

Duke University
Durham
North Carolina 27706

Office of the President

January 17, 1984

AN AVUNCULAR LETTER

To My Duke Students:

The enthusiasm of Duke students in Cameron Indoor Stadium during basketball games is legendary, especially at ACC games. That's great! It is as if we had a sixth man (maybe seventh, eighth, or tenth sometimes) playing on the floor.

But hold a minute--I have a reservation about all that. There is a recognizable line between enthusiasm and cheapness.

It is generally assumed that a person resorting in conversation to profanity and obscenities is short of an adequate vocabulary. That is doubly true in public utterances.

Resorting to the use of obscenities in cheers and chants at ball games indicates a lack of vocabulary, a lack of cleverness, a lack of ideas, a lack of class, and a lack of respect for other people. We are, I am sorry to report, gaining an unequalled reputation as a student body that doesn't have a touch of class.

I don't think we need to be crude and obscene to be effectively enthusiastic. We can cheer and taunt with style; that should be the Duke trademark. Crudeness, profanity, and cheapness should not be our reputation--but it is.

I suggest that we change. Talk this matter over in your various residential houses. Think of something clever but clean, devastating but decent, mean but wholesome, witty and forceful but G-rated for television, and try it at the next game.

We have too much going for us as an outstanding university to tolerate the reputation we now have for being so crude and inarticulate that we must resort to profanity and obscenities at ball games.

I hope you will discipline yourselves and your fellow students. This request is in keeping with my commitment to self-government for students. It should not be up to me to enforce proper behavior that signifies the intelligence of Duke students. You should do it. Reprove those who make us all look bad. Shape up your own language.

I hate for us to have the reputation of being stupid.

With best wishes,


President Terry Sanford