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Dialogue

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Residents of my neighborhood have been shocked twice over the past year by murders in the area. Both of these murders have occurred within a block of my house—one a block to the north, one to the south. Strangely, the community's reaction to these murders has differed greatly. This difference is due as much to the location of the murders as to the identities of the victims. Though I can walk from the site of the first to the site of the second in less time than it takes to walk across this campus, the short walk takes me from one side of the line dividing my neighborhood to the other.

The first of the two murders occurred last spring. An Aquinas College student was killed in the parking lot of the neighborhood Methodist church early one morning. The killing shocked residents of the neighborhood for two reasons. First, the investigation turned up no motive or suspect. And second, this murder occurred north of the dividing line.

Most of the white, middle-class families and college students residing on the well-kempt streets north of the line had no fear of assault when walking after dark, but after the murder that changed. People became more cautious when outside their homes and started leaving outside lights on after dark. Not all of the action, though, was defensive. Friends of the victim raised money to be used as a reward for information about the crime and established a scholarship fund in the victim's memory. The announcements offering the reward and asking for memorial contributions still hang on telephone poles in the area.

With the color of these posters, the memory of murder in the neighborhood had begun to fade when it happened again. The second murder occurred this fall, this time south of the line. The victim, a high school freshman, was accidentally killed with a bullet from a Soviet-made assault rifle. Unlike the Aquinas student, this young man was not the intended victim of the murderer; he just happened to be in his murderer's line of fire.

A community feeling different than that of the first murder showed in the news coverage of the second. Everyone in the immediate neighborhood of this murder knew the motive; most even knew the murderer. Yet there was no outcry by the victim's friends and acquaintances. The killer, an eighteen year-old, had targeted the victim's cousin because of an argument earlier in the day. Those who knew the victim and his cousin told the television crews that they thought it was too bad that the kid had died. He was a nice kid they all said. No one on the news that evening lashed out at the killer or the
unjustness of the act. No one called for increased police patrols in the area. One boy, not much older than this victim himself, coldly told the camera that he wasn’t scared of hanging out in the area. He knew he could take care of himself and didn’t have anything to worry about. Only he knows whether or not this was a front.

The juxtaposition of the responses to the killings of these young men begins to show the differences between the residents who live on opposite sides of the line. These two students died only three blocks from each other; they both left life through the brutal action of another. Yet the reactions of the people who knew them differed so greatly. On one side of the line, the victim’s neighbors set themselves to the task of bringing some sort of good from this evil. On the other, the victim’s neighbors treated the murder as an exciting event, a spectacle. A raucous crowd congregated around the emergency crews as they worked on the body, and the next morning a local business owner fearing trouble had to call the fire department to wash down the street because a boisterous crowd had gathered around the dried blood.

There are not many places where a small urban area is divided into two distinct cultures as noticeably as in my neighborhood. In areas where a neighborhood is divided such as this there is usually tension between the groups on either side of the line. In an area of Belfast where Catholic and Protestant neighborhoods meet, a wall has been erected to keep the two groups from terrorizing each other. In my neighborhood, though the division is as well delineated as it is in Belfast, there is no wall.

The urban dynamic at work here both fascinates and scares me. The fact that two groups, so clearly different in worldview, can live so closely without conflict intrigues me. What scares me is the fact that they do. With the increase in racial tensions in the city over the last few years, I worry that, in the future, points of contact between residents on either side of the line will lead not to bonds but to conflict. With so many difference and so few similarities, once conflict (rather than the present laissez faire attitude) reigns, the chances of the community turning into a battle ground become great.

Over the last year, residents from each side of the line who have already realized this have been disappointed that interest in their attempts at neighborhood unification has fizzled out. As the contact and understanding decreases between residents on both sides of the line, the irony that the only similarity which both groups now share is a violent death truly becomes cruel.
When the rancher’s daughter bent her blond hair toward the sheriff, points of light seemed to tremble in the summer sun. “Do you have to go, Jett?” she asked breathily.

“ Seems that way,” Jett responded. He sat tall on his horse, his hands fiddling with the brim of his hat, his gaze faraway in the sunset across the prairie. “You should know that better than anyone.”

I looked over at Duncan, who had stopped stuffing his face with popcorn and was leaning forward in mid-mouthful, waiting for them to kiss. What a moron. I slumped down in my seat and let the movie end without watching it. What good is a western that has more talking and kissing than shooting? As soon as the credits started, I was up and moving.

Duncan caught up to me as we got out into the lobby, blinking in the daylight. “Let’s see something else!” he said, spitting a piece of popcorn onto my shirt.

“Aw, come on,” I complained, “let’s get outta here. We already saw two, and that last one sucked.” I kind of thought I had a point there, but Duncan had worked himself around the outside edge of the Saturday crowd and was having another look at the movie list on the big board over the ticket counter. I stuck my hands in my pockets and waited.

Finally, since I knew that it would take drastic action to drag that idiot away from the theater, I grabbed his arm and pulled him toward the row of video games along the wall that separated one hallway worth of movies from another. “Let’s play Commando,” I suggested, and to push my point I shoved a quarter into the slot on the video machine and started massacring a few thousand enemy soldiers. I don’t mind saying that I’m pretty good at Commando, and I usually play out a quarter for all it’s worth. So by the time I looked up, it was five minutes later, and I realized that Duncan wasn’t watching over my shoulder, admiring the slaughter. I looked around, kind of surprised, since old Duncan is always there looking over your shoulder, whether you want him to or not. He never really takes off on you, he just whines a lot and pouts until you do whatever he wants to do. I think that’s because his mom is such an old crab to him all the time, which would sure make me whine. But that’s why I was sort of thrown when he wasn’t right there.

I hated to lose my hold on the video game since there was some punk kid who looked to be about in third grade eyeing it, but I didn’t want to lose Duncan, well, not really, so I walked back into the hallway toward the theater where we’d just been. Sure enough, there he was, all legs and scuzzy T-shirt and messy black hair. I started in that direction but then stopped when I saw what he was looking at.

She was a girl, maybe a year or two older than me and Duncan, maybe in high school, dressed in one of those old-fashioned usher outfits with all the buttons on the front, bright red with gold braid and tight pants that made you want to look at her. Her hair was kind of a golden color, and it was all in little curls all over her head. She looked like someone out of one of Duncan’s old movies or something.

I started walking toward her, trying
to head Duncan off, because I didn’t want to listen to him get dumped on again. That kid worships movies and just figures everybody else does, too, and so he says some stupid things. Sure enough, before I was close enough to block the shot, good old Duncan slammed himself into the trash can of love.

This time that moron did the cowboy bit, straight out of that lame movie we’d just sat through. He swaggered up to that pretty girl, doffed his imaginary ten-gallon hat, and drawled, “Howdy, ma’am. You new in these here parts?”

I closed my eyes, trying to think of how I was going to save him from his own stupidity. But darned if she didn’t answer him back, in a breathy voice just like that girl talked with in the movie. I opened my eyes fast, thinking maybe this was a trick and she was his cousin or something, but it wasn’t and she wasn’t. Then she actually reached out and took old Duncan’s arm and snuggled up next to him and all. I could hardly believe it.

I was standing there with my mouth flopped open, and Duncan turned to me with this silly look on his face and he said, “Come on, Ben, Sylvia’s gonna get us in a movie for nothin’.” And Sylvia giggled with a laugh that ran in circles just like those lights that flash around the big movie marquee outside.

Now, I ain’t a cheapskate, but I like to get into things for nothing just like anybody, so I followed them down the hallways for a minute and finally caught up with them enough to ask, “What are we gonna see?”

Duncan didn’t even look at me, he just kept grinning at Sylvia like a total fool and answered, “Love Story, in theater seven.” Sylvia giggled again and snuggled even closer to him. I just couldn’t believe it. We were almost to theater seven, and the usher at the door started to stick out his hand for our tickets until he recognized Sylvia; then he just opened the door.

Sylvia and Duncan were a couple of steps ahead of me, but I stopped them by grabbing Duncan’s shoulder, the one without the girl hanging all over it. The last thing I wanted to do on a Saturday afternoon was to sit and watch some sickening love story along with my nerdy friend and some dumb girl he managed to pick up in a theater lobby when I could be slaughtering enemy soldiers instead. So I said, “I think I’ll play some more Commando, OK?”

“OK,” Duncan said, without even having the decency to put up a fuss. They smiled at me, both of them, like there was a joke that everybody caught except me and went on in without me. The usher let the door close, and I stood there for a minute shaking my head. Then I went off and played Commando.

When I had polished off my last quarter, which, like I said before, takes me awhile, I looked up and was kind of surprised to see that the adult crowds were starting to take over the lobby. I looked at the blue and red Pepsi Cola clock up on the wall and realized that I’d
been playing for over three hours! Where the heck was Duncan? I wandered around all those identical hallways, trying to remember which way I’d come, until I was totally lost. I latched on to a crowd of little kids and moms getting out of the Disney movie and followed them all the way back to the desk where the manager sits, and I figured I might as well just ask him since he didn’t seem to very busy.

People who work at places that get lots of kids for customers shouldn’t hate them so much. When I said, “Excuse me, sir…” he just snapped, “What d’ya want, kid?” and kept looking at his magazine. He was a skinny guy, kind of pink and balding, wearing a white shirt and black bow tie. The big tie was to make up for the fact that he didn’t have much of a chin, I thought. Anyhow, he just snapped at me when I talked, but I figured that since I’d gone this far, I might as well ask.

“How do I get to theater seven?”

He still didn’t look up. “Come back in six months,” he answered.

“What?”

“I said, come back in six months.” He let the magazine drop a fraction of an inch and glanced up at me. “We’ll be building over the fall, and we’ll have four more theaters for Christmas. So come back in six months and we’ll have theater seven.”

Turns out he was serious. There wasn’t a theater seven and no hallway and no usher or nothing. I walked all over that place, back and forth, trying to figure out where Duncan had gone. I remember the little sign over the door had said, “Love Story,” and that the usher had had red tennis shoes on with his uniform and had a lot of pimples, but even though I’ve gone back every week for the last six months I haven’t seen that usher again.

I haven’t seen Duncan, either. About a month ago, when he hadn’t been home since August, his mom got so angry at him for running away that she started throwing out his stuff, just to show him, not that he had that much stuff to begin with. I managed to dig his autograph book out of the trash can that night—that’s one thing he’d miss, even though it didn’t have any autographs in it. (“Yet!” Duncan would always point out when I mentioned that to him.)

The theater’s opening all their new screens tomorrow with a film festival, and I didn’t need a newspaper to find out that they’re showing Love Story in the brand-new theater seven. I’m going to be there, but I’m not going to watch the movie. I figure I’ll just put the autograph book down in the back row, where all the lovers sit and make out, and I’m sure good old Duncan will come for it. Wherever he is, I bet he’ll finally get some use out of it.
the unveiling

sweet firm chirp draws self-serve gaze to nestled nest 'tween beam, sheet negating wind whimsy, predator prowl.

one evening at Meijer's gas station I spotted this worldly-wise sparrow drawing attention to her very wise building of her nest. It looked so secure and safe and wondered about the irony of technology all over again did God intend steel trees?
Metaphysical Prayer

Oh curb my appetite for sin
The sweetness rots my teeth
And swallowed pleasure spoils within
My starving soul beneath.

A wholesome hunger heaven gave
Now teach me how to chew
For once I taste then I will crave
To only eat of you.
Free Speech vs. Racism

By Gerard Hammink

The Campus Dilemma

If the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature can show social trends by its categories, then racism at institutions of higher learning is on the rise in today's society. When beginning research for this essay, I looked in the Readers' Guide for headings such as RACISM and RACIAL TENSION for articles about the recent racial incidents occurring at universities across the United States. Under these headings I did not find what I was looking for; instead I was directed to "See also COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES." So, towards the front of the book I went and to my surprise found the sub-heading RACE RELATIONS among the many sub-headings under COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES. I do not know what criteria the producers of the Readers' Guide use to decide where and how they will list articles, but apparently they thought there were enough articles about race relations at universities and colleges to warrant a sub-category. The Readers' Guide recognizes race relations as an issue on college campuses even if most of us do not.

The tension between students of different colored skin is a problem some schools have tried to solve by banning those things that, unlike sticks and stones, supposedly can never hurt us—unkind words. Despite the rhetoric of the "Sticks and Stones" rhyme, we all know that words do hurt. But words, mean or not, are not easy to ban in America where it is tradition and law that men and women may say what they want. Thus, the attempts of some universities to prevent the injury caused by racial slurs have been called illegal and dangerous. Not only are state universities supposed to obey the constitution, but they also should be promoting free rhetoric as a part of learning, critics say. While I was working on this article, the ABC news program World News Tonight aired one of their "American Agenda" reports concerning the conflict between the goal of fighting racism and the right of free speech at America's academic institutions. I do not know what criteria the producers of World News Tonight use to determine special report topics, but apparently they thought that this was an issue important enough to receive coverage.

Why all the articles? Why are writers writing about this topic? Why is it a topic that makes the evening news? What's this all about?

Racism is a problem because of the large
number of incidents and the high level of intensity. Recently, racial incidents have proliferated at those places in America where people are supposed to be smart and necessarily civil. Additionally, it is more than an increase in behind-the-back, under-the-breath derogatory statements; such would be significant but unnoticeable. Incidents are noticeable, and some events have been painfully noticeable to those who believe racism is wrong because the events have been so shocking.

The incident this year that caught the attention of the national press is the story of Sabrina Collins. The Afro-American Emory University freshman returned to her dorm room on the evening of March 5 to find her clothes soaked in bleach, "Nigger Hang" written in lipstick on the wall in her closet, and her teddy bear and other stuffed animals cut open. She then began receiving death threats in the mail. In May, as she packed and prepared to move out, she lifted the rug to find "Die Nigger Die" written in nail polish on her floor. Sabrina collapsed, was hospitalized for emotional trauma, and didn't speak for two weeks.

Newsweek reported that law enforcement officials investigating the case suspected that Collins staged the attacks herself. The magazine said that investigators found no evidence of forced entry and that handwriting analysis suggested that Collins herself may have scrawled the racist statements. Police say Collins may have just been unhappy and homesick as she had no past history of instability. But it would be strange if such normal feelings in a college freshman resulted in feigned racist attacks. As a dean at Emory was quoted in Newsweek as saying, the person who did these things "must be disturbed." What would motivate a student to attack another in that way? Or, what would motivate a minority student to make it appear as if she was attacked in such a manner? Either way, racism appears to be a pervasive element in this situation.

Sabrina Collins' tragic story is only one of a number of disturbing stories of racial intolerance occurring on campuses around the country in the past few years. Others include:

—In October 1988 at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, one fraternity held a mock slave auction as part of a pledge party where the pledges were in black face.

—Last fall, fraternity members at the University of Mississippi bound two naked pledges together, wrote "KKK" and "We Hate Niggers" on their bodies, and dumped them on the nearby campus of mostly black Rust College.

—At Yale recently, the words "White Power" and a swastika were painted on the University's Afro-American cultural center.

—At the University of Michigan, a student caller to the campus radio station joked on the air, "Why do blacks always have sex on their minds?" Answer: "Because all their pubic hair is on their heads." And, "Who are the two most famous black women in history?" Answer: "Aunt Jemima and Mother Fucker." Also, a flyer distributed around campus asserted that blacks "don't belong in classrooms, they belong hanging in trees."

Blacks are not the only students facing bigotry. In December of 1987, eight Asian-American University of Connecticut students on their way to an off-campus dance were harassed by a group of large football players who spit on them, called them Oriental faggots, and sang "Yellow Submarine."

In the spring of 1988, a student election at the University of California, Los Angeles, caused fighting between white and Hispanic students. At Memphis State University, a swastika was painted on the Jewish student union, and at the University of Kansas, Hillel Foundation members found a letter taped to their door reading "Jew-Boy get out. I'm going to burn your Torah."

Racist incidents similar to those described above have occurred at more than 250 universities and colleges since 1986, according to the National Institute Against Prejudice and Violence. Yet, in an article published early this year in US News & World Report, John Leo questioned whether race relations are really "turning ugly on one campus after another." Leo claimed he has seen the same examples (those above) in numerous articles concerning this
subject. He implied that writers and the media use the existence of a few fires as proof that we are all going to burn up.

Indeed, the research director of the National Institute Against Prejudice and Violence, Howard Ehrlich, admits the impossibility of knowing whether racist incidents have actually increased or whether more minorities are filing reports of such incidents. The latter could be seen as positive if it is the case, as Ehrlich suggests it might be, that minorities are showing courage in reporting problems, asserting that such occurrences are wrong and that things must be different. But, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, which surveyed American colleges for a year, issued a report in May entitled Campus Life: In Search of Community. The report claimed that colleges are places of informed thought and discussion only in an idealistic dream-world which acts as a facade, covering the reality of the intolerance of racial minorities, women, homosexuals, and Jews.

Whether most U.S. colleges are intolerant or just indifferent may be hard to establish, but that racism and intolerance are perceived as a problem by many people at these institutions is much less debatable. At schools where shocking and violent things have happened, students have held vigils and demonstrations, and the administration has reacted to these responses with new rules and programs.

While all new rules and programs trying to deal with this issue are being debated, none are as controversial as the new rules being written which prohibit certain kinds of speech. In 1988 after several incidents, including the racist radio jokes, the University of Michigan instituted rules that ban any discriminatory behavior. The resulting policy demands a more tolerant campus. If the rules had been in place when that student told racist jokes over University radio waves, he would have been placed on probation, and if he made additional racist remarks while on probation, the administration could have suspended or expelled him. The rules were so broad that in 1989 a student was charged with violating the regulations because he said in a classroom discussion that he considered homosexuality a disease that was treatable with therapy. (The rules also banned victimization of a person on the basis of his or her sexual orientation.) The American Civil Liberties Union challenged the University in court, and in September 1989, U.S. District Court Judge Avern Cohn ruled that the regulations were in violation of the First Amendment’s guarantee of free speech. That ruling does not end the debate about the constitutionality of such rules, and it certainly does not close debate about whether such rules are right or wrong and good or bad.

“The Michigan case typifies the debate now raging among liberals and others on the left as U.S. campuses grapple with a marked rise in slurs and actions that are antigay, antiwoman, and racist,” says Jon Wiener, who teaches history at the University of California, Irvine. “The question at the center of the debate is, how do colleges and universities protect free speech and at the same time combat the increase in abusive language by the dominant white-male group? Understandably, the victims of such harassment are demanding that their institutions do much more to make campuses what they ought to be: places that are free of discrimination, that foster and celebrate diversity.” A broad and a narrow approach to prohibiting offensive speech and verbal harassment are being debated, according to Wiener.

The policy at the University of Michigan was one of the broadest. It prohibited “any behavior, verbal or physical, that stigmatizes an individual on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, creed, national orientation, ancestry, age, marital status, handicap or Vietnam-era veteran status.” More specifically, the University banned speech which has the purpose or effect of “interfering with an individual’s academic efforts.” When Judge Cohn struck down the policy, he did not say that bans on offensive speech were unconstitutional. Specifically, he wrote that the University of Michigan could not “establish an anti-discrimination policy that had the effect of prohibiting certain speech because it disagreed with ideas or messages,” nor could it “proscribe speech simply because it was found to be offensive, even gravely so, by large numbers of people.” Civil libertarians attack broad policies because they say such policies can be used to prohibit any speech that the majority doesn’t like, such as the speech of blacks against the majority.

The narrow approach attempts to avoid such problems. A narrow policy only bans speech that is face-to-face, intentional, threatening and inflammatory. The University of Connecticut threatens to expel students who direct...
“derogatory language” and “fighting words” at another person. Pennsylvania State University, the University of Wisconsin, and the nine-campus University of California system have also established rules following the narrow approach. While trying to free expression, narrow policies also can frustrate those being abused because these policies seem inadequate. Under its policy, the University of Wisconsin cannot punish the fraternity who held a mock slave auction because the members did not directly confront blacks. Such limited rules also would not allow the administration to punish the caller to the Michigan radio station who told racist jokes on the air.

Even though they don’t seem adequate, the “fighting words” policies are also under attack by civil libertarians. The University of California policy differentiates between words that express ideas, which are protected, and words which insult and injure, which are prohibited. But critics ask how one is to decide whether statements in question are only meant to insult or are meant to express an idea. Criticizing the attempt of University of Wisconsin, Parkside, Chancellor Sheila Kaplan to rid that campus of anonymous hate literature, Nat Hentoff writes, “Who decides what speech can be heard or read by everyone? Why, the Chancellor, of course. That’s what George III used to say, too.” Hentoff implies that many of these new policies challenge the long tradition in this country that people can think and say what they want and that the government should not interfere. As with the broader policies, critics are concerned that the narrow policies could adversely affect those they are trying to help. The beliefs of minorities about their situation, when expressed in words, may be offensive to many whites, but whites should not have the ability to suppress such speech. Whites certainly do not have such a right. The ACLU opposes all bans on speech because, says ACLU national executive director Ira Glasser, “We live in a racist society, which is why you can’t trust the people in power to make distinctions about which speech should be permitted. Ours is still a white society defending its historical racism. We can’t control how they (those in power) will interpret these rules.”

Much of the legalism involved in any debate about the policies of state schools doesn’t apply to Calvin College. Calvin, a private and church-owned institution, is not bound by the Constitution as are state schools. However, Calvin must follow its own rules. Calvin’s policy could be defined as broad, although it is not nearly as specific as the Michigan policy which was struck down. The Student Conduct Code prohibits violence which it defines as “All acts which produce either bodily or psychological injury in other persons.” Last year, as part of a general revision of the entire code, a statement was added to make it clear that acts of racial harassment are considered violence. At Calvin, a mean look that causes someone to become upset could be punished. But such prohibitions come within a code of conduct that explicitly and repeatedly emphasizes that all its rules are based on Biblical principles, and that all Christians should be trying to obey God’s commandments. The current language of the code is ambiguous, but in the mind of Vice-President for Student Affairs, Jinny DeJong, “the right to be respected and treated with dignity supercedes free speech rights.” DeJong believes her view is influenced by a Christian perspective. Christians should yield their right to free speech when it interferes with others’ right to dignity.

The danger here, as at other campuses, is that restrictions on speech will limit discussion of the issues of racism. Time laments that “if such bans succeed in suppressing obnoxious impulses, they merely drive them underground—along with many ideas that deserve to be aired, if only to kindle a more heated debate.” Recently, University of Kansas administrators refused to allow a student host/producer of a radio news program to interview a leader of the Ku Klux Klan. “So much for free inquiry on that campus,” says Nat Hentoff. Last year a Brown University art professor cancelled a showing of the D.W. Griffith classic film about the Klan, The Birth of a Nation, because the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People opposed the screening.

Last spring, minorities at Calvin were offended by a spoof ad in the Chimes satire issue, Cheers, that tried to make fun of the “Consider Calvin” recruitment advertisements. Some thought the spoof ad implied that Calvin lowers its admission standards for minority applicants and that it mocked the college’s efforts to increase minority enrollment. Dejong and others in the Student Affairs Division were concerned, but no disciplinary action was taken. That incident points out that it can be hard to discuss
Students are not aware of their unique ethnic identity, and this lack of awareness limits their ability to understand ethnic groups different from their own.

minority issues without offending and that working towards sensitivity in such discussions is imperative. It also makes clear the need for sensitivity towards minorities and the issues surrounding them.

In her editorial in the October 5 issue of Chimes, Kari Verhulst asserts rightly that dialogue about racism is needed at Calvin and that we must “move gently toward greater understanding.” While everyone at Calvin should talk softly—even listen more than talk—in search of understanding, helpful discussion and deep discussion do not come easily. I currently experience no real interaction with those blacks who attend Calvin, as I suspect is the case with most other white students here. Only about two percent of the Calvin student population are minorities. While I certainly could make more effort, the chances for interaction are slim because so few blacks are enrolled. Calvin College wants this to change. The 1985 Comprehensive Plan for “Integrating North American Ethnic Minority Persons and their Interests into Every Facet of Calvin’s Institutional Life” is the recommendation of the Minority Concerns Task Force on how to make Calvin “a genuinely multicultural Christian academic community.” Calvin wants to promote understanding and multicultural awareness through this plan to deal with racism, racial intolerance, and racial insensitivity.

The best way to end the occurrence of words that hurt as they relate to race, it seems, is not merely to ban them, but rather to work to make a community where such hate does not exist. The Comprehensive Plan calls for Calvin to have twenty full-time ethnic minority faculty members by 1993-94, ten of whom shall be in tenure-track positions. By 2003-4, Calvin wants fifteen percent of its tenure-track positions to be held by ethnic minority persons. As for the student body, the plan wants ten percent to be ethnic minorities by 1993-94 and fifteen percent by 2003-4, with retention rates for ethnic minority students not significantly different from those for the entire student body. To develop a multicultural student community, the plan calls for activities that will increase “positive cross-cultural communication among members of all ethnic groups.” More minorities will lessen the isolation felt by all minorities, but more importantly, it will end the isolation of the majority from minorities.

The struggle to increase the percentage of minority faculty members and students occurs at campuses across the country. In 1988 the University of Wisconsin, Madison, committed itself to doubling the number of minority undergraduates over the next five years, to adding financial aid packages for low-income students, to doubling the number of minority faculty members over the nest three years, to hiring or promoting 125 minority academic staff members over the next three years, to requiring ethnic studies courses in each college, to raising the money to offer twenty-five new minority graduate and professional fellowships, and to budgeting enough money to fund all this. They have even asked the Wisconsin legislature for new appropriations to fund these programs.

The big problem with the “Madison Plan,” as with the Comprehensive Plan, is the practical impossibility of hiring as many minority faculty members as the plans call for because the number of minorities with the required credentials is so low. Wisconsin is trying to solve this in the long term with its monies for financial aid for undergraduate and graduate students. Until there are more minorities with PhDs, Wisconsin and other schools with hopes to increase the number of these people on campus will be fighting each other for them. As this continues to happen, Calvin will lose because it cannot offer high salaries and a multitude of perks.

Calvin has had trouble and will continue to have trouble attaining black and Asian professors. The Multicultural Affairs Committee is currently evaluating how well the college is doing in working towards the goals of the Comprehensive Plan. While the plan and the attempt at implementation could be criticized, what must be applauded is that Calvin had such a plan and such a desire. Admirably, it did not take an ugly incident for Calvin to adopt this plan. The faculty and the Board of Trustees approved the Comprehensive Plan in early 1986 while UW-Madison introduced theirs two and a half years ago.

Along this line, in an attempt to develop a multicultural student community, the plan calls for activities that will bring “positive cross-cultural communication among members of all ethnic groups.” Part of the problem, says DeJong, is that Calvin students are not aware of their unique ethnic identity, and this lack of awareness limits their ability to understand
ethnic groups different from their own. DeJong does not believe this problem is unique to Calvin students, saying it is probably very much the same case at Grand Valley State, for example.

DeJong would like to raise awareness about prejudice and racism on campus. If most students are ethnocentric and ignorant about prejudice and racism, it will be impossible for Calvin to instantly achieve the multicultural awareness the Comprehensive Plan envisions. Multicultural awareness is a rather sophisticated level of understanding, DeJong says. In one effort to increase understanding, a video presentation about the Comprehensive Plan is shown as part of freshman orientation. Calvin is but one of many schools making such efforts. “Many freshman-orientation programs now include seminars and workshops on race relations, ethnic diversity, and homophobia,” states Time. This past year Columbia University instituted a mandatory multicultural sensitivity training session for all new students.

Many schools are changing or considering changing their core curriculum requirements to include courses on ethnic cultures. “The best place to battle willful ignorance and bigotry, of course, is in the classroom,” said Time. “Teaching that strengthens reason over reflex, curiosity over insularity may help improve students’ behavior outside the classroom as well. Though the changes are often controversial, many colleges have revised their curriculum to include courses in non-Western cultures and values. Fewer and fewer of the history and literature surveys focus exclusively on the western-European heritage.” A committee at Calvin, looking at the core, is considering the addition of ethnic studies courses. Freshmen and sophomores study Western Civilization so they can learn about the dominant culture. It needs to be stressed that we, as descendents of Europeans, are not better, although we are dominant. We are different and not the only culture on this earth.

As of now, Calvin does not specifically restrict speech. The Student Conduct Code is strong in the fact that it does not do so while allowing for punishment if any ugly and obnoxious cases should arise. The code, fitting for a Christian college, is more about what we should do than about what we should not do. Reconciling one person’s right to speak freely and another’s right to have self-dignity by implementing written regulations seems impossible, although such a reconciliation would be an admirable personal goal for all college students and all individuals.

In attempting to do this, we must realize that we live in a multicultural world. “Students can’t ignore this issue in their lives,” says DeJong because white people do not make up a majority in our world; whites are not the only people on this campus. As ABC News reported, by the year 2000 ethnic minorities will account for one-third of the population of the United States. In California, minorities as a group will soon be the majority. Goals regarding the number of minority teachers and students on campuses are concerned with making a school more like its society and the world. Changes in curriculum are concerned with moving towards a better understanding of our world. Becoming a multicultural-academic-Christian community is about celebrating the diversity of a world that beings to God, rather than being scared and feeling hatred towards others.

Sources


I was nervous for my first interview with television film critic Michael Medved, so nervous that afterward I could not remember much of what had been said in those forty minutes. But I was sure that it had been interesting, so that afternoon, I went home to play the tape of our conversation—only to find myself in a pickle. The machine had recorded only my voice. There I sat, listening to minutes of static painfully punctuated by an occasional “Oh” or “Ah,” making it clear that he had done most of the talking. I’m OK about it now; my therapist explained later that I had been victimized by technology. The next day, after a few deep breaths, I called the busy man again for a second interview. It was 11:45AM in GR—8:45AM in Santa Monica. I could hear a kid making noise in the background. After sheepishly explaining my predicament, I asked him if he could verify some quotes for about ten minutes. He graciously agreed, and we ended up talking for another forty minutes.
Around Hollywood, Michael Medved, who has co-hosted PBS’s *Sneak Previews* since 1985, is an exception. Unlike most movie people, he is openly religious—a self-described “observant Jew.” Along with keeping kosher on his lunch breaks and taking no calls on the Sabbath, he is facing, on a deeper level, the clash of values in his two worlds. In response to his situation, he has become outspoken on the subject of Hollywood and religion.

Medved knows that he is seen as an oddity, a position, I got the feeling, he thrives in. After all, he is good at defending it. His rhetoric is direct, confident, animated, and provocative; he is aware of the power of words. It came as no surprise that he has a masters degree in composition and is a successful writer of such books as *Whatever Happened to the Class of ’65* (with David Wallehchinsky), *The Shadow Presidents*, and *Hospital: The Hidden Lives of a Medical Center Staff*. Also on his bookshelf are some collaborations with his younger brother that analyze the “bad movie” genre, *The Golden Turkey Awards*, to name one. He has had a varied career, and in his analyses I saw evidence of his experiences as an American history major at Yale, a law school student, a teacher in a Jewish school, and a political speechwriter.

From the start, I wanted to establish my credentials: “In case it doesn’t become horribly clear, I know very little about movies,” a comment which he was quick to dismiss. “That’s no problem,” he said. For the most part, then, our discussion of films, though often specific, considered the industry at large and its relationship—healthy or otherwise—to American culture.

It does not take much prodding to know where Medved stands. I asked him about his upcoming lecture entitled “Is Hollywood Out of Touch with America?” which is to be presented as part of the January Series, and he expanded on the implicit yes.

On the family: “Movies almost exclusively are about single people, and Americans, for better or for worse, choose to live in families. The fact is, for every one movie that you can think of that features a couple or a family, there are twenty that are about single people.”

"Hostility to traditional religion goes so deep and burns so intensely that Hollywood insists on expressing that hostility, even at the risk of commercial disaster."
On business: “Polls show consistently that Americans may not love big business but have a somewhat respectful attitude toward it, and many Americans want to go into business. But Hollywood’s portrayal of business is almost universally hostile—which is ironic considering that it is part of a major industry itself.”

On the military/CIA: “The military ranks high among respected institutions in most polls, but in its portrayals in movies, it is instant hostility from Hollywood. Also, the CIA has become, in Hollywood terms, almost a three-letter abbreviation for evil, and I don’t think most Americans share that view.”

On obscene language: “According to a recent Associates General poll, obscene language in film is something that seventy percent of Americans object to. The ubiquitous use of four-letter words is not something that the American public appreciates, and yet it’s very rare to find a motion picture that doesn’t employ it.”

On religion: “Hostility to traditional religion goes so deep and burns so intensely that Hollywood insists on expressing that hostility, even at the risk of commercial disaster. By sneering at zealots and deriding conventional religious beliefs, a filmmaker can win the respect of his peers, even if his work is rejected by the larger public.”

“On all of these areas you’re dealing with an industry whose job is to appeal to the public and is doing that only in the sense of appealing to one segment of the population. But it has tuned out huge portions of the American people because their values are so infrequently reflected or respected on screen.”

Well, I was thinking, he certainly knows how to prove a thesis. But, I wondered, what has happened to the movie industry to create this situation? “You would say that something has become disfunctional in the relationship between America and American movies . . .”

Right away he predicted my direction. Before I could ask for a historical perspective, he gave me one.

“Yes—and the evidence I would give is that a much smaller percentage of Americans goes to movies today than what did in the past. Go back to 1960 when TV was well-established. At that time you had over seventy million Americans who went to the theater every week. Today, you have seventeen million.”

So TV was not the cause . . . but what about the impact of VCRs?

“And that is not simply, as the movie industry officially says, because of TV and videos. That’s nonsense.” Medved seems conscious of the fact that his opinions are controversial; he’s prepared to be contradicted. What’s more, he’s a step ahead.

“Movies used to be the way that Americans sort of talked to themselves,” he continued, “or that the culture communicated with the masses. It was a genuinely mass media. Today, movies by and large are addressing only one segment of the population.”

It logically follows that other segments of the population are
missing out, including what Medved describes as the "new counter-culture." "It is not drugs, rock 'n' roll, and free sex like it was in the sixties. It's a Christian, religious, conservative counter-culture that has its own symbols and means of communication that

"I'd rather see a bad movie of Paul Schraeder than a good movie by a lesser director."

differs from the official culture that you see on everything from The Tonight Show to America's Funniest Home Videos."

"Has TV replaced cinema in its function as a mass media?"

An audible reluctance stretched into "to some extent, yes. For instance, movies are almost exclusively about single people, and TV is almost exclusively about families. But I don't want to talk about television." His speech had begun to gallop in an attempt to reach the next topic. "I'm not particularly an expert. I don't own a TV and I haven't owned one for twenty years."

Boing! What? "Why don't you own a TV?"

"Because the fact is that anyone who has a TV ends up watching the darn thing. There are some good things on TV—I think Sneak Previews is a good thing on TV—but there is nothing on TV that's so good that my time would not be better invested doing something else, whether that be reading the newspaper or playing with my daughters or taking a Talmud class. It makes you more alive than watching television. It's bad enough that as part of my job I have to spend ten hours a week watching motion pictures!"

Still in shock, I asked him what drew him to film. "I have always liked movies, ever since I was a little kid going to matinees." He denied that, for him, movies had ever been the "magical experience" to which so many movie buffs testify. Instead, I think, he likes to look at movies as cultural phenomena—textbooks for and of the American people. When I asked him what he admired about the film industry he responded, "The film industry is extraordinarily competent. It's amazing how many movies are made that get it all right. It's astonishing! Making a movie is sort of what D.H. Lawrence says is the perfect metaphor for America—the Pequod—a mad captain on a ship with a mission with no purpose but tremendous competence and dedication pursuing that white whale, which is next year's hit."

I was curious as to how he critiques a film for his show. "I ask one question: does the film accomplish what it sets out to do?" Comparing Rambo and Glory, for example, would be silly; they have different intentions. There is a relativity here which is also present in his attitude toward the public taste, an attitude which says simply that Michael Medved cannot decide what everyone will like. This is one reason why he hedges on questions like "What is the best movie out right now?" and "What is the best movie ever?"

In a field that involves so much subjectivity, Medved has developed what seems to be a pragmatic approach to his varied audience. But this was no time for diplomacy. This was an interview. I wanted him to opine! "I will give the name of a director and you give me three adjectives. Spike Lee."
“Overrated, energetic, (pause) incoherent.”
“David Lynch.”
“Audacious, self-indulgent, deranged.”
(These flowed easily, no hesitation.)
“Paul Schraeder.”
“Intense, . . . gifted, . . . tormented.”
Medved was already aware of the fact that Schraeder is a Calvin graduate, so I asked him for his thoughts on our Hollywood alumnus.
“I think he is a major figure in the film industry. He’s one of those people who, even when he makes bad movies, and he makes many of them, [they] are full of interesting elements. I’d rather see a bad movie of Paul Schraeder than a good movie by a lesser director. Given his background, there is enough rage/conflict/intensity about the whole subject of God that there is a sort of brittle emptiness that you won’t find in some of the utterly secular and mindless work that is out there. There’s tons more going on in a Schraeder movie—even if it is a twisted kind of energy.”

From here, the conversation bounced to the larger subject of religious values in the Hollywood culture, and it was in his discussion of this topic that I sensed the most passion—whether in the context of reverence or resentment—in his voice. Committed to the practice of traditional Judaism, he and his family are active in the Pacific Jewish Center, a congregation of about 400 which he helped found. Yet his career steeps him in a business which he perceives as not only non-religious but also anti-religious.

“The entire culture of Hollywood, which is hermetically sealed, is one that is not tolerant of religion. The late David Niven said forty years ago that he knew more people in Hollywood who worshipped Satan than who worshipped Jesus.” This statement, which comes from an era in which devil worship was becoming popular in Hollywood, was said half-jokingly. But, says Medved, “that’s still probably true. There are more people today who follow Shirley MacLaine than follow Moses or Jesus. It is so pervasive that those few people who are religious believers are almost afraid to reveal it in any way because it can

"The mighty engines of our popular culture—the media and the academic world—are totally dominated, ruthlessly dominated, by militant, uncompromising, intolerant, triumphalist, brutal secularists who are not only not religious but also hate religion."
genuinely hurt their careers."

“What is it like for you, being openly Jewish in this culture?”

He laughed perplexedly. “It’s very weird.”

Sounding like a Calvinist concerned with integrating something and something else, I asked him, “To what extent can you mesh your Judaism with the culture of Hollywood—or to what extent do you adhere to some sort of policy of resistance?”

“Hmmm . . . I don’t think it’s possible to be fully attuned to the culture of Hollywood, to go to all the parties, the dinners, and to have that network of friends that is the prerequisite if you’re going to be very accepted into the mainstream social life. That’s not consistent with regular religious practice; the values are too much at variance. You know, one of the cliches that they use about a producer is ‘Oh, that guy, he would sacrifice his first-born son for a movie hit!’ When people are saying that, it’s not hypothesis—it’s true!” At this point he had raised his voice to a persuasive volume. In a more reflective tone he said, “As with many other art forms, the movie business can be enormously consuming. I’m not saying you can’t participate or you can’t play a constructive role—but I do think if you’re religious it’s unlikely that you will rise to the top of the heap.”

And the parallels to Calvinism began to collect. Specifically with the Mussar movement, predominant in Jewish intellectual circles for 200 years, Medved sees similarities. “As I understand Calvinism, the Mussar movement represents a Calvinist strain. It teaches that every day should be a day for self-judgement, self-improvement, and it very much teaches the idea the there is a daily struggle that goes on within every human being.”

He seems to feel a bond with Christians because he sees Judeo-Christian religious groups as poised together against secularism. “There are millions of people who are personally religious in this society, but the mighty engines of our popular culture—the media and the academic world—are totally dominated, ruthlessly dominated, by militant, uncompromising, intolerant, triumphalist, brutal secularists who not only are not religious but also hate religion.”

His intolerance of secular society spreads to politics, specifically in his support of prayer in public schools. His reasons? “I don’t think it
should be threatening to anyone—Jew or atheist or Christian or anyone—to pause to begin a classroom day with a few moments to focus on something as serious as the existence or non-existence of a God. I'm not suggesting that if you have kids praying that all of a sudden schools will become safe havens for model students, but it certainly can't hurt. It's basic behavioral psychology.”

From here we digressed to his law school days. “The school prayer decision eliminating prayer in public schools is such an obvious distortion of the first amendment. It's so obviously bone-headed and wrong. The Supreme Court begins its sessions with a prayer, so does the Congress. It's true! If they are not enjoined by the establishment clause of the first amendment, then why, in heaven's name, is a third grade classroom in Grand Rapids enjoined from beginning its day with a prayer?” You know, he probably would have been a good lawyer.

He is similarly adamant on censorship. “I am not in any sense in favor of censorship. I don't think that the problem of Hollywood is the point of view that is expressed in a few left-wing movies. The problem is balance. The problem is the lack of anything on the other side. The answer to Hollywood's problem is not ‘Stop making certain kinds of movies’—it is ‘Start making different kinds of movies.’”

China Cry, funded by the Trinity Broadcasting Network, is one such film. Medved had gone to the premiere the previous night and had found it “adequate” and “rather moving,” and had been impressed by the experience. “I have never seen an audience respond this way to a movie before. This kind of development—a film with beautiful and gifted well-known stars that carries an underlying but not heavy-handed religious message—is a very interesting development. If films like this start making money, then people in the movie business can't help taking notice.” And he sounded hopeful. I think he has a good dose of what he called “the American condition of optimism” in his blood.

There is more than a hint of nostalgia in Medved's assessment of America in 1990. Not that he is dreamy. In fact, he is intensely engaged in the present and looking toward the future. Throughout our talk, however, I noticed admiration for products of the past and contempt for those of the present, not just films, but also political leaders and classical musicians. For instance, he finds it “unbelievable” that “certain clowns in Washington are the heirs to Clay and Calhoun and Webster.” Moreover, in classical music, an art form which means more to him than movies (“I will confess it readily”), he is upset by recent works. “All of the great composers, virtually without exception, were writing their music in one way or another to the greater glory of God. When people take that element out of music, it becomes the cry of a wounded animal and nothing more. That's what so much of contemporary music sounds like.”

I felt like we were going overtime, so I made a move to wrap it up. He agreed, “I'm running on. But now that I know that you are taping, you'll take, like any journalist does, one-twentieth of what I have said [and] quote it out of context . . . .”

Well, I can certainly try.
This month we are taking a look at a tremendously exciting new branch of the arts, the field of animal literature. Spurred by a few breakthrough achievements that have taken place in the last half-decade, this new field has been called the most exciting thing to happen to the arts since synchronized swimming. Without further ado, let's examine some of the research results that have caused all this fuss.
DOG CARTOONING

Our look at animal literature begins with the oldest and most popular form of animal expression, dog cartoons. Displayed here are samples of the three most widely read dog comic strips.

*Pound Dog* began in 1955 as a *Little Orphan Annie* spin-off. This strip details the adventures of Rex, the incarcerated cousin of Annie's dog Sandy.

*That Darn Tail* is the most popular canine comic strip ever. Human critics have had trouble understanding the attraction, but dogs love the series which runs identical drawings every day but with different backgrounds. One episode, entitled "Paris," won the Golden Bone award for the best strip last year.

*Superdog*, another well-liked cartoon strip, features a dog from Krypton similar in talents to Superman but more promiscuous.
1000 TYPING MONKEYS

The problem: if a group of monkeys was trained to work electric typewriters and set to the task of randomly pecking keys, could one of the monkeys someday type out the entire play Hamlet? Over the years this philosophical conundrum has been used by bored philosophers as an excuse to argue a variety of unrelated trivialities. Two years ago, a group of Bell Laboratory scientists received a $2.2 million NEA research grant so that they could put 1000 monkeys to work to decide this age-old dispute. This September the group reported their first startling find. While the monkeys are still considered to be a long way from Shakespeare, one enterprising monkey did manage to complete an entire romance novel with a style unmistakably reminiscent of Danielle Steele.

This first novel, entitled Snare of Desire, is being published by Bantam Books under the Danielle Steele pseudonym. The monkey has already been offered a $10,000 advance on his next novel; while Snare of Desire is being regarded as a statistical, if not literary, miracle.

These results of the Bell Labs project have received sharp criticism from several academic corners, not the least of which is the Association of High School Grammar Teachers. Representatives of this group have ripped into the novel, calling it “non-literature,” accusing the monkey author of having “no concept of the proper use of the English semicolon,” and insisting that the monkey be given back the book to rewrite.

The monkey himself has remained quite humble about his achievement. As he self-effacingly admitted (via word processor) on the Oprah Winfrey Show, “sdf$%^$F$DD:lsfdg*()#$% Really, the last one hundred pages wrote themselves. I mean, &%(lsdfvbnb)()+ who didn’t know that Mirabella was going to dump that neurotic boyfriend of hers and run off with Big River, the Indian chieftain.”

Although the Bell research team finally labelled Snare of Desire an inconclusive result to their research, they are increasingly hopeful for the future. Their star monkey is still on the talk show circuit as of this writing, and although scientists insist that Snare of Desire was the first of his works which was not normal, random monkey gibberish, several of the monkey’s earlier works have been published by less respectable journals of modern poetry.
COCKROACH DREAMS

Finally, we come to an area of animal literature that until recently had been overlooked. When the field of animal literature first began to gain scientific import, most of the research centered on mammals and other higher life forms. The common house cockroach was ignored. Scientists now admit that this was a great oversight; after all, cockroaches have lots of spare time and the species has had several gazillion years in its present form in which to develop linguistic skills. Also, the typical cockroach has a deeply felt need to express his or her individuality and personal worth, as would you if you had 18,000 identical siblings. Many cockroaches have learned to express their fears and fondest hopes in poetry such as this sample from the recently published *Cockroach Dreams* (translated and compiled by DCon Laboratories, Inc).

**ANGST**

Onion juice smear
puddled on the floor
Oh rapturous height
Of Sensuous Delight!
Nutrients suspended
in translucent broth
Sweet, Sour blended!
I'll slurp like a sloth—

what shadow is this
creeping overhead?
A premature dusk?
Or will I soon be dead?

A FOOT!
oh, no ohno ohnoohnoohno
whymewhymewhyme I'm too young
runrunrun turnleftturnleftleftleft
runrunrunrunrunrunrunrun run
wriggle into a crack in the wall
whew.

decaying crumb here,
left from last year,
not nearly so sweet
but this crack sure is neat.

Although the literary quality of these early animal-authored works had been modest, the publishing world has already been turned on its ear. The day *Snare of Desire* hit the bookstores, Bantam Books’ stock jumped twenty points, the *National Enquirer* sold 100,000 copies of “Psychic Gerbil Predictions for 1991,” and Shirley McLaine announced that she had an exclusive channel to the departed spirits of both Rin Tin Tin and Toto. The actress’ new 900 telephone number is reportedly taking in more than $15,000 a week. Animal literature, albeit still very new, is obviously being quickly assimilated into American culture; literary merit or no, animal-authored literature is here to stay.