

Dennis Seavers

High-Tech Lynching

The purpose of this article is twofold: to level a charge of racism against the Campus Safety Department, and to examine the ways in which racism shapes the way we think.

Each month, Campus Safety releases information that is compiled in a column in the News section of the *Davidsonian* called "Campus Crime," which lists crimes that took place during the previous month. For the December 9 issue, the Campus Police released the following in connection with the theft of two laptop computers, a portable CD player, a CD, and a bookbag:

11/7/96, 2200 hours

Two witnesses reported having seen a black male and black female on the second floor of Little Library in the area of the stolen items. The couple was observed between 1100 and 1300 hours. Witness states that the two had asked her about the photocopiers and where they were located.

The only thing that the article overtly states is that two black people were seen in the library during the late morning or early afternoon. Since the article is "November

Crime," one conclusion to draw is that it is a crime to be black and to be in the library, especially if a larceny happens to have taken place in that area. The article implies that if you are black, you become a prime suspect in the investigation of this crime.

There are some odd circumstances that resist such a simple analysis. The two were in the area of the larcenies around the time that the crimes took place. They were on the second floor of the library, ostensibly looking for photocopiers. Since it seems strange to look for the photocopiers on the second floor, the two people appear to be out of place. Presumably, most students and faculty know where the photocopiers are on campus.

The campus police, in their investigation of the crimes, probably had good reason to consider these two individuals as suspects. Releasing this suspicion is another matter. After all, the column is entitled

"November Crimes," not "November Suspects." On this note, I looked in archived issues of the *Davidsonian*, but this naming of suspects seems to be unique. Since the two individuals were not charged with the crime, and since the evidence against them is not conclu-

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sive, the information should not have been released.

My claim becomes salient when one considers the consequences of printing the article. The connection between these individuals and the crime is made concrete: when we think of the possible criminals, they should be black. At the same time, the two black people are not *particular* black people. As a result, anyone who is black is implicated. Moreover, the article em-

phasizes the idea that black people are out of place in Little Library. Since these two blacks were in the library, and since this fact is reported in "November Crime," we are prompted to be suspicious of the presence of any black person. Typically, the campus police list the race of arrested individuals; it is significant, though, that in the same column, the race of a person committing an aggravated assault at PAX was not listed.

Someone might point out, rightly, that the racist overtones of the release are not intentional. We should not attempt to exonerate ourselves, however, by appealing to what our overt intentions were. My claim is that racism (as well as sexism and classism) grabs hold of us in ways that we don't suspect. We should always turn critical attention to ourselves and to our society.

Narratives like the one above shape the way we perceive each other. We should always strive to examine the way we think about others and ourselves. In what way

does racism influence this perception? It might help to think about it this way. We can watch videos of protesting blacks being hosed and attacked by police dogs. We might ask, "How could people treat other human beings that way?" We must ask ourselves, "How will people 30 years in the future evaluate race relations today?" Reality has a way of encompassing us, but we must step back and examine it. We must challenge images such as the "welfare queen," black violence and crime, and black poverty. Do we accept these social constructs as how the world is supposed to be?

I have presented a serious charge against the Campus Safety Department. I hope that it will try to answer some of these charges. Better yet, I hope it will turn critical attention towards itself. Relations with blacks on campus and the campus police have been a focus in the past, and the campus police have been optimistic about the improvements made. I would suggest that this optimism is unwarranted. Additionally, we, like the campus police, should constantly strive to root out the racism, sexism, and classism that mold the way we view the world.

Katherine Okey

Nothing Like the Third World...

So I'm in Kenya, on the phone with the United States Embassy in Uganda, waiting for a reply to my question, "Is it safe for American women to travel in southwest Uganda?" The response I received after some hesitation was "Well, yes, it should be. The fighting is mostly in the north, and the last time bullets were fired over the border from Zaire was a good two weeks ago." So four friends and I went. We had six days of freedom from the watchful eye of the School for Field Studies, and we wanted to see another country and hopefully the nearly extinct mountain gorillas. We bought one-way overnight bus tickets to Uganda's capital city, Kampala. "Nothing like the third world" became the motto of our journey.

We arrived in Kampala in one piece and wanted to do some exploring. Now, Uganda doesn't have nearly the amount of tourism that Kenya has, so five little white girls, most of us blonde and blue-eyed, stood out just a bit. Having been in Africa over almost two months, I was used to being stared at, but this was ridiculous. Everywhere we went people pointed and screamed "Wazungu, hey, wazungu!", which means "white person, hey, white person!". Women stared at my clothes with awe and sometimes disgust, children laughed, babies cried, men proposed, it was quite an experience. But the strangest incident occurred when we rounded a

corner on a street and coming towards us was a tall, beady-eyed psycho we affectionately named Crazy Pete, holding a dead cat by the tail. He saw us and started screaming "WAZUNGU!!!" and pointed at the cat as he started swinging it at us. All my friends, traitors, hid behind me so I'm trying to duck this dead animal and run away. Meanwhile this car full of Ugandan women had stopped to watch and were laughing hysterically. This distracted Crazy Pete long enough for us to make our escape. That's the third world, I guess.

The next morning we started our journey to see the gorillas. We went to the Department of Tourism and asked them which park we should visit. As they were telling us to go to this one place, because we'd have a better chance of seeing the gorillas, someone comes over the radio saying troops from Zaire have just invaded that park, so we decided to go with the other park.

Getting to the Bwindi National Park was an ordeal. First we had to take a bus to Kabale, the largest town near the park. This was the point at which our motto turned to "Just get me there alive." The bus was really crowded, which was good because at least I couldn't see how many times we almost ran off the

road. Every town we came to (i.e. every place where more than three people, four cows, and a goat lived) we had to stop at. Every time we stopped people ran up to the bus and started shoving various items through the windows. You know, chickens, bananas, bread, pictures of the president, the usual. At this point somebody would see the wazungus and everyone would go

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crazy "Wazungu, buy my chicken! Hey wazungu, marry me and take me to America!" If you bought a soda, you had to chug it really fast so you could give the bottle back to the guy you bought it from before the bus started moving again. The weirdest thing, though, was chicken-on-a-stick, a roasted chicken that had been impaled with a stick, that they would shove in through the window right into your face. By the end, it actually looked sort of good.

So when we finally got to Kabale, we had to figure out how to get from there to the park. That's where Crazy Pete #2 comes in. He told us that he would be glad to

drive us up there in his car for a mere \$100. This was the best price we could get for the five hour drive, so we agreed.

He took us to his car and we saw this white pick-up truck with a tarp in the back. He saw our faces and laughed "No, that's not my car." Relieved, we looked to the car he was pointing at, a yellow pick-up truck with no tarp. So we said what the hell and climbed in. The ride wasn't that bad, pretty bumpy (no roads are paved), but the scenery was amazing. You have to understand, Ugandan streets are approximately ten feet wide, with cliffs on both sides, and are *highly* infested with goats, chickens, cows, and machete carrying children. As we sped around a curve at around 80 km/hr, we would inevitable spot one of the above in our path. Our driver's method of dealing with this was to blow the horn, then speed up and aim for whatever was in our path. At this point the motto evolved to "I don't care if I die, I just don't want to be mangled." As it started getting dark, we started getting nervous. The ride was taking forever, we had no idea where we were, we kept having to stop at these police checks where men with bad attitudes and AK47's were checking out the wazungus, and our driver had decided to bring two friends along

who were shotgun with him. We didn't really get scared until we started seeing refugees from Zaire jumping into the bushes as we drove along. "White slavery" crossed our minds just a few times. When we finally got to the park, we were watching our driver negotiate with the park warden about where we could sleep. Suddenly, this voice behind me goes "Boo!", I about passed out I was so scared. I turned around and it was this cute little man. He laughed "You thought I was an animal???" We laughed "No, we just thought you were going to kill us." He ended up helping us find a place to stay that night.

So I got to see the mountain gorillas, a truly amazing experience. We had hiked all morning with a tracker, following their trail. The moment when we found them was absolutely incredible. I was staring at the silverback, thinking about the closeness of man and beast, the insignificance of the human race in the span of the earth's life, the beauty and grace with which these magnificent creatures move. Tears were coming into my eyes as the silverback, in all his greatness, looked up and stared into my eyes.

I could feel the evolutionary connection between us, the closeness was indescribable. He looked at me with such intense curiosity, and let out a fart that lasted ten full seconds and was probably heard across the continent. There really is nothing quite like the third world.