

# Campus racial issues remain hot

(CPS) — More than a few heads bobbed last spring during University of Alabama professor Louis Williams' biology exam when students came across a question which asked:

"Which of the following communities multiplies most rapidly: (A) Rodents (B) Rabbits (C) Negroes (D) Benthos (E) Plankton?"

Although Williams later told *The Washington Post* that "it was a biological question... and was not intended to imply prejudice," his black students felt otherwise and two of them complained to the university's academic vice president.

The vice president claims he took the complaint as general criticism and in turn reminded his underlings to promote more understanding towards campus minorities. The two complaining students feel their grievance was ignored.

The incident, which black students say illustrates what they call Alabama's "institutional racism," which they say pervades the campus, has come to light recently with the August naming of Alabama president David Mathews to President Ford's cabinet as Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW).

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in programs, Mathews will have to grapple with, among other things, the smoldering question of college desegregation. It is a hot campus issue, especially in the south, even a decade after the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which forbids racial discrimination in institutions receiving federal funds.

Currently, HEW is closely monitoring desegregation activities at colleges in 10 southern states following a successful NAACP federal suit that claimed HEW was dragging its feet on desegregation efforts.

The court ordered HEW to clamp down on the southern colleges, many of which were historically all-black or all-white schools, by June, 1974. Today, HEW officials say desegregation progress is being made although some colleges as well as some state governors are balking at HEW's proposals. As HEW chief, Mathews will have to decide how much pressure to apply on them to force compliance.

Mathews will have to walk a tight political tightrope, however, as Ford administration politicians are worried about the president's image among conservatives in an election year, especially in the south.

"The issue is quite live over at HEW right now," says NAACP attorney John Silard, who recently returned to Washington District court to ask that the desegregation plans of eight of the southern states be thrown out. The NAACP contends the plans, the ones HEW approved in June of 1974, are inadequate and are

not being followed anyway.

Ironically, one of the chief political thorns in the side of Mathew's boss is Alabama Governor George Wallace, who in 1963 stood defiantly in a university doorway and thumbed his nose at two black students seeking admittance.

Everyone seems to agree that much racial progress has been made since then, but still University of Alabama blacks say school officials are insensitive at best to their concerns. They put some of the blame on Mathews, a history professor, who took over as Alabama president in 1969 at the age of 33.

Last October, 350 black students staged a protest march to publicize a list of 13 grievances which were advanced by the university's Association of Afro-Americans and endorsed by 20 black staff and faculty members. The students generally

said that Alabama officials discriminate against them because they are black.

Mathews, responding to the charges, told *The Post* he had always worked hard to "include blacks in greater numbers in all elements of campus life" and would say that it's important to note that every year we have done more than we had the year before."

However, Mathews admitted that the university, which has granted him an 18 month leave of absence, "is not where we need to be" when it comes to black faculty. He also agreed that whites enjoy better campus facilities than blacks.

Currently, there are 1,200 blacks out of 15,500 students at Alabama and 15 fulltime black faculty members out of 624. One black professor has tenure.

Nationwide in 1974, blacks

made up nine per cent of 8.8 million total college students. In 1964 there were five per cent blacks out of 4.6 million students.

During congressional hearings on Mathew's appointment last summer, the question of black grievances at his campus was not aired, much to the recent consternation of several senators and civil rights officials. "It represents a serious gap in the confirmation process," said an aide to Senator Walter Mondale (D-MN).

The Atlanta regional civil rights office said last summer at the time of the hearings that it knew of no greater number of complaints by women or blacks against the university. But Association of Afro-American leader Sylvester Wilson told *The Chronicle of Higher Education* in June that the university "had been lackadaisical in hiring black instructors for a school this size."

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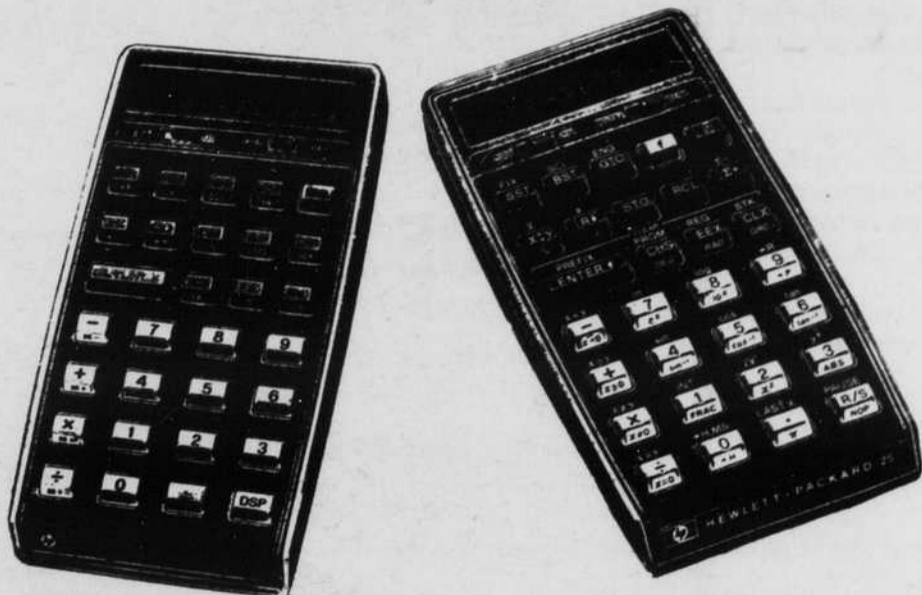
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