

Peer pressure

Davidson, you made us proud on Wednesday when 46 of you boarded a bus, endured the 12-hour ride to Jena, Louisiana, marched in 91-degree heat and joined people from across the country to stand up for what you believe.

Over the past two weeks, we've come down hard on the student body, but you and your supporters on campus reminded us that Davidson students are impressive when they decide to fight for a cause. (See "Journey to Jena" on the front page.) SGA organized the bus trip down to Jena, and the Union kept those of us who remained behind updated with a screen in the atrium showing CNN coverage of the event. All around, it was an effort of which the College should be proud.

Now that you've returned, though, what do you plan to do to maintain that spirit of social activism? More importantly, what do the rest of you—those who wanted to but could not attend the protest, those who generally support equality and, most importantly, those who are apathetic—intend to do to make the world a slightly more comfortable place for everyone.

May we offer a suggestion? Look around you.

By now, you've probably all heard rumors about what happened last weekend. People down in Martin Court heard racial slurs uttered, and someone scrawled another slur across the outer door to a dormitory. The Davidsonian was shocked enough to learn during the Jena 6 discussion at the Black Student Coalition a few weeks ago that some students on this campus make racist remarks toward their peers, but imagine our utter disappointment when we learned that, even with awareness spreading across our community, multiple instances of hate speech occurred this weekend.

It is starting to feel pointless to address those few who commit these acts, since our and others' earlier pleas for awareness and respect have apparently fallen on deaf ears, but, for those of you who care about your fellow students, follow the example of those who spoke up this weekend when they witnessed their peers behaving inappropriately. If you hear someone utter a racial slur, call him or her on it. We alluded to peer pressure last week. It achieves enough negative ends, but, this time, use it to achieve something positive. If we as a community make it clear that intolerance is unacceptable, people won't have much choice but to comply. Our small community occasionally feels like a pressure cooker. We complain about it sometimes, but the insular nature of this campus also means that we have no choice but to take our peers' suggestions seriously, and, if enough of us continually make the same suggestion, our peers' attitudes will change.

We don't care if you are a minority student or not; anytime someone makes a judgment based on race, the campus becomes a more uncomfortable place for one of your friends, and it embarrasses the entire community.

Accept responsibility toward justice

CHRIS BURTON
Guest Columnist

One of my favorite scenes in film comes from Spike Lee's "School Daze." In the scene, Laurence Fishburne's character wakes the entire campus with the plea/admonition "WAKE UP!"

After 90 minutes of cultural conflict furthering the schism on Lee's fictional "Mission College" campus, Fishburne's plea awakens every student, faculty member and administrator. The scene resonates with my assessment of our campus over the last weeks.

Based on Opening Convocation, campus conversations about the Confederate flag and the reaction to Jena, I, too, find myself standing on the proverbial campus green, awakened by Fishburne's call to "WAKE UP!"

I don't know anyone who finds complete comfort in these conversations; they are firmly embedded in the nerves of our culture and heavily guarded by complacency and oppression. But in the midst of it all I see opportunity.

Last Thursday, I had the pleasure to be one of 46 Davidsonians who partook in the protests in Jena. It was a powerful experience that will remain in my mind. To see around 20,000 people gather to fight injustice was remarkable. People came from all over the country and across the political spectrum.

Down there, it was clear that indignation was a general sentiment but that it was restrained. Police tape and boards on windows indicated residents' expectations of violence and calamity, but, even so, everyone seemed to understand that there was a greater purpose in peace than in impulsive acts of violence.

On our return to Davidson, we noted that our experience is not the end-all, be-all experience, nor is it an opportunity to pat ourselves on the back. You don't need to ride a bus for 25

hours to fight injustice; it is a daily dying of the flesh. It can be neither a minority problem, nor a product of majority culture.

Injustice affects us all, and only when we realize that we all suffer from prejudice will we truly be free. I understand that conversations regarding prejudice on campus may not be a big deal to some because the prejudice displayed here isn't as apparent as that exhibited in Jena.

Prejudice at Davidson might not materialize itself in the form of a noose or the exchange of physical blows, but it manifests itself in a passive form. And perhaps it is the subtle forms of prejudice of which we are all guilty that really hold us back.

My greatest desire for this campus is that we truly gain a greater sense of who we are. I envision the Davidson community taking a stand on injustices both near and far and contributing to the discourse regarding the improvement of our world.

Idealism aside, standing up for what is right is more of a responsibility than an option.

Our stand must start here. We cannot stifle these conversations, despite how uncomfortable they may be, because we need to talk in order to improve. Moreover, conversations about our differences must be founded on respect and the desire for greater understanding. It's difficult, but we have the tools, if we have the patience, to explore each others' views and experiences.

And, besides, let's consider the alternative. Accepting things as "the way they are" would allow us to maintain a pristine appearance...while intolerance and "otherness" quietly impede us, sagging like a heavy load. Or does it explode?

Chris Burton '08 is an English and African Studies major from East Orange, N.J. Contact him at chburton@davidson.edu

Vandalism of "You" shows intellectual immaturity

KATHERINE HESTER
Guest Columnist

As a senior art major, I feel obliged to contribute an art student's voice to the discussion concerning the prank involving Antony Gormley sculpture "You."

I would like to begin by recognizing that I was once a DUFF Fox, have chugged a Milwaukee's Best or two out of a Frisbee in my day and know that Ultimate players are among the friendliest and most well-meaning folk around. I also know that the people who put a cape on the sculpture did not do so in a spirit of malice but in a playful spirit that only DUFF could muster.

However, as an artist, seeing a cape duct taped to a piece of fine art made my heart sink. For the first time in my career at Davidson, I felt genuinely disappointed in and embarrassed by my school and my peers.

While I knew instantly that no real harm was meant by the act, it became clear to me that Davidson has a long way to go in terms of understanding and appreciating the visual arts as a part of intellectual discourse—a fault that, as a prestigious academic community, we should feel ashamed of. However, we can either point fingers at one another in relentless debate over who is to blame, or we can allow this event to help us realize within ourselves and our community a need for reconciliation and change.

I hope that from this regrettable situation that we will feel motivated to brainstorm new ways of educating ourselves and others about the irreplaceable role that the visual arts play in an academic setting and that we will eventually birth a renewed knowledge and appreciation for the visual arts in our community.

Davidson is an institution that values and respects intellectual discourse, and the artworks in the sculpture garden are physical manifestations of such discourse, the same as a literary work in the library.

Mocking, poking fun of or physically damaging such works demonstrate a careless disrespect for the individual who created the work as well for the value of the creative, intellectual, spiritual and philosophical inquiry that the art form embodies.

However, instead of arguing over what constitutes righteous punishment for this deed, I challenge all of us to engage in constructive community discussion about why such an act is wrong. More than anything, we must ask ourselves as a community why our students do not see dressing up a sculpture as undoubtedly wrong and disrespectful and what we can do together to increase our awareness of and apprecia-

tion for the visual arts on campus. The sculpture garden itself takes a major step towards meeting this end by making fine art readily accessible to Davidson students on a daily basis.

While art may at times be hard to understand or seem elitist and unapproachable if you have not studied it extensively, the same could be said for any other academic discipline. You may feel as though you have not had adequate exposure to art and therefore cannot see Joel Shapiro's "Untitled" as anything more than a "boxy black Transformer."

If that is the case, I encourage you to take advantage of the bite-sized portion of the MoMA in our backyard! On your way home from class or during a late night study break from all that reading in E.H. Little, spend 10 minutes with "You." Imagine what the figure might be thinking or feeling, and what it may suggest about what the artwork means to be a human being. Give "Homage to Rodin" the time of day, allowing yourself to discover unexpected things within its rocky crevices.

Let Shapiro's "Untitled" warp your mind as you ponder how such rigid, boxy black shapes can compose such a graceful, lyrical gesture—what other philosophical paradoxes does this call to mind? Open yourself to the questions that these works evoke in you to ask of yourself and the world. That is what art is about—and believe me, those questions matter more than what grade you make on your next review.

Above all, I challenge all of us who strive to "let learning be cherished" to have the courage to approach something that may be new to us, or that we don't understand, in such a way that we truly allow it to challenge and change us.

Katherine Hester '08 is an art and religion major from Wilmington, N.C. Contact her at kahester@davidson.edu.

Corrections

The Perspectives article titled "Forgotten freedom: the right to vote" was written by Sunny Lee '11, not Zeke Webster. Contact Sunny at sulee@davidson.edu

The Perspectives article "Heed Petraeus' recommendation on Iraq" was written by Matt Petit '08, not Bobby DesPain. Contact Matt at mapetit@davidson.edu

In the News article "Political organizations gear up for '08" in the Sept. 12th issue, Lauren Woodall was misquoted as saying that College Republicans and Young Democrats would watch the presidential debates together. Instead, each group will watch both debates separately.

The Davidsonian

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The Davidsonian is published Wednesdays during the academic year by the students of Davidson College. One copy per student. Please address all correspondences to: The Davidsonian, P.O. Box 7182, Davidson, NC 28035-7182. Phone (704) 894-2148.

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