



FOREIGN STUDENTS



r. emerson

Bridging A Cultural Gap ***By 'Maria Christina Leitao'***

"You are from Brazil! What are you doing at URI?" Accompanied by a look of surprise and curiosity, this question has often been posed to me during the past two years. Now as the moment approaches for me to pack up and go home, the same question comes back to mind, this time in relation to a larger area of experience than the mere accidents that brought me to Kingston. Another turning point in life has been reached, my two years at URI seem already like memories—it is time to look back and evaluate their meaning.

Being a foreign student is undertaking the rather painful and exasperating task of building a bridge between two cultures. He has to undergo the bewildering—though often hilarious—process of adjusting to the ways and customs of a new country. This involves such diverse activities as trying to master a foreign language, becoming a football fan, learning about women's liberation. I cannot forget my first contact with registration procedures at URI: the anxiety and frustration I felt were not unlike those experienced by chapters in an absurd play.

On the other hand, the foreign student cannot neglect those particular aspects of his personality that carry the stamp of his native culture. As I shall always be spotted as a foreigner by my accent, I will also be recognized by such strange habits as singing aloud while crossing the quad on a beautiful morning, standing too close to the person I am speaking with, indiscriminately distributing hugs as a sign of enthusiasm and affection.

This bridge-building process becomes even more difficult when foreign students try to deal with the human element of his new environment. He has to struggle to get beyond the superficial reaction of surprise and curiosity in order to establish meaningful relationships. It takes him months to be able to communicate effectively. During his earliest, friendliest months he experiences the incredible solitude of a crowded Ram's Den at noon time, and the sensation of being the only survivor of an atomic explosion, while wandering through the deserted campus during holidays and vacations. But slowly the foreign student begins to find people who look at him not only as a foreigner, but a person and teachers who appreciate the individuality of his approach to learning.

It takes a long time to build a solid bridge, but once the task is accomplished one enjoys the benefits of being able to relate to both cultures. At the last registration I felt proud to offer my help to some lost and desperate Americans. However painful the process I feel that it was worthwhile. And when in the years to come I look at my experience as a foreign student, I know that my most vivid memories will be those of friends I made and of the trees on this early spring covered with flowers and buds framed by the windows of Independence Hall transforming my classrooms into exotic enlargements of a Japanese Print.



L. Loney



F. Sherman

ANOTHER VIEW OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

By Norman C. Lyon

My initial response for the request of this article for the year book was to decline on the grounds that my background would not satisfy the readers concept of a "foreign" student. My being English, with consequent exposure to the western culture and life style, would perhaps not make me different enough to provide an alternative perspective on student life at URI. However, I succumbed and the thoughts expressed herein reflect my own viewpoint, not necessarily an "objective English Analysis". No doubt the four other British students on campus would concur by proposing four dissimilar "English" appraisals of URI.

The University as such cannot be considered in isolation from all other aspects of American life in which the foreign student becomes embroiled. This total involvement is an educational aim additional to the degree under pursuance. One's preparation for this involvement through films and the news media is admittedly biased and occasionally anti-American. Thus my preconceptions and bias arrived with my luggage.

To mis-quote some past eminence "Britain and America are separated by a common tongue" is possibly the quickest introduction to my initial difficulties in American life and nailing it down within the concepts of my own culture. Words evolve, hopefully for the better. Perhaps my scientific training or, dread the thought, conservatism, resisted the niceties of the verbal transition. Most Americans (& Britons are familiar with the simple word differences such as ride-lift-elevator, and I will not dwell on this. However words of common usage such as village, sports car, street involve similar objects but represent altered concepts of their transatlantic brothers. More serious is the apparent upgrading of the mundane to a level with a supposedly higher status. This is particularly marked in the educational field. Thus school children are "students" whose school is a "campus" administered by a headmaster who is the "principal". On completion of their school years the children "graduate" first from kindergarten and then from high school. Such terms are usually reserved for university which is presumably more prestigious, as every child attends school but not everyone can enter college and complete a degree a recent Cigar article well illustrates this trend, where an actor with just two previous plays plays under his belt, is described quite seriously as a "veteran"!

During my adjustment to the cultural shock which was much acute for me than for some of the students from third world countries, I observed several differences between URI and my old English university. The presence of a police force on campus and the requirement to carry an I.D. at all times appeared to be quite casually accepted by most students although to me it smacked of totalitarianism. Army training within the confines of the university was also new to me and somewhat unsettling. The sharp polarization between the frat/sorority system and the hippies and freaks was viewed as a possible reflection of polarization within the country as a whole, engineered and spurred on by its political leaders. The conservatism that is the Fraternity system that initially opposed the anti-war movement, and official co-ed living allied with its anti-intellectual activities of house destruction and car-wrecking was scorned by more sober thinkers of the student body as a sign of unworthiness for the scholastic life. The non-Greeks also had their share of mediocrity. Those students, for example, who rationalize their own scholastic incompetence by skipping course work, dropping out and nonparticipation in student activities, always reinforced by indolence of their peer group. Changes are occurring though and less hostility between these groups appears evident as the Greeks become involved in social welfare projects and other students engage in student politics and activities.

One quickly becomes aware that the popular British pastime of denigrating the country, its leaders, and the weather is not an exportable commodity. The foreign students learn that "love it or leave it" lurks in the subconscious of every eager interrogator and that harsh criticism of American habits and institutions are not rewarded by social acceptance. There is no shortage of items to praise. The wide variety of courses available to study, the relative lack of restriction in major curricula, the beauty of the campus, and the casual style of the students. I never believed that I could take flower arranging as part of a degree! Nevertheless I was impressed by the lack of unity within the student body and the absence of popular debating in the Union coupled with a lack of political interest and awareness in the lands beyond the America's shores. I marvelled at the ability of students to hold down jobs and read for a degree at the same time.

As URI is a state University I toyed with the idea that this may be the cause of some of its shortcomings, and thus not truly reflect the intellectual standards of a typical American university. The drawing of 90% of the student body from a small geographical area, a parochial conservative and Catholic one at that, detracts from the concept of a university as a seat of learning for active minds from a wide and diverse background to mix and interchange ideas as part of the educational process.

The low level of admission standards although permitting many state residents to attend university with its associated prestige, leans toward mediocrity. Thus students delude themselves, believing that they are obtaining the fullest in university education. Many students actively pursue a degree solely as a means of obtaining a job on graduation. Training at a Trade School would suffice for such students.

America is a country of rapid changes, through European eyes URI has moved ahead quite markedly in the last three years, reflecting social changes in the world outside. It remains both perplexing and challenging for foreign students. In this land of paradox with some of the world's best highways, yet ridiculously low speed limits and veritable forests of radar traps, the potential is there yet URI ticks over at low speed waiting for, waiting for?

BLACK STUDENTS



j. norris



C. Shervin

Black Student Dilemma

by Valerie J. Southern, editor-in-chief, Black Gold

"I'm depressed all the time. I'm so depressed that I can't study," replied George Brown, a former Black University of Rhode Island Student, when asked how he felt as a black on a predominantly white campus.

"Some days I just don't give a damn about going to class . . . I ask myself what's it worth?" "I come from an environment where there is a Black majority," continued Brown, "this campus is a change I'll never get used to . . . I'll never accept it."

Black students entering URI are increasing in number each year. However, with this increased enrollment there seems to be increased Black discontentment.

Presently there is an estimated 120 Black students attending URI. This figure, as compared to the 1968 enrollment of approximately 25 students, is exceedingly high. However, in proportion to the estimated 11,000 white students walking URI campus, the number only composes a scant 1% of the total student body population.

Academic irrelevance, lack of Black representation as well as social isolation maybe a few of the problems which face blacks daily.

"I feel paranoid," said Patricia Burgie, now entering her senior year. "There . . . no one to identify yourself with," she continued. When I'm in a class room all I see is white . . . everywhere I go I'm a minority.

A major cause of discontent is that there are not enough blacks, on the administrative and student level to meet the needs of the 1% Black population.

"We are totally outnumbered, socially and academically," replied senior, Robert Young "I am definitely unhappy . . . it is hard to relate to instructors . . . whites don't realize that the Black experience is totally different," protested Young.

Presently, at URI there are approximately five Black faculty members, in comparison to 400 white members. The number of blacks on an Administrative level is approximately six in proportion to an estimated 250 white administrators.

Alexa Grant, a transfer student from Rhode Island Junior College, is now entering her junior year at URI.

"It's harder for Blacks to get together," she observed, "because this large number of whites is a hindrance, they cause Blacks to get farther apart."

Comparing the two educational systems Alexa said, "at RJC there were no dorms, nothing but one big building . . . we (black students) we're much tighter."

Because of the size and magnitude of URI, she suggested Blacks are becoming diffused. Much like throwing 120 black marbles into a barrel of 11,000 white marbles, separation and distribution inevitably occurs, she suggested.

Obviously, a Black Student Dilemma exists. Striving to obtain educational goals in an unrelated environment seems to become more difficult each year for students. Because blacks are totally outnumbered in all aspects of University life, an unequal balance exists. However, being taught white

oriented education by a white professor in a classroom filled with white students, may seem to only be half the problem.

Striving to relate this educational system to themselves and to their community may be the other segment of the dilemma.

"It's a drag . . . nothing but a white man's paradise," said Everett Myers, now entering his sophomore year.

Since Black students seem so obviously discontented one might wonder why they are attending URI at all.

Diana Guy, a sophomore, give her reasons: "I watch how the white people have been getting on the Blacks all the time . . . they can't stand to see us on the same level," she said.

"Since I know this, I just keep pushing harder, I'm here doing what they don't want me to do."

"White people upset me," she confided, "but I know I upset them too I keep pushing because I know, someday, Black people are going to get over."

Some Solutions

What can be done to end the unhappiness and isolation accompanying Black Student life? "We need more black faces on campus," said George Brown, "once there is a reasonable amount, then there will be more ideas and programs initiated."

"Ethnically speaking," Robert Young suggested, "there should be more Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, etc. . . more different people relating together being around a totally dominant race is hard."

The educational experience is one which should strive to open all avenues of opportunity for all people. If feelings of paranoia or isolation accompany this experience then perhaps another look should be taken at the structural content of high level institutions.

Students such as George Brown, Alexa Grant, and Robert Young suggest qualitative elements of their experience is lacking, until their voices are recognized and understood the present Black Dilemma may perpetuate and grow.

Afro-American students must be given the relevant educational fruits they are seeking. Until then, they will continue to feel, as said by Everett Meyers, a sophomore at URI, "loft . . . that's it . . . very lost."



UNITY HERE ON CAMPUS

Society has molded the Black world into a separated and confused people. It has caused us to be a divided and untrusting people. Alone, each of us walk an alien land with a false football. Alone, each of us are seeking a cultural exuberance totally unlike that of our forefathers. All alone, the Black seeks to unify with long, lost, beautiful Black manhood and power.

Here at the University of Rhode Island there are approximately 120 Black students. Completely alone, each of us walk this campus. Although we try to always hold tight to our dream, the white society attempts to batter it from our grasp. Daily we are in a struggle to continue along our routes of survival and to find a means to make our routes eventually explode into one.

The classroom locale keeps us separate. Since we are all enrolled in numerous colleges, our daily schedules spread us thin over this sparsely populated campus. At 11 a.m. on any given weekday, although all 120 of us could have class, we may only see four or five faces of distinction. Feeling exceptionally alone, we must trudge towards our class (knowing we have an exam ahead) with no desired words of consolation from our friends.

The dormitory keeps us separate. At 12.00 on this same day, we head back to our rooms. After a person has had an exam a feeling of ecstasy overcomes the body. Happy that this drudgery is over, one wants to speak of this to his friends. Unfortunately, our friends live clear across campus. With few places to meet, the 120 Black students head back to their rooms. Everybody realizes that it's too cold to go to the room of a friend only to find that he is on his way to yours. On this particular day, the person enters his room and puts on a little music for comfort.

Predominately white education keeps us separate. In an institution where predominately white professors teach, what more can a Black student expect than a predominately white education. Confused by his own views, and those of the white world, the student has to be given more time to adjust. In his home he believes himself to be important. In his class he is just another Black face. The professors shout out libertarian views to social problems, but even a pure liberal knows it could never work. With enormous effort, the Black student strives to keep himself out of the educational process but feeds back all that this white man expect to hear.

White students keep us separate. Stressing that he sees no difference in you, the next door white person tries to comfort us. Those whites who are concerned, seek the Black student out. It is at this time that our unity is immensely questioned. Everybody wants a friend, so we tend to lean towards these sympathetic whites. Slowly, we begin to unravel our inner-most selves. We try to accept the idea that someday things will get better. Our Black strengths begin to fail us, and we almost believe in universal brotherhood—until a stupid "cracker" makes some remark about our color.

Keep in mind that someday our goals will be one in the same. We as Black students will extend our experiences (whatever they had been). Together we will strive to make what has always been a dream, during our university years, a factual reality. Together, the Black population at URI must restructure itself in such a way that no leakages of whiteness can ever seep in. All around us we see the white student manipulating his existence and we know that we have to do the same. We as "alone" Black students must attempt to reunite. As a unified Black mass, we do have power. Each of us must get involved in all that we, as Blacks, undertake. "The strongest Black man is he who stands amongst other Blacks."

Nancy Perry

Intellectuals.

Intellectuals
shielded by the golden wall
inside the univarsity
the univarsity
Sit around
on their spreading asses
And get off on
Their bad
breath

Toni Foxwell

Freedom Wail

A black voice
Cried out
In the nit
Ripping the darkness
With bitter anguish
A cry that
Pierced cracked walls
Rang
Through mansions
Over mountains
That reached
Beyond the beyond
A wail for freedom
Heard in eternity.

Aitba

Our fathers
Who were in slavery
Bless'd be Your names
May Africa survive;
May your children live,
Proud of the strength You have
given.
It aids us in our daily life
and brings us all together
in the face of hatred.
Aid us in our rise
by destroying corruption.
For you are our Strength,
and our Unity and our Glory.
Amen

by Thomas Nance



SUICIDE NIGGER

Have you heard the dude speaking up,
Walked by, he followed and then he stopped me,
And asked me my name and I said had to go,
And asked me to stay but I said had to go,
And asked me why I was such a evil thing and I said huh,
And walked quickly to the package store, jvc nigger

..... i whispered
under my breath,
And as I walked I shugged bottle that wine, the addict,
whatever I'll bet
And I drank to my eyes fell to ground and my stomach danced,
And my feet went to the door,
And I stumbled to the street,
And pans shot through my body from loneliness and want,
And found myself passing the old soul,

Hey nigger come on my name is
Hey nigger want to talk
Hey nigger tell me some jive
Hey I'll sit beside you here on the corner,
Hey nigger can you hear me I'm talking to you?
Hey look here ain't I cool!

Nigger
Nigger
you can't sleep now
i need company
i don't care if you shoi
just speak
just speak
..... sorry lady but he ain't sleeping
..... he just cut his wrist,
see the blood in the street

Linda Coleman



Message to a Nation of Black People

Love each black man as a brother,
Each black woman as a sister,
..... or mother,
To each black child be a father
To each elderly black person become
..... a daughter or a son
LOVE ALL BLACK PEOPLE
forget none,
Because in UNITY we acquire
STRENGTH

Aitba