

ences at the MLA's 111th conference in Chicago. The LU session, "Tall in the Stall: Exploring Transgressive Sexual Sites," was far and away the best attended at the convention. Hector Mondo-Bizarro, in "Psychic Charges from the Intersecting Public and Private Zones Within the Stalls of Institutional Men's Room," explained how the magnetizing pull of the dangers lurking behind the toilet stall door led to homophobic anticommunism and Proposition 13. Although Oscar Odsodd was unable to attend owing to a painful accident incurred during an intimate celebration of diversity at the University of South Dakota College of Agriculture's Bovine Research Center, his "Barn Buns: Oh Wow Brown Cow!" was read by Professor Piustranostrano to a spirited response. Odsodd's paper, which problematized heterospecies sexual difference, continued his exploration of themes adumbrated at last year's session.

Leading off the session entitled "Transgressions for the Twenty-first Century: Great Leaps Forward," LU's Elizabeth Burke-Hare delivered "At the Jeffrey Dahmer Delicatessen: A Study of the Anthropophagian Aesthetic in Contemporary Culture." This paper explored the sometimes gruesome interplay between life and art, between actual anthropophagia and textual anthropophagia. Rather than exclude cannibalism from critical consideration by dismissing it as a mere crime, Burke-Hare urged her audience to ponder the killer-cannibal's artistic role—and their own experience as witnesses, vicarious consumers, or voyeurs.

Professor Harry Glibb chairmanned a well-attended afternoon session on "Discourse Liberation: Overcoming First Amendment Barriers," and LU's Elektra Hardwitch presented "Free Speech and Hate Silence," a review of strategies for dealing with yawning, slumping, snoring, shuffling, doodling, diddling, grimacing, groaning, horse-race handicapping, and comic-book reading in the classroom by sexist-racist-homophobic-reactionary undergraduate elements determined to undermine Postmodernist discourse by disruptive apathy. Her paper ended at 9:30, when a graduate student in the front row had some kind of fit and the entire audience escaped in the confusion.

An LU graduate student, J.F. Bodley, received the MLA "Postmod Bod Door Prize" for a paper entitled "The Embod-

iment of the 'Indian' Body within the Body of Texts concerning Captive White Bodies: Engendering the American Self as the Body of (Dis)Embodied Alterity." The judges felt the title of Bodley's paper embodied this year's theme—the Embodiment of the Body—more profusely than any other at the convention.

The MLA Central Control Commission did, however, revoke Professor George S. Stodgett's lifetime membership and forbid his attendance at all future MLA functions. Stodgett was overheard describing the graduate students at the Convention as "the unemployable in pursuit of the unintelligible." The CCC pronounced this kind of insensitivity intolerable. Stodgett's colleagues (who have been encouraging him to retire since 1979) were almost unanimous in endorsing the revocation.

It should also be noted that Henry "Huckleberry" Slagg, a hobo stranded in Kafka, South Dakota, when the old Mud Butte, White Owl, and Wanblee Railroad failed in 1935, passed away at the beginning of May, regretted by all at LU. Henry Slagg first attracted the attention and sympathy of the Lagado community during the Decade of Greed. As the only year-round, full-time, long-service certified Homeless Person in the city of Kafka—or within a 180-mile radius of Lagado University—he came to assume a pivotal role in every one of the marches, vigils, rallies, sit-ins, sit-outs, sit-downs, and sit-ups held by Youth Against War, Fascism and Homelessness, the LU Coalition for the Homeless, and Advocates for the Homeless in America.

Many departments at Lagado utilized Slagg as a valuable resourcematical—he figured in at least a dozen dissertations by Ph.D. candidates in Sociology, Psychology, and Anthropology—but "Huck" will always be remembered with special fondness in the English Department. Between 1985 and 1992 he appeared in half the papers turned in by the students in Harry Glibb's "Literatures of the American Experience." A LUNexis survey reveals that Slagg recurs 13,033 times in creative writing papers by LU students during the seven-year period. He was also the subject of three published poems by the faculty.

In 1992 "Huck" declared that he was too old to continue, nailed a mailbox up in front of the old MBWO&W caboose that sheltered him, and announced his retirement from the homeless profes-

sion.

It need hardly be said that everyone in the English Department respected Henry Slagg's wishes. In any case, homelessness is an 80's kind of thing, and most members of the Lagado community agreed that it was time to move on to the concerns of the 90's.

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## Letter From Inner Israel

*by Jacob Neusner*

### Our Free, Christian Land



St. Petersburg—A while back, synagogue members and civil rights groups picketed the Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, when the Coral Ridge Ministries held a conference on "Reclaiming America for Christ." The local newspaper reported, "Thousands of Christian activists from across the nation discussed such topics as, 'reclaiming the public schools,' 'battle for our children's souls,' 'winning the new civil war: recapturing America's values,' and 'why liberals win and what we can do about it.'"

When Jews picket Christians, one thing is clear: this is a free country! Not only is everyone free to say what he wants, but the smallest minorities speak with the loudest voices. That means they are not afraid.

In Germany recently, a court in Bavaria said crucifixes could not hang on classroom walls in public schools. The organized German Jewish community of some 55,000 maintained absolute and total silence. Not a single Jew said what everyone (including ten million Muslims) was thinking: that this proves Germany is not a free country. Public opinion will not tolerate difference when it comes to what really matters. But, as we learned in Fort Lauderdale, America is different.

The protesters in Florida objected on

two grounds: first, separation of church and state precludes praying in schools; and second, statements that America "had been founded by Christians alone" are inaccurate and offensive. A local rabbi argued that the ministries "are promoting . . . principles such as exclusion and a narrow definition of morality." The newspaper further reported, "A large contingent of the protest came from the gay and lesbian community, as well as ACLU members and Muslim activists."

So the organized Jewish community, led by rabbis and synagogue members, now assumes leadership of far-left causes—in the name of Judaism. A conference member responded, "Much of what we are discussing at the conference deals with the values stated in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. The Christian religion is based on the Jewish religion."

Presenting themselves not as an ethnic but a religious group, engaged not in political but in religious action, these Jews made history. So far as I know, Jews, in the name of Judaism, picketing Christians assembled in the name of Christianity represents an authentic innovation—a true first in the history of the Jewish people for the last 2,000 years! Never before, nowhere else in the world today, has such a thing happened or could such a thing take place. What a tribute to the freedom that Americans accord to one another and to the profound toleration that Americans have for one another.

But to whose credit? Since over 95 percent of those Americans who profess a religion describe themselves as Christians, the answer is clear. Left, center, and right—Christians affirm the tradition of completely free public debate, even on sensitive religious questions, and Jews (among others), by their actions, acknowledge that fact. No better evidence of American exceptionalism, now and in the past, presents itself. In no other country have Jews conducted themselves in such a way, and it would be hard for the Christian right to refute its enemies more eloquently than the Coral Ridge Presbyterians did: going about their business with respect for those who, outside the door, chose to protest, saying simply, "The Christian religion is based on the Jewish religion."

So if it is a Christian country, then Christians have much in which to take pride. That makes all the more puzzling

the controversy over the statement, "America is a Christian country." What should offend anyone in the claim that the vast majority of Americans are Christian, and that the history of this country is the story of how serious Christians conducted themselves in peace and in war? If not Christian, then what?

Well, is America a Christian country today? Yes, but *not only* Christian. Some people think America is *basically* a Christian country, because different forms of Christianity have predominated throughout this country's history and have defined much of its culture and society. The vast majority of Americans who are religious—and that means most of us—are Christian by religion. But to be a true American, one can hold another religion or no religion at all. The first religions of America were those of the Native Americans, and while Protestantism and Roman Catholicism laid the foundations of American society, America had a Jewish community from nearly the beginning, the first synagogues dating back to the mid-17th century.

Today this country has become the meeting place for nearly all the living religions of the world, with the Zoroastrian, Shinto, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu religions well represented. Various religious groups from the Caribbean and from Africa and Latin America likewise flourish. Pretty much every religion in the world is practiced by some Americans. When Christians call it "a Christian country," some certainly mean to exclude non-Christians. But many simply mean that the majority of Americans stand for something, and something of worth. The news from Fort Lauderdale underscores this simple fact.

If you doubt it, find me some Bahai in Iran to picket the mosques, or some

Christians in Egypt to do the same, or let's go to the Western Wall in Jerusalem and worship in the manner of Reform Judaism. To cut closer to home still, try getting a Jewish group to say that America is the best place in the world, and in all of Jewish history, to practice Judaism. I did, in the *Washington Post* around a decade ago, and I can report from years of experience that the American Jewish community demands for itself what it will not accord to others, that is, the right to speak freely. The organized Jewish community prefers to marginalize and drive out difference of opinion, not to debate it, and that accounts for its chronic sectarianism.

In Islam and in Judaism, religious expression outside of the enforced consensus is dangerous. In Iran and in Egypt, you can lose your life for less. If you're a Reform Jew at the Wall without a skull cap and reciting a prayer, you might well get your head bashed in. When Orthodox women said their prayers at the Wall a few years back, they were pelted with rotten tomatoes and bridge chairs. And in the liberal American Jewish community, to contradict either the radical left or the ethnic dogma is to get yourself marginalized.

But Christianity, for its part, gave up on the Inquisition in the 18th century, and neither does it burn witches anymore. So much for the "threat" from the Christian right.

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## LIBERAL ARTS

### ALL THE NEWS THAT'S FIT TO SPIKE

Harry Smith of CBS News and Peter Jennings of ABC News delivered the following account of an incident in Bosnia. Brackets indicate the facts they omitted.

Walking over Vrbanja bridge [from the Muslim to the Serb side, after being guaranteed safe passage by Muslims], Bosko and Admira, Bosnia's "Romeo and Juliet," were shot [in the back] by [Muslim] snipers, and left [to rot] for eight days. [They had intended to move to Serbia.] Their bodies were recovered by the Serbs [crawling under Muslim fire]. The bodies were exhumed from the Serb soldiers' cemetery and reburied in the Lion Cemetery. [Admira and Bosko lie at the foot of Muslim grave markers. Bosko was a Christian.]

—J. Peter Maher

## EDUCATION

## Affirmative Action and the Academy

by Philip Jenkins

While most of us would deny that the United States has an official ideology, much of our daily life is profoundly shaped by a body of principles that are manifested in policies known as affirmative action, multiculturalism, and "diversity." These decide matters as fundamental to one's life-chances as access to jobs and education, to social mobility and economic status, while the underlying principles have been absolutely internalized by millions who have given no thought to the ideological system they represent. This theoretical structure dominates our thought and conduct at least as pervasively as Marxism ever guided the population of the former Soviet Union or the present China. This is all the more remarkable because the theory in question has no immediately obvious name, no founding texts or writings, no groundbreaking individuals whose icons are given places of honor by the party faithful. We cannot point to paleo- or neoverions of the theory, no orthodox or heretical strands. Paradoxically, though, the basic principles of the model are regarded with such dogmatic veneration by its adherents that criticism or discussion is unthinkable. Careers have been destroyed by the devotees of this stealth theory.

There are two reasons for this lack of definition. First, the theoretical framework that gave us affirmative action originated as an ad hoc set of responses to what were perceived as egregious injustices, and these emotional reactions subsequently exercised a critical influence on policymaking. The theory thus developed to buttress the policy, rather than the other way around. Second, the ideology is not expounded at length because if it were, the basic principles would have

to be admitted and discussed, and it would rapidly become apparent that these notions would carry no public support whatever, being thoroughly inimical to conventional concepts of democracy, fairness, and common sense. We therefore find the curious situation that a hugely influential theory of social organization and reform survives only by virtue of not being discussed, and indeed its advocates pursue a consistent strategy of avoiding an overt definition of principles. A strange theory indeed, all the more so since so many countries around the world are on the verge of imitating the American experiment in this area. This situation has a peculiar relevance for me personally, as I have spent most of my working life in the American higher education system, a world dominated by the system of structural racial and gender privilege that is called affirmative action. If this scheme is indeed to become worldwide, then I can truly say that I have seen the future at firsthand, and it absolutely does not work.

Affirmative action originated in the widespread public outrage at black oppression prior to the civil rights era, and the notion that vigorous government action was requested to counteract centuries of abuse. While this approach commanded wide public support, there was always a basic confusion about what exactly government was meant to do. A large majority of the population favored the creation of legal mechanisms to combat discrimination, especially in employment, and the only organized opposition to this idea came from a largely discredited group of segregationist politicians who warned that civil rights would ultimately mean a new form of racial bias against whites, and the institution of racial quotas. These warnings received little attention, and political leaders declared (probably sincerely) that neither outcome was intended or probable.

In the decade after 1965, however, a number of developments radically transformed the nature of "nondiscrimination." The courts played a pivotal role, with a series of decisions that enlarged the scope of discrimination and moved in the direction of equal outcome rather than equal opportunity. This meant, for

example, that employers were prohibited from using a wide range of hiring criteria which had the de facto effect of eliminating more black than white applicants. The courts also supported federal schemes to ensure that employers moved toward a certain proportion of minority employees, students or contractors, effectively the quota system that had specifically been ruled out in the 1965 debates. This meant adopting differential racial criteria, such as the long-clandestine practice of "race-norming" test scores. (For instance, X receives 89 points on a test, Y receives 79. X scores at the 80th centile for whites, while Y scores at the 82nd centile for blacks. This means that Y's score is *higher* than X's, and is permanently and officially recorded as such, without any inkling of the sleight of hand which made a score of 79 superior to one of 89. In summary, Y gets the job or the university scholarship.) Still more explosive, the courts tended to place the burden of proof on defendants in discrimination lawsuits, making it exceedingly difficult to show that a limited minority presence did not amount to systematic discrimination. By the late 1970's, most employers had got the message that pro-minority discrimination was not only acceptable but essential, especially for those who had any hope of dealing with federal or state government. The 1978 *Bakke* decision consecrated the new regime.

Moreover, "minority" had now subtly expanded to include categories far beyond the intended beneficiaries of the original civil rights legislation, meaning Americans of African descent. The same principles now applied to all racial minorities, and most critically, to women, all of whom now required the same form of group compensation for past maltreatment. The oddities of the theory are, or should be, obvious. Fundamental to the notion of compensation is that there are identifiable groups who have historically gained or lost by discrimination. The black-white question alone involves the acceptance of the category "white," which while including the descendants of slave-masters and traders, also covers the heirs of Slavic miners, Irish laborers, or Jewish sweatshop workers, including those who had not set foot