



IMPRESSIONS OF ADJUSTMENT

Joe Okpaku

A certain type of foreign student has received particular emphasis on the Northwestern campus recently. He is the black African, one whose mere skin colour places him in a unique and uniquely artificial class, in a student body which can be best described as consisting of a white matrix with few and scattered traces of black particles. This situation demands some observations, reflections, and changes in order to give Northwestern a campus life and attitude that befits its size and name.

First let us deal with the foreign student in general.

The first problem that he faces as soon as he arrives in Evanston is housing. That the housing facilities are inadequate is self-evident. What should be more self-evident is that the early experiences of a foreigner go a long way to influence his orientation towards the community in which he plans to stay for a few years. The problem here involves an absolute stranger being let loose in Evanston and given addresses and telephone numbers to find himself a closet to dump his impedimenta in and a bed to lay his head.

WHEN THE foreigner (let us call him John for convenience and say he is male) has finally found a living place and has had enough time to turn around and face the campus, the first social manoeuvre he encounters is the Greek rush and its powerful machinery. He is told two equally unacceptable things. First that one purpose of this secret cult is to give one security in this very insecure world. He is not told why this community is inse-

cure, and if it really is. His reaction to this is naturally, "What does an eighteen-year-old American from Chicago or even a nineteen-year-old from New York have to feel insecure about on a college campus?" How insecure then should John, who may be eighteen or twenty or even twenty-five, be when he is 8000 miles from home amongst absolute strangers, made stranger still by the glaring vestiges of an affluent society.

Before John has time to find out what makes Northwestern insecure, he is given the other half of the "Greek Philosophy," that of being with people *of your type*. It does not take too long to discover that this second facet of the philosophy causes the problem which the first tries to solve. John, being Chinese, is definitely not a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP), or being African, is not a blond. Whatever he is, he definitely does not fit into one of these artificial types, so he is left to the one group that is his type, the group of foreign students. This should help answer those who question foreign students forming their own group.

It should be emphasized that John *only* questions the Greek philosophy and its implementations. He has nothing against the believers, many of whom become his friends. He is generally able to isolate his beliefs in this respect from his human relations, but he nevertheless expresses his views openly and in good faith. There is no doubt that the affiliated students are just as friendly as independents. He is more cautious about criticizing the female Greek cults, possibly for fear of limiting the range of his dating field!

ALSO JOHN thinks that the unhappiness caused to a few freshmen who fail to "get in," is unnecessary. He is, however, not blind to the possibly many advantages of the system, but these can be attained in less exclusive social clubs. Being with people of your type is not the best preparation for life. People you meet in later life may not be your "type."

The foreign student after being told, in what seemed to be endless days of orientation, to relax because Americans are relaxed people, easily finds that Northwestern is far from being typical of relaxed American communities. One of the main advantages of attending a large university is to meet people of different ideas, ambitions, and drives, people of different races, colours and

creeds. In later life this should make one feel at home anywhere and with any group of people. This is the mark of an educated man. Defendants of Northwestern conservatism have argued like this: "You must understand that students here are from conservative upper-middle-class and wealthy-upper-class homes."

The question they should answer is "Who has said that the upper-middle and upper classes have no right to relax and make friends?" When did wealth become an impediment to happy co-existence? Besides, to talk of social classes in the life of a college community is, to put it mildly, far from being intellectual. Sons and daughters of lords and princes do go to college with commoners. To be able to get one's self

out of the confining shell of one's self-importance, self-consciousness, and self-everything, and to be able to talk and react to people, even absolute strangers, as if there is no difference between the two — this should be the goal of college students. That is another mark of an educated man. This is the type of an educated man who should be a graduate of Northwestern, and this is what we should and shall aim for during these next few years. There is much we can do, individually and in groups. Basically, it is a personal problem, and any solution must start with the individual.

Let us now examine where the black African or Latin American foreign student stands in the melting pot. The atrocities of a segregated community with particular reference to housing have received much publicity on this campus recently. All that needs be said here is that for this to be the first impact of the society on a foreigner shakes, if not shatters, his hopes and dreams. Why, in spite of this and other experiences, the African student does not lose his enthusiasm and is far from being cynical and withdrawn is a question that does not need to be answered. In this respect, the reaction of many students to the housing episode has been most gratifying, not only to the African, or the foreign student, but to the Northwestern student body.

IT IS IMPORTANT that the student body understand what form the veins of racial discrimination that permeate our campus take, so as to better know how best to purge itself of these unfortunate strains. It is not with any bitterness or hard feelings that these references will be made. There can be little doubt that the African students at Northwestern are far from being bitter.

When a bunch of Northwestern boys under the cover of a car and enshrouding darkness yell: "What are you doing with that white girl, you b—— nigger?" at a foreign student who is part of, or worse, guest of the university, one cannot but wonder about a few things. And it does not even matter if the abused student was American, so it makes little sense to argue that the carefree chaps were ignorant of his identity. It hardly makes more sense to excuse them on the grounds that they were drunk, because alcohol does not elicit ideas and words which were hitherto not within the person. In fact, there is no need to search for an excuse. The foreign student concerned does not even care to be given an

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excuse. It did not make him think less of America, which seems to be the only concern of not an insignificant few, but just made him say to himself: "Come on, fellas, it's about time we shaped up." And one may add, "the time to shape up has been long overdue."

The African's unfortunate experience is mainly a beautiful collection of disappointments, especially in most unexpected quarters. The African at Northwestern who has been able to go to all sorts of "white" communities alone or with fellow students, playing his part, in his little way, on most of these occasions, cannot help but be shocked when he finds that his close friend cannot go to a Negro church with him. He is afraid of worshipping with his own countrymen.

Or when a fellow student volunteers to get the foreign student a blind date and then leaves the 4000 girls at Northwestern to go find a Negro girl at National College, how should the African feel? It hurts more when one remembers that the blind date was uncalled for, the African student himself being a non-believer in blind dates. To argue that the social aide "thought he (the African) would be more comfortable with a Negro girl" is to make absolute nonsense of the obvious role Africans have tried to play in Northwestern's social and academic life.

AS A LAST illustration, let the reader ask himself how he would feel if, as he sits beside a fellow student, the latter immediately walks out through one door, re-enters through the other, and sits himself as far as possible from the reader. Apart from the fact this is unprovoked and perfectly unintelligent, it is also a very naive and most unsophisticated way of satisfying one's funny biases. It may be repeated again that not every one of us is guilty of these ridiculous behaviors, but we cannot say all of us are not, and this is the sad limitation.

That the sex element in America's race problem is bound to come out more and more into the limelight is not a far-fetched prediction. But let those directly concerned

take care of it. It is pardonable, though not reasonable, if someone is angry that he is losing his girl friends to others, be they black, pale, white or green, red or blue. But to be angry at the sight of a black boy and a white girl who have elected to be together, just because "society" does not allow it, is not a mentality which should exist among educated college students.

The classical idea of a university was a community that was intellectually far above society, one that judged and told society what to do. Why should this be an anachronism today?

Many people have asserted that the attitude of some American-educated African politicians towards America is a result of their experiences during their student days in America. This is an argument by itself, but suffice it to say that the responsibility of an African politician to the problems, developments and ambitions of his countrymen and country completely transcend his personal feelings and are far too great to allow for relatively petty vengeance for sad memories. And even if this assertion were true, which it is not, how best do we avoid this? Is it by making more Africans feel this way?

THE AFRICAN student has full sympathy for America's unfortunate race problems, and although he suffers from it, he knows that people are beginning to do something about it. What concerns him is the attitude and beliefs of those in his presumably intellectual circle. The world of tomorrow is not our parents', it is ours. We therefore must begin to solve (at least in our little way) problems that are likely to impede our progress when the time comes for us to take up the reins of the world and ride the human race into distant fields of happy coexistence, commensurate with the scientific achievements of our time.

Joe Okpaku is a junior in civil engineering at Northwestern. After receiving his Ph.D. in this country he plans to return to his home in Sapele, Nigeria, to teach civil engineering.

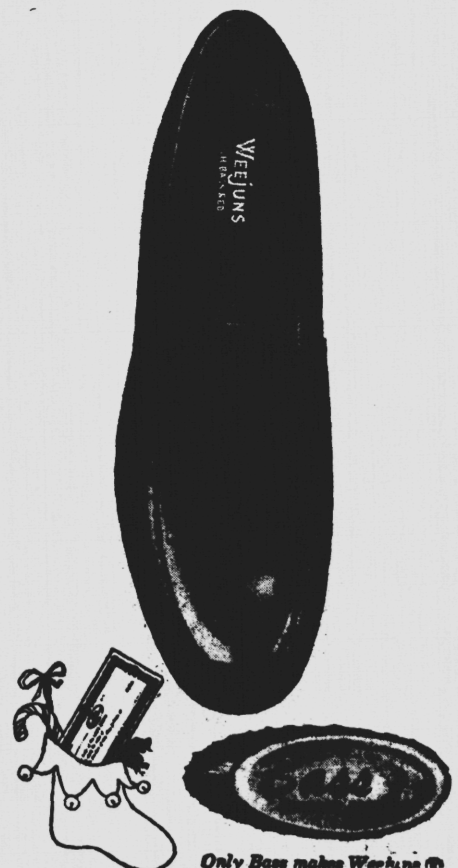
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