

# EDITORIAL/OPINION

## Black Studies Deserves Better Treatment

Two weeks ago it was reported in the Observer that the Portland State University Curriculum Committee denied a request by the Black Studies Department to issue a minor. The Curriculum Committee said Black Studies was denied a minor request because Black Studies was a "certificate program and is so close to being a minor that there was no need to have a minor within it." The Curriculum Committee made its decision to deny Black Studies approval for a minor on the recommendation of the University's Faculty Senate. The Faculty Senate is a deliberative body that gives advice to the University's President and the Curriculum Committee on curriculum and other policy matters.

The Observer feels the manner which the Curriculum Committee and the Faculty Senate used in denying the Black Studies request for a minor was insensitive and down-right disrespectful. The Senate's refusal to allow the Black Studies Department an opportunity to

present the merits of its minor proposal before recommending that the proposal be denied by the Curriculum Committee, while other departments were given the chance to do so, is overtly discriminatory.

Equally alarming is the fact that the Curriculum Committee acted on the Faculty Senate recommendation knowing that Black Studies was systematically denied these courtesies and communication considerations that departments are given by both the Senate and the Committee.

Portland State University president, Natale Sicuro, should take a leadership role by becoming actively involved in determining the reason the Black Studies Department was given negative treatment by the Faculty Senate and the Curriculum Committee. The Black Studies Department and the Black community deserve to know the answer to this question.

## High Profile — Low Visibility

It is always amusing to note promises made by candidates during an election campaign. Ranging from "ridiculous" to "redundant", they somehow seem to captivate voters who are willing to give candidates another chance to perform as they so diligently promised during the campaign.

Focusing on issues such as prostitution, drugs, police brutality, unemployment, etc., election hopefuls have discovered that "sensationalism" in the news not only attracts readership but votes as well.

For example, some of the issues mentioned above were topics addressed by candidates during the last election. Concerned citizens, especially those in Northeast Portland, responded more favorably to these "community based" problems than they did to others of equal importance due to a lack of "sensationalism".

Health, the budget, senior citizens and housing deserve, and sometimes do get, equal "play", for it would certainly appear that all are somewhat related.

Candidates embark on a platform of social reform and

crime prevention, vocalizing their expertise and experience in dealing with such problems. They promise to introduce legislation (if elected) which would wipe out prostitution, drugs and unemployment, etc. They spend a great deal of time and energy making public appearances trying to sway voters opinion in their favor. They can be seen everywhere during the campaign, but, once elected, seem to fade into the splendours of absenteeism.

Promises made during a campaign are not kept because mostly it is impossible to do so or they are just plain forgotten.

According to one Multnomah County elections official, who asked to remain anonymous, "Some campaign promises attributed to candidates are not only lacking validity but border on illegality. They need to be more aware of the facts before they make a public statement."

Maybe what's needed is a mandatory candidates' school for those aspiring to run for public office.

## On The Constitution

BY Edwin L. Coleman II

"Our constitution is color blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens. In respect to civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law. The humblest is the peer of the most powerful. The law regards man as man and takes no account of his surroundings or of his color when his civil rights as guaranteed by the supreme law of the land are involved."

Justice John M. Harlan, 1896

An underlying issue to be explored, in the limited scope of this article, is to what extent does the evolution of our constitution as a frame of reference for our political institutions represent a gradual or revolutionary development? In one sense, and as many historians have noted, our revolution projected a number of contradictory trends.

The men who wrote the Declaration of Independence and later played an important role in drafting the constitution, reflected the attitudes of their time to some extent. They were certainly ahead of their time in many respects but they also depicted in published writings as well as in their private letters the racial prejudices of that era. Historian Herbert Aptheker has made some poignant comments about some of our founding fathers which are still relevant for the 1980s. Writing about the Declaration of Independence and our revolution, in his 1980 book, "Unfolding Drama: Studies in U.S. History," Aptheker observed that "it affirmed in achievement and in theory . . . the right of national self-determination. It postulated the equality of all men."

This concept was carried over to a limited extent in the constitution. However, it is important to recognize that there is always a big gap between revolutionary rhetoric and day-to-day practice; our revolution, as with all revolutions before or since, was deficient. Revolutions are often necessary and useful, but they are never perfect, and they have yet to produce the utopian society.

Aptheker, in discussing ours, noted in his book that "The revolution and the instruments of government resulting from it expounded the concept of popular sovereignty. Again, with those who announced this, its meaning was limited to the concept of 'people' in the 18th century—male, white, propertied."

In short, our revolutionary process reflects an on-going struggle, and the civil war of the 1860s, the reconstruction period 1865-1877, and the civil rights campaigns of the 1960s each represent important stages in that process. Our constitution was borne out of conflict. It did not simply evolve out of a genuine consensus.

To answer the question, is our constitution "color blind," one should define what is meant by "color consciousness," for that has been a part of the American experience since the very beginning. The historical record suggests that many of our founding fathers were color conscious when they talked about Blacks as three-fifths of a person. With the adoption of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments came the political-ideological contest between contending forces within American society; a struggle with many facets. In many ways it is at the heart of today's ideological-philosophical confrontation between progressive forces who want to push our revolution forward and the so-called "new right" who want to stop it or push it back, if possible.

Color consciousness is not the sole issue in American politics that brings progressive and the new right into conflict. It is, nevertheless, one of the major issues in defining the social-political context. It should also be kept in mind that neo-fascist movements have always attempted to wrap themselves in religious and patriotic garb of one kind or another. Their idea of an ideal society is one consisting of people who look like them and think as they do on every single issue.

In many ways our constitution mirrors political reality, especially in the way it is interpreted. Even a cursory reading of Supreme Court rulings on the scope of the 14th and 15th amendments at different stages illustrates the point dramatically, keeping in mind the broad range of issues covered by the 14th. Plessy v. Ferguson reflects one kind of political reality for Black Americans while Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka reflected a changing reality. These decisions did not take place in a vacuum totally isolated from political pressures, political conflict, and ideological manipulations.

How the constitution is interpreted can be a life or death proposition for many. This is certainly the case of Black Americans. The question is not so much in the constitution color blind, but rather WHO is defining color consciousness and in what kind of political context. If the United States is to become a true "melting pot," then ethnic and cultural differences must be accepted, studied with some concern for an in-depth understanding, and the best taken from each to build on a richer AMERICAN culture. Whether we have the spiritual will to do this is an open question at this point in our history.

Coleman is a professor of English and Director of Ethnic Studies at the University of Oregon.

# MONEY MANAGEMENT

A weekly column on personal finance distributed by the Oregon Society of Certified Public Accountants.

## On Wedding Bells and Taxes: Filing Jointly or Separately

On St. Valentine's Day, more marriage proposals are made than on just about any other day of the year. And, when a man and a woman decide to get married, they have many details to think about. Usually, how they decide to file their income tax is not one of them. But come tax time, says the Oregon Society of CPAs, they have a decision to make.

Most married couples file jointly because they reduce their tax bill more than if they file separately. The tax rates for married couples are lower and there are many tax benefits to filing jointly that may not be available to separate filers.

By filing a joint tax return, married couples are entitled to the two-earner deduction (which will be phased out in 1987), IRA deduction for a non-working spouse, the credit for the elderly, the earned income credit or the dependent care credit. For the maximum deduction, all totaled, these benefits could provide a substantial tax savings.

Still, couples may elect to file separately. One reason to file separately is if both husband and wife have separate incomes and one spouse has substantial medical bills. In this case, medical expenses that exceed five

percent of this spouse's adjusted gross income are tax deductible in 1986. If the expenses are great enough, they can reduce his or her tax bill considerably.

Couples who choose to file jointly must be married. Separated and divorced couples may still have to file jointly depending on certain circumstances. If you were married December 31, 1986, consider yourself married for the entire tax year. If your spouse died during 1986, you may still file a joint return.

Separated couples may file returns as though they are not married as long as they did not live together at all in 1986. In this situation, one spouse may file as a head of household as long as the couple's dependent child lived with him or her for more than six months out of the year. If you were divorced in 1986, you cannot file a joint return unless you remarried within the same year.

If you got married, separated, divorced or became widowed in 1986, you will have to make a decision as to the best way to file your income tax return. If you feel you need more information to properly file your return, contact a certified public accountant or the Internal Revenue Service. Both are good sources of information when it comes time to sort through your finances.



## CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

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## Racist Violence on the Rise

One might have thought the statement by Bradford Reynolds was the Reagan Administration's poor attempt at a joke. In the midst of one of the greatest surges of racism and racist violence in recent memory, Mr. Reynolds, in charge of the Justice Department's Civil Rights division, actually said there was no "Rising tide of racism." In fact, he said, "There has yet to be produced any evidence to back up this bald assertion, and, indeed all available evidence collected on such matters indicates quite the opposite."

I guess Mr. Reynolds doesn't read his own department's reports. For, the Community Relations Service of his own Justice Department notes that in the 6 years between 1980 and 1986, the number of reported incidents leaped from 99 to 276 — almost a three-fold increase. And these are just the incidents reported to the Justice Department.

Then there are the figures recently revealed by the NY Police Department's Bias Incident Investigating Unit. In New York City alone the number of confirmed incidents against Blacks — that is, assaults, threats made with weapons and verbal confrontations — has steadily risen since 1982. And in the month following the Howard Beach, Queens incident, confirmed incidents of racial bias in New York City rose a dramatic 150%.

But enough of statistics. Let's talk about actual people. In December of last year a 15-year-old Black youth was so brutally beaten by a white police officer in a suburb of Washington, D.C. that 11 witnesses, many of them strangers, signed a complaint. A passenger in a car that was driving by at the time said the officer hit the young man with a night stick "at least 10 times" and then, when the youth, his head bloody, tried to get up, the officer hit him between his legs. According to the Washington Post, the young man was stopped by the cop after he dropped a candy wrapper on the ground.

Then there was Jimmy Lee Bruce, 20 years old, who got a little loud in a movie theater one night in upstate New York. Next thing he knew he was being held in a chokehold by a white off-duty policeman. Friends say the young man kept saying, "I give up, let me go," as


he gasped for breath. He was pronounced dead at 11:04 that evening.

It's not only the police, though. At the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, last October, approximately 3,000 white students gathered to watch a World Series game. A Black student walked by and said he was a Mets fan. Soon the white student mob was attacking any Black student in sight. The incident left 10 injured and one Black student was beaten unconscious. A recent report about the incident called it "predictable, preventable and primarily racially motivated."

There have been other incidents at the University of Chicago, Mt. Holyoke in Massachusetts, and a number of other colleges throughout the country. In other words, racism is not just a disease of the economically deprived within the white community, as some have suggested. It is also a disease of the so-called "best and the brightest."

Similarly, in another mob action, a group of suburban white high school students in a Boston suburb this month attacked a busload of Black students who were participating in a busing program. The white students were looking for three particular Black students. When they couldn't find them, one white student shouted, "Well, let's get them all," and the mob attacked the bus with stones and a tire iron.

It is to be expected that anyone who would suggest that a mob of 2-3,000 Klansmen throwing rocks and bottles in Forsyth County, Georgia were just "a small band of bystanders whose childish prattle went almost completely unnoticed," would also think these and other such incidents were simply isolated occurrences. They are not. Howard Beach is not an isolated incident. Nor is Louisville, Kentucky; Hutchinson, Kansas; or Easton, Maryland, where other racial incidents have occurred in recent weeks. And the more this Administration tries to sweep this endemic racism propelling these incidents under the rug, the more they will increase. Only is we, as a nation, begin to speak out and aggressively confront these racist forces, will we be able to halt this self-destructive course.



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a Sense of Direction  
Before  
He Leaves Home**

*Hyun*

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