What does it mean to be white?

## **CONTROVERSIAL STATEMENTS SHEET**

Submitted by: Joe Boehman, Assistant Director Training and Advising, East Carolina University

1. Black Power has done more to hurt blacks than to help them.
2. With all the jobs available, anyone who wants to work can find a job.
3. Violence in the cities is caused primarily by outside agitators.
4. Before we can have social justice, we must first have law and order.
5. If blacks really want to move up, they would stay in school.
6. One of the problems today is the apathy of blacks.
7. If we really integrate the schools, we must accept a lowering of educational standards.
8. It is as easy today to work your way up as it was for the immigrant groups.
9. The welfare system needs investigation to correct "coddling" and "fraud."
10. Unwed mothers who continue to have illegitimate children should be placed in jail.
11. The police could control violence if their hands were not tied by recent Supreme Court decisions.
12. Professional workers know best what is beneficial for the poor.
13. Keeping whites out of the civil rights movement will prevent any real progress.
14. One of the major causes of civil disorder is white racism.
15. Blacks have made a lot of progress in recent years.
16. Bussing ghetto children is only going to antagonize the white community and make the situation worse.
17. Blacks ought to get equal treatment, but it is not fair to give them preference over whites for jobs and promotions.
18. Property values always go down when a black buys a home in a white neighborhood.
19. Interracial marriage is a threat to most white Americans.
20. Interracial marriage is all right for the couple, but presents overwhelming problems for the children.
21. Private clubs should have the right to exclude people for racial or religious reasons.

22. The examples of men like Senator Brooke, Ralph Bunche, and Thurgood Marshall prove that blacks have equal opportunity and treatment.

23. Every white person in this room is justified in feeling superior to any black in the world.

## **FACTORS THAT PROHIBIT MINORITY STUDENT INVOLVEMENT**

Excerpt from Involving Minorities in Student Services A National Minority Campus Chronicle Publication

- \* Cultural Conflict - Many campuses operate as white cultural institutions with an emphasis on middle class values. Often Minority culture and values are ignored or rejected. This can result in an identity crisis on the part of the minority student. Universities should promote cultural pluralism and the inclusion of the minority experience as an integral part of the curriculum.
- \* Self-determination Positions Taken by Minority Groups in Which the University Interprets as Segregation - Minority Student organizations (MSO's) serve a very important function for minority students. The challenge is to allow minority students autonomy while at the same time encouraging them not to limit their involvement with MSO's.
- \* Minorities Absent From Top Positions in Student Services Hierarchy - Students need role models and peer groups in which they can identify and feel comfortable with.
- \* Inflexible Guidelines That Ignore Cultural Needs of Minority Students - Early closing of Student Unions is an example we frequently encounter. To the Urban student this presents a problem. All university policies should be evaluated in terms of bias and their perceived or real impact on minority students.
- \* Tokenism - Many minority students feel their viewpoints won't be accommodated or that they will be put in a figurehead position without any real power. Universities should make sure that committees, Advisory Councils, and Task forces truly reflect a fair representation of minorities.
- \* Struggling to Survive Academically - If you can't make the grades, involvement tends to be a low priority. The establishment of supportive services by many campuses has proven to be a plus in helping minority students achieve academically. The payoff will hopefully result in students taking a more active interest in campus affairs.
- \* Campus Administrators and White Student Leaders Not Attending or Showing Little Interest in Minority Initiated Activities - It is important that students know there is a sincere commitment and interest in activities they initiate. Although it is unrealistic for administrators to attend all minority oriented programs, it is devastating to student morale if administrators don't attend any.
- \* Unfamiliarity with Parliamentary Procedure on Minorities Part - Many student government meetings are run using parliamentary procedures. Students unfamiliar with this procedure often feel inadequate or intimidated. Universities that are sensitive to this plight have either encouraged other forms of operating procedures or provided students with parliamentary procedure training.
- \* Peer Group Pressure - Some minority students are into "racial nationalism" where they feel their energy and time should be spent with their particular racial group. What we have encouraged college officials to do is help students move beyond racial polarization by helping them understand that we're all here together. Students can learn to be secure in their own culture while at the same time joining hands with others to address problems that affect everyone.

\* Alienation - Over the years many minority students have expressed their belief that most campus activities on predominantly white campuses are geared towards white students. Once I asked an administrator who was successful in getting minority students involved his secret. He said "make them feel comfortable." Once a student feels a part of the institution chances are good that he/she will participate.

\* Having to assume the role of "minority student" representative rather than student representative .

\* Hassles of obtaining and justifying "separate" funding.

\* Racial bias as perceived by the minority student.

\* Involved in the sub-culture of alternative activities, organizations on campus.

\* No one on campus ever encouraged them to become involved.



## **GENDER ISSUE STATEMENTS**

Submitted by: Karinda Rankin, Area Coordinator, Western Carolina University  
Reference: Maureen Wilson, University of South Carolina, 1993

I feel most proud of women when

I feel most proud of men when

What I like most about women is

What I like most about men is

What I like least about women is

What I like least about men is

What men least understand about women is

What women least understand about men is

I am embarrassed when I see women

I am embarrassed when I see men

Being feminine means

Being masculine means

The most important quality for me in a partner is

A feminist is

The most significant issue facing my gender is

Please answer True or False.

I am a feminist or support feminism.

I believe it is important to use gender inclusive language.

Women talk more than men.

I cannot be satisfied unless I marry and raise children.

I feel the other gender pays more attention to my appearance than to my other qualities.

Men should pay for dates with women.

## **GROUND RULES**

Submitted by: Karinda Rankin, Area Coordinator, Western Carolina University

1. None of the ideas, comments or attitudes that you express today will influence your grade.
2. All individuals will actively participate.
3. Honesty will serve as the basis for response.
4. Participants are to use I instead of WE or THEY: I think, I feel, I believe.
5. Participants are to deal strictly with black/white concerns.
6. Participants are to deal with concerns in the here and now and to refrain from referring too heavily on history.
7. All individuals are expected to confront others when the ground rules aren't being followed.

## **OPEN-ENDED STATEMENTS**

Submitted by: Joe Boehman, Assistant Director Training and Advising, East Carolina University

1. If I were asked for a date by a Black/White person, I would...
2. Black/White roommate problems stem from...
3. What makes me the angriest about Black or White people is...
4. If I were to suddenly find my skin color changed, I would...
5. The racial atmosphere in residence halls at my institution is...
6. I think people who are prejudiced...
7. One way our department practices discrimination is...