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Life Is Like a Salad Bowl (or Should Be!)

By Anthony B. Major
UCF Forum columnist
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Everyone in the world eats salad of some sort. We enjoy all the different ingredients in our salads depending on what we have a taste for at the time.

We expect the different types of ingredients we select to bring their own flavor to the bowl. When it is mixed just right, depending on the quality of the ingredients, we say the salad is great — just what we wanted. However, when the ingredients in the salad get old and soggy and we can no longer taste the individual flavor of each ingredient, we throw the rest away.

When it comes to diversity, I say it should be like a salad bowl: Each culture presents its own flavor. We need to respect the cultures of all nationalities and appreciate the differences between them in what I call the salad bowl of life.

But when we discard or disrespect the cultures of others, we reduce our own humanity when we accept only people like ourselves. To quote my friend, actor Gilbert Lewis, “People keep getting in the way of human beings, as human beings would not treat other humans the way some people do.”

Gentility is a choice and human beings have to make a choice to use it. People just act or react.

During the summer of 2006, I was teaching an advanced documentary film class with poet Valada Flewellyn, who informed me of an article entitled “The Monster Who Ate Goldsboro.” It was about how in 1911, Florida Rep. Forrest Lake overnight led a

legislative effort to dissolve Goldsboro, an all-black town, and annex it into neighboring Sanford, which was looking to expand. This destroyed the soul of Goldsboro.

I decided to have the class do a documentary on Goldsboro. Starting with a town hall meeting in a church in Goldsboro, my class met the citizens affected and took oral histories. It was evident that the octogenarians had a lot of pride and passion for the town they lived in. The younger participants had great respect for the elders and the town.

One young man said, "It made you proud to walk down 13th Street." The main street in Goldsboro leads to Crooms Academy of Information Technology, named after Joseph Crooms, the founding black educator. Today, U.S. News & World Report recognizes it as one of the top technology high schools in the nation.

It was during the process of interviewing that the students began to feel a spirit of community. Even though the community had been shattered in 1911, the sense of Goldsboro persisted. The community's identity and independence slowly eroded after annexation, which led to the formation of two Sanfords, one very old and one new.

This land grab destroyed the cultures of the people who built Goldsboro and some other nearby communities that were a focal point of those residents' education, businesses, religion, and sense of ownership. The new Sanford has spent the past two years after the Trayvon Martin case trying to unify a hundred years of resistance.

I asked my students, who are very diverse, to write about their experiences on the Goldsboro Project, and what they felt they had learned. Their responses brought tears to my eyes. I then decided to tell the story of this black town through the eyes of some UCF college students.

They wrote about the passion of the people being infectious. They learned that what kept this community together was life-changing.

Even though the students had the experience of working in the field in a group setting, developing their interviewing skills and learning the fundamentals of documentary filmmaking, the most important thing they learned was that people had different stories. But they were, as one student wrote, “weaved together like a tapestry.”

The residents’ respect for religion, education, each other and the community they lived in, taught all the students how different the African-American culture was, yet retained similarities to their own. By doing classes like this in Africana Studies at UCF, we allow any student to understand life experiences.

Another student wrote, “The most fascinating thing I learned while taking this class was the effects of desegregation. In school I learned that it was wholly positive, but now I see the real price. It destroyed a culture that was successful on its own for the price of assimilation into a larger one, and being white I can honestly say that it should have been the other way around.”

When cultural differences are accepted by people as a normal part of the whole, they will work together to make great contributions to the human race.

Life is like a salad bowl — or should be!

The documentary “Goldsboro: An American Story” can be seen in a UCF Profiles broadcast at www.youtube.com/watch?v=_1OImyHQMiI.

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