

THE COLLEGE STUDENT SPEAKS

By DORIS BROWN
NEGRO PRESS INTERNATIONAL

"Polish jokes" have of late become a national fad and an object of condemnation. The furor over the jokes has reached such proportions that television networks, bombarded by complaints from Polish viewers, have promised to keep the jokes off the air.

Clergymen have gotten into the act by charging that the jokes reflect "unbrotherly" hostility against Polish-Americans. I submit, however, that the intrusion of a moral issue in the hullabaloo over Polish jokes is misplaced.

What is pictured as hate is really inter-group envy. And Poles are envied because they represent a group within American society with a colorful past and a cohesive community life.

The jokes about the poles may allude to filth, crudity, and poverty, but there is more would-be nostalgia than animosity involved in such references.

A JOKE which refers to a Polish "two-piece luggage set" as two shopping bags reflect a yearning for the "good old days" when people's lives were supposedly simple enough to make shopping bags a major item of concern.

That Polish jokes have become popular at a time when inter-ethnic lines have become increasingly blurred is at once paradoxical and significant. Cause of the jokes' popularity is "alienation"--the notion that anything which smacks of loyalty to a faction, group, or country is reprehensible.

Rising standards of living and social change have made us a restless, insecure population not sure of its loyalties and identifications. Who knows where he really belongs, any more? Should Negroes seek to become a part of American society or stick to themselves? Should Irish Catholics and Italian Catholics intermarry? Should Protestants go out with Catholics?

The answers to these questions used to be definitive. Now they are fuzzy.

IN VIEW of this, it is no wonder that many of us long for the days when ethnic and religious groups provided a sense of "belongingness" largely missing in today's mass society. And our longing reflects what our citizenry lacks: identification with one's own community and pride in its achievements.

Regardless of what one's group is, there is a pervading envy of what other elements of the American population have and do.

Whites, I maintain, do not so much hate Negroes as they envy them. Every condemnation of supposed Negro licentiousness and recklessness carries with it a secret desire to be part of the reputed "action."

On the other hand, many black people express more self-hate than animosity toward whites when they make racial accusations. Behind much black power belligerence is a wish to be embraced by the very white society one is condemning.

And the militants' demand to be called "Afro-American," rather than Negroes, semantically reflects more of a desire for inclusion in the "American dream" than a resolve to be separate from it.

Thus, whites and Negroes are, in fact, "equal"--despite their finger-pointing at one another. Each envies the other and longs to be someone he is not, while seeking identification with a group other than his own. The big word for this game of "musical chairs" is "alienation"; and the overriding problem is self-hate.

HOW TO offset our alienation? As long as our society is, by nature, an alienated one, finding one's place in one's own group--and liking it there--will not be easy.

But that, nevertheless, remains the challenge before all of us, of whatever group. And until we meet that challenge, we will continue to envy the Poles and other old-fashioned groups in the name of a displaced hatred that really expresses our own inner discontent.

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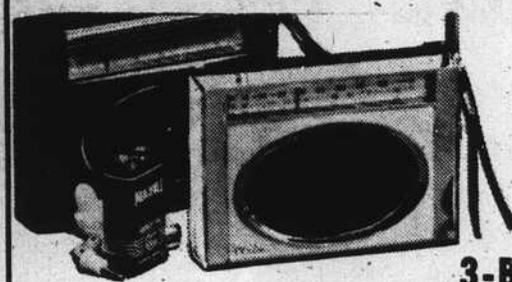


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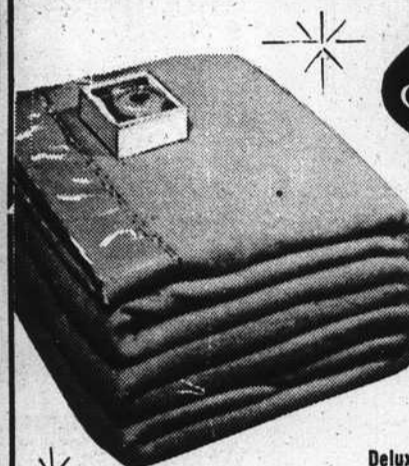
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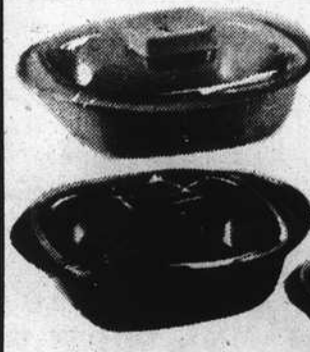
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