

Staff Editorial

♦ LETTERS TO THE EDITOR ♦

Green light for NPHC sorority

For all the effort Davidson puts into attracting a diverse applicant pool, getting students here is only the first step. To truly learn from diversity, that student body must mix.

Indeed, an area of major concern at Davidson remains social interactions along racial lines on Patterson Court. Alpha Phi Alpha's addition in recent years is a start toward addressing this problem. Now, a group of women want to bring a historically black sorority to campus.

While the support for their effort has been overwhelming, the student body remains firmly opposed to sororities in general. How can this paradox be explained? If sororities are not wanted, what would adding a historically black sorority mean for Davidson?

This editorial board, members of the group, and several eating house presidents conducted a round-table discussion last Sunday evening to address the concerns that have arisen from this effort.

The gains of the new addition are promising. Participation by black women on the Court has been minimal. A historically black sorority would open a big part of Davidson—its social life—to a previously-excluded portion of the student body. Because the proposed sorority would not have a house on the court, co-sponsorships with existing court organizations might abound.

It is also hard to ignore the implications of the proposal for admissions. Prospective students who inquire about historically black sororities at Davidson—an important consideration to many—will be told that this option does exist here. To whit, we are concerned that Davidson will no longer be able to boast being “sorority-free,” which was a factor in the decision of many women to come here.

More important than the quantity of minority women that apply to and potentially attend Davidson is the potential for a higher quality experience for those women.

While we are convinced that a historically black sorority would be the appropriate means of addressing diversity on the court at this time, we are concerned about what the addition will do to diversity within houses. In the future, will minority women feel social pressure to join this sorority over current eating houses?

Proponents of the effort can claim that women have the option to join both the eating house and the proposed sorority, thereby eliminating any concern of reduced diversity within eating houses. The claim is simply not credible.

Yet concerns that this would open the door to other sororities are unfounded. College regulations and national “white” sorority policies are currently incompatible. Patterson Court Council, which voted 24-2 to endorse the addition of a historically black sorority, would retain veto power over any further sororities. That approval does not seem forthcoming.

The women heading this initiative have addressed an issue that the campus should be concerned with resolving. Their proposal represents a much-needed step in the right direction. For these reasons, our editorial board endorses the proposal for a historically black sorority.

Religion not sole source of ethics

Carey Baxter asserts that my lack of religion should leave me full of “uneasiness or shame” (“The Danger of a Liberal Mind”, Nov. 2). This attitude is a prime example of why so many people are eager to identify themselves as “not religious.”

It's wonderful for Ms. Baxter that she has found one creed that satisfies her. But for many people, that simply isn't the case.

New ideas force-us to examine and evaluate our personal faith, so that we can truly be invested in our beliefs rather than swallowing someone else's down whole. The “light rejection of God” that she refers to is no worse than a light acceptance of God. A faith that cannot stand up to questioning is on shaky ground indeed.

She creates a false dichotomy between morals and free thought, claiming ethics as solely the province of organized religion. The school shooters showed a lack of morals, certainly—but to blame that on lack of religion presupposes that there is only one path to morality.

Ms. Baxter implies that rejecting religion is an act of laziness and fear. I

could easily argue that embracing it is as well. But I won't, because I don't believe that. I respect Ms. Baxter's faith. I am simply asking for the same respect in return.

Cecily Stokes-Prindle '06

GSA neither 'trite' nor 'shallow'

I would like to respond to Joe Taylor, who states that he found National Coming Out Day “trite and shallow” and did not see how signing a banner helped promote awareness (“A Critical Mass of Campus Awareness”, Nov. 2).

Before there can be education, people must be aware that there is a problem. Handing out ribbons and signing a banner raises awareness of the Gay Straight Alliance on campus and highlights issues that need to be confronted.

We want students to know that GSA supports all sexual orientations on campus. We would like prospective students to know that there is a gay community and straight allies to feel comfortable expressing their support. We feel that a banner accomplishes all

three of these goals. Many more students are now aware of GSA and will hopefully attend our events.

We have a lot of educational events, and we would like for more people to be involved. We have already sponsored one movie and discussion about transgendered issues, National Coming Out Day, and Barbaqueer—where there was thought-provoking discussion about sexual orientation issues.

The last GSA meeting included discussion of Margaret Spellings as a commencement speaker, an article about how gay teens are coming out earlier, scholarships for gay students, and religious groups that claim to turn gay people straight. We encourage all students and faculty to come to our meetings and tell us what issues they are interested in.

Meaghan McFadden '06

The Davidsonian welcomes letters to the editor. Please e-mail submissions of less than 250 words to davidsonian@davidson.edu by Sunday night. We reserve the right to edit for content, brevity and grammar.

Thin line between facts and racism?

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SCOTT SALDAÑA

Last week, Penn State football coach Joe Paterno stated in a press conference that “the black athlete has made a big difference. They have changed the whole tempo of the game.”

This comment came a week after Air Force coach Fisher DeBerry was officially reprimanded for saying that “African-American kids can run very well.”

Both of these remarks resulted in the coaches being labeled as racially insensitive. But these

claims, while taboo, are justifiable. According to the NCAA, African-Americans constituted 47 percent of Division I football players in 2003-04. This is far higher than their representation in the normal population, which hovers around 13 percent.

Why, then, is it not appropriate for these coaches to conclude that African-Americans are superior athletes, when they compete at a rate of nearly 3.5 times what they should if all ethnic groups were represented proportionally?

These episodes pale in comparison to the backlash resulting from former Secretary of Education William Bennett claiming on his radio show that “If you wanted to reduce crime, you could—if that were your sole purpose—you could abort every black baby in this country, and your crime rate would go down.”

While this statement sounds blatantly racist, Bennett did qualify that comment by reminding the audience “that would

be an impossibly ridiculous and morally reprehensible thing to do.”

As in college athletics, African-Americans are disproportionately represented as prison inmates. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, around 40 percent of inmates are black. However, studies have shown that socioeconomic and family background, regardless of race, is a better determinant of one's predisposition to commit a crime.

Dr. Bennett would have a stronger position to argue had he cited those factors rather than the social construct of race.

Part of the reason these types of comments seem so incendiary is due to the way the media chooses to cover them.

In Dr. Bennett's case, media coverage took his claim out of context and neglected to acknowledge that he, as an ardent pro-lifer, would hardly support aborting babies.

Paterno, on the other hand, was given a free pass compared to his friend DeBerry; however, when the story first broke, it appeared to be heading in the same direction.

The original headline to the ESPN.com story read,

White athletes ought to be insulted at the implication that no matter how hard they work, they will be automatically less desirable due to the color of their skin.

“Paterno links black athletes to increased scoring,” which is far more inflammatory than the revised headline, “Penn State coach offers his take on black athletes.”

Something as simple as a headline changes how the story is read. If either DeBerry or Paterno were truly racist, it would have manifested itself during their combined 55 years of head coaching experience.

Their statements were hardly a dig on the abilities of African-Americans; if anything, white athletes ought to be insulted at the implication that no matter how hard they work, they will be automatically less desirable to coaches due to the color of their skin.

Nevertheless, the comments of Bennett, DeBerry, and Paterno are inconsequential. Rather than wasting energy debating political correctness, we ought to focus on remedying more institutionalized forms of racism.

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The Davidsonian

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