

believe the latter can be destructive to the individual, and we formed the union to help keep it from happening."

Sterlin Adams, a 29-year old candidate for a PhD in math, is a former college teacher in a black school in Tennessee. He says he came to OU because he realized the widening gap between the education available in the areas of math and science for black people and white people. "I wanted to find security and escape from the realities of the black college," says Adams. "But my contact at OU gave me more than I bargained for. I began to see more clearly the problems facing black youth, and I knew I couldn't ignore them any longer. And there were those of us who were trying to do just that. On the national scene many black people are ruthlessly suppressed and unable to ignore their predicaments. It dawned on me that few persons are generally interested in the black man's problems, that one gets along best at OU if he pretends no problems exist or if he restrains himself from rocking the boat by never involving himself in more than a purely academic discussion of the problems.

"Because of this realization my goals have changed. I understand that the problems facing my people were created by white America and that whites do not have the right to live without the consciousness of the oppression that hangs over 21 million

black Americans 24 hours a day. I believe it is my duty to impress on black students who will shortly join the middle class that the problems will not be solved by pretending they don't exist or that they themselves aren't affected. It's important that they know the wounds will heal only if they speak without fear of white reprisals. Fear, unfortunately, is the state of mind of most of the black students at OU. I hope the union can make them aware of this situation."

Membership in the union is about forty. Its participants have discovered apathy and timidity among the black students. Says Gwenevere Hodges, assistant secretary of the union: "As long as nothing is said, nothing is done. You can become so accustomed to being slapped in the face because of your skin color that you become numb and withdraw. I used to try to be oblivious to the frowns and whispers, but it became impossible for me. I can't accept the prejudices as some students condition themselves to. The union will encourage the black student to take pride in himself and not to fear rebuffs. Too many now turn their heads. Others try to turn white and disassociate themselves from their black classmates."

Members hope the indifference can be overcome. Says an officer: "We want as many black students as possible to take part, of course, and we believe more eventually will. Our pri-

mary concern, however, is to function effectively, to offer leadership. We know there will always be some who will be afraid to join an all-black organization, and too, we have found that white students don't have the monopoly on apathy."

The main areas of concern for the union, in addition to serving as a social outlet, are housing, prejudice in the campus community and in public accommodations, and education.

Black Heritage week, in conjunction with a nationwide observance, was held at OU Feb. 12-17. The union displayed works of art and literature by black people in the library, sponsored an information booth in the foyer of the Student Union, and presented a program of song, readings, and poetry in addition to a visiting speaker on Feb. 16.

The formation of the Afro-American Students' Union marks a new chapter in the racial history of the University of Oklahoma and in the black man's search for identity and equality in this nation. In discussing the creation of the union, President Andrews told the audience at the Black Heritage Week program of his conversations with an administration official when he had applied for an organizational charter and had explained the purposes of the group. The administrator told him, "I regret you find the necessity of such an organization at the University." Said Andrews, "I, too, regret its necessity."

Confessions of a Black Student

By Vance Raye

Steady, unconscious indifference can abuse and erode hope as totally as overt hostility

To have learned how to make a virtue of bitterness; to have witnessed the increasing despair of one's black associates; to have endured the steady, persistent disavowal of one's racial identity in the face of an indifference which is more ambiguous, more thorough, and more skillfully underplayed than conscious discrimination; to have felt one's capacity for love being replaced by an

increasingly bitter hate against all white authority to the point where it seems that all whites are engaged in a conspiracy of silence against blacks; to have felt a growing sense of alienation from a society which disvalues all traces of one's culture; to have endured countless "grains" of discrimination and viewed their coalescence into a mosaic of intolerance and prejudice; to have struggled against almost insurmountable feelings of hopelessness and despair at being an "invisible man" in a disconcerted society—this was not what an education meant to me when I was a high-school senior in Muskogee, Oklahoma.

Vance Raye, who has a BA from OU, is a student in law school, information officer of the Afro-American Students' Union, and editor of the organization's newsheet.

At 17—a student in an all-Negro high school—I was optimistic of the Negro's future in America: the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had been passed; the local YMCA had agreed to admit Negroes into membership; Edward Brooke was being acclaimed as a great personality who just *happened* to be a Negro; the white and colored signs which once graced the water fountains at the downtown Kress store had been removed; Sammy Davis and May Britt were living together happily; and the now archaic platitudes of "brotherhood" and "justice" and the myth of the American Dream were then in my mind achievable, though yet to be achieved, goals. "Integration" was the watchword and I, along with countless thousands of others, waited anxiously for the racial utopia which America was to soon become—an America where the children of Willie Joe and Bessie Mae would live, play, work (yea, even sleep!!) alongside those of Miss Ann and Mr. Charlie. I came to OU believing in my gifts, my ability to absorb, build, be assimilated, and later to leave as a better person capable of leading a better life in an integrated world.

At 21, almost four years, seven white roommates, and one BA degree later, I regard most allusions to integration as ludicrous; feel most attempts at ingratiation by white liberals are insincere and hypocritical; believe equality by a juristic concept is a nullity; think most Americans to be basically and almost hopelessly racist (to lesser or greater degrees); and whenever there is talk of American justice, law, and order, I find it difficult to listen. It is not a coincidence that my views were acquired while a student at OU. The radical transformation of my beliefs has been less a reaction to overtly hostile acts of prejudice than the outcome of a critical self-examination of the delusions on which I predicated my attitudes toward race. Although cognizant of the brutal manifestations of prejudice in the South, I had remained convinced that such acts were perpetrated by a small and ever dwindling minority. The caustic remarks of the Leander Perezes and the Robert Sheltons were to a degree neutralized by the pious protestations of liberal apologists. It seems almost ironic that the slow, almost imperceptible metamorphosis of my convictions came about during a period when I was undergoing my most intense association with whites. And yet in retrospect the change seems to have been almost inevitable.

Every Negro who seeks to integrate into white society is confronted with the basic question of his identity in a predominantly white social setting. Unlike the popular stereotypes, my own "search for identity," while crucial in molding my attitudes on the "white problem," was not a period of agonizing introspection. I consumed little time contemplating the philosophical abstracts of "Who am I?" and "What am I doing?" Instead, my efforts were directed at coming to terms with the fact of my physical and psychological blackness and its myriad implications. Before enrolling at OU, such a coming to terms had been impossible. The crushing realities of life in the miniature ghettos of Muskogee, coupled with the euphoric vision of life in an integrated society, created within me a compulsive desire to escape from my black origins.

Since birth I had been taught in a thousand different

ways that the word "black" as applied to human beings connoted inferiority, and everything in my life experiences affirmed the veracity of those teachings. Like James Baldwin, I soon came to realize that "Negroes in this country . . . are taught really to despise themselves from the moment their eyes open on the world. This world is white and they are black. White people hold the power, which means they are superior to blacks (intrinsically, that is: God decreed it so) and the world has innumerable ways of making this difference known and felt and feared. Long before the Negro child perceives the difference and even longer before he understands it, he has begun to react to it, he has begun to be controlled by it." At 17, I had long perceived the difference and was being controlled by it. I learned early that the adage "If you're black, stay back" was as much a reflection of the Negro's attitude toward himself as it was a correct statement of white attitudes toward the Negro. Unlike Baldwin's father, who "was defeated long before he died because at the bottom of his heart he really believed what the white people said about him," but like Baldwin himself, I struggled desperately not to believe the white stereotypes about me as a Negro. The barriers to non-belief were formidable, however. While one could strive incessantly "not to act like a nigger," the fact remained that you were a "nigger" and that very admission conjured up multitudinous disparaging thoughts. In a sense I was Elijah Muhammed's prototype of the Negro: "He wants to integrate with the white man, but he cannot integrate with himself or his own kind. The Negro wants to lose his identity because he does not know his own identity." And like Baldwin I concluded that in America "there was not, no matter where one turned, any acceptable image of one's self [as a Negro], no proof of one's existence . . ." Unwilling to identify with the "Negro" as a spiritual ideal, I set out along the "weary road to whiteness," patiently discarding all Negro stereotypes and persistently pursuing middle-class white values. I was not alone in this pursuit; many of my friends were similarly engaged. And in all of my black associates, there was a desire (though usually latent and present in varying degrees) to escape from their basic "blackness."

The years spent at OU were to be a continuation of this journey toward "whiteness." Instead, they signaled an abrupt halt to my trip. As a student in an all-Negro high school, I found it possible to idealize about the features of life in an integrated setting. My limited contacts with other white students had convinced me of the basic "goodness of white folk," and I naturally expected that the opportunity for free association between Negroes and whites would eliminate any latent biases which might still exist. As a black student in a predominantly white university, I was quick to perceive the pervasiveness of racism in American society. My personal experiences at the University, the changing climate of race relations in America, and my presumed greater intellectual development led me to this perception.

The blatant, certifiable episodes of prejudice with which I have been confronted while a student at OU are few in number and are of no great consequence. Strangely enough the truly hostile acts of prejudice, while momentarily traumatic, can usually be tolerated. The cry of "Go

home, nigger" emanating from a speeding car as it screams past; the botany instructor who makes frequent allusions to the "nigger in the woodpile"; the bus station attendant who refuses to serve you until all of the white customers have been waited on; the racial slurs hurled at black players on an opposing baseball team—all can be written off as the death cry of a fading age. And while I cannot in honesty declare that these and other incidents played no role in the acquisition of my more militant outlook on racial affairs, I am convinced that other factors were more crucial.

The relationship between blacks and whites at OU seems to be a kind of passing acquaintance. For a variety of reasons, there appears to be an extreme reluctance on the part of whites to form lasting friendships with Negroes. In three undergraduate years, I can only count three lasting friendships. Though some alchemy, Ralph Ellison's "Invisible Man" has been transformed into OU's "Invisible Student"—a nameless, faceless creature whom few white students ever see and even fewer ever really come to know. When white students do accept black students as something more than objects of curiosity, the acceptance is usually clouded by an atmosphere of ethnocentrism. One is accepted because he "acts just like one of us" (i.e., like a white man). This is intended as a compliment. Here is a black man who has "risen up" out of his group to embrace our standards.

At the opposing extreme are those whites who go out of their way to show that they hold no race prejudices. This patronizing, for this is what it is, in effect, only serves to alienate the more sensitive. Of course, many black students are flattered by such advances and enjoy it.

These types are described very harshly by George Lamming, the West Indian author: "They notice a cold stare, an enigmatic sneer, the built-in compliment which is used to praise and at the same time remind them of whom and what they are. But education has trained them in duplicity; their whole life becomes an experiment in double-think." These "white Negroes" close their eyes to the everyday experiences of campus life which, however small, serve to remind them of "their place." Like certain of their elders, they reverently repeat the conservative platitudes of the Darwinian era and angrily denounce the actions of their less educated brothers in Newark and Detroit. The cry of the "black revolution" has been drowned out by the call of "assimilation," insofar as their ears are concerned.

"Negritude" as a philosophical calling has little meaning to them, and any suggestion that black could possibly be beautiful is regarded as the height of absurdity. Few black students ever come to recognize this tendency—the tendency to equate white values with right values—within themselves, and when they do realize it they tend to suppress it. With visions of suburbia in the foreground, they push valiantly down the weary road to whiteness.

Racism in America and at OU in particular has gone "underground." Few whites want to be identified as racists, so consequently most attempt to submerge their prejudices beneath an ocean of hypocrisy. However, despite the most dedicated efforts, biased attitudes almost

invariably ascend to the surface in a variety of forms. These latent biases are encountered at the most unlikely intellectual levels. The history of the concept of black power offers a case study in the exposure of the more latent aspects of prejudice.

For years conservative whites had contended that the answer to the "Negro Problem" lay in the Negro community itself. All the "nigras" had to do was to show some initiative and like the Poles and Italians, who had passed before, they too would share in the American Dream. Black power is in many respects a variant of this conservative ideology—merely extended it to its logical conclusion.

Sociologists had long bemoaned the powerlessness of the black ghetto. Black power was a reaction to this prevailing mood of powerlessness. Instead of appealing to the anesthetized consciences of people who had tired of appeals for "brotherhood," black power demanded the creation of political and economic power in the hands of blacks and used for the benefit of blacks. The struggle for civil rights was to be removed from the pulpit to the market place and the ballot box. Almost immediately white America responded in the fashion of a lady who sees a mouse. Conservatives screamed "reverse racism" and disillusioned liberals, convinced that the "movement" would fail without their messianic guidance, felt betrayed. Any Negro who openly avowed support for this "radical" doctrine was instantly labeled an extremist and hence a fit subject for deportation.

In Oklahoma Negro "leaders" stumbled over each other to perform meaningless gestures designed to assure "Massa" that all was peaceful on the plantation, and at least one district attorney publicly plotted his plan of action in case things weren't so quiet. By the fall of 1967 things had calmed down considerably and in some circles black power had ceased to conjure up thoughts of fire bombs and devastated streets. At OU the calm was broken when Paul Boutelle, a black man and Socialist Workers Party's candidate for Vice President of the United States, arrived in town.

It would be redundant to repeat the details of his appearance but a few points do deserve mention. Certain newspaper accounts of Boutelle's appearance were grossly inaccurate. One paper's report appeared to deliberately distort facts concerning his reception by the audience. The fact that he was given a standing ovation by almost half of the audience was ignored while deliberate stress was given to the actions of the rabble-rousers in the audience who all but refused to permit him to speak. Great emphasis was placed on the fact that Boutelle was a high-school dropout, an attitude which ignores the fact that at least one recent President and a number of earlier ones never finished high school. Criticism was leveled at Boutelle's talk as being unscholarly, and yet I obtained a deeper understanding of what black power means to a New York ghetto dweller from Boutelle's talk than I was ever able to glean from 15 hours of sociology courses. Moreover, if scholarly presentation were a prerequisite to a person's right to speak in public at OU, I know of more than one college professor who would be silenced forever. The newspapers placed a great deal of emphasis on Bou-

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telle's Marxist beliefs. However, at least two avowed Marxists spoke on campus within weeks after Boutelle's appearance and not a murmur of dissent was heard. I can only conclude that hostile receptions are reserved for black Marxists.

Latent race biases manifest themselves in forms other than the reaction to a catch phrase. The widespread ignorance of the black man's contribution to American history and the absence of a significant volume of scholarly inquiry into the "dark continent" (as exemplified by the absence at OU of any course dealing with American Negro History or Africa south of the Sahara Desert) reflect the prevailing belief that world civilization is exclusively the product of Anglo-Saxon industry. The nation states of Africa are widely depicted as being ruled by barbarians only one step removed from the jungle. Every African revolt is viewed as a cannibalistic uprising of savages. Ignored is the fact that the most established democracies of Europe underwent violent, revolutionary changes in route to representative government.

It is within the sexual context, however, that discrimination assumes its most repulsive visage. The age-old fear of the black man's sexual potency still exists. The white university woman who forms a relationship with a black

male is quietly ostracized. To walk down the street with a white girl by your side is to run the gauntlet of staring white faces—"She couldn't possibly be decent." That such primitive attitudes are held by purportedly educated people indicates the pervasiveness of discrimination at OU.

The gradual revelation of the frailty of relationships between blacks and whites at OU; the extirpation of one's original conception of the race problem as being endemic to situations where there is little opportunity for personal contact and where the educational level is low; the unprovable certainty that most white students assume the native superiority of the Caucasian race; the increased sensitivity to the inconsistencies between alleged beliefs and certifiable conduct among white students at OU have all conspired to increase my frustrations at being a black man in America. To endure four years in the University community is to see one's dreams of brotherhood and equality transmogrified into nightmares of disillusionment and cynicism. And yet despite the blighted hopes, the vain expectations, the fallen countenances, a particle of hope survives. Against the certainty that hypocrisy and unmitigated racism permeates campus life is another certainty—the existence of a small white minority willing to accept the black student as another human being rather than as an object of scorn or overbearing love. The possibility that today's minority will become tomorrow's majority is a source of optimism. The evidence of four years has not been encouraging. END

I, Too

Langston Hughes

I, too, am America.
I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the
kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll eat at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—
I, too, am America.

Outcast

Melvin B. Tolson Sr.

Black Crispus Attucks taught
Us how to die
Before white Patrick Henry's bugle breath
Uttered the vertical
Transmitting cry:
"Yea, give me liberty or give me death."
And from that day to this
Men black and strong
For Justice and Democracy have stood
Steeled in the faith that Right
Will conquer Wrong
And Time will usher in one brotherhood.

To Richard Wright

Claude McKay

For the dim regions whence my fathers came
My spirit, bondaged by the body, longs.
Words felt, but never heard, my lips would frame;
My soul would sing forgotten jungle songs
I would go back to darkness and to peace,
But the great western world holds me in fee,
And I may never hope for full release
While to its alien gods I bend my knee.
Something in me is lost, forever lost,
Some vital thing has gone out of my heart,
And I must walk the way of life as ghost
Among the sons of earth, a thing apart.
For I was born, far from my native clime,
Under the white man's menace, out of time.

Dark Symphony

Conrad Kent Rivers

You said that your people
Never knew the full spirit of
Western Civilization.
To be born unnoticed
Is to be born black,
And left out of the grand adventure.
Miseducation, denial,
Are lost in the cruelty of oppression.
And the faint cool kiss of sensuality
Lingers on our cheeks.
The quiet terror brings on silent night.
They are driving us crazy. And our father's
Religion warps his life.
To live day by day
Is not to live at all.