

Justice for all

International students need government's protection



LESLEY OWUSU is a sophomore broadcasting major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

It happens every day. Somewhere in this country people are victims of crime. We hear about very few of them. Only the major events are ever reported in our papers.

You have to be a popular figure or a celebrity before you are given even a mention in the local news.

If you're non-American or a minority, you have even less of a chance of gaining attention in the press.

International students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln have concerns about their status and safety in this country.

Many face problems that the majority of American students are unaware of.

As an international student, I relate to other students in America from across the world. Not only are we in a foreign country, we are thousands of miles from our family. Most of us are alone. We are forced to adapt to a totally new environment and culture.

Many international students have language barriers that Americans often take for granted.

Other students look at us differently because we are foreigners.

International students come to the United States with many expectations, but they also have many fears.

They see America as the "promised land," a place of opportunities to make dreams come true.

However, this is not always to be.

I was very disturbed by a recent crime that involved the death of a Kenyan student at North West Shoals Community College in Alabama.

My African history teacher, Professor Learthen Dorsey, informed many African students about this story.

The African Students Association asked me to inform the rest of the school about this story. It received little nationwide attention, and few people have heard about this tragedy.

I decided it was my duty as an international and African student to share this story with everyone on this campus.

The following details are from Martin White, a lawyer who has looked into this case.

Catherine Mutheki was a 20-year-old who had her whole life to live for. She had traveled to America to complete her degree in pharmacy.

A perfect 4.0-GPA student, she had never missed a day of school since she arrived last March, and she

showed no indication that she was emotionally disturbed.

She was described by her friends as a "quiet and sweet person."

She was last seen alive on Aug. 9 in her residence hall.

Four days later, her body was found on a slope of an abandoned railroad track. She was hanging from a tree by her own sweater.

Her death was declared a suicide by the local police in Alabama after an autopsy. But to me, this sounds like a very awkward suicide.

Parts of this story make it very mysterious.

This case is only now being investigated by the FBI, months after her death, after questions were raised by the victim's family who said their daughter would never commit such an act, under any circumstances.

Why is this case so puzzling? The victim was hanging low

My concern about this event is it seems the authorities find it easier to label Catherine's death as a suicide rather than a possible murder or "hate crime."

I would hate to imagine that this event received little attention because the victim was not American.

I wonder if this case would have received more attention if the victim had been a white American student.

The shocking death of Matthew Shepherd was a different case, but received headline news for days.

Shepherd was a gay, white American who was a victim of a "hate crime."

It is very possible that Catherine was a victim of a "hate crime," simply because she was a Kenyan. But the media did not publicize her death.

It appears that when minorities are victims of crime, they are lucky to get mentioned on the back pages of newspapers.

No grand jury looked at this case, because apparently there was no evidence of suspicious circumstance.

Perhaps this case really is not a huge deal because it happened in the South, where suspicious deaths occur all the time.

It's "just another suicide."

But this matter is a big deal to me and other

international students because we find it difficult to understand why the authorities waited so long before anything was done. We could all be victims of crime.

My deepest condolences go out to the victim's parents, who surely cannot be at peace until they know why their

daughter died and who was responsible.

They cannot bring her back. But they can try and find justice for their daughter.

How much hope do non-Americans in this country have in such a situation? Are we given equal protection?

Are we considered less of a priority than American citizens? I hope not.

Is the law always on my side, as it is for American citizens? Can I rely on and trust the law?

If I were to die under suspicious circumstances, will the law label my death as "just another suicide?"

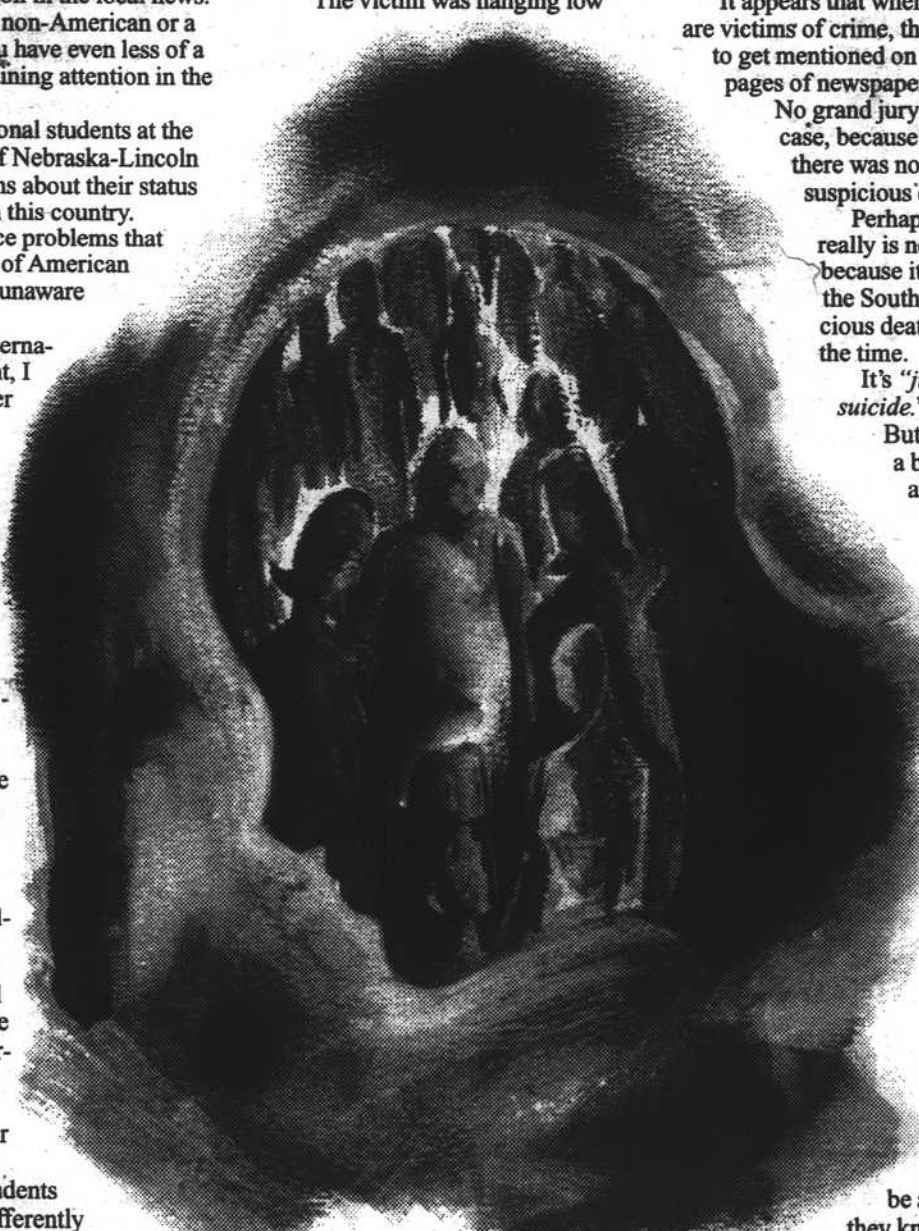
The authorities are here to protect their citizens and seek justice for all, so why was Catherine's case given little coverage? Many of you never heard about this story until today.

No one will ever really know what happened to Catherine Mutheki that night. All we know is that her life was unfortunately cut short.

If this incident was not a suicide, there are problems concerning the safety of all students on all college campuses.

The mystery of Catherine's death still continues ...

So do my fears.



MATT HANEY/DN

enough when her body was found that she could have placed her feet down at any time.

Her neck was also damaged in a way that did not look like suicide.

People who are interested in this story have possible theories as to what might have really happened.

Catherine may have been a victim of a "hate crime."

Messages on the Internet speculated that she was killed as retaliation for the bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Kenya, which occurred just days before Catherine was found dead.

It also is possible that she committed suicide, as the police said that she had been feeling depressed.

According to some of Catherine's friends, she received anonymous threats after the bombings in Kenya.

But those very close to the victim said it would be totally out of character for Catherine to kill herself, especially since she had come to the United States purposefully to study.

After speaking to several Kenyans at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, they informed me that few people in their culture would hang themselves. They would be more likely to take poison to commit suicide.

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