

EDITORIAL

Burlington • Vermo.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
FEBRUARY 17, 1970

Following is the text of an editorial by Stuart T. Martin, president of WCAX-TV, broadcast the evening of Tuesday, February 17, 1970:

One of the marvels of the human condition is the ability of people to become obsessed with a theoretical idea and devote enormous energies to impose it on those around them. The less it has to do with their immediate condition or welfare the more intense the obsession.

The idea that the performance of the Kake Walk is an expression of racism has become just such an obsession.

Here is what walking for the cake amounts to. It's an exuberant, demanding exercise having its roots in the authentic culture of the American Negro. The performance is a unique student custom at the University of Vermont enduring for generations -- a genuine tradition.

For reasons which defy analysis it has become a badge of liberal thought to allege that this dance expresses scorn for the condition of negritude. A determined group insist it is intended as an offense to blacks and the practice must stop. You may form your own opinion of their position. To me it's highly unreasonable that these students are expressing scorn for black people by devoting the long hours of practice and physical conditioning necessary for this occasion.

-more-

(At this point a film showing of two students during the Kake Walk began)

(At this

WCAX-TV
Feb 20, 1970

Once again, Kake Walk tries to rear its ugly head, and in spite of the humanistic stand taken by UVM students last fall, there appears to be a number of people in the white community who exhibit the same insensitive, ignorant, disgustingly-racist behavior which characterizes so much of America.

To understand the objection to kake Walk, one must understand the attitude of white racism. White Americans, in order to justify black slavery, invented the image of the Negro -- the so-called Magnolia Myth which stereotyped the black man as an inferior being. He was viewed variously as criminal, coward, comic, congenital rebel or as the happy-go-lucky, shiftless, national banjo player.

This myth has remained to become embedded in the national character. In America, a way of life has been developed -- an American ethos -- a national style which contains the assumption that blacks are inferior. Black people are not condemned in America because they are poor, uneducated or even black, but rather because they are Negroes.....that is, because of an idea, an image of the Negro, and that Negro's place in the white American mind. This myth remains as a pervasive influence in this society and is supported by public information media, textbooks, schools, and other major institutions. True history has taught us that this is in fact a myth; yet, most Americans cling desperately to these wish-fulfillment fantasies.

Kake Walk was conceived as an extension of this racist thinking. To anyone who has researched the subject, the derogatory stereotype

- 3 -

Further, the chant of artistic freedom is invalid; such freedom is not all-inclusive but is limited by good taste and humaneness. Nor is tradition a valid excuse for this event. Black progress in this country has been delayed continually on the grounds of tradition. Lynching, I might add, has a very long tradition in America. So what?

More importantly, we blacks do not need white people to determine for us what is offensive. Unfortunately, many whites have the arrogance to think themselves greater authorities on blacks than blacks themselves. This is just another example of their racist thinking.

The point is, Kake Walk is offensive to us, and America has not earned the right to play upon the very myth about blacks which it has used and still uses as a basis for denying us access to society. Perpetuation of this myth would be wrong in any setting, but in a University...in a community of scholars, in this day, such activity is unthinkable. The presence of black students is irrelevant; whites should find their racist needs despicable even without the presence of blacks.

The final specific task for the white citizen is to undo his diabolical inventive destruction. The great alterations must emerge from the side which generated the entire distorted history.

H. Lawrence McCrorey
1970