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Commentaries

The Davidsonian
Wednesday, February 14, 1990

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Adams' racial utopia prevents cultural pride

Lucia Kendall

I was delighted to see evidence in the last issue of *The Davidsonian* that there is an exception to Davidson students' general tendency to be apathetic about issues that do not directly affect them. Before I explain why I agree with Mr. Adams, I would like to say that I regret his taking the initiative to write about racial issues in the first place.

The thesis (and the headline) of Clay Adams's article was, "We need to blur our sense of racial identity." He describes a "utopian" society in which nobody thinks of themselves as a member of any particular race, and in which there will eventually be no distinctions because of all the intermarriages that would occur.

Although I see the attractiveness of a society in which race would not cause conflict anymore, I am deeply disturbed by the implications of the desire for a type of society Mr. Adams envisions.

Certainly, all of us should make an effort to learn about and respect the cultures and traditions of minorities. Mr. Adams, however, advocates that instead of living mainly in the tradition of our own racial identity, we should incorporate the ideas of other racial cultures into our lives. Let's use Davidson as an example of how that would operate. Davidson has 62 blacks and 1361 whites. Which group do you think is going to end up making the most compromises and concessions in their racial identity?

Maybe it isn't fair to criticize a utopian ideal on the grounds that there is no practical way for it to work. Nevertheless, the suggestion that blacks should learn about white culture at the same time that whites learn about black culture strikes me as patently ridiculous. Blacks don't have to study white culture; they are surrounded by it. For example, many colleges offer

courses in Black History, but no college in the whole country offers a course in White History. White History is called "History."

In the same way, I have a hard time in thinking about what "white culture" is because I have become so accustomed to thinking of the culture whites live in as the norm. I don't think that a white culture really exists. When whites talk about races blending together we seem to have an unrecognized expectation that it will mean blending into the norm. In most cases we are the norm, and people who are different have to do the blending.

I think a lot of the recent arguments against the possibility of a fraternity that would contain mostly black members stems from this unrecognized expectation. Why do we call a fraternity that would be mostly black separatist, but not call a fraternity that is 100 percent white separatist? Is it because we expect blacks to fit into our system instead of expecting ourselves to fit into theirs?

Because people of all races are entitled to the same rights and opportunities, black people have been striving for years to attain the rights and opportunities that have been given only to white people. This does not mean that black people want to be white people.

A Jewish New Yorker should not want to have the same identity as a Cuban in Miami, or an Idaho potato farmer of Scandinavian descent, or a Black Georgian. They may all have different attitudes about life because of their different backgrounds, and while respecting the differences of others, they should be proud of who they are. None of them should try to be somebody else.

Not only that, none of them could if they wanted to. No matter how much I may sympathize with the problems of blacks, because I am white I am always looking at those problems as an outsider. I have never had to deal with their struggles. I have never been mistaken for a janitor because of my race. I am not

related to anyone who was a slave or who was denied the right to vote because of being black. So expecting me to adopt the outlook of a person of another race is impossible. (Actually, I have a lot of doubts about whether I have any right to be writing this article in the first place because I don't want to seem to be speaking on behalf of anyone besides myself.)

Mr. Adams suggests that if we all live according to his plan "individual racial ideas will become obsolete as people incorporate ideas according to their personalities, their interests, in short, according to forces much more constructive than any limited by racial identity." This statement would be true only for those of us who have grown up in vacuum chambers. I didn't: my personality, my interests, my attitudes, my beliefs have all been shaped by my background, which includes my racial/cultural background.

If I had grown up as a black child within a black family I would be a fundamentally different person. Who I am has been determined by where I came from. If I deny where I came from I am denying a part of who I am. In trying to blend racially and culturally we lose our racial and cultural identity without gaining anything.

Learning should help us accept and respect each other's differences, not try to smother or squelch them. Wouldn't it be boring if everyone were a cultural carbon copy of everyone else? The reason "diversity" is such a big buzzword for colleges is that it is our differences that make us interesting. Can you imagine, for example, the richness that would disappear from Toni Morrison's novels if she had written with no sense of racial/cultural identity?

We should never expect blacks or anyone else to give up or deny their racial or cultural heritage. It is wonderful that they are exploring and celebrating these aspects of their identity. If their doing so makes us feel a little excluded once in a while, then we should learn to live with that.

Here's the correct version of my trip to India

Kirk Williams

To go abroad and only want what can be found in a 7-11 is to miss the point of travelling. Sure I missed Minute Maid and Dunkin' Donuts but the puris and mango juice made up for it. India has so much to offer of its own that to dwell on the lack of foreign goods is pointless.

Our program started with two months at Madras Christian College in southeastern India. The time here was highlighted by the overwhelming friendliness of the staff and students of the college. Our classes were supplemented with trips to temples, museums, and elsewhere. Of the temples the most stunning was the Sri Brahadeshwara temple in Tanjore. Its tower rises 200 feet (no, there are no 8000' high temples) from a large, serene courtyard. Our "Fall Break" trip to the western Ghats (mountains) included a trip to Ooty and the Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary, where we went for a dawn elephant ride through one of the last rain forests in India.

The program ended with a month-long tour of northern India, including such spots as the Taj Mahal, Bombay, Delhi, and Rajasthan. In the State of Rajasthan (No it's not just an abandoned fort) I was in the incident partially described in the article in which my emotions were exaggerated by exhaustion and a crowd of 30 overly excited, curious children. I felt the story made it sound like people were trying to rob me

constantly for three months. This definitely was not the case. Considering the amount of money and valuables I had with me it is a testimony to the Indian sense of honor that I never got robbed. My week in Kashmir, a north Indian state fighting for its independence, highlighted the northern tour. Though winter was settling in, the beauty of the valley and the surrounding Himalayan peaks was incredible.

Sure, Indian cities are extremely noisy and difficult to relax in at times, it was usually only when I was tired that these or the natural curiosity of the people got to be too much. The constant staring was usually fun and the desire to meet foreign travelers, such as we were, is very understandable.

Finally, I'd like to thank Dr. and Mrs. Proctor for everything they did for the group, and everyone else who went to India for making the trip really special.

As my semester ended with the fantastic sunrise near Mount Everest in the Nepalese Himalayas I had mixed emotions.

While I was happily to be going home to my family, I was sad to be ending the best part of my Davidson experience and hope to someday return to India, Nepal, and Kashmir.

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Where's the money for the weight room?

Reed Finlay

One part of my day I have always looked forward to every evening between eight and ten has been that of using the weight room in the Johnston Gym. This has been the best time for me because the evening is the only time which fits into my busy schedule. The evening has also been a good time because the varsity team "monopoly" is withdrawn after five in the afternoon and those of us who also want to complement

our academics with a form of athletics are able to enjoy the facility. I speak for many on these points, I know.

One evening last week, at about eight p.m., I finished my AT session and went to the weight room only to find it closed, the new hours being ten a.m. to four p.m. for "general use," four p.m. to six p.m. for "varsity team use," and six p.m. to eight p.m. for "general use." The new and reduced hours are completely incompatible with my schedule, and with others' too, no doubt. In addition to class and labs during the day, there are meals to be eaten, work-study jobs to attend and various other extracurricular

activities that take up the morning and afternoon hours. I believe the hours use to be eight a.m. to eleven p.m., which allowed much more time in the evening and relieved some of the afternoon crowding.

A member of the athletic staff told me that this complication (and others related to it) is the result of a lack of money. It is difficult to find money to pay someone to monitor the gym, just like it is difficult to build a seventeen million dollar sports complex. Somehow, millions were raised to build Baker, and somehow it should be possible to find enough money to keep the weight room open a few extra hours.