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The Student As Nigger

From the Editor

Up From Waverly



Unlike past years, the fifth annual Waverly Conference produced and presented a new perspective for the future of the University. Also unlike past years, the participants were few and select and issues were specific and restricted.

The conference produced thirty-nine resolutions — some very meaningful and important. From the start, participants sensed that the conference was not to be a meeting for the presentation of gripes, but its true purpose was for concentrated thinking, long ranged planning and development. The University could really sparkle this year if recommendations are fulfilled. This is not guaranteed, however, in view of the past when resolutions have been forgotten, overlooked, or simply ignored and then excuses are made and approved.

Although the conference had many bright points of hope, there were a number of inadequacies and failures. The conference lacked the full impact of confrontation that had been forthcoming all year between the administration — faculty and students. The meeting was a pretty one with not many blemishes coming to the foreground. No one really became upset it seems, but

I was disappointed. One reason was that debate was mostly philosophical and idealistic and not practical; mostly long ranged and no immediate plan of action; situations of inadequacies and injustices prevailing over half a century were left intact; and the inadequacies that had thrived during the academic year were usually trounced and concealed with excuses which were accepted by the body. An overriding tragedy of the conference was the over creation of investigating committees to study the feasibility of recommendations — thus delaying issues a year and finding at the next conference the same situation in the same state again.

This year I urge SGA to act on each recommendation to assure the student body of their fulfillment. SGA cannot let these recommendations die because of administrative maneuvering, bad memory, or a simple case of oversight. I feel very confident of SGA President Potter and the Senate this year. It is a potentially important year of transition and the active functioning of this body is most essential. This promises to be a great year.

Johnny Turner

Rehashing Old Problems

Another year is staring us in the face. Doubtless it will bring its own special problems and challenges, plus a few left-overs from last year. It should be an interesting year.

For an example let us look at a random sample of questions waiting for answers.

Federal Aid is now a reality more or less, but an even more important question lies beyond it. How will all of those hard earned Federal dollars be spent? Will the Mercer campus suddenly sprout forth shiny new buildings to impress alumni and if so, where will they be placed?

Or, will the money go where it will most benefit the students; that is, will it be applied for new professors and stronger departments? If you do not believe in this need, ask a Political Science major or Economics or Math major about it and then make yourself comfortable. It will be a long answer.

Another perennial thorn in the side of students and the administration is the chapel issue. The question here seems to center around whether chapel can be made interesting enough to overcome the natural distrust of the students toward required attendance. The program was at one time interesting and stimulating.

A problem which has lain relatively dormant for a year is now threatening to explode. This concerns our good friend Mayor Ronnie Thompson's decision to block Mercer's expansion plans by refusing to permit the use of Urban Renewal. Avid newspaper fans might have followed the running battle between Mercer officials and Mayor Thompson. It ended with the good mayor pronouncing a plague upon our collective heads.

Unfortunately that was only one more round of what promises to be a heated debate in the future.

And that timeless question of separation of church and state still twitches occasionally. Governor Lester Maddox and Mayor Thompson provided evidence for this when early in the summer they both officially blasted Mercer for

accepting Federal Aid; thereby violating the very principle they sought to uphold.

Another annual problem is that of Freshman retention. Look in the 1967 and 1968 Cauldrons and see how many Freshmen faces are missing now if you need evidence. This problem is very complex and very serious.

One of the solutions to the retention problem can be found in the concept of a comunity. Mercer is small enough to exist as both a community and university rather than a collection of small groups all squabbling among themselves. At least it is according to the theory.

It should be interesting to observe the progress of the S.G.A. this year under the new constitution. Its members have a host of problems to tackle that ranges from student apathy to parking congestion.

This short survey is by no means complete but it indicates what may be waiting for us. Those who still feel like going to school will assemble Sept. 29.



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SGA President Potter

A Year Of Promise

Once again Macon opens its arms for the Mercer Mammies to return to College Street for another year of Chichester and the paper mill. There were times this summer when it seemed that the University might move from its pleasant setting to Atlanta. However, at least for this year, we'll remain with Mr. Thompson.

There have been several changes within the University during the summer including the faculty, curriculum, and housing. There were also several resolutions from the Waverly conference that will affect every student. In order that the student body be aware of these changes there will be a convocation early fall quarter, in which we will discuss the university and its present state.

The student senate, early last spring quarter, joined the United States National Student Association (NSA). Through this organization, we will be provided membership services including a record club and travel opportunities. Also, early in November, will start a book club handling mostly textbooks — which could save every student money. These opportunities will also be discussed at the convocation.

Students will be working throughout the year on projects for the benefit of the university, especially the student body. As shown by the large number of committee applications last spring, many of you would like to work in some of these areas, including educational reform, teacher-course evaluation, free university, disciplinary procedure, and student discounts. There will be opportunities throughout the year for all of you working in these various areas, thereby improving the educational experiences of every student at Mercer.

Students are niggers. When you get that straight, our schools begin to make sense. It's more important, though, to understand why they're niggers. If we follow that question seriously enough, it will lead us past the zone of academic (bullshit), where dedicated teachers pass their knowledge on to a new generation, and into the nitty-gritty of human needs and hang-ups. And from there we can go on to consider whether it might ever be possible for students to come up from slavery.

First, let's see what's happening now. Let's look at the role students play in what we like to call education.

At Cal State L.A., where I teach, the students have separate and unequal dining facilities. If I take them into the faculty dining room, my colleagues get uncomfortable, as though there was a bad smell. If I eat in the student cafeteria, I become known as the educational equivalent of a nigger-lover. In at least one building there are even rest rooms which students may not use. At Cal State, also, there is unwritten law barring student-faculty love-making. Fortunately, this anti-miscegenation law, like its Southern counterpart, is not 100 per cent effective.

Students at Cal State are politically disenfranchised. They are in an academic Lowndes County. Most of them can vote in national elections — their average age is about 26 — but they have no voice in the decisions which affect their academic lives. The students are, it is true, allowed to have a toy government of their own. It is a government run for the most part by Uncle Toms and concerned principally with trivia. The faculty and administrators decide what courses will be offered; the students get to choose their own Homecoming Queen. Occasionally, when student leaders get uppity and rebellious, they're either ignored, put off with trivial concessions, or maneuvered expertly out of position.

Student at Cal State is expected to know his place. He calls a faculty member "Sir" or "Doctor" or "Professor" — and he smiles and shuffles some as he stands outside the professor's office waiting for permission to enter. The faculty tell him what to do (in my department, English, even electives have to be approved by a faculty member); they tell him what to read, what to write, and frequently, where to set the margins on his typewriter. They tell him what's true and what isn't. Some teachers insist that they encourage dissent but almost always living and every student knows it. Tell the man what he wants to hear or he'll fall your ass out of the course.

When a teacher says, "Jump," students jump. I know of one professor who refused to take up class time for exams and required students to show up for tests at 8:30 in the morning. And they did, by God! Another, at exam time, provides answer cards to be filled out — each one enclosed in a paper bag with a hole cut in the top to see through. Students stick their writing hands in the bags while taking the test. The teacher isn't proud; I wish he were. He does it to prevent cheating. Another colleague once caught a student reading during one of his lectures and threw her book against the wall. Still another lectures his students into stupor and then screams at them in a rage when they fall asleep.

Just last week during the first meeting of a class, one girl got up to leave after about ten minutes had gone by. The teacher rushed over, grabbed her by the arm, saying, "This class is NOT dismissed!" and led her back to her seat. On the same day another teacher began by informing his class that he does not like beads, mustaches, long hair on boys, or capri pants on girls, and will not tolerate any of that in his class. The class, incidentally, consisted mostly of high school teachers.

Even more discouraging than this Auschwitz approach to education is the fact that the students take it. They haven't gone through twelve years of school for nothing. They've learned one thing and perhaps only one thing during those twelve years. They've forgotten their algebra. They're hopelessly vague about chemistry and physics. They've grown to fear and resent literature. They write like they've been obliterated. But, Jesus, can they follow orders! Freshmen come up to me with an essay and ask if I want it folded and whether their name should be in the upper right hand corner. And I want to cry and kiss them and caress their poor tortured heads.

Students don't ask the orders make sense. They give up expecting things to make sense long before they leave elementary school. Things are true because the teacher says they're true. At a very early age we all learn to accept "two truths," as did certain medieval churchmen. Outside of class, things are true to your tongue, your fingers, your stomach, your heart. Inside class, things are true by reason of authority. And that's just fine because you don't care anyway. Miss Wiedemeyer tells you a noun is a person, place or thing. So let it be. You don't give a rat's ass; she doesn't give a rat's ass.

The important thing is to please her. Back in kindergarten, you found out that teachers only love children who stand in nice straight lines. And that's where it's been ever since.

What school amounts to, then, for white and black kids alike, is a 12-year course in how to be slaves. What else could explain what I see in a freshman class? They've got that slave mentality: obliging and ingratiating on the surface but hostile and resistant underneath.

old grey-headed house niggers you can still find in the South who don't see what the fuss is about because Mr. Charlie "treats us real good."

College entrance requirements tend to favor the Toms and screen out the rebels. Not only of course, some students at Cal State L.A. are expert con artists who know perfectly well what's happening. They want the degree of the 2-5 and spend their years on the old plantation alternately laughing and cursing as they play the game. If their eyes are strong enough, they cheat a lot. And, of course, even the Toms are angry down deep somewhere. But it comes out in passive rather than active aggression. They're unexplainably thick witted and subject to frequent spells of laziness. They misread simple questions. They spend their nights mechanically outlining history chapters while meticulously failing to comprehend a word of what's in front of them.

The saddest cases among both black slaves and student slaves are the ones who have so thoroughly introjected their masters' values that their anger is all turned inward. At Cal State these are the kids for whom every low grade is torture, who stammer and shake when they speak to a professor, who go through an emotional crisis every time they're called upon during class. You can recognize them easily at final time. Their faces are festooned with fresh pimples; their bowels boil audibly across the room. If there really is a Last Judgment, the parents and teachers who created these wrecks are going to burn in hell.

So students are niggers. It's time to find out why, and to do this, we have to take a long look at Mr. Charlie.

The teachers I know best are college professors. Outside the classroom and taken as a group, their most striking characteristic is timidity. They're short on balls.

Just look at their working conditions. At a time when even migrant workers have begun to fight and win, college professors are still afraid to make more than a token effort to improve on their pitiful economic status. In California state colleges the faculties are screwed regularly and viciously by the Governor and Legislature. Yet they still won't offer any solid resistance. They lie flat on their stomachs with their pants down, mumbling catch phrases like "professional dignity" and "meaningful dialogue."

Professors were no different when I was an undergraduate at UCLA during the McCarthy era; it was like a cattle stampede as they rushed to cpe out. And in more recent years, I found that my being arrested in sit-ins brought from my colleagues not so much approval or condemnation as a muffled astonishment. "You could lose your job!"

Now, of course, there's the Vietnamese war. It gets some opposition from a few teachers. Some support it. But a vast number of professors who know perfectly well what's happening, are coming out again. And in the high schools, you can forget it. Stillness reigns.

I'm not sure why teachers are so chickenshit. It could be that academic training itself forces a split between thought and action. It might also be that the tenuous security of a teaching job attracts timid persons and, furthermore, that teaching, like police work, pulls in persons who are unsure of themselves and need weapons and the other external trappings of authority.

At any rate teachers ARE short on balls. And, as Judy Eisenstein has eloquently pointed out, the classroom offers an artificial and protected environment in which they can exercise their will to power. Your neighbors may drive a better car, gas station attendants may intimidate you; your wife may dominate you; the State Legislature may shit on you; but in the classroom, by God, students do what you order — or else. The grade is a hell of a weapon. It may not rest on your hip, potent and rigid like a cop's gun, but in the long run it's more powerful. At your personal whim — any time you choose — you can keep 35 students up for nights and have the pleasure of seeing their faces pale with the pleasure of party-faced and red-eyed carrying a sheet of typewritten pages, with little page, MLA footnotes and margins set at 15 and 91.

The general timidity which causes teachers to make niggers of their students usually includes a more specific fear — fear of the students themselves. After all, students are different, just like black people. You stand exposed in front of them, knowing that their interests, their values and their language are different from yours. To make matters worse, you may suspect that you yourself are not the most engaging of persons. What then can protect you from their ridicule and scorn? Respect for Authority. That's what. It's the policeman's gun again. The white swane's pith helmet. So you feign that authority. You whisper with a murderous glance. You crush objectors with erudition and heavy irony. And worst of all, you make your own attainments seem not accessible but awesomely remote. You conceal your massive ignorance — and parade a slender learning.

You might also want to keep in mind that he was a nigger once himself and has never really gotten over it. And there are more causes, some of which are better described in sociological than psychological terms. Work them out, it's not hard. But in the meantime what we've got on our hands is a whole lot of niggers. And what makes this particularly grim is that the student has less chance than the black man of getting out of his bag. Because the student doesn't even know he's in it. That, more or less, is what's happening in higher education. And the results are staggering. For one thing, damn little education takes place in the schools. How could it? You can't educate slaves; you can only train them. Or, to use

an even uglier word, you can only program them.

Educational oppression is trickier or fight than racial oppression. If you're a black rebel, they can't exile you; they either have to intimidate you or kill you. But in high school or college, they can just bounce you out of the fold. And they do. Rebel students and rebel faculty members get smothered or shot down with devastating accuracy. In high school, it's usually the student who gets it in college, it's more often the teacher. Others get tired of fighting and voluntarily leave the system. This may be a mistake though. Dropping out of college, for a Negro, is a little like going North, for a Negro. You can't really get away from it so you might as well stay and raise hell.

How do you raise hell? That's a whole other article. But just for a start, why not stay with the angry? What have black people done? They have, first of all, faced the fact of their slavery. They've stopped kidding themselves about