

CAMPUS TIMES · Friday, March 25, 1983

Students Comment on African-American Concerns

To the Editor:

The current debate sparked by the concerns raised by the African-American student community at the UR warrants some critical observations and comments. Although we welcome the recent and long overdue responses by prominent S.A. representatives to the BSU's grievances, we would like to address some potential pitfalls that must be avoided in order to achieve any real gains. We urge white students and their representatives to consider the following points.

First, white student sympathy for BSU's complaints, if merely a verbal and noncommittal gesture, will do no good and will fool nobody. If we want to appear sincere and credible to African-American students we must be prepared to question many of our long-held assumptions and not to fear self-criticism. When the BSU points out to the SAAC that the latter has no business determining what represents black culture and what events are appropriate for the former group, the SAAC should acknowledge that it is indeed (by

the nature of its composition and assigned tasks) in a poor position to judge what the needs and interest of African-American students are. The personal attack, launched by the SA treasurer, on the BSU president is distasteful and counterproductive.

Second, the suggestions that the BSU is too radical and somehow unreasonable are simply wrong and serve to put the blame where it least belongs. The situation over the past few years patently demonstrates the exact opposite: It is the Administration, not the BSU, which has been, and continues to be, the unyielding party.

The UR president himself acknowledges this in his statement that the "University moves with the same kind of speed as moving a cemetery (sic!)" Of course, this apt description of the UR's policy toward minority students--which virtually amounts to a declaration of incompetence in dealing with this part of the student community--clearly doesn't fit the UR's overall policies. For instance, we wonder why and how the UR can install new and costly computers

overnight if it is so troubled by bureaucratic inertia. As a CT editorial suggested, the reason is that "Mr. Sproull does not understand the concerns of black students and has not made it a priority to understand them."

Third, if we want any 'understanding and reconciliation with the BSU we must first establish a firm basis for such cooperation. The BSU has outlined a number of demands and until we are willing to sit down and discuss *those demands* our sympathy will count for nothing. The questions at hand reflect substantive, not technical, issues which can't be exclusively resolved through bureaucratic channels. African-American students are not asking for empty and vague gestures of sympathy - we are often generous when it comes to that - but concrete

and committed support for its demands. The relevant S.A. committees must decide whether they support and are willing to assign a high priority to the establishment of a Black Studies program and a significant increase in the number of African-American students and professors.

A strong and united student support for the BSU's demands would be the most effective way to pressure this recalcitrant Administration. Perhaps we can compel the University to abandon its "cemetery model" and if not, we can at least remind the Administration that one can go on digging graves only for so long without digging ones own.

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March 23, 1983

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March 23, 1983