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UMO blacks say Maine is biased

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6 UMO blacks say Maine is biased

Cultural ignorance and lack of knowledge — these factors lead to racial prejudice in Maine, and particularly at UMO according to six black students here.

"Maine people have had no experience with the black culture, and prejudice is the result of ignorance," says Jimmy Jones, a junior from New York City majoring in social welfare.

Louie Smith, a freshman from South Carolina who is majoring in English, said, "They (whites) try to relate to an image they've seen on television or read about."

There are 13 American blacks on the Orono campus. Ten of these students are on full scholarship through the Martin Luther King Student Union scholarship program, which is now incorporated into Onwards.

The Martin Luther King scholarship program was instituted in 1968 after the assassination of King. Seven blacks received scholarships to the University of Maine both years. Since the program ended in 1969, three blacks have entered the Orono campus, one of whom is on a scholarship through the Onwards program.

Most of the six students regard the Martin Luther King program as an immediate re-

sponse to a guilty conscience after King's death, and several of the students see their presence here in Maine as a form of "tokenism" to the blacks.

None of the students have run into any open prejudice, yet they think that it does exist.

"Prejudice up here is more undercover," says Doris Sykes, a senior music major from Washington, D.C. and a Martin Luther King scholar. "I was told I was a guest on this campus by some teachers," she added.

Miss Sykes' greatest problems were with teachers who downgraded her academic capabilities.

"They (teachers) expect us to be doubly good so we can go back to the ghetto and teach," said Miss Sykes. "I was told I was behind, and had to sit down and straighten things out with one professor first."

Several of the students see Maine as a closed-minded state, not necessarily to blacks in particular, but to all outsiders.

"Maine people lack the awareness to deal with minority group problems," said Smith.

"People in Maine are prejudiced against out-of-staters," said Dave Cannon, a sophomore from Pennsylvania majoring in political science.

"People up here are preju-

diced against anything different," says Brenda Billingsly, a senior English major from D.C. "If there were more of us, we'd be more of a threat."

"In D.C. you can tell where you stand — up here it's little looks, and wisecracks," she continued. "We're 13 out of 10,000 — what can we do?"

"For those students who came to Maine from Washington, D.C., it was the first time they were acutely aware of the fact that they were a minority, for D.C. is 80 per cent black. For those blacks from such a situation, the adjustment hasn't been easy," said Miss Billingsly.

Miss Sykes mentioned that there were several different directors to the Martin Luther King program in the first year and a half of operation, and thus when a black student had a problem, he often ran into a "pass the buck" situation.

The economic and environmental differences between the two cultures lead to many problems, perhaps the majority of the problems that may exist between two races, says Jones.

"Urban life is so different — you are very conscious of time. Up here it's a different way of life. This is oblivion as far as I'm concerned — a total social turnaround."