1991 Correspondence between Elliott and Travis re Beacon article on Leslie Williams

Commission for Women

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March 13, 1991

Dr. Nina Elliot
Chair, UTK Commission for Women
401 Student Services Bldg
CAMPUS

Dear Dr. Elliot:

The Beacon recently carried an account of a UTK student pedestrian who was struck and killed on Cumberland Avenue. The front page story was extremely poor and biased reporting. The headline used a phrase that made it sound almost as though the pedestrian hit the car. Descriptions of the victim's clothing and race were included in the coverage, but there was no parallel treatment with respect to the offender. The opinion of a male bystander that absolved the driver from blame was included, with the implication that the victim was at least partly to blame, perhaps because she was dressed in a provocative fashion. The article did not make any reference to the laws regarding drunk driving or the criminal classification of inflicting grievous injury to others while under the influence of alcohol. A thorough coverage of the incident would have noted that the victim was a UTK student, that the driver was found to be carrying a weapon in the car, and that the driver had other DUI offenses on his record.

I believe that the tone of the article and the indifferent editorial review that allowed it to be published are explained partly by the fact that the victim was a black and a woman. I urge the Women's Studies Commission on the Status of Women to formally protest the article, the bias it reflects, and the lapse in editorial guidance. I am concerned that the implicit racism and sexism of the article may pass without remark by those groups in a position to make the most effective statements. Please, share with me copies of any formal correspondence you have on this matter.

Sincerely,

Cheryl B. Travis, Ph.D.
Associate Professor

CBT/jr
May 4, 1991

Dr. Cheryl B. Travis
Psychology Department
303 C Austin Peay Building
CAMPUS

Dear Dr. Travis:

Once again I thank you for your letter concerning Leslie Williams. The Beacon's handling of the Williams' story did not go unnoticed by the Commission members. Your letter was discussed at the Commission's April 4th meeting.

During the discussion, it was brought to our attention that the Beacon's handling of the Williams' story had been resolved, and the Commission felt that it was too late for us to write a letter. Nevertheless, we thank you for sharing your concerns with us. And we also invite you to attend some of our CFW meetings and to give some thought to becoming more actively involved in the Commission.

Sincerely,

[Signatures]

Nina Elliott
Chair, CFW