

Derogatory remarks lead to call for teacher's removal

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ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

"...the professor asked a question, 'What question would you ask yourself when making up a test?'" [Dale Royster] wrote. "I answered the question by saying, 'What am I testing (with this test)?' The professor then said, 'It took that lousy black girl to answer that question.'

"Later on in the class period during his lecture, he said to me, 'Do you get it, black lady?' 'Do you get it, black girl?'"

"Just for the record, (other) terms used by [Carl Martini] in class: 'Betty's too stupid to know the answer.' 'Stupid black girl from the ghetto.' 'I don't want to call on you, you wouldn't know the correct answer.' 'That poor black girl from the ghetto wouldn't know.'"

FULL TEXT

Several members of the black student body at Salem State College are asking for the removal of tenure of a white education professor for allegedly making racially derogatory remarks about his black students during his classroom lectures.

the tenure of professor Carl Martini, a secondary education instructor at Salem State for 19 years, the students are prepared to plead their case before the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD), and enlist the services of the Massachusetts chapter of the National Conference of Black Lawyers.

The primary incident which generated calls for Martini's removal occurred during the college's recent intercession period. Dale Royster, an African student, wrote her version of what happened for Salem State's Afro-American Society's records.

"...the professor asked a question, 'What question would you ask yourself when making up a test?'" Royster wrote. "I answered the question by saying, 'What am I testing (with this test)?' The professor then said, 'It took that lousy black girl to answer that question.'

"I was shocked, I really didn't believe he had said it... I went to the second class and he didn't say anything derogatory so I came to the conclusion I was hearing things. The third class, I didn't understand what was going on, so I raised my hand. He answered my question and went on with the lecture.

"Later on in the class period during his lecture, he said to me, 'Do you get it, black lady?' 'Do you get it, black girl?'" Another black student, Betty Pruitt, also wrote of her experiences with Martini for the Salem State Afro-American Society files:

"...I must confess that I have never been in a class like this before. Carl Martini used words and phrases that were never used in any other classrooms that I had been in before. To the point, Carl Martini used degrading adjectives when addressing me.

"An example of one of his degrading adjectives would be to call me a 'dumb black girl from the ghetto.' He would use these sayings in a class full of white students. After having heard the teacher use such sayings, white students started using them...

"I never complained, because I didn't want to get into an argument with him. I did not want my grade to be affected

by any misunderstanding between Mr. Martini and myself.

"Just for the record, (other) terms used by Carl Martini in class: 'Betty's too stupid to know the answer.' 'Stupid black girl from the ghetto.' 'I don't want to call on you, you wouldn't know the correct answer.' 'That poor black girl from the ghetto wouldn't know.'"

Martini, contacted by the Banner by telephone, sounded surprised that his remarks had caused so much furor. He was especially surprised at Pruitt's report. "I don't know what to say about my remarks," he said. "Those phrases were not malicious in any way. In fact, I meant them to be complementary, to mean that blacks are not inferior. "I had asked everyone in the classroom a question, and none of the students had answered it except for Dale Royster. I meant for my remark to mean that if this (so-called) 'lousy' black girl could answer the question, the rest of the students should have been able to get it."

He said he employed the remarks as part of his "open and casual" style of teaching. Martini added that he later apologized to Royster and to the class, saying that he hadn't intended to offend anyone.

Walter T. James, academic dean of Salem State College, met with both Royster and Martini. In a letter to Decca Wingard, chair-person of the college's Afro-American Society, he said that Martini had been "officially admonished" and that he had apologized to Royster and to his class.

James also agreed with Martini in his letter to Wingard that his use of the racial remarks was part of his particular teaching method.

"Over the years," wrote James, "Professor Martini has employed a somewhat dramatic classroom technique intended to develop in his students an increased sensitivity to how various individuals and groups may perceive and react to situations, problems, epithets, and habits of speech in different ways.

"This technique was intended to alert students, particularly would-be teachers, against various kinds of stereotyping and name-calling. If done in a spirit of openness and friendliness and good humor, Professor Martini has in the past found this methodology to be effective."

However, Wingard, along with two other black students at Salem State College, met with James on July 6 to tell him they were not satisfied with the outcome of the incident, nor were they convinced that Martini's remarks were made in the spirit of "openness, friendliness and good humor."

James told the group that they had "slim grounds" on which to have Martini's tenure removed. He added that Royster had accepted Martini's apology. The students retorted that she had no other choice, and had not agreed with the outcome.

Royster or Pruitt could not be reached for comment.

Meanwhile, Winston Kendall, chair person of the Massachusetts chapter of NCBL, said he has written a letter to the college's administration asking for Martini's removal. If he doesn't receive a satisfactory response, he said, he will file a complaint with MCAD on behalf of the students involved, and he will write a letter to the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare asking that federal funds for the college be impounded if the professor is not removed.

"Perhaps that will get them (Salem State) to show black people more respect," he said.

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