

Professor says white bias does exist

Professor says *Howler* article an example of whiteness theory.

Dear Mr. Lyles: Thank you for mentioning in your editorial on Sept. 11 my contribution to the forum held on Sept. 8; it was an exciting evening. As a veteran of campus reporting I am well aware of how easy it is to take copious notes while

Eric K. Watts

GUEST COLUMNIST

failing to listen carefully. I find it instructive that you begin your commentary by referencing the angst caused by the production of white guilt.

Such a feeling is important, for it drives a thundering heartbeat in you that drowns out the voices of those who wish to speak with you.

Your editorial also demonstrates the result of not being able to listen to those drowned-out voices—it keeps one ignorant. That is, your editorial literally shows that you do not know what you are talking about. Fortunately, this is a university, you are a student and I am a professor; thus, I am happy to convert your angst-ridden moment into a teaching moment.

There are two lessons. First, you accuse me of espousing “a theory that subconsciously all whites contribute to a cultural ‘whiteness complex’ that seeks to oppress blacks to regain the control lost over them after slavery.”

At best, this is a poor paraphrase; at worst, it’s a reflection of your pained psyche. Having to live with the “unfair” imposition of guilt must be difficult; try living as the object of historical, cultural and institutional racism and see if you like that better.

I clearly asserted that night that many white folk are anti-racists who interrogate racial discourses in various guises so as to be active agents of change; that it was not enough to simply shrug one’s shoulders and say “Hey, I’m not racist.”

In fact, whiteness studies as an area of inquiry is richly populated with anti-racist white folks. Knowing many of them personally as I do, it would have been absurd to suggest what you say I did.

Indeed, I do not conceive of whiteness as a “complex” at all; it is a discursive formation—a construct—that regulates, indexes, directs and deflects power; it responds to and alters ideologies about “race.”

Theodore Roosevelt forcefully mar-

The *Howler* article, among other things, resembles this rhetorical legacy as it positioned whiteness as universal and as central to the *ethos* of this university. This is not the same as saying that Ms. Rinehart is a racist; I do not think that she is; I know Alan English well and I do not think that he is a racist either.

shaded whiteness as he articulated the conditions under which European immigrants could, in a sense, become American. An examination of his rhetoric shows that “American” is explicitly coded as “white” just as “exotic” is racially coded as non-white.

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This is not the same as saying that Ms. Rinehart is a racist; I do not think that she is; I know Alan English well and I do not think that he is a racist either. My comments were not at all about individual behavior, they were about how racial rhetoric functions within and through a language system.

Secondly, the studies of whiteness are analytically rigorous, substantive, strongly reviewed and extensively researched. Just because you are ignorant of its character doesn’t mean that it’s groundless; it simply means that you are ignorant.

But, Mr. Lyles, ignorance is not a sin; presumably you are here to be educated. I hope that you peruse this literature and hear what you have been apparently missing while you were busy fretting over being made to feel guilty, preoccupied with the pounding of your own heart as it races to keep up with your injured imagination.

Beware that your editorial demonstrates my point: it tries to substitute your personal grievance as more important than interrogating racism as a discursive practice; I recognize the strategy, I’ve seen it many times. Ignorance is understandable, and so is your frustration with these bothersome racial issues.

Your discomfort makes sense to me, but it cannot stand in our way as we work together to enrich our world. Not knowing what you are talking about is a small problem, but not knowing that you do not know what you are talking about is a bigger one.

I am tempted to say: here ends the lesson ... but I know that such a teaching moment should never end.

Eric King Watts is an associate professor of communication.

On mission of mercy

Gifts from the hearts of university students and faculty enrich Afghan lives.

This past April, I wrote in the *Old Gold and Black* to inform the Wake Forest community of our Spring 2003 Army ROTC service project that we entitled “Afghanistan Aid.” The goal of this project was to sponsor a campus wide drive to gather, pack and ship some

Maj. Bob Seals

GUEST COLUMNIST

basic life enriching commodities to the youth of Afghanistan, currently recovering from the tragedy of war.

Spearheading this noble effort was the leadership of our National Military Honor Society, The Society of Scabbard and Blade, Company L, 11th Regiment, to include Cadet Captain “Pip” Rinehart, First Lieutenant Jackie Harris, Second Lieutenant Courtney Ellers, and First Sergeant William Scales.

Over three hundred dollars was raised through the generosity of all on campus. These funds were used to buy and ship such items as basic school and art supplies, personal hygiene items, toys and children’s clothing.

All items arrived safely at Bagram Airbase, north of the capital city of Kabul within two weeks of shipment. My wife, Dr. Jennifer A. Seals, Veterinary Corps, serving with Task Force 44th Medical Brigade after the activation of her Army Reserve unit, received our items and accounted for same.

South of Bagram, there exists a small

My wife reported that the most popular items were the simplest, i.e., pencils and notebooks that could be used in their makeshift school. She said, “I am proud to be part of an Army that is working day by day here in an attempt to hopefully provide the Afghani with a brighter future.”

village of Afghani refugees who have relocated, after their modest homes were destroyed by spring flooding.

As throughout the entire country, efforts are underway to improve their lives. Tentage has been provided and a well has been dug to provide safe drinking water to all.

In early May, in conjunction with an Army Civil Affairs Team, Dr. Seals distributed our items as above to these hardy villagers. My wife reported that the most popular items were the simplest, i.e., pencils and notebooks that could be used in their makeshift school. She went on to say, “I am proud to be part of an Army that is working day by day here in an attempt to hopefully provide the Afghani with a brighter future.”

What an amazing contrast. Under the medievalist Taliban tyranny little girls were forbidden from attending school or even learning to read and write.

Now, after the efforts of our entire Armed Forces, a new day has dawned in that amazing country in Southwest Asia. Life continues to be far from perfect in Afghanistan but one has to applaud the efforts of so many whom are striving to improve it. My personal thanks, and the thanks of all here in the Army ROTC Department, to those of you that provided assistance.

Major Bob Seals, U.S. Army Special Forces, is an assistant professor of military science.

Trade barriers hurt everyone

The world has yet to see the good that global capitalism can do.

When it is within our power to help someone in desperate need at little cost to ourselves, most of us will respond with a helping hand and a generous heart. When we are able to help someone at a profit to ourselves, it is only the province of fools and misanthropes to refuse aid. Yet this is the course that



Jacob Lyles

OLD GOLD AND BLACK COLUMNIST

the leaders of the developed world have chosen.

An alliance of third world countries representing most of the Earth’s population, led by India, China, Brazil, and 23 other nations, went into World Trade Organization meetings in Cancun over the weekend to explore the western world to let down their agricultural trade tariffs and cut their agricultural subsidies. These countries are poor, but blessed with perfect growing climates, wide stretches of open land, and cheap labor. They can make food much cheaper than we in the developed world. The U.N. estimates that the liberalization of agriculture trade would result in a profit of \$700 billion for third world countries. This figure is more than

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ten times the total amount of aid dollars given to them every year, quite a substantial sum for citizens living on a dollar a day. At the same time, a CATO institute study estimates that the changes would bring a net benefit of \$20 billion to the US economy through lower prices for agricultural goods. But the talks failed, largely through the unwillingness of rich countries to even discuss the demands brought to the bargaining table by the poor.

The most puzzling question is why countries like the U.S., who pay lip service to the free market and trade reforms, are dragging their feet over a win-win proposition that has the potential to bring prosperity to billions of people.

The answer is that the interests of politicians and the interests of the people they represent don’t always agree. If we cut our 200 percent tariff on sugar tomorrow, Brazilian unemployment would plummet. In an economy where an opening for a cashier’s position draws 2000 applicants, Brazilian farmers say that they could easily double production and employment if allowed access to the large markets of America and Europe. Sugar prices in the U.S. would fall, and so would the price of every product made with sugar, freeing American budgets to spend more money on other goods. This would create jobs in

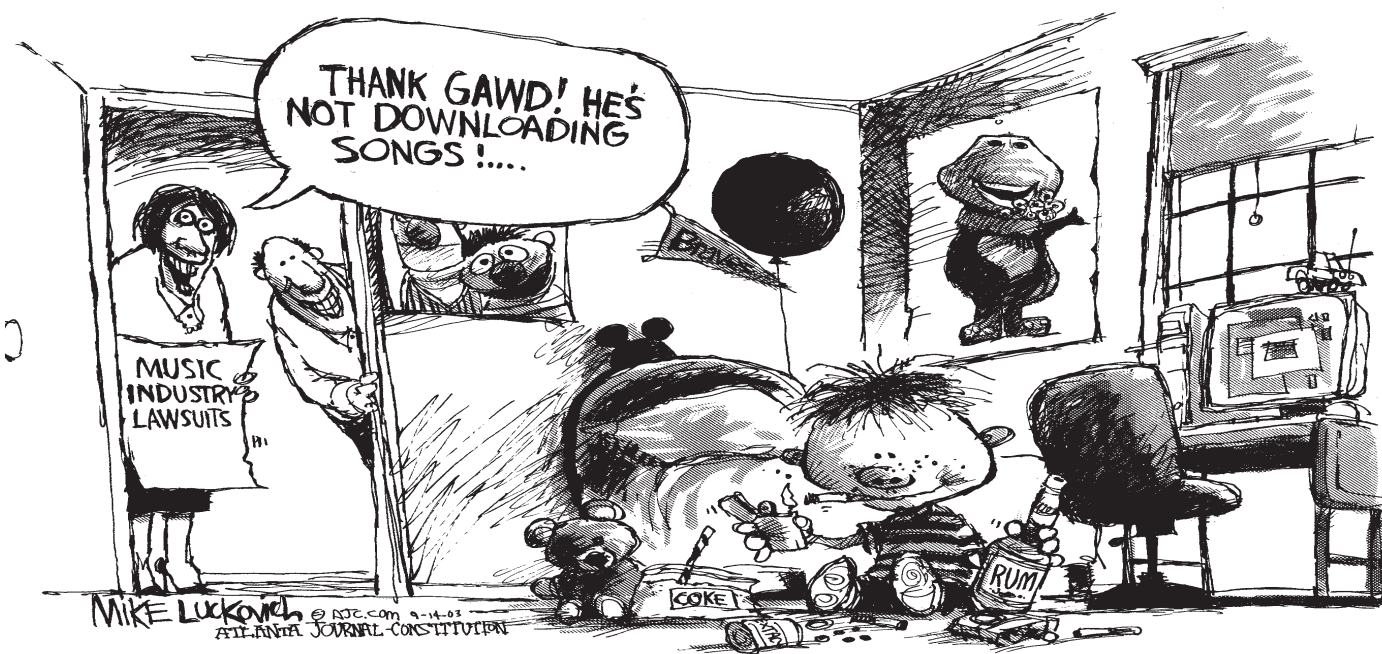
areas where they should naturally be created, instead of artificially holding on to farming jobs with government subsidies. The boost to our economy would be moderate; the boost to the Brazilian economy would be breathtaking. The boost in good will towards America would be priceless.

A second obstacle to progress was in the streets outside the meeting halls in Cancun. Neo-leftists, defying 200 years of economic theory and empirical study, insist that trade would make third world nations poorer.

Others would rather see third world workers die than accept a job with working conditions that are substandard compared to countries that have had hundreds of years of development. Third world workers would probably like to be given the choice themselves. It is perhaps ironic that leftists are often portrayed by the media as advocates for “the little guy” while they continue to support policies that harm the world’s most desperate citizens. Unfortunately, these uneducated advocates against progress have equal voting rights and louder voices than the advocates for free trade.

Hopefully, through economic education and bold leadership, changes can be made. The last 50 years have made more progress in fighting poverty than the previous 500. Yet this is but a drop in the bucket compared to the latent possibilities as yet untapped in global free market capitalism.

Jacob Lyles is a junior majoring in mathematics and economics.



Whiteness theory has relevance

Lyles’ concept of racial guilt ignores distinct advantage for whites.

What is most remarkable after reading Jacob Lyles’ column “Culture of Guilt Exists,” (Sept. 11), is how students from such similar backgrounds can reach such divergent conclusions of the same event. Lyles should be praised for his candor in

Ben Halfhill and Sarah McArver

GUEST COLUMNISTS

addressing a sensitive subject; however, we fear that the version of events presented by Lyles so distorts what occurred, that it maligns both the activity of race dialogue on this campus as well as its participants. Through misperception or misrepresentation, Lyles’ article obscures the larger lessons that could have been learned that night.

Lyles begins his arguments by summarizing what it means to be white in America today. “To be white,” Lyles writes, “is to feel guilty.” We couldn’t agree more.

The unfortunate fact about race in America is that the majority members are nearly oblivious to the advantages and opportunities available to those with light skin pigment.

To compensate for our lack of understanding we consciously, or unconsciously, place special emphasis on the exploitation and dehumanization that has occurred in this country for over two hundred years—undoubtedly hoping that shame and guilt can help prevent such abuses from occurring again.

Lyles states that “society, through the vehicles of education and media, forces

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white people to feel huge amounts of unearned guilt for the actions of their ancestors and for inequities in society that they did not create.”

To what extent, if any, the media perpetuates “white guilt” is not clear to us; for these two writers, we can’t recall any instances of sudden remorse for our ancestors arising after watching episodes of “Friends” or “Frasier”.

If “white guilt” is the extent of the suffering that white people feel, then we would say that we’ve had it pretty good.

What Lyles has failed to acknowledge is that minorities too, particularly African-Americans, suffer from societal guilt as well. Black Americans are often “guilty” of crimes or undeserved promotion in the eyes of a society and a media that are content to perpetuate such stereotypes.

If whites suffer from “undeserved guilt,” then blacks suffer from undeserved oppression and suspicion.

What the dialogue on Sept. 8, as well as the subsequent articles in the *Old Gold and Black* prove, is that diversity is a desirable component to any education. It is important to recognize that an education can exist outside the classroom; the university should offer an environment conducive to completely fulfilling a student’s desire to learn.

The university experience is a prime opportunity for students to learn from each other. To promote such an environment, for Lyles, would necessarily result in less white faces, and causes him to question whether “a white person cannot represent a black person in

the (student) population.” Doesn’t this question eerily parallel the infamous question posed in the *Howler*?

The answer is, of course, no; a black student’s best conjecture of what a white person’s experience is like, is no substitution for asking a white student what it is like to be white.

And isn’t this the very core of the problem, that individuals don’t know what it is like to grow up another color. And thus, that we don’t understand the extent to which race impacts our lives.

This is what makes Lyles’ misrepresentations of Watts so infuriating. Watts never called anyone a racist.

What Watts said, and what Lyles conveniently forgot, is that while whites who unwittingly benefit from the inequities in our society are not racists per se, they are not helping the situation either.

As they say, if you’re not working on a solution, you are contributing to the problem. Complacency on the part of whites, content that we have already achieved equality, ignores that lives are still colored by race.

The whiteness studies alluded to by Dr. Watts, and disparaged by Lyles, offer insight into what it means to be white in America, to expand our (white) understanding of our race beyond one word characterizations, i.e. guilt.

Whiteness studies is but another tool to help the multitude of races on campus and in our society better understand, and hopefully reconcile, what color can do.

Mr. Lyles, before you denigrate Watts in print again, you should accept his offer to more fully explain whiteness studies to you (at the Sept. 8 dialogue); whether you think it is “an ill-defined piece of bad academics” or not, we think you at least owe him this courtesy.

Ben Halfhill is a senior political science major and Sarah McArver is junior political science major.