

Evicting Jim Crow from fraternity row

Author

Curry, George E.

Article

While there was predictable outrage recently over White fraternity students making a fool of themselves at Auburn University in Alabama and the University of Mississippi, the racially insensitive incidents raise fundamental questions about what we should be doing in and out of school to prevent that kind of obnoxious conduct.

The idea that White university students, especially in the era of supposed racial harmony as a result of the ongoing war in Afghanistan, could think it's okay to simulate a lynching, wear KKK robes and hold a gun to the head of a cotton-picking African-American is reprehensible. What's even more reprehensible is the kind of education and training those students received- or did not receive-before they set foot on a college campus.

Let's start in the home. In order to foster an atmosphere of acceptance- I don't use the term "tolerance" because I think people should do more than merely tolerate one another-every family should read and discuss at least one book that reviews this country's history. If you're going to read only one book, my recommendation would be John Hope Franklin's classic "From Slavery to Freedom." Inasmuch as we live in a visual age, I also recommend the family watching and discussing the PBS series "Eyes on the Prize."

There is also plenty of information on the Internet to educate both parents and students. An excellent place to start is www.tolerance.org, the site maintained by the Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery, Ala. The site helps one examine his or her hidden biases, provides tools for fighting hatred, and gives the history behind many of the derogatory images of Blacks throughout history.

Ferris State University in Big Rapids, Mich. maintains a "**Jim Crow Museum** of Racist Memorabilia" on line at www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/cartoons. The curator of the site says the cartoons were downloaded this year from White supremacy sites on the Web. "American Blacks have often been mocked by the larger society," the curator writes. "This dehumanizing ridicule was evident in the minstrel shows of the 1800s, cinematic depictions in the 1900s, and on comedy stages today.

"Despite the gains won during the Black Civil Rights Movement, too many Americans still laugh at the portrayals of Blacks as physically repulsive, intellectually inept, morally stunted, and culturally deprived." An important question was posed: "Why do so many people find these cartoons funny?"

In some instances, the answer is prejudice. And that's the focus of another good site, www.prejudiceinstitute.org. The Baltimore-based group produces special reports and a bimonthly newsletter "dedicated to readers who actively seek to counter the disinformation that pervades everyday life in an increasingly diversified society."

The Prejudice Institute's fact sheets on what teenagers can do about prejudice suggests: work on yourself first; be conscious of your discomfort or fear around certain types of people; be aware of tendencies you may have to judge other people, examine whether you equally included people from other groups in your regular activities, think of different ways to know more people in other groups and work together with other people to organize new

solutions to the problems of discrimination and ethno-violence.

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