

# NOVEMBER'S PERSPECTIVE: RACE AND ETHNICITY

JAMIE HOFMEISTER

I am a second generation American. But my ethnicity has never really been a stumbling block, and it has never occurred to me that this may be a different experience than someone else's. I am anglo-saxon, a wonderful mix of English, German, Scottish, and who knows what else, I am white. I can trace my American heritage back to the Daughters of the American Revolution on the one hand, and on the other, back to my grandpa, Poppy, who was born in a small town in Scotland. While there are ways in which these roots color my life, a mild obsession with bagpipes, a love of Scottish pastries and the British Isles, a last name which is difficult for strangers to say or spell (the best mispronunciation has been Homsister) I have never thought of myself as ethnic, as different, as other than someone who is American and belongs in America.

And yet, as I think about it, there are people who are second generation Americans, fifth generation Americans, and probably forty-fifth generation Americans for whom their race/ethnicity has had far greater implications for their lives. I am thinking particularly of a man I met this summer while in Washington, DC. He is a first generation American. He is an active advocate for Asian American

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culture. He told stories at the Smithsonian folk-life festival this summer, and holds a high position in the Asian American cultural society in the US. But he told me of his initial rejection of his Asian American heritage. Growing up in the American deep south during the era of segregation he was welcomed at neither the white schools, where he was not allowed to attend, nor the black schools, where he was ostracized. He learned quickly to reject his cultural heritage, to avoid anything that would further distinguish him as different, as other, as foreign. He grew up not speaking Chinese, intentionally not learning

rituals or histories, and generally rejected anything Asian in pursuit of being strictly America, of being accepted. That is, until he fell into depression, a depression that led to his divorce and his move to Washington, DC.

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He sat there in a coffee shop, sipping his milkshake and telling me a deeply personal story about self-discovery that led to fullness of life. He told me his story and taught me the power of history, the power of culture, the power of embracing our identity. He taught me about something I knew nothing about, the oppression and segregation of Asian Americans. And he taught me what it means to be American, Asian American, African American, Mexican American, Latino American, Hispanic American, Anglo American... His words continue to echo in my mind at unexpected times, reminding me to embrace who I am in all regards. His words echo in my mind reminding me why it is important to talk about our experiences of identity, even those we feel get talked about too much, because there are always stories that surprise and teach, there are those precious moments in life in which someone invites you into the depth of who they are and how they discovered that. I hope maybe this month and beyond we can share stories and hear stories that illumine the wonderful power of community and identity, a power that overcomes rejection, hopelessness, loss, and loneliness.

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## White (girl) noise

KATE KELLY

In my senior dinner with Tom Ross this evening, he mentioned the upcoming renovation of the library. Ol' E.H. Little is due for a face-lift based on aesthetics alone but given that print is an endangered species, this renovation isn't your grandma's standard nip and tuck. President Ross highlighted that this renovation will be (perhaps for the first time in college history) aimed towards creating less space for books and more space for reading and group studying. Instead our library will be upgraded with the finest electronic sources for reading.

The days of card catalogs are over. "Cut and paste" is something that we do daily without involving scissors or glue—objects that are morphing from art supplies to relics.

As an editor of *Libertas* and a member of the editorial team for Hobart Park, I have witnessed the decline of submissions, the lack of readership and general apathy that greets me while delivering copies of *Libertas* to your dorm room doors. As evidenced by Sunny Lee's desperate—yet comical—plea for submissions to *The Davidsonian* last week, the editorial staff of *Libertas* and Hobart Park are not the only ones feeling this shift. Print publications have lost their audience. Yes, I am speaking to you now directly. Print has no way of competing with YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Skype sessions, text messages and yes, even basic cable at times (welcome back, Conan).

As I sit down to pen down my thoughts, I realize that I've already become obsolete. First by using the word "pen" because no one "pens" anything anymore. The word now is "type." Second by the intrinsic irony rooted in choosing to publish this in *The Davidsonian*.

Print's days are numbered and writers are scraping together their word-per-minute bragging rights in hope that it will get them a job or a low-budget blog at the very least. The death of print is marginalizing writers causing them to go mad, to rant desperately about how they have no one to write for, no medium for their art. Alternatively, print's lack of an audience translates to a lack of quality in submissions, writing quality and

effort. Who wants to try if it's a losing game anyway?

As a result, print has become a space where you can rant and rave and talk politics on top of one another for years' worth of issues not because your opinion matters but precisely because it doesn't. I've waited

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How do we remedy this problem? Is there a defibrillator capable of shocking us back into print anymore? Or do we just need to adapt our methodology and embrace the internet as our new medium?

In a last-ditch effort, I'd like to offer the readership (or what's left of it) a final challenge. For the first and possibly last time, you have the opportunity to see your work in print by submitting to the fall issue of Hobart Park. It will be something that you can one day tell your grandchildren about, something that you can carry with you without plugging in our booting up, something that isn't completely ruined if you spill a cup of coffee on it. C'mon, for posterity's sake, wouldn't you love to see your name in print?

Now, for the plug.

All submissions for Hobart Park should be sent so sulee@davidson.edu by November 15. We're accepting, well, anything that can be reproduced via laser jet.

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## Queen city and tar heel voters

BRITTANY PILLSBURY

As a United States citizen it is my national obligation to perform the single most important public service - vote. In the early morning hours of this past Election Day, I made the 30-minute drive to south Charlotte to vote in the 78<sup>th</sup> precinct. As a Charlotte native, I have not had to deal with absentee ballots in my voting career, but rather morning or afternoon rush hour traffic to cast my vote.

My first ballot was cast in 2008 for the next President. I remember being encouraged by P. Diddy, Angelina Jolie, Robert Duvall, Dean Cain and Oprah to make my vote count. In the 2008 Presidential elections, 49% of the 18-24 age demographic voted. The radio airways and television broadcasts were bombarded with advertising encouraging young voters to "Rock the Vote." Since the 2008 election cycle, there has been a dramatic decrease in the number of young voters heading to the polls.

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The "Rock the Vote" campaign targeted young voters in Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Florida, yet this 2010 election cycle reported that only 20.4% of voters from the ages of 18-24 cast their vote nationwide, compared to 23.5% in the last mid-term elections. Collegiate voters are placed on one of two sides of the political consciousness spectrum. Some know the candidates and issues of the major national races well, while others have no interest in the amount of seats won in Congress by any political party. Some collegiate voters cast absentee ballots for their hometown and state while they are away at school, while others claim residency on the college campus in order to vote locally.

In my unique experience, my vote matters not only at my permanent residence, but also where I attend college. In this past election cycle, voters in Mecklenburg County elected members of the Board of Commissioners, District Attorney, Sheriff, District and State Superior Court Judges, Court of Appeals, North Carolina and U.S. Senate and House. The occupancy of these political offices may seem like the concern of the property owners and permanent residences of Mecklenburg County; however, these politicians and their policies could also impact life at Davidson College.

In particular, if you are looking to stay in the area after graduation, Governor Richard Burr encourages college students to get involved in state politics by applying for internships. Additionally, the county commissioners' office will be focusing on unemployment issues in the metropolitan area. Governor Burr also supports legislation that will serve to protect children from paying uneven taxes on the benefits they receive from the loss of a parent who served in the military, benefits which could be applied to college tuition. If you enjoy visiting Charlotte or even using the local highways to get around, the city approved a bill that would improve streets and highways allowing for increased motor vehicle accessibility.

**"...keep in mind that the legislators we vote for today will pass laws and enforce policies that will affect not only our present, but also our future."**

In the overall scheme of things, North Carolina, which was previously a blue state, has slowly been stripped, increasing the number of GOP representatives in Washington. Some of these issues may apply to you while others, like the approval of housing bonds, may never cross your radar. Although only a minute percentage of the student body are native Charlottians upon enrolling at Davidson, votes cast across the country can make a difference where you live, where you are and where you could be.

As collegiate voters we must take the time to voice our concerns and "Rock the Vote" whenever we get the chance. While things are getting shaken up in Washington, with politicians moving in, out and around after this past election cycle, keep in mind that the legislators we vote for today will pass laws and enforce policies that will affect not only our present, but also our future.

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