

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Controversy over affirmative action

Dear Editor,

I would like to respond to the letter about the Collegian cartoon. First of all, it's obvious that the reader read this cartoon with a closed mind. It's not about minorities complaining, nor is it about slavery ending. Instead, it is about the trials and tribulations we minorities had to endure while trying to get to where we are today. If it were not for programs such as affirmative action, and the organization know as the N.A.A.C.P., can we truly say that minorities would still have equal opportunities. From what I see we can't, because a minority has a bigger chance at getting overlooked when it comes to promotions and getting jobs in today's companies. We minorities are not looking for handouts, nor do we expect them. We are just working to achieve what we well deserve.... the right to equal opportunity.

Another issue that bothered me was the fact that this reader is commenting on two minority organizations with ignorance. These organizations are not strictly for minorities, but for anyone who expresses interest. What this reader failed to understand was that these organizations were started by these minority groups because someone saw a need for them. No one is preventing any organization from being developed on this campus. If you feel a need for a Society of Caucasian Engineers, then be the one to start it. I've noticed that many students are quick to speak before they think, so to anyone who speaks about a minority organization with an ignorant mind... DON'T COMMENT WITH IGNORANCE TOWARDS SOMETHING YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND!!!

Sincerely,
Andrea Carr
Secretary-Association of Black Collegians

Dear Editor,

This letter is in response to last week's article about minorities. I am not offended that the writer voiced his beliefs, but I feel a need to let you know the REAL truth about how life as a minority really is. Let me first say that I would be ignorant to demand you or any other white male to understand life as a minority. You cannot. The fact is, you are white and you are male. I would, however, like to enlighten you if you would be open enough to the challenge.

I am black and I am female. Even today, this automatically gives two strikes against me. According to your article, it seems that you feel minorities are lazy and undeserving of any of the benefits that we have every right to have. I work a full time job, go to school part time, and I am raising a child. Is this lazy in your opinion? I did not share that to brag on myself, but I shared it because you draw a very unfair picture of us. I am neither lazy nor uneducated.

Yes, slavery did end long ago and I am sure you, along with others, are tired of hearing some blacks complain about what happened to them. I am just as tired of hearing some white people make the complaints you made. If you think being looked at as inadequate because of your gender, color, or sexual preference does not happen, you are sadly mistaken. Imagine yourself living in a world where minorities GREATLY outnumber you. Would it be unjust for there to be programs to help you achieve what every American wants to achieve? I suppose it would be all right if the odds were stacked against you, if you were the minority.

What's wrong with minorities finally getting a piece of the pie? God knows it was anything but handed to us. If you are searching for the truth, the truth is this; whether black, Hispanic, female, homosexual, or physically challenged, we have had to fight to get what we have today. Look around you. How many faces, not like yours, do you see on this campus? Why can't there be organizations to support us? Why do people who share your beliefs protest at the first sign of any programs or organizations, such as The Society for Black Engineers, that are set in place to uplift and inspire us? How many black engineers do you know compared to white ones? Are you so disconnected from reality that you think that we have it easier than any of you?

Finally, to my beautiful minority family, we have every right to be proud of any opportunities that benefit us. Why? Because they have not always been there. Even with remarks such as

what was printed last week, all we need to do is allow them to add fuel to our own personal fire. Continue to work hard, educate yourselves and support each other. Do not let any remarks of ignorance cause you to stop. All of us deserve the very best, whether he or she is white or not. To any non-minorities who share the opinions of the writer from last week, I'm not mad at ya. I hope that one day, you will realize that just as we have some opportunities that benefit us, so do all of you.

Truthfully Speaking,
Sandra L. Smith
Property Protection Guard
Police and Safety

Dear Editor,

I am writing this letter in response to Jonathan Kolbe's letter that complains about how "blacks and other minorities have life [sic] better off than whites."

I find his attitude very disturbing. I did not see the comic that he is protesting about, but I think that he needs to take a better look at the real world before proclaiming his ignorance. Mr. Kolbe should perhaps take a lesson in bigotry and discrimination; yes, slavery in this country did end a long time ago, but it took a century before Jim Crow was abolished. And even now, racism, ignorance, and discrimination are still embedded in our society. Just because it's more subtle and insidious, we believe that minorities in this country have better life opportunities than white males. It is this mindset that allows hatred and ignorance to poison our society and hold everyone back from achieving their full potential.

I myself am not a big advocate for affirmative action, especially in instances where people have been discriminated (whether or not they are white) because of so-called racial quotas. Reverse discrimination also has no place in an enlightened society. However, there are a lot of changes that need to be made in this country before all Americans have equal opportunities for education, employment, civil rights, and other areas where minorities have either been explicitly excluded or historically disadvantaged. This may mean that students from certain groups are given a break when they apply to difficult schools or majors. This may allow persons who were denied opportunities because of racial or socioeconomic factors to be given the tools to better themselves through work or education. Those who argue that this is unfair need to consider the disadvantages that have been and still are bestowed upon minorities and women.

I hear a lot of complaints of how there are educational clubs especially for women or minority students. Many students complain that they have to take diversity classes like "Black History" or "Women's Issues". To be perfectly fair, perhaps we should have organizations for only white males, or national associations for the advancement of white people. Those who advocate such things forget that most institutions are designed for the white majority. It would not only be racist but ridiculous to have a club called the "National Society for White Engineers", because the status quo is for WASP males. American history as taught in too many of our schools and universities should be considered "White History," because the contributions of Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans, Jews, Muslims, and even women are ignored or left out.

Kolbe also implies that blacks and other minorities are more content to receive special incentives, rather than earn their fair share or better themselves. This is the same ignorant excuse that too many politicians use to justify "reforming" welfare, cutting school lunch programs, and eliminating waste in health care subsidies. Using convenient stereotypes to validate one's argument only shows lack of thought and disregard for reason.

And finally, Kolbe criticizes the Collegian for publishing "an untrue comic". Even though I highly disagree with his opinions, I believe in his right to have them printed. Censorship and apathy only breed hatred and ignorance. Since he is a freshman, perhaps there is still hope that he will learn tolerance and humility before he embarks on the real world.

Sincerely,
Robert Higgins
06 MIS

Dear Editor,

Ho hum—two steps forward, one step backwards I suppose. Just as the semester is winding down, and I am feeling pleased with the analytical progress the students in my writing classes have made, a Letter to the Editor in last week's Collegian reminds me of one of the most frustrating things about students: some of them have just enough brains to get themselves into trouble but not half enough to get themselves back out.

The letter, titled "Student Responds to Collegian Cartoon", was written by a student who is "sick and tired of hearing minorities complain about how bad off their lives were. Slavery," the student wrote, "ended a long time ago, so GET OVER IT. If blacks spent more time working and trying to succeed in life, instead of dwelling about how the world is biased, this world would be a better place!"

I hope all the students on campus have had a chance to meet this unique gentleman, who apparently is such an inspirational figure that blacks have come to him personally to complain so much that he has reason to be sick and tired of it in his less than two decades of existence. I know I am looking forward to my opportunity to catalog for him all of my complaints. The sheer arrogance of the statement annoys me. And it reflects negatively upon the person who said it, not so much as a racist comment, but as one which has less to do with reasoning and more to do self-righteousness.

True, most students (yes, Mr. Sick and Tired, even the black ones) at Behrend will be able to tell you that slavery as an institution is over. However, slavery was not historically the true cause of racial tensions, for the establishment of Jim Crow Laws and segregation after the abolition of slavery proved that the problem was much deeper. The problem then (and now) lay in the attitude that some people are inherently superior to others, whether it is because they have skin that tans or because they have a penis between their legs. And while Mr. Sick and Tired may not see it, such sentiment is present in his own letter.

Let's clear something up right away. Black people are no more lazy than anybody else. In fact they may be less so; after all if blacks were so lazy why did "intelligent" white men insist upon keeping them as slaves? I have yet to see a history book where it was the white slave doing the work while the black master was relaxing with a drink in his parlor. Nor should our esteemed letter writer take the ability to protest or disagree with society as a sign that blacks aren't working hard enough or that they are "dwelling about how the world is biased". I am sure he is working just as hard these last couple of weeks to successfully complete his classes, yet he still found time to sit down and write his letter to the editor.

So our student is "sick and tired"? Well so am I—of every know-it-all in America who thinks that they have come up with The Solution that no one has ever thought of before them, and if we all listen to them universal peace will rain down like manna from heaven. There are no easy solutions to the race problems in America. And most of the time when I hear someone asking, "Why can't blacks just let the past go?" what I really hear is a person who wants the Get Out of Jail Free card, much like those people in the Dark Ages who bought pardons in advance from traveling priests to be used in the future for when they sinned.

The rest of Mr. S&T's letter is pretty typical and predictable. He questions the presence of multicultural groups on campus like the National Society for Black Engineers and a Society for Hispanic Engineers. Why, he asks, is there no such organizations for whites? First, if he wants to see such an organization for the advancement of whites, he should visit any of the numerous exclusive golf clubs and country clubs throughout this country. If he studies their history, I think he will find that the deals made behind those gates are far more lucrative than anything the Multicultural Council or any other culture-specific group produces. Second, if he really feels the need for such a group for whites to exist, there is nothing stopping him from establishing one, but that is not his goal. What he apparently is more

interested in is pointing fingers at organizations in an effort to continue the tension present between groups. The tensions those groups were organized to address were here long before any minority group established an organization. The question we must answer now is what can we do to bring them down.

Look, I agree that affirmative action, like many other government programs has its defects and abuses. And I will be the first to admit that some blacks will ride the race issue as a scapegoat/ excuse until it takes them off a cliff. But suggesting that the result of either of these things has been the ascendance of blacks and other minorities to the comprehensive detriment of white males is ridiculous. Some of these affirmative action programs have been around almost twice as long as you students have. Yet how many blacks or women do you see as CEOs in the Fortune 500? How many do you see in the U.S. Congress? How many do you see just here on campus?

If you really want to do something about the race problem in America, if you really want to heal the scars, stop griping about why there is a NAACP or a Society for Hispanic Engineers. I suggest you go join them. Become a member (you will have an easier time joining I assure you, than I would have at joining certain clubs around here). Find out what concerns the group has that cause it to feel isolated. Prove that there is no need for such organizations to exist by actually accomplishing their goals. That is one of the major principles behind the 1950s and 60s civil rights protests. It wasn't some "sick and tired" man standing on a street corner that desegregated the buses in Montgomery. It was a woman who decided to stand up by sitting down in a seat on the bus. Do something to break down the barriers you see instead of just being "sick and tired" all the time.

People who take this "fed-up" position have always seemed hypocritical to me. They constantly rant and rave about how people should stand up and take responsibility for their actions, but they are the exact ones who are doing all they can to avoid looking in the mirror to see what is there. Face it; whether you have ever thought or said a racist or sexist thing personally is not the point here; the indisputable fact is that for centuries white males chopped the economic, social, and psychological "legs" off of minorities and women so that they could get ahead in the race. Now that they have such a huge lead, they turn around and actually have the nerve to blame those crippled minorities because those groups can't run as fast. True, no person alive today has any direct blame for slavery, but to suggest that minorities should just get over it is like that freshman in Kentucky who shot down the members of that student prayer group and then apologized. His regretting his actions now may help him to feel better about himself, but it doesn't do those dead kids or their families an iota of good.

It is easy for the oppressor to insist that all things should be forgiven, and honestly, there are some crimes in history that are so great that in the end the only thing you can do is learn from them and move on. Many minorities are struggling to do that. But it only exacerbates the situation when someone wants to simply ignore the past, pretending it never happened because it never happened to them. Maybe you had nothing to do directly with the pain someone else is feeling, but that doesn't mean their pain does not exist. Nor does your denying that pain make it vanish. There are people all across the country, of both sexes, all races, religions, and sexual orientations who are out trying to break down the walls which have always been between us. It is not coincidence that many political leaders, including President Clinton have focused so much attention on hate crimes; even this week, the President is hosting a conference on building race relations. While the fishbowl around you may seem to be utopian, the rest of the country, including the faculty, staff, and students right here on this campus, is dealing with the fact that racism, sexism, and homophobia do still exist as serious problems and sources of

division in American society. If you are truly "seeking the truth" Mr. Sick and Tired, stop spending your time criticizing a cartoon and get out and learn something about the people you are so eager to assert already have too many rights in American society. If you talk to them instead of about them, you may even talk them into giving up some of those "rights" you feel have been taken from you.

Our innocent, distinguished, ill-and-weary intellectual ends his article suggesting that perhaps the Collegian should look more into issues before publishing untruths. Perhaps he should look more into some old advice: Physician, heal thyself.

Candidly,
Gregory W. Fowler
Lecturer of English

Dear Editor,

I was appalled after reading Mr. Kolbe's editorial, in which he claims "I am sick and tired of hearing minorities complain about how bad their lives are." This is the same kind of ignorant and racial sentiments which perpetuates negative attitudes towards minorities in society today. Twice this semester I've been confronted by racial comments made towards African Americans regarding the issue of slavery. I've accepted these individuals rights to freedom of speech, although I passionately disagree with their comments. Albeit the comments were directed towards me as an individual, they still effected me as if they were

Mr. Kolbe responds "GET OVER IT" in regards to slavery. How can I or any other minority which has been oppressed by the majority simply get over it, when one is still feeling the rippling effects of a system which imparted indignities and degradation upon a particular race of people. YES, slavery ended some hundred years ago but blacks did not get the right to sit in front of the bus, drink of the same water fountains and attend school with other until the late 50's and 60's, or did Mr. Kolbe just forget about this time in history when he was too busy screaming "GET OVER IT."

There would be nothing to complain about if in all aspects of society, blacks, white and other people of color were treated equal. There are huge disparities in median incomes, education and poverty and levels between whites and blacks.

I am not using slavery and segregation as an excuse for these inequities, yet they are dominant factors which have influenced and are still influencing black communities today. I cried but then I got angry when I heard "GET OVER IT" Myself and many other black people still feel the emotional, mental and social effects of the constant reminder of our inequality in the United States in the past and unfortunately the present. Mr. Kolbe is not black, has never been black and can not decidedly say that blacks have a life better off than whites when hew has never lived it.

Mr. Kolbe is right in one aspect when he says the example of racism hit close to home at Behrend College, and he exemplified it beautifully when he submitted his racist editorial to the Collegian. Racism is still alive and prevalent in The United States and even Behrend college as proven to me by Jonathan Kolbe and a young woman in my Political Science 123 class. Yet as a young black woman who does not complain but rather who is working diligently so that one day people who have these racist an ignorant attitudes will not be able to once again suppress the views of minorities in government and society.

We all have (whether we are willing to admit) various stereotypes and criticism about people who are "different" from ourselves or the "norm." Is there a cure for this affliction that many of us (white, black, yellow or red) suffer from? YES, it is to WAKE UP!! WAKE UP! Jonathan Kolbe. WAKE UP America. WAKE UP Behrend College and yes I too need to WAKE UP. Once "WE" realize that our differences (not only our similarities) make us stronger we will truly be a united people who comprise the United States
Trying to make a difference,
Ayodele Jones
Political Science 03

Greeks defend reputation

Dear Editor,

On behalf of all Greeks on campus I would like to thank you for slapping us in the face yet again. Two issues back you printed two letters to the editor; one from Theta Phi Alpha and Tau Kappa Epsilon and the other from Alpha Sigma Alpha. Both letters expressed sincere concern with the Collegian's lack of interest in positive Greek life.

First, you deemed it necessary to put an editor's note after the letter from Alpha Sigma Alpha, saying that the claim that the letter we submitted was not printed was false and that it had been printed in the calendar section. We looked the paper over, and the letter we submitted to you was not printed in the calendar section. Instead, it was drastically condensed and most of the information was removed. I understand that you "reserve the right to edit" anything that is submitted. However, by doing so, you took away the identity of that individual article.

Second, the cartoon that you ran next to the letters was uncalled for. This was a clear representation of what your editorial staff sees in Greek life. The cartoon said something to the effect of "We don't haze, we build lasting friendships" and showed a picture of a person standing on a box with others around him apparently preparing to paddle him. Thank you for this. Thank you very much for bashing something that you know nothing about. Greeks nationwide are being criticized and stereotyped, and you, with your yellow journalism, have jumped right on the bandwagon.

Just for informational purposes I want to tell everyone that Greek life is more than pledging. Greek life is more than wearing letters and drinking alcohol. We Greeks, as a whole, do volunteer work and philanthropic events for the organizations we help to sponsor. We provide this campus with entertainment (one example would be the concert that Theta Phi Alpha and Tau Kappa Epsilon sponsored—which the Collegian failed to identify as sponsors in the story that covered it), we clean up highways, facilitate at Special Olympic events, roll barrels to raise money for our philanthropies, and we also fight against the stereotypical discrimination that is fueled by incorrect and incomplete information by papers just like yours.

I am part of a strong sorority, one that ranks with the best in the country. We are trying very hard to fight the stereotypes and to make others see Greek life in a positive light. We do NOT haze and we do not appreciate the Collegian's implications that we do. You cannot see what we are on the inside because you only see what is provided to you on the wire. Why can't you look right in front of you and see what good we Greeks do on this campus and in this community?

All we want is to be seen in an unbiased light and to be represented fairly. It seems that as a whole, journalists are enjoying this opportunity to jump on the bandwagon and criticize Greeks. Be the responsible one, please, and get off that bandwagon.

Sincerely,
Doreen Foutz
Alpha Sigma Alpha

Editors Note: The Collegian printed the full text of the Alpha Sigma Alpha press release on the Calendar page of the October 30 issue with the exception of the last sentence of the press release, which was inappropriate for a page of calendar notices.

Trigon acknowledges support

Dear Editor,

I would just like to thank the entire Penn State-Behrend community for the support Trigon and the Joint Residence Council have received concerning the Safer Sex Cabaret. It is only through educational programming of this sort where we find the key to ending ignorance concerning safer sex, HIV/AIDS, and homophobia. Trigon has received nothing but raves from students, staff, faculty, our sponsors, and community. As we put a close to this semester, I ask you to remember what we have learned and practice it in good health. Remember... "You paint your own rainbows".

Sincerely,
Christopher Caraballo
Trigon President