

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

Debate on merits of multi-cultural classes meritless

Seems that the proposal to add multicultural classes to UNLV's curriculum has some professors in a huff. Seems that these professors fear the core curriculum university students must take and pass would somehow be diluted with the addition of another class (or classes) geared toward supposedly legislating morality. Seems these academics are also worried that adding three-credit classes and an international studies class — proposals on board and heard during Tuesday's three-hour meeting of the UNLV Faculty Senate — would further bog down those students in difficult disciplines such as engineering or nursing. Seems that multicultural classes at UNLV are doomed.

Things aren't always what they seem. Faculty members in the education college argued during Tuesday's meeting that multicultural studies are already in place. If true, why would it hurt the university to follow suit? The answer: It wouldn't.

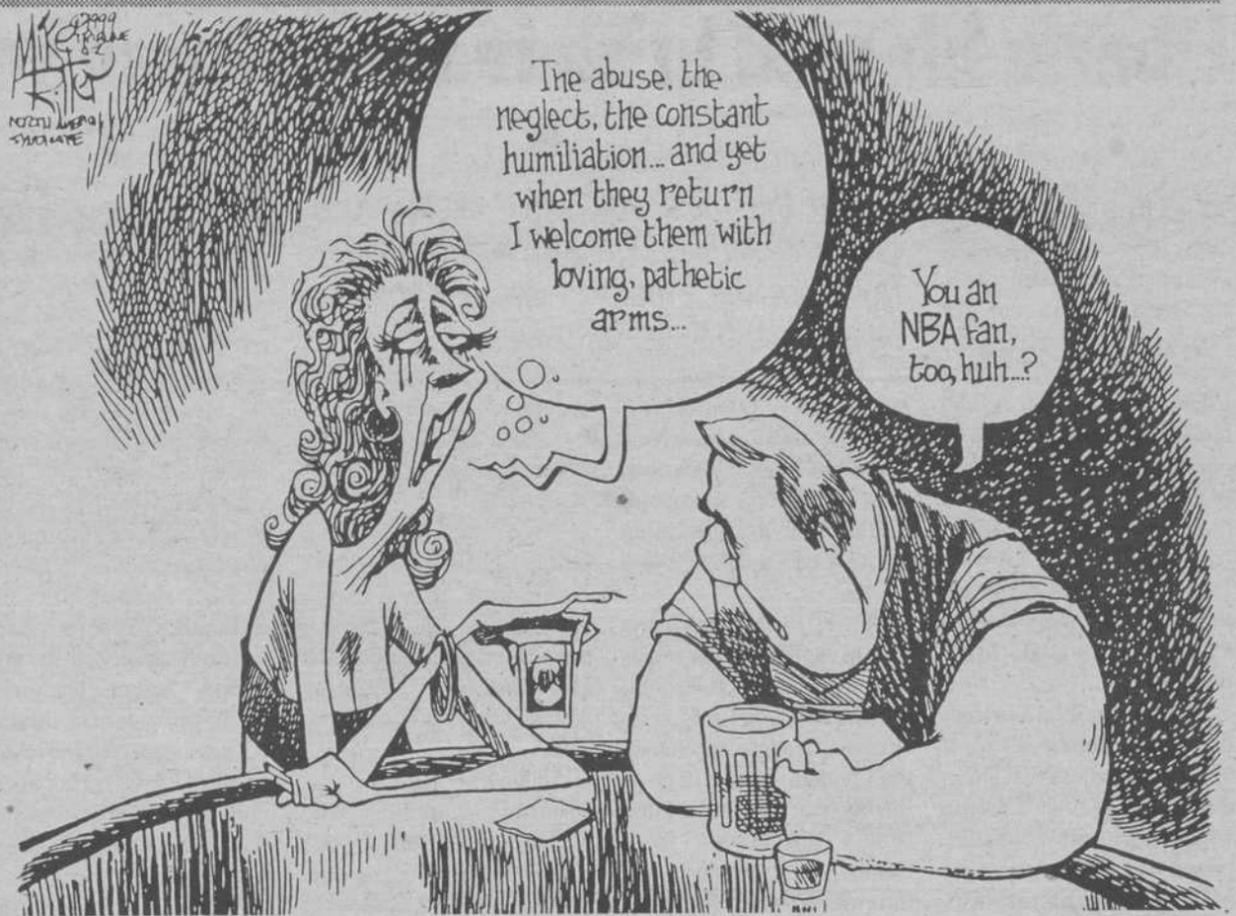
Despite claims that changing requirements for the first time in 14 years to include multicultural courses isn't wise, and that the goals of adding such classes are ambiguous, and that professors shouldn't try to legislate values, the courses should be implemented. If there weren't a need for them, a committee that studied the university's core curriculum last fall would have never recommended adding multicultural classes.

Contrary to opinion, the classes wouldn't be used to teach Political Correctness 101 but, as core curriculum committee chairman and associate dean of the liberal arts college Michael Bowers said, would be used to foster more dialogue and understanding among cultures.

Let's understand something: Multiculturalism isn't Afrocentrism, as some mistakenly think. Multiculturalism centers around exposing everyone to everyone else's culture. Multiculturalism can include studying the customs of the Quakers in the New England states, enclaves of the Amish community in New York, Creoles in Louisiana or those South Carolinians who speak in the Gullah tongue.

Multiculturalism is all-inclusive. While these classes likely won't convert avowed racists or fence-sitters with no particular concern one way or the other to embrace other cultures, at least they'll expose them to the contributions other ethnicities have made. A skinhead probably won't care to learn about Charles R. Drew, but when someone in their family lives longer via a blood transfusion, at least he will know that a black man discovered the process of saving, storing and transferring vital blood plasma. Countless tidbits of similar information are unearthed in multicultural classes, as are tips on business and religious customs, cultural moors and taboos and other valuable information.

It would behoove professors to support multicultural education. In the first quarter of the next century, America will be a minority-majority country. The wheels are already turning in that direction. The economy has long since gone global. If you want to produce students who compete and thrive in the 21st century, you might consider exposing them to all the information out there. Isn't college about higher learning? Or does it just seem that way?



Black farmers' reparations only minor justice

Special to Sentinel-Voice  
Even in today's post-technological age, the farmer remains a powerful American icon.

The very word calls to mind one who is fiercely self-reliant and yet, because farmers provide sustenance to the larger society, good-hearted and patriotic.

That's one reason the story of the bias practiced for decades by the U.S. Department of Agriculture against African-American farmers ought to shock us. That shameful record ended earlier this month when the agriculture department settled a massive lawsuit brought by black farmers.

The federal agency agreed to pay hundreds of millions of dollars — it may total as much as \$400 million — to thousands of African-American farmers who were denied federal loans and other subsidies during the 1980s and 1990s because of their race.

The National Black Farmers Association, which filed the lawsuit, estimates that as many as 3,000 farmers are likely to seek a standard award of \$50,000. Farmers seeking higher awards can pursue a judgment by an outside arbitrator.

The unprecedented settlement means USDA avoids any formal admission of wrongdoing.

But there is no doubt that a vicious combination at USDA of individual and institutional racism drove many black farmers deeply

**To Be Equal**

By Hugh B. Price  
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into debt and caused others to lose their farms altogether.

Those racist practices were particularly crippling because black farmers have historically had great difficulty gaining credit from private lenders.

They were heavily dependent on USDA to fulfill its mission as the farmers' lender of last resort.

In the high-risk business of farming, with success or failure often dependent on the weather, access to loans to sustain a farm over one or two or three seasons can mean the difference between survival and bankruptcy.

Instead, systemic racism at USDA has contributed to the fact that black farmers are disappearing at a rate three times that of their white counterparts.

Between 1982 and 1992, the number of black farmers in the U.S. dropped by 43 percent, from 33,250 to 18,816, one percent of nation's 1.9 million farmers.

True, black farmers have fallen to the same economic forces that affected all small farmers who lack the resources to compete with the large corporations that now

dominate agriculture. But USDA officials routinely denied African-American farmers loans to buy the necessities for farming, or the loans were too little and given too late — resulting in poor crops which weren't profitable enough to repay the farmers' debts.

USDA statistics showed that applications from white farmers were typically processed in 60 days.

The typical wait for black farmers was 220 days — a delay which would likely result in the loss of a crop and sinking into steep debt.

A 1990 Congressional committee report declared that these and other USDA

policies were "directly responsible for the loss of land and resources these farmers experienced."

Pushed by black farmers associations, their advocates and their allies in Congress, USDA quickly moved in October to settle the case after Congress stipulated that farmers' complaints dating back to the early 1980s were still valid and a federal judge ruled that the farmers could bring a class-action lawsuit and set a trial date for Feb. 1.

USDA has also begun to implement some of the 92 reforms put forth last year by the agency's civil rights task force. One already in force is that local county committees are no longer allowed to decide who qualifies for loans.

In addition, the settlement requires USDA to return some of its 1.5 million acres in foreclosed property to black farmers if discrimination can be proved.

But for black farmers and Black America, the victory is (See Justice, Page 10)

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