



Black at Kenyon . . .



what it is . . .

To Prospective Black Students of Kenyon College:

"And the tom toms beat--and the tom toms beat--
And the low beating of the tom toms stirs your blood!"
—Langston Hughes

In this era of great social, economic and political consciousness, it seems strange that an institution of higher learning is, comparatively speaking, no further versed now in areas of Black-White racial relations than it was at its creation in 1824. Astonishing? Well, Kenyon College, for one, has done the phenomenal-- if you consider it a phenomenal fact that Kenyon, as typical of American institutions, has remained irrelevant to black people.

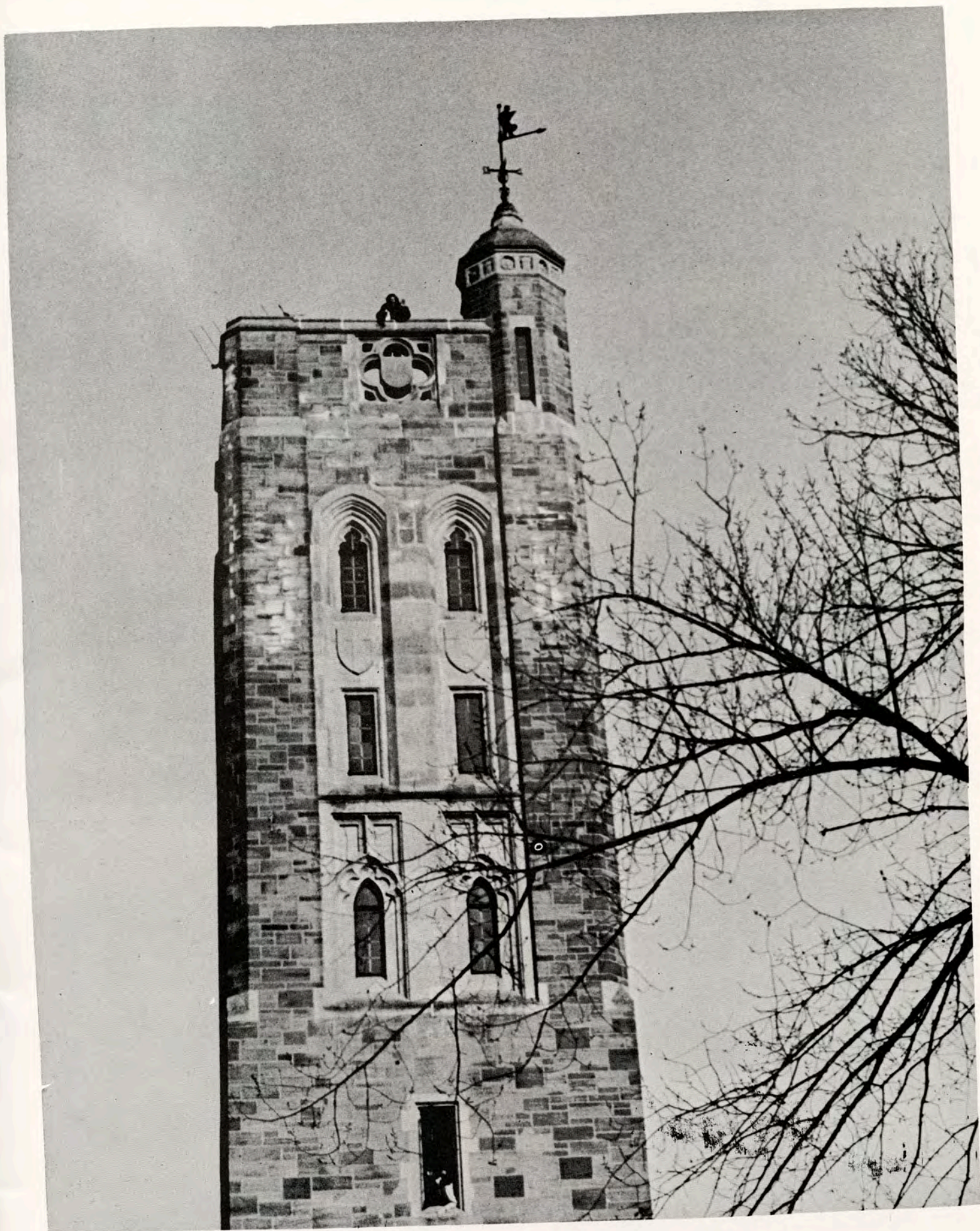
Kenyon College, an all-male school until 1969, is a small (approximately 1,300 students), PREDOMINANTLY white, liberal arts college in central Ohio. The first black was admitted to Kenyon in 1859. Since then, blacks at Kenyon have been few indeed. There were, in 1968, ten black men at Kenyon. At the beginning of the 1969-1970 school year, only six of these men remained. In one year, forty per cent of the blacks left without graduating. Academically, Kenyon is considered one of the best small colleges in the country. It is of equal or better ranking, depending upon the poll, with Amherst, Oberlin, Wesleyan, and others. An academic atmosphere which permeates just about every facet of Kenyon's college life and the lack of social outlets familiar to black people make Kenyon, for most blacks, a socially depressive school. This social depression, for most blacks, is the greatest hindrance to a successful academic and social performance at Kenyon. A combination of academic stress and, particularly important, social disorientation seem to have been the main factors contributing to the high attrition rate among blacks at Kenyon. In 1969, six black freshmen, three men and three women, entered Kenyon. In the beginning of the 1970-71 school year, there were eight black freshmen, five men, three women. During the 1971-72 school year, there were three, two men, one woman. Three blacks have left Kenyon without a Kenyon degree since the beginning of the 1969-70 school year. This somewhat lessened rate of attrition since 1969 may most probably be linked to the creation of an organization for black students, the Black Student Union of Kenyon College, in 1969 and the establishment of a Black Student Lounge in 1970. Kenyon's all-time high for blacks in attendance during one academic year (1972) is twenty-one: Kenyon College, 148 years old, and an all time high of only 21 blacks in attendance at one time! See what I mean by phenomenal?

"And the tom toms beat--and the tom toms beat--
And the low beating of the tom toms stirs your blood!"

I cannot definitely state what Langston Hughes meant when he wrote the above lines: but for me, it symbolizes a tendency toward stagnancy at Kenyon. Year after year, we hear the same trite phrases uttered by the upper middle class whites at Kenyon, the same nerve-wracking questions: "How do you get your hair to stand on end like that?" "How do you all dance like that?" "Do you sing Bessie Smith or Mahalia Jackson?" Year after year, it seems that the same ignorant questions arise. And the "low beating of the tom toms" has stirred the blood of blacks at Kenyon. We cannot sit idly by and watch black students become depressed and disastrously discouraged by the Kenyon College atmosphere. We must let black students know what Kenyon is like before they get here. So, we have composed this brochure.

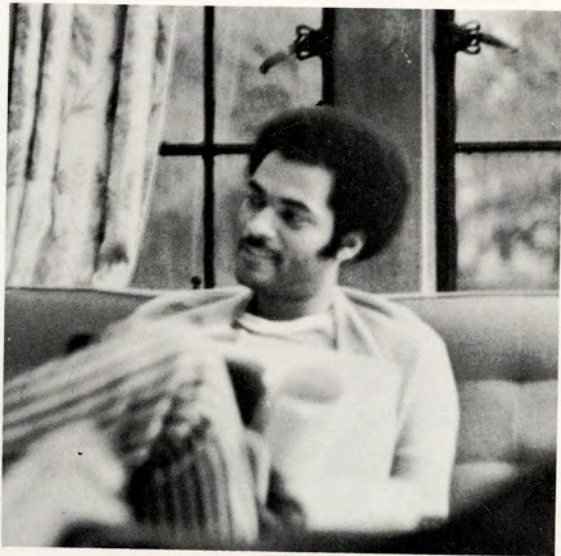
This brochure consists of the black student's personal and individual attitudes toward black existence at Kenyon. We sincerely hope that this publication will not cause fewer blacks to apply and/or attend Kenyon. **THIS IS NOT THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOKLET!** What we wish to do is to make you, as prospective blacks at Kenyon, aware of what life may be like for you at Kenyon. We hope that prospective black students will not interpret this brochure as a warning against coming to Kenyon but rather as a call to the cause. There is a struggle here at Kenyon. Black people cannot run from the fight. Any accomplishment for black people at Kenyon is an accomplishment for black people everywhere. Brothers and Sisters in the struggle, use Kenyon as a stepping stone to ultimate Afro-American victory.

Johnnie L. Johnson '73
Chairman of Black Student Union (1972)



Kenyon College is

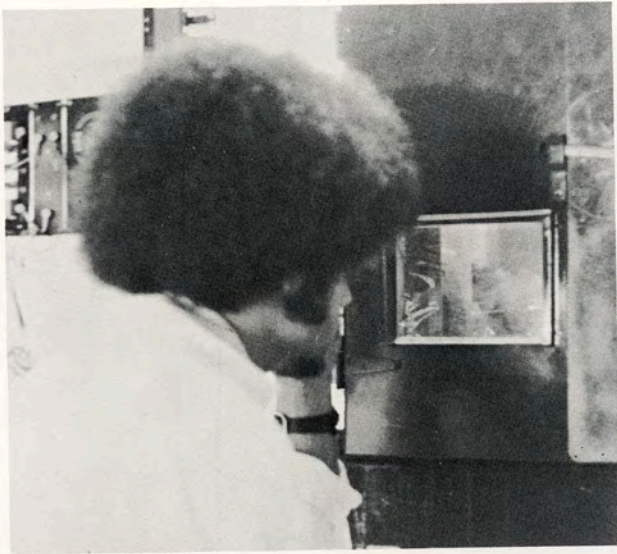
a haven for intellectual pursuit. Surrounded by trees and isolated on top of a hill, Kenyon is physically separated from the hustle and bustle of the everyday world. Though physically separated from the rest of the world, Kenyon has tried to keep itself relatively abreast of current needs of the college student. The recent enlargement of the campus because of increased student enrollment, largely augmented by the admission of women to this traditionally male school, has produced new, modern buildings and equipment which contrast with the gothic, ivy-covered buildings of earlier decades.



The college experience is, for the most part, a process of finding one's limitations as well as capabilities. The black student at Kenyon must come to terms with this situation. The black student should not come to Kenyon expecting to find a refuge for student activism. Instead, one ought to consider the plausibility of finding satisfaction in a largely contemplative life style.

Beyond this, the black student at Kenyon must exist in an environment that is, on one level, subtly hostile and, on another more significant level obviously challenging to the validity of the black experience.





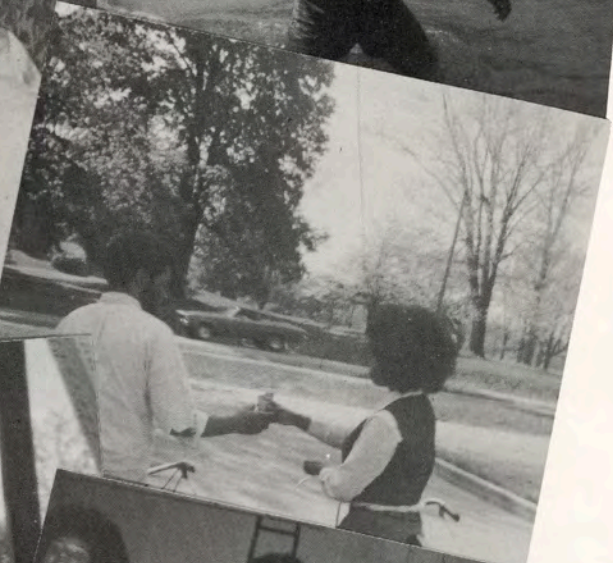
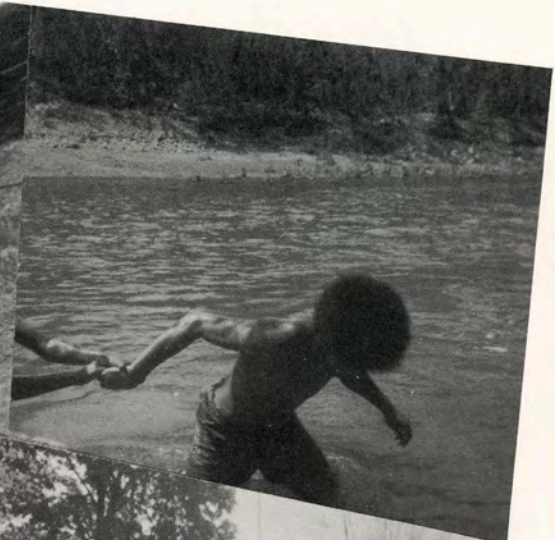
The science departments are psychology, biology, chemistry and physics. Here at Kenyon the Science Division has an adequate supply of technical equipment. This equipment allows the student to explore with a better understanding the many interesting problems in which the sciences are involved. Being able to handle this highly technical equipment gives the student experience which cannot always be obtained through reading books.



Most courses in the science departments are foundation courses which give you an excellent synthesis of what the career in science is all about.



The Kenyon experience can be one of great academic enlightenment if you let it.



KENYON IS WHAT YOU MAKE IT.



Here at Kenyon, is the novel experience of having 'mucho' free time. However, — and this may be one's greatest challenge as a college student - you must decide how to reap maximum benefit from this time. You can study sixteen hours a day and sleep the other eight or party every night of the week. You can stay high every second of the day or you can become involved in the Black Student Union and in the problems and needs of the total black community, so that the black student can effectively work for the grass-roots. I think he must somehow incorporate study, play, and involvement as part of his individual college experience.



In spite of the fact that the primary emphasis at Kenyon is academic excellence, Blacks are exposed to and participate in various intercollegiate athletic sporting activities. One is able to discover, develop and professionalize his skills in basketball, baseball, football, lacrosse, ice hockey, soccer, wrestling, track, golf, tennis, and martial arts.

Although Kenyon does not offer physical education as a major, it has been able to maintain a respectable competitive status among the various teams of the Ohio Conference.

For Blacks, Kenyon is a place where personalities are developed. Kenyon is a place where soul-searching is a way of life. Kenyon is a place where the Black student dramatically realizes the importance that he, as a part of the whole movement, has toward Black Liberation.

There is a common bond among black people on small campuses such as Kenyon. Here black people on this campus realize the importance of "sticking together" for a common cause, something that is many times lost in the shuffle of a large college or university. Although problems do arise, here, they are considered as a "family affair".

I was very amazed at the understanding which I found among the blacks at Kenyon — blacks with a true sense of togetherness.

Coming to Kenyon and being faced with an overwhelming abundance of white faces can be a startling thing when your past has been filled with black faces. I have survived at Kenyon mainly because of the Black Student Union. The B.S.U. brings together black minds to give strength to the weak, comfort to the weary, and a pat on the back for the discouraged.

CREATED FOR YOU

I hit
the air
and was knocked out by the blow
of wind
parting my 'fro
cutting my flesh
and jerking
me
home.

I lay
face down.
Each out stretched limb
was home

My left leg stood
in far off Ghana
blades of savanna
grass tickling my foot soles
newly bathed in tumbling
streams, the diamonds on
its toes now gleaming out
beneathe the rich brown
blackness of my legs as I stand
wearing wraps of my
home culture.

My right leg wet and slick with
sweating
muscles taut and strained
from endless nights of urgent
running
foot calloused and bloody
after many days of southern
field trudging
and sidewalk shuffling
home.

The veins on my arms
popped out
seeking the
North.
My fingers ached grasping
the word freedom,
Clinging tightly as I felt it disappear.

I'm near Home.
A mist arose from the depths of the earth
as I lay asleep in Eden
My skin was refreshed with the moisture of love and the pure
air of peace revived me again. MY LIFE IS THE SUM OF OUR
PAST. AT LAST I AM HOME.

Across the nation, Black Student Unions and other similar organizations have developed both at the collegiate and secondary school levels. The advent of such organizations not only brought apprehension from the whites but from our people as well. Like the whites, our people have labeled us with distorted epithets ad infinitum; all characterizing our mind, body and soul to be in a state of outrage, irrationality, and militancy. To an extent, these epithets are legitimate because our methods of dealing with social problems are very different from our parents and ancestors. However, the epithets become illegitimate when our methods are viewed as a fragment of a total changing society. Contemporary society's methods of dealing with social problems are, too, radically different from the methods of earlier societies.

Not only must we fight to attain our goals, we must also fight this distorted image. We must prove to our people that as an organization we have a rational mind, body, and soul. That we do, indeed, have specific, constructive goals we are striving to attain. It is our obligation, therefore, to express our goals clearly to our people and any prospective members. As it is with other Black Student Unions, we, too, have a constitution with our philosophy and goals expressed therein. The Preamble to the Constitution reads:

The Black Student Union of Kenyon College has been established to further the understanding of the ever-changing perspective of the Black Student at Kenyon. This understanding can only be realized through the adamant efforts of an organized group of members dedicated to this purpose. The B.S.U. will strive with unending tenacity to uphold the dignity of Black people everywhere.

In questioning its aims and purpose, is it really necessary to have an organized group of people whether they be black, red, or white? Answering this question through an historical perspective, I find that an organization or Union is needed for an oppressed group that has not given its full contribution to the world. Frederick Douglass, William E. B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, to name a few, have all supported the idea of a separate organization that would enlighten the black man's perspective even though their ends may have been relatively different. DuBois, who in my opinion has expounded most emphatically on the subject, stated eight distinctly, differentiated races upon the world stage; defining each to be "a vast family of human beings, generally of common blood and language, always of common history, traditions, and impulses, who are both voluntarily and involuntarily striving for the accomplishments of certain more or less conceived ideas of life".

He argues that history and sociology have transcended the scientific definition of man and look upon mankind as divided human beings. History of the world is the history not of individuals but of groups, not of nations but of races. He cites that the English nation stood for constitutional liberty and commercial freedom; the German nation for science and philosophy; the romance nations stood for literature and art, and the other race groups are striving, each in its own way, to develop for civilization its particular message, its particular ideal, which shall help to guide the world nearer and nearer to that perfection of human life. The Black race has not given its particular message to the world yet, largely because we have lacked organization. At Kenyon, we must fight to implement and maintain some form of organization. This established Union helps in the deliverance of our black message which is only a fragment of the pan-african unity that is needed. As DuBois concludes, "there is no power under God's high heaven that can stop the advance of eight thousands, thousands, honest, earnest, inspired, and united people. In an extensive learning environment, this Union greatly assists to further the understanding of the ever-changing perspective of the black student at Kenyon, promoting unity and a message. We feel that this understanding can only be realized through the adamant efforts of an organized group of members dedicated to this purpose.

The Black Student Union will strive further with unending tenacity to uphold the dignity of Black people everywhere. As a race, we are beautiful and have something to give as any other race. As Sister Harrison of the Black Panther Party writes in an article on culture nationalism and using Franz Fanon's work, The Wretched of the Earth, she concludes that those who believe in the "I'm Black and Proud" theory, believes that there is dignity inherent in wearing naturals; that a buba makes a slave a man; that a common Vanguard, Swahaile, makes all of us brothers.

America no longer hears the cries of her people. Many times has it been shouted that human beings are smothering in destituted, rat-infested environments; and she has not made a constructive response yet. It would be somewhat unfair to assert that she is deliberately ignoring her people as such actions would be inconsistent with her morals, her way of life. Rather, I believe that she can not hear. The etiology of her deafness to the people's cries is largely caused by her engrossment in technology. The banging of machinery and the roaring of engines have damaged her auditory senses. Before they also blind her, we must force her to realize and make constructive responses. In advancing her technology, she can see a way through fragments of individuals and groups who take it upon themselves to obstruct her path. But she can not see a way through an immensely solidified mass.

Larry J. Parker '73
Chairman, Black Student Union (1971)

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