

My greatest joy would be to know that future students were finding the same insights into themselves and others. This is the greatest gift that Swarthmore can bestow.

March 16, 1970

Dear President Cross,

I am quite dismayed by the decision to turn Robinson House into a Black Cultural Center for many reasons. However, I will present just one objection to you here.

Last year, Dean Hargadon mentioned to me that one of the major problems he was encountering in recruiting and interviewing Black applicants was the almost universal fear of coercion by SASS. He said that most applicants asked how strong the pressure to join SASS was, and how well a Black student would fare who wished not to belong to this group. Hargadon tried to assure these people that there was no pressure to join SASS and that each person would be free to choose his own course of action.

He was obviously wrong. From the first day of Orientation, Black freshmen were subject to pressures from SASS. One Black boy was remonstrated to "stick to his own kind" after he spoke to some white girls during the Orientation picnic. Girls who chose to straighten their hair were denounced as traitors by others, and active recruitment to join SASS was begun from the first day. We can only guess at the other forms of coercion. Last year, Diane Batts published a letter she had received from SASS telling her that if she would not join with her Black Brothers and Sisters she should at least keep her mouth shut. This year, one black girl was so upset by the decision to stay away from classes that she came to some faculty friends in tears, but I think she finally went along with SASS's decree. Jean-Marie Prestwidge, who chose to remain friends with whites has been totally excluded from the Black community and is subject to derision from other Blacks. I am afraid the same fate awaits one courageous freshman girl who is not taking part in the sit in. By following their own beliefs, these people are denying themselves any kind of satisfying social life and are subjecting themselves to all kinds of abuse. It takes a very strong individual to accept this.

I am concerned with those who are not so strong. By agreeing to provide a Black Cultural center we are fostering the powers of coercion, nurturing a group which destroys individual integrity. Swarthmore College is (or was) a community of individuals. Its uniqueness rested in the fact that education at Swarthmore was a constant dialogue between different individuals fostering myriad points of view while at the same time promoting understanding and tolerance of others. I cannot begin to express how wonderful these four years have been for me. I was taught to see my unique perspective on the world and my unique background as assets that made me a very important person, while I grew to see that my way was no better or worse than anothers but that we all form a cohesive whole because we are all so different.

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A Black Cultural center emphasizes superficial similarities while it denies deeper individual differences and stifles the most important aspects of human character. The creation of such an institution at Swarthmore will be a great disservice to its Black students, as well as to the community as a whole.

Sincerely,

Anne Newman '70

Last year, Dean Hargadon mentioned to me one of the major problems he was encountering in recruiting and interviewing Black applicants was the almost universal refusal to join SASS. He said that most applicants asked how well a Black student would fare who wished not to belong to this group. Hargadon tried to assure these people that there was no pressure to join SASS and that each person would be free to choose his own course of action.

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