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Black Students Dump Campus Newspaper at Penn

By Mary Jordan
Washington Post Staff Writer

A group of black students at the University of Pennsylvania, upset about "blatant and covert racism" on campus, confiscated nearly all 14,000 copies of the student newspaper on Thursday and dumped them in the trash.

The incident, one of many recent acts of racial tension at colleges, occurred the same day that 16 students were arrested at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill during a protest over the site and location of a new black cultural center.

"There were people waiting for the drivers when they delivered the newspaper around 7:30 a.m.," said Stephen Glass, a junior who is the executive editor of the Daily Pennsylvanian. Glass said he believed that a conservative student columnist, who has questioned the heroism of Martin Luther King Jr. and written about what he described as preferential treatment of blacks, was the target of the protest.

In a column in February, Gregory Pavlik wrote that "black militants rail against...white bigotry...while praising hafemongers like Malcolm X, an exemplar who conspired with the Ku Klux Klan." Pavlik, who was residing in New York when the column was written, is quoted in the paper, also criticized the Onyx Senior Honor Society, a black student group accused of hacking. He wrote that a white group would be "kicked off campus if its members behaved the same way.

Yesterday, no black student contacted was willing to be quoted about the incident. Instead a group calling itself the "Working Committee of Concerned Black and Latino Students" issued a statement saying, "This protest was not in response to specific events or individuals." Rather, it said, "it was a legal protest of the blatant and covert racism, continually perpetrated by both institutions and individuals on Penn's campus."

"Not only are the papers free, but there exists no explicit restriction on the numbers of papers that any given student may receive," it said in defending its actions.

Signs left on the empty newspapers boxes by the students said: "Sometimes inconvenience is worth the price...think about it."

Black student protestor said that one student had spoken to police. "No charges had been pressed," she said, and the matter was not being handled through the "judicial process."

Like many other universities located in inner cities, Penn has had ongoing friction between the predominantly black, low-income neighborhood it borders and its predominantly white, well-off student body. Of its 31,000 undergraduates, 700 are black.

There has also been a long-running controversy between black students and the student newspaper at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. In addition, there have been rallies at many colleges, including Harvard Law School, about the scarcity of black faculty members.

On Monday, a student group that met with the university's president to discuss the incident said that one male student "simply questioned the motives for his detention after the seizure of the newspapers." A statement by the black student group said, "This, along with the verbal harassment of other protesters, was the latest evidence that the campus police "disrespected, violated, threatened and ultimately brutalized" black students, the statement said.

Glass, the Penn editor, said there is a lot of racial tension on campus. But he "understood and encouraged the complaints and criticism," he thought students should be "held accountable" for throwing away the paper. Another group of students went Thursday morning digging out the dumped papers and distributing 5,000 new copies.