

## LAST LAUGH

ART HOPPE

### Black like who?

**U**NDoubtedly the gravest problem our local, state and federal governments face today in the area of race relations is attempting to determine in any given situation the race of the citizen with whom they are having relations.

From Brooklyn, where parents with names like Rifkin and Gehm are claiming to be Puerto Ricans and such in order to enroll their children in their neighborhood schools, to San Francisco, where 53 policemen seeking preference in promotion suddenly discovered they were American Indians, racial discrimination is simply not what it used to be.

Across the land, otherwise honest Americans are yielding to temptation in their drive for success. They are denying their rich racial and cultural heritages in an understandable effort to break through the invisible color barrier—to “pass,” as it were, for something they are not.

Typical, perhaps, is the case of little Andy (name withheld), who grew up in Georgia, deep in the heart of the South. The son of a poor but proud family of Norwegian descent, Andy was cursed from birth with blue eyes, blond hair and a fair complexion. By the time he had graduated from high school, he saw that the future held little affirmative action for a member of his race. A plucky lad, Andy saved every penny he earned from the menial jobs that were open to him. Instead of frittering away his money on marijuana, rock records and “groovy threads,” as did his fellow Caucasian playmates, he purchased an Afro wig, brown contact lenses and a bottle of Man Tan. His parents were shocked by his transmogrification. “Why can’t you be proud of what you are, Andy, and learn to live among your own kind?” demanded his father, Sven, a janitor. Andy, however, was adamant. “You don’t undersand, father,” he said firmly. “I want to make something of myself. I want to be somebody.” Thanks to his foresight, he was acted upon affirmatively and in swift succession won a scholarship to college, a seat in Congress and the friendship of a president. Today, he is the handsome, influential United States ambassador to the most

prestigious of international organizations (name withheld), a living symbol to the world of America’s new-found tolerance and a credit to the ingenuity of his race.

**I**T IS THIS INGENUITY THAT IS causing our governmental bodies so many headaches. To establish a citizen’s race, most generally rely on the doctrine of “visual inspection” first promulgated by the Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. In this age of enlightenment, it is not only considered impolite, but it is considered against the law in many states to ask a job applicant, “Hey, there, are you black or white?” The FEEOC, therefore, instructs employers not to be so crude as to employ “direct inquiry” in order to determine a job applicant’s “race/ethnic identification,” but to rely on “visual surveys” instead. To assist employers in this interesting task, the commission neatly divides all of mankind into five categories:

(1) *“White (Not of Hispanic origin)—All persons having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, or the Indian Subcontinent.”*

(2) *“Black (Not of Hispanic origin)—All persons having origins in any of the black racial groups.”*

(3) *“Hispanic—All persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.”*

(4) *“Asian or Pacific Islanders—All persons having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Pacific Islands. This area includes, for example, China, Japan, Korea, the Philippine Islands, and Samoa.”*

(5) *“American Indian or Alaskan Native—All persons having origins in any of the original peoples of North America.”*

Well and good. These official categorizations seem concise and foolproof, yet they afford a plethora of opportunities for cheating to those unscrupulous swindlers who would take advantage of racial discrimination. What, let us ask ourselves, is to prevent a black-skinned Dravidian from India or a dark-skinned Yemenite from the Arabian Peninsula, who are both, of course, (1) White, from passing as (2) Black? Could not the black-skinned Samoan, who is anthropologically a Caucasian, deny his (4) Pacific Islander heritage to do the (2) same. And what of, lo, the poor Mexican Indian? Is he a Mexican and therefore a (3) Hispanic? Or, if the dictates of affirmative action so require, is he not a person having origins in any of the original peoples of North America and therefore a (5) American Indian? Nor is there any need for the dishonest exploiter of such loopholes to commit perjury. Under the doctrine of visual inspection, all the black-skinned Cuban who is legally a (3) Hispanic requires to cross the color line and pose as a (2) Black is to look Black, an underhanded stratagem that all too many black-skinned persons blatantly employ. Conversely, should an

employer’s quota require one more (3) Hispanic, the street-wise ghetto (2) Black needs only show up for the job interview wearing a basket of fruit on his head, rattling a pair of maracas, and singing, “I left my heart in Santo Domingo, sí, sí, sí.”

This brings us to the plight of the good-hearted soul who yearns, above all else, to be an equal opportunity employer. Not only must he contend with dishonest job applicants who pose as something they are not, but under the rules of the game he is prohibited from asking them what they are posing as. Thus he must be able to distinguish, with one eye closed, a (3) Spanish grandee from a (1) Italian count or a (2) African bushman from a (4) Papuan bushman. That this magnificent challenge has been met and surmounted attests to the indomitable spirit and technological know-how of American industry.

**T**HE BREAKTHROUGH WAS scored by Hiram MacBean of The MacBean Tool & Die Company. MacBean carefully studied the racial/ethnic composition of his community and determined that his labor force, to be properly balanced, should consist of 48.9 percent White, 22.3 percent Black, 18.6 percent

**“That’s funny,” said the inspector, “he doesn’t look Chippewa to me.”**

Hispanic, 9.8 percent Asian or Pacific Islander, and 0.4 percent American Indian or Alaskan Native. As MacBean’s entire labor force consisted of 12 persons, he appeared faced with what weaker individuals would consider an insoluble dilemma. MacBean, however, merely hired his 11 closest cousins, all of Scottish extraction, and a superb metal punch operator named Solomon Gerschfeld.

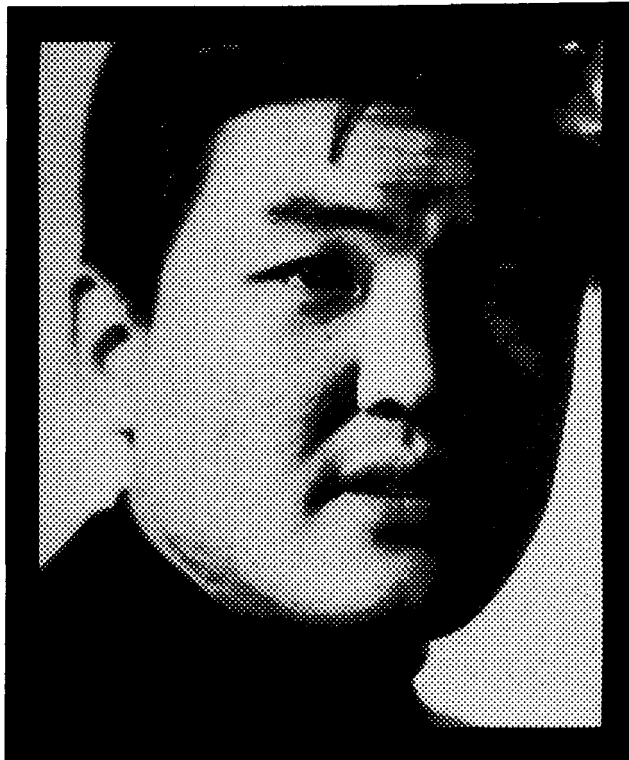
In no time, an inspector from the Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission was beating on his door. “You’d better surrender quietly, MacBean,” said the inspector grimly, as he visually inspected the 12 employees. “You haven’t even come close.”

“To the contrary,” replied MacBean with dignity, “as it so happens, I am right on the button.” And he calmly visually identified this cousin as 47.3 percent Bantu and that cousin as 39.2 percent Guamanian and so forth. The denouement came when the two visual surveyors reached Solomon Gerschfeld.

“And what’s that one supposed to be?” whispered the inspector suspiciously.

MacBean wiped his eyeglasses, consulted his pocket calculator and announced that

ART HOPPE is a syndicated humor columnist. His most recent book is *The Tiddling Tennis Theorem*, published by the Viking Press.



Kim Chi Ha is

# ON TRIAL FOR HIS LIFE

in South Korea. His "crime":  
Writing articles criticizing the  
South Korean government's  
harsh treatment of political  
dissidents.

Kim Chi Ha and half a million  
other "prisoners of conscience"  
are in jails around the world, not  
for anything they've done, but for  
what they believe. Help us help  
them. Write—

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

2112 Broadway NY, NY 10023 • 212-787-8906

**1977  
Prisoners of  
Conscience Year**

Solomon Gerschfeld was 0.48 percent Chippewa and 99.52 percent pure Paraguayan.

"That's funny," said the inspector, "he doesn't look Chippewa to me."

MacBean glared coldly at the inspector, shrugged and asked the perceptive question that has thrown the government's entire, multi-million-dollar affirmative action program into total disarray. "What," inquired MacBean, "does a Chippewa look like?"

With an instinct for the jugular, MacBean had gone to the heart of the matter. The heart of the matter—unbelievable though it may be to any knowledgeable American—is that the United States government to this day has produced not a single, solitary federal guideline whatsoever to aid in visually determining the racial or ethnic composition of its citizens. Nowhere in the volumes of rules and regulations is there a hint that Blacks should have broader noses, play basketball and/or tap dance, or that Asians should possess black hair, perseverance and/or stoically inscrutable demeanors. Without such guidelines who is to decide who is what?

The consequences of this monumental oversight cannot be exaggerated. It means that every employee is whatever his employer visually determines him to be and that every citizen is unchallengeably whatever he says he is. It means that freckle-faced Puerto Ricans will be playing in our schoolyards with round-eyed Japanese. It means that thin-lipped Bantus will be getting the scholarships and pale-faced Redskins the jobs. It means that this country, as our forefathers had prayed, will finally have become The Great Melting Pot wherein the color of a man's skin or the shape of his features will matter not a whit in his climb up the ladder of success. It means that after years of heartache and striving we will have achieved at long last The Great American Dream. □

## CLASSIFIED

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING RATES: \$0.25 PER word, minimum insertion \$5.00. Six to 11 insertions: 10 percent off; 12 or more insertions: 20 percent off. Payment must accompany insertion order.

### Travel

DAYTRIPS IN EUROPE FOR PEOPLE WHO LOVE to walk! Visit fascinating places at low cost using our unique travel guides. For free information write Great Trips, Box 5199-I, New York, NY 10017.

### Literary Services

WRITERS: "PROBLEM" MANUSCRIPT? TRY AUTHOR AID ASSOCIATES, Dept. I, 340 East 52nd Street, N.Y.C. 10022. (212) Plaza 8-4213.

### Merchandise

FOR A LITERATE CHRISTMAS: "ESCHEW Obfuscation" totebag, \$6.75; T-shirt (S-M-L-XL), \$5; plaque, \$3.50; letter-seals, 200/\$2.50, 500/\$5; bumperstickers, 2/\$1, 6/\$2.50. "Words of One Syllable" plaque, \$3.50. And Yule love our "Merry Christmas!" bumpersticker, \$1, 3/\$2.75, 6/\$5. WRY Idea Co., 3373 Tulane, San Diego CA 92122.