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Letters

Skin color not relevant in discussion of minority issues

FRIDAY AFTERNOON I started reading the article "Out of the loop, students fear 'conservative agenda'" in The Daily. I wondered what news had surfaced in the growing tensions between Stanford students and the administration — the tensions surrounding the inevitable budget cuts.

As I read, I noticed yet another reference to those infamous words spoken by Condoleezza Rice on Jan. 12 at the forum organized by the Students of Color Coalition. "I've been black all my life," she said. Then it struck me, more than a month after the fact — what do those words mean?

Rice's comment was a response to a question challenging her commitment to minority issues. Her statement was a troubling and inadequate response to a challenge posed by a concerned student. For Rice to reason, as she did, that therefore "you [the students] don't have the standing to question my commitment to minority issues," is far from a logical truth.

Indeed, it struck me as a knee-jerk criticism to a legitimate question coming from, of all people, a woman intolerant of knee-jerk criticisms. Rice's position as Provost necessitates that she constantly reaffirm that commitment to the student body. That she

should think otherwise is a gross underestimation of the demands we as students necessarily put on our administration.

A perfect administration would fully serve each student's interests. However, we don't live in a utopia, and I'm not about to assume without question that my interests are being served fully. As Stanford students, we are sophisticated enough to appreciate the dynamics of limited resources and the role of subjective judgment in the decision making process.

Furthermore, as minority students, we are not a monolithic population, even though we may have an aggregate interest — ensuring our presence on this campus. This is a subtle and crucial distinction. We are a complex body of students, who are not by virtue of our skin color political, never mind radically political. I hesitate to say, we can look at a majority of the black population here at Stanford to be reminded of this fact. Arguably, however, we ought to be — either one would do. This is one of the great dilemmas of being a person of color in America — the reconciliation of personal autonomy with group responsibility — dare I say, something whites can hardly empathize with.

My point is that we must all advo-

cate our ideas and interests as individuals. When we discern systemic abuses, then we work as a group to protect our mutual interests. This is not to say, however, that we are therefore all the same within that group. Life is sufficiently complex that skin color alone is not determinant of one's assessment of the causes of racial inequality. Some people perceive the problem to be more superficial (less systemic) in nature than others; we can look at Clarence Thomas if we need be reminded of this fact.

Rice's skin color is irrelevant when testifying her commitment to student groups on campus. She shouldn't be surprised that minority students aren't placated by her words of reassurance or that students should have been appeased is a personal affront. Is it not surprising that whites were unaffected by her comments? Was it not a prime opportunity for The Review to do an exposé on Rice's conflicts of interest as provost? Of course not, because whites realize also that Rice's reference to her skin color is of no substance in the context of affirming her commitment to student groups.

The precarious existence of minorities on this campus is one that demands that we go above and beyond the nor-

mal means of protecting our interests. Certainly, the ethnic centers, as a reflection of our presence on this campus, are the most obvious manifestation of that predicament. Whether it be as overt attacks on affirmative action relating to assertions that our alleged inferior SAT scores and GPAs are watering down the quality of academic life here at Stanford or as subtle as implying that we suffer from an inferior gene pool, we are in a position of perpetually justifying our existence.

To this, I can only say that the proportions of cultural biases and systemic oppression experienced by many minorities exceeds the threshold of comprehension of the many truly poorly educated on campus. Feeble-mindedness is most manifest in analytically unsophisticated assertions. The relatively few students actively thwarting off these malignant forces are doing what any progressively minded student would do — staying one step ahead of the adversary.

I'm not so crude in my assessment of the opposition as to group the administration with the other more morally repugnant conservative associations. But if we're not careful, who knows?

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