

Culture victimizes individuals

**LONI STEWART
COLUMNIST**

I never thought twice about the fact that there were only two African-American students in my elementary school, population 444, as I recall. I didn't worry about the fact we "prayed" every day or said the pledge or that Bible stories were read to us. I think I vaguely recall that it was okay to punish student misbehavior via spanking or something to that effect. I didn't worry about my after-school care teacher blowing smoke rings as we napped.

But now that I look back upon it, was I a victim of circumstance? Was I somehow adulterated or imposed upon? Maybe, but the real question is, should I plea as such?

I can honestly say I don't think these situations I experienced marred my adult life. Was I a victim because I didn't experience real life, or were the two African-American students victimized for having to attend a school with such ratios? Did I turn out different somehow? Well, I do not believe I am a racist. Would going to a very interracial school have changed my feelings? I hope not.

Okay. What about the fact that religion was imposed upon me as a vulnerable child. That's fine. I have used those experiences to cultivate what I feel is best for me, religion-wise. I appreciate the Bible stories, as they are a representation of history and civilization. Not to mention how handy knowing these passages has come in English classes, where, like-it-or-not, Biblical allusions are plentiful.

Can't we just see these "injustices" as learning utensils? Why must we always play victim? Whether the way you grew up was right or wrong doesn't matter anymore.

And about school officials physically punishing students: arguably, it may be the parents' job to discipline their children, but children these days are seemingly more disrespectful and out of control. I recall being punished for doing something evil like throwing erasers across the room, and I never did it again. Case closed, it worked. And as far as I know, I am not mentally disturbed as a result.

Finally, I must boast that I am not a smoker, even though I found the smoke-ring-blowing preschool instructor fascinating to watch. Key word — watch. I watched and learned as he backed uncontrollably, too. Kids are not stupid. Does it seem that too much in life boils down to who was victimized? Further, how can we get our just compensation (money and/or publicity) for our tragic victimization.

Maybe I'm an idealist, but life would be much easier if it was okay to just live and not have to worry about being attacked for doing something every time you turn around. I'm not saying it's okay to use this logic against certain groups of individuals, but rather as a mechanism to unite individuals. We are one people. We learn from one another.

For instance, I'm sick of worrying about speaking politically correctly, but if I don't, some "victim" out there will be further victimized. I don't like the cheap rationalizations people have for using racial, social or political slurs, contending that since they are victims somehow, then it is justified. I'm tired of contending with the theory of how "I should be compensated" for each and every minor imposition life has cruelly thrown at me. I am female, I am black, I am Native American, I come from a poor family, my mother is disabled, my father went to Vietnam, thus I deserve to be compensated for what I have been given.

What ever happened to "take it as it comes" and make the best of it? Why don't we try working for our goals instead of finding ways we were victimized to get ahead. It is true, "All men are created equal," but that does not mean all lives are the same. In other words, take what you are given and make it work! If nothing else remember, "Where one door shuts, another opens."

This would be a good place for your stuff. Contact The Gamecock, 777-7181.

ON VALENTINE'S DAY, MESSAGES OF LOVE COULD BE FOUND IN ALL ASPECTS OF CAMPUS LIFE.



QUOTE, UNQUOTE

"People also tend to vote for who they know the best. White Greeks naturally associate with white Greeks and black Greeks with black."

Julie Johns, SG elections commissioner

Weight woes begin in dressing rooms

The sounds from the dressing room reminded me of a bad TV movie, like one of those after-school specials where the anorexic or bulimic girl ends up in the hospital with bony arms and blue lips.

"We need to work out again," she voice said.

She was standing in front of the mirror at the end of the long, white hallway that ran through the middle of all dressing rooms. She put a hand on her stomach and sucked in so her belly would disappear.

"The size 11 looks like a whale. I need to be a seven and stay a seven," she said.

The dressing room: the epitome of America's weight obsession. The voices are always there on busy days, mourning too-tight dresses and the weakness of eating breakfast, lunch and dinner all in the same day.

People fret over precious pounds lost and horrific pounds gained. Both men and women are frustrated, because in real life there's no computer that can stretch out people's legs to make them longer, no way to erase an inch or two from your waist in an instant.

Blaming the entertainment industry, advertisers and other businesses for our preoccupation with our bodies is pointless. A demand for these industries to do something to change America's negative weight obsession, to do something about the hundreds of young people who punish themselves for not looking like the magazine covers, won't change society's ideas about what is beautiful and what

Place for black history is in classrooms

In 1926, historian Carter G. Woodson began what is commonly considered his most successful attempt to popularize black history.

He chose the second week in February and declared it Negro History Week. The week was chosen to commemorate the birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln.

The original celebrations involved printing pamphlets and other promotional literature, conducting parades of costumed characters depicting the lives of famous African Americans and holding breakfasts, banquets and other ceremonies.

In the 1940s, the celebration became more sophisticated and attracted larger, more diverse audiences.

By the early 1970s, the Association for Study of Negro Life and History extended the celebrations to the entire month of February and changed the name to Black History Month.

Today, in 1996, the condition of black history has improved considerably since Woodson began his famous celebration. But the improvements are not enough.

Black history does not belong in February.

It belongs in textbooks and in classrooms.

When students of American literature read the writings of Davy

is clumsy.

A perfect example of a failed attempt to change the impossible ideal is the Happy to Be Me Doll. The doll, who I'll just call Happy, was manufactured by the High Self-Esteem Toy Corporation and was supposed to debut about five years ago. A New York Times article from 1991 described her as a "sort of politically correct Barbie," whose mission was to "help young girls develop realistic body images and accept themselves as they are."

Happy had more realistic proportions than Barbie, the blonde freak who has supposedly been distorting little girls' images of what the ideal female body should look like for decades. But where is Happy now?

A Kay-Bee toy store worker didn't know what I was talking about when I asked about Happy. I wouldn't be surprised if she wasn't well-received at toy stores, because self-esteem just can't be manufactured. And I've never heard anyone in a dressing room say, "These jeans don't fit because I've gained 20 pounds since last year, but, hey, I'm just happy to be me."

I think the real problem is the fact that people don't realize they don't have to live up to society's expectations to be happy.

Lisa Mohn, director of health and wellness services, said one of the best ways to prevent the problems that arise from weight obsession is for people to realize that "you don't have to live up to someone else's ideal."

**JOHN LYONS
COLUMNIST**

Crockett and study the literary techniques of local color, they should be introduced to James Pierson Beckworth. Beckworth was a black frontiersman and explorer who wrote a flamboyant, exaggerated autobiography.

History courses should introduce students to George Washington Carver, a scientist and educator.

W. E. B. Du Bois, a famous sociologist, should be well-known among students of all racial backgrounds.

These three men and other important black figures must not be neglected any longer.

Black History Month is currently no more than a token gesture.

It draws attention to many of the shortcomings of the teachings of American history.

Yet, somehow, though the problems are crystal clear, they have not been alleviated.

Black history is still limited to quick overviews of slavery and civil rights.

A month of recognition does not make up for a year of neglect.

Teachers must act throughout the year to incorporate black cultures into their curricula.

This does not mean all courses should become celebrations of black history. But in those courses where it

Mohn said often someone's actual looks don't have anything to do with body image — a person's perception of his or her appearance. I can't count the number of times I've heard people who look like they have about three percent body fat say "I need to lose weight."

"The self-critical aspect of it is really sad and dangerous," Mohn said.

We were discussing body image in one of my classes, and one my classmates said, "I've always been thin, so I've never had a reason to be unhappy."

But not being society's definition of thin has never been a reason to be unhappy. The sadness begins with what the individual perceives: their reflection in a mirror, clothes that look better on someone else, the amount of fat grams in the candy bar they've just eaten.

It's all a number game and how different people add their numbers up. It starts with the number the dressing room attendant hands you, the big three or four standing for the number of clothes you are trying on. Then you add the size on the tag, the amount of calories you ate for lunch, the number of pounds over 100 that you weigh on the scale.

The numbers keep adding up until a size 11 is as big as a whale, and people can't remember what it was like to be happy with the way they look.

is appropriate, the contributions of blacks should be acknowledged and studied.

American history courses are obviously the most important places to implement change, but they are not the only courses needing improvement.

Literature classes must not limit the study of black authors to the Harlem Renaissance. Black writers should be seen as an integral part of the curriculum and not as an isolated addition.

The study of African Americans in history, literature and other subjects should be actively pursued.

The month of February works very well to celebrate black history, but it must also serve as a reminder of the shortcomings of textbooks and teachers.

All Americans should realize that African Americans have made important contributions to our society.

The United States has been affected by African Americans and attitudes toward them throughout its existence.

From race riots in Los Angeles to the creation of jazz, American music's most influential genre, blacks have contributed much to this country and have had a significant impact in its history.

Black History Month is a good start at improving awareness, but it should only be seen as a beginning. There is still a long way to go.

The Gamecock

Serving USC Since 1908

Wendy Hudson, Editor in Chief • Ryan Wilson, Managing Editor,
Tina Morgan, Brent Seeliger, Viewpoints Editors

Editorial Board

Chris Dixon, Martha Hotop, Karen Layne, Robbie Meek, Tyson Pettigrew, Matt Pruitt
Ryan Sims, Stephanie Sonnenfeld, Cece von Kolnitz, Robert Walton, Allison Williams

IN OUR OWN
OPINION

Racial bias has no place in SG runoff elections

There's no denying the fact that USC, like most major college campuses, has racial divisions. Unfortunately, students and administrators alike try to avoid, fudge or even sweep this idea under the rug far too often, causing even more strife among racial groups on campus.

Deny as we may try, today's election may be just another manifestation of this hot topic of debate. In both remaining executive runoff races, there is one Caucasian candidate and one African-American candidate. Although the idea of race as an issue in this election is often denied or even ignored, it no longer can be avoided.

Unfortunately, only a mediocre percentage of voters are out to vote for the candidates' platforms of increased safety, academic forgiveness, Student Government forums or food service. Many voters vote to support fellow organizational members or friends, not truly thinking out the issues at hand. Others will, although they may not admit to it, vote for race.

It is sad to realize this campus has become so racially motivated that it lets Jim Crow ideals seep into almost every aspect of scholarship, leadership and overall academia.

THE TOPIC
Race and the SG runoff elections

OUR OPINION

Vote for merit, not for race

So, we might be advocating a dream — to go into today's election color-blind, to mark your votes not on who is black or who is white, but who is the most qualified candidate. It's a utopian ideal that will probably never be fully achieved, but if the message reaches a few, it will be

somewhat successful.

Call us a liberal rag for wanting some sort of color-blindness to today's election, but when it comes down to electing the people who represent us, we should want people capable of reflecting an image of intellect, ambition and courage. Although that image may not necessarily take the form or skin color of choice, it is the ideal we should strive for.

Ask yourself if you think it is fair to deny a certain candidate the opportunity to hold an office because of their skin color or their heritage. Ask yourself if you are voting for someone because their skin is the same color as yours or if you are refusing to vote for a candidate because their skin is different from yours. The ultimate goal of a democracy is to be somewhat democratic with your vote — and being democratic does not mean being racist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Chairperson thanks clubs, participants

This letter is in response to yesterday's front-page picture of the African-American Male Spotlight. While I appreciate the inclusion in your paper, I would like to make a brief commentary of the event.

The program, which was held on Sunday, was sponsored by the Black Cultural Commission of Carolina Productions and the Freshman Council of the Association of African-American Students. It was a Black History Month event designed to salute several positive African-American males here at USC. The 11 honorees represented a vast majority of the black organizations on campus: Alpha Kappa Alpha, Alpha Phi Alpha, AAAS, Kappa Alpha Psi, MAP Team, National Society of Black Engineers, Omega Psi Phi, Phi Beta Sigma, Sigma Gamma Rho, Society of Minority Journalism Students and Zeta Phi Beta.

The contest itself was structured similarly to a pageant, with Introduction, Interview and Formal Wear as the primary categories. However the awards that were presented were not based solely on these aspects. Clifton Chestnut, representing the Society of Minority Journalism Students, received an award for Scholarship. Jermaine Britton, representing Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity, received an award for leadership. Quenton Tompkins, representing the MAP Team, received an award for Community Service. And Christopher Smith, representing the Association of African-American

Students, was named Man-of-the-Year.

I would like to take this opportunity to personally thank everyone who helped make the show a success. As the main coordinator of the event, I was pleased with the outcome and think it went very well for a first-time project. I want to congratulate all of the candidates — Lorenzo, Michael, Chris, Jermaine, Quenton, James, Kerrick, Lee, Shon, Clifton, Walter — who did a wonderful job and were very cooperative throughout the whole ordeal.

I'm especially happy about the large number of parents who came out to support their children. I say thank you to all the judges and emcees, for whose participation we are very grateful. I'd like to thank Sharpe's Formal Wear, who was generous enough to donate the formal wear for the contestants. I appreciate the entertainers — Krystal Kenely, Akil Pinkney and Shannen Thomas — whose talents were an added bonus. I thank Carolina Productions for their faith as well as their finances. I thank AAAS, who, as usual, always comes through in times of crisis. And last, but certainly not least, I want to thank my committee who was with me from day one; I could not have done it without you. In short, I want to thank EVERYONE who helped me fulfill this dream of mine.

Kimberly T. Baxter
AAAS Freshman Council Committee Chairperson

The Gamecock

News: 777-7726
Advertising: 777-4249
FAX: 777-6482

Student Media • Russell House-USC • Columbia, SC 29208

Wendy Hudson
Editor in Chief
Ryan Wilson
Managing Editor
Tina Morgan
Brent Seeliger
Viewpoints Editors
Martha Hotop
Cece von Kolnitz
News Editors
Chris Dixon
Stephanie Sonnenfeld
Features Editors

Robbie Meek
Matt Pruitt
Sports Editors
Allison Williams
Special Projects
Ethan Myerson
Graphics Editor
Karen Layne
Copy Desk Chief
Deanna McLendon
Copy Desk

Tyson Pettigrew
Robert Walton
Photo Editors
Adam Snyder
Jennifer Stanley
Asst. News
Jennifer Hansen
Dipka Bhambhani
Asst. Features
Achim Hunt
Asst. Sports
Ryan Sims
Online Editor

Chris Carroll
Director of Student Media
Laura Day
Creative Director
Jeff A. Breaux
Art Director
Sue McDonald
Jim Speelman
Graduate Assistant
Marilyn Edwards
Taylor
Marketing Director
Erik Collins
Faculty Advisor
Jason Jeffers
Cartoonist

Letters Policy

The Gamecock will try to print all letters received. Letters should be 200-250 words and must include full name, professional title or year and major if a student. Letters must be personally delivered by the author to The Gamecock newsroom in Russell House room 333.

The Gamecock reserves the right to edit all letters for style, possible libel or space limitations. Names will not be withheld under any circumstances.

The Gamecock reserves the right to edit all letters for style, possible libel or space limitations. Names will not be withheld under any circumstances.