

Observer Censored

Fifth Estate Collective

1968

"I'm tired. I'm tired of being tired. White man, devil, don't bother me. No, bastard, I'm going to keep my cool. I won't give you an easy way. I'm going to kick your ass at your own rigged-up game. When I do it you'll probably be too cold to feel it. Honky, I'll never get as cold and as inhuman as you. I wouldn't want to be as cold and inhuman as you. I wouldn't want to be your Goddamned imitation. I've got better things to do."

—"Painted Black"

The above passage is an excerpt from a diary written over the Summer by a black Oakland University student. The diary, which gives her reactions to white America and white Oakland, was to be published under the title "Painted Black" in the *Observer*, the student newspaper of Oakland University.

But on Tuesday, October 1, the *Observer* was notified by Interlakes Press that they would not print the diary unless the copy was substantially altered.

Veritypers at the printing company had refused to type the material, referring to the diary as "pure trash."

The *Observer* was also told by Howard Fitzgerald of the Pontiac Press, of which Interlakes is a subsidiary, that the obscene nature of the material would jeopardize the second class mailing permit of the two firms. According to Fitzgerald, the language of certain passages of the diary might be found objectionable under the federal codes which do not allow certain kinds of wording to be sent through the mails.

Mike Honey, editor of the *Observer*, denied that there was any "obscenity" in the material and further stated: "I think what is perhaps closer to the heart of the matter is the content of the material involved. Most whites would probably rather not hear what this black student has to say. If there's any obscenity involved, it is in the truth this person was revealing to the public as a black student. It is American racism that is obscene, not what she said."

At a meeting of the University Publications Board later in the week Honey stated that the matter should not be allowed to drop and that he felt that the University should bring suit against Interlakes Press for breach of contract. He said too, that many printers are able to "get away with" censoring the papers they print merely because they don't agree with the content of the publication.

In a telephone conversation the *Observer* told the *Fifth Estate* that a complaint would be filed with the Michigan Civil Rights Commission on grounds that the censorship of the paper was racially motivated.



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