

that say 'colored only,' "Coleman says, "so you know how to deal with that."

"I don't take kindly to somebody calling me a nigger or anything like that," Reynolds says, "but I would rather know that somebody is a racist... I like to know where people stand."

Newton agrees. "In the South it's blatant — you know who's for you and who's against you straight upfront. And that's easier because you know who you're dealing with," she says. "Here they'll smile in your face and stab you in the back."

What can be even more damaging is when people make racist comments without thinking.

Rhodes says it makes her angrier "when it's almost unintentional because you just know they were raised that way. It makes it so institutionalized."

Galbert tells of a student in the dorms who made comments and jokes about black people and wondered why Galbert would become angry. For example, Galbert says, the student asked a friend of hers, a black woman with French braids, "Is that part of your heritage?"

Reynolds says people tell him jokes about black people. He pauses and wonders aloud, "Am I supposed to laugh at that?"

Then there are the stereotypes. "I've caught store employees following me because they thought I was going to steal something," says Rhodes.

Anthony is tall so people assume he plays basketball. "That's an assumption I've been living with for most of my life..." he says.

Cook says people have asked her if the black rubs off. And when inquiring about her apartment, the landlords asked her if she plays loud music and races up and down the street in her car.

"It feels bad," she says, "it always makes you realize who you are."

There's no single reason why people form stereotypes, says Myron Rothbart, head of the University psychology department and a recognized expert on stereotypes. But one reason is that people have a natural tendency to enhance differences between groups to try to make sense out of things, he says.

In one study, for example, people were given abstract information about two categories — information the subjects would have no reason to care one way or the other about, such as sets of numbers.

Then the subjects were given new information — information that either blurred the categories or separated them. The researchers found that people resisted the information that blurred the categories more than the information that separated them.

Rothbart emphasizes that the tendency is not based on emotion. Rather it is an inherent thought pattern the brain uses to perceive the world. The tendency is as strong in bigoted people as in non-bigoted people, he says.

But once a stereotype is accepted, it takes only a few examples to reinforce it, Rothbart says. He explains it as an "A-ha" complex — whenever people see someone who fits the stereotype, they think "A-ha! There's another example that proves the stereotype is true."

And evidence suggests people tend to remember only the people who fit the stereotype, he says.

"So you have a very powerful mechanism for perpetuating a stereotype based on a very few instances," he says.

And evidence does not support the hypothesis that stereotypes can be

broken down through contact with people who don't fit them, Rothbart says. Instead, those who don't fit the stereotypes are treated as exceptions, he says.

Stereotypes do tend to erode when a person discovers an unsterotypical characteristic in someone who otherwise reminds them of the stereotype, Rothbart says.

But he stresses, "The problem is in the perceiver, not in the target group."

However, some black people do blame other blacks for perpetuating the stereotypes.

"One of the things I think holds black people back is black people," says Rhodes, pointing out that some blacks have bought into the stereotype.

"Their expectations of themselves aren't any higher than mainstream society's are of them," she says.

For example, when a black person does something positive, whites often say, "Oh, you're not a normal black person," says Rhodes. But rather than point out that blacks are capable of positive behavior, some blacks perpetuate the stereotype by agreeing that they are exceptional, she says.

And some of the black people who have become successful have turned their backs on black society, says Coleman.

"They have become 'they' now — they look down on black people as 'them,' 'those people' — that's the unfortunate part," he says.

"They haven't said, 'I'm against you,' but they're not for you either," he adds. "They don't do anything — they don't have time — because they've bought totally into the system."

Cook finds that even children buy the myth.

"We've got black kids in this town that say they're white," Cook says. They want to identify with whites because they're the ones who get the jobs, she says.

According to Jan Oliver, director of the University Council of Minority Education, the most difficult part about being black in Eugene is being visible.

Her sentiment strikes a common chord among the community's blacks.

"The high visibility of the relatively few people of color who live here creates a certain amount of pressure on them because there is that kind of fishbowl feeling," says Anthony.

Cook says, "You always feel like you're in someone else's territory."

And according to Birden, "It seems like wherever you are you always feel like you're being watched."

And it's something that affects black people here every time they step out of the house.

By the second day of classes, Rhodes says her professors know who she is. "No matter what size the class is, they know what your name is, and it's like there's nowhere to hide."

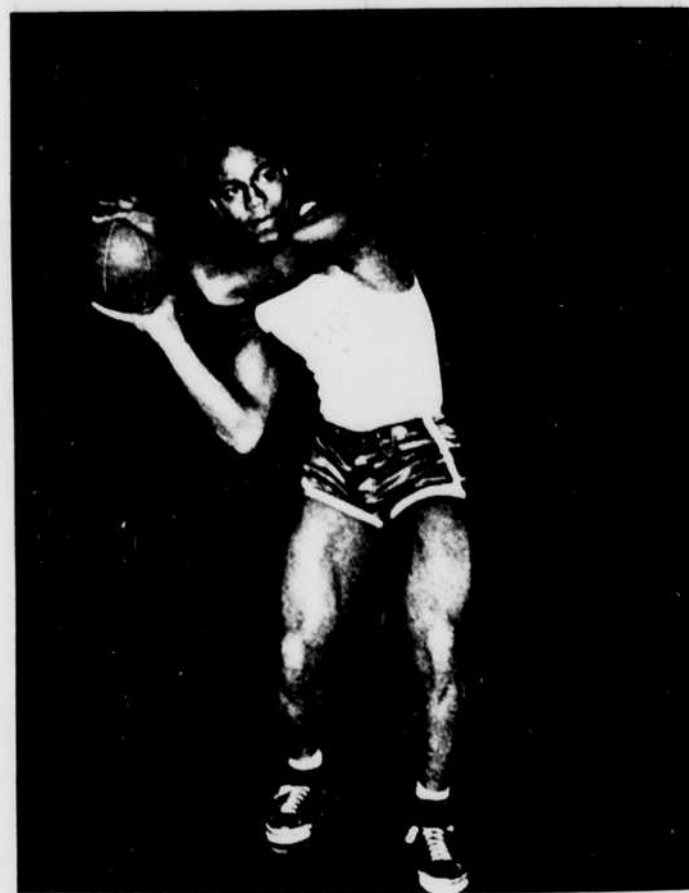
And being the only black student in a class can be intimidating, says Reynolds. He says he usually maintains a low profile by sitting in the back of the room and keeping to himself.

"Even going into restaurants, people turn and they look for awhile," he says. "I guess I should be used to it, but it's just something that you never really get used to."

At the same time, because the black community as a whole is small, blacks also suffer from invisibility.

"The visibility is something that you feel as an individual," Anthony says, "but within the town itself, and in society itself, there's a general perception

The Brown Bomber



Charles Patterson, Center—Forward

Photo Courtesy of University Archives

Charles Patterson, the Northwest's first black collegiate basketball player, in his yearbook photo.

that you're not even there."

Coleman agrees. Watch the local news, he says. "Who are the faces you see? You see white faces. You don't see any brown or black faces."

The same is true for other media and for city government. "You look at the structure of our municipality — it's all white faces. We don't talk about how we can recruit minority people or minority businesses to Eugene," he says.

That's one aspect of what it's like to be a non-white in an all-white community, he says. "And it can be very, very depressing — very depressing."

According to Cook, many blacks also have been denied their ethnic heritage. Unlike whites, who usually know if they're Irish, German or English, blacks often don't know where their forebears came from. When slaves were brought to America, many people were separated from their families at a young age.

"That's why we feel comfortable calling each other brother and sister because we just may be," she says.

"We're losing our identity," she adds. "A lot of us really wish we could make some connections with our homeland."

Another thing that frustrates some black people is watching the Reagan administration dismantle many of the gains blacks made in the '60s.

"Things are getting just as bad as they were before the '60s, and that's because of the Reagan administration," says Coleman. That includes William Bennett, U.S. secretary of education, who, by cutting programs that help minority students pay for college, is making education available only to those who have money.

"So what we've seen in the past six years is a reversal of many of the gains that were made in the past 20 years."

Anthony agrees. Since Reagan was elected "there has been a conspicuous lack of commitment on the part of the federal government to enforce anti-

discrimination legislation," he says. "There has also been a policy of ignoring those institutions which had been formed precisely to fight discrimination."

And many of the same attitudes exist on campus, he says.

"I'm seeing more and more students who are reflecting the attitudes of their parents, that they are fed up with the subject of race, the subject of racism, that they feel minorities have gotten more than they deserve, that they have gotten certain advantages through affirmative action, and so on. There's a general kind of backlash that is apparent — again, since the advent of the Reagan era — because the presidency sets a tone for an era."

But visibility, stereotypes and racist comments are just minute fractions of what it's like to be a minority.

Being black is more than being called a nigger in K-Mart, says Oliver. It can't be summed up with a few examples of discrimination, she says. "It's more than that."

"Many black people are happy in Eugene... and consider this to be home," she says, "but that doesn't mean they're exempt from the racism blacks face every day of their lives living in America."

"We grow up in this town, we fall in love in this town, we get jobs in this town... we're not visitors here," she says. "We have an investment being here, and we take pride in being here."

And black people want the same things white people want, Coleman says — blacks will be happy when they can enjoy the same things white people do.

"I want the same kind of opportunities. I want to be able to make the same kind of decisions. I want (my children) to be able to apply for a job and get it or lose it on the basis of their abilities and not what they look like," he says.

"I don't think black people want any more than that."