

EDITORIAL

Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

Don Peterson's excellent letter in the Free Critic has spurred my lethargic pen to write a word on behalf of my friend and former student, Fred Wilson. Some of what I say will, of course, if only indirectly concern Derrick Hill, but Derrick has not yet given me the pleasure of his dynamic presence in one of my classes (he is promising to do so soon). So I do not feel I have any right to make him the center of this Discussion. Lucille Meredith's account of the events which contributed to Fred's departure from City College have now been widely read and adequately commented upon; these remarks are directed neither to her nor against her, but to all of us who are concerned about the present revolution in the concept of what is meant by education.

Fred was my student in English 1A last year and, for a month this semester, in Humanities GI1A. It would have been easy, upon occasion, to have got up tight when Fred complained about an assignment or wrote a paper off the subject as, indeed, he sometimes did. But Fred was not the first student to want to take off on his own nor, I hope, will he have been the last. His effect was to force me to re-examine the purposes of the assignments. I realized that essentially I had two reasons -- both quite valid -- for specifying topics for 1A essays: to keep the writing relevant to the reading and discussion and to satisfy the demands of the students for such guidance. Ideally, I think a 1A class should provoke thought which will in turn produce some relevant critical comment in discussion and writing. Are we not trying to teach something about coherent thinking and writing, rather than any specific subject matter? Therefore, when a student comes along with specific subject matter? Therefore, when a student comes along who has ideas of his own, when we get someone that mature, it seems to me that we must cherish and nurture that student and let him write what concerns and interests him, giving his papers the same attention to organization and mechanics that we give to the more conventional assignments and relishing the pleasure we can take in reading an honest statement. (If we are having any impact at all, some of the papers will be on topics that interest us, too!)

I don't mean that Fred never wrote on the topic suggested, only that when he did not, he had reasons worth attending to. It is precisely here that the revolution I refer to lies. We can no longer go on thinking of our students as "kids" (check out Alice's Restaurant!), boys, children. No doubt some of them are immature, undeveloped, but why focus on their immaturities, why fix them at that point? There is a formal pretension in calling our students Mr. or Miss; are we only playing a game of treating them like adults? Perhaps we do not really believe in the maturity or in the individuality of our students? We may end in calling each other by our first names and thus acknowledging a certain parity, really feeling that we are dealing with adults, with young people who are our peers in some areas if not in scholarship, skills or age -- and do all these three superiorities have a slightly hollow sound? I am quite prepared to admit that many young people I know today have insights into political, moral and emotional values every bit as meaningful as those held by me or my contemporaries. Why not honor them and enjoy those insights?

I was, to be sure, already conscious of the ideas stated above before last year; Fred Wilson was one of several students who have made me more sharply aware of them, brought them into focus. We did not always agree, but we respected each other, and the class benefited, I would like to think, from both participating in and observing the sometimes electric discussions which our differences produced. I was looking forward to enjoying the same teaching aid in my humanities class this semester, and Fred's departure is a personal loss. But we must also regard his departure as a failure of the school to keep one of its better students. Many of my colleagues must know (like me) other bright young people (forgive me, Fred; you are still young in my eyes) who either leave college or never arrive because they cannot dig the value system they

One Wednesday the twentieth of November Larry Pinkney of the B.S.U. met with the Executive Committee of the Academic Senate and presented a list of suggestions to help establish a Black curriculum at City College. He spoke with utter seriousness and conviction about the need for a Afro-American studies department and with the help of his Vice-President described a program that could be established along the lines of the autonomous department scheduled to begin at Merritt college in January. Included in their suggestions was the desire for City College to hire a Black lady to replace the outgoing Dr. Mary Golding as Dean of Women. It was this suggestion that raised the most eyebrows, but it was this suggestion that had the greatest priority. The Free Critic feels that it is an extremely valid request and deserves affirmative action from the administration. The present racial imbalance of our schools administration is a whitewashed disgrace to the minority students that comprise over one third of the students on campus. Truthfully we feel that the imbalance is an anachronism that focuses on one of the most crucial problems still facing this college -- Racism. It takes only a glance at our administration to recognize this, and it is time for President Conlan and his Deans to face up to the fact of this inherent racism.

Larry Pinkney's request for a Black Lady as Dean suggests to us that black students feel that a dean should be competent in areas besides the need for proper grooming and fashion shows and mid-afternoon teas. For many women the office is now thought of as the all-American finishing school of every saxon mothers dream. With this in mind, the Free Critic strongly suggests that white female students begin running to catch up with their black counterparts and stop learning to play house and seek a Dean of Women and not a substitute mother.

The response to Larry Pinkney, as regards the appointment of a Black Dean was familiar -- essentially wait and see. The problem with such a response is that it has no sure and solid meaning. No real purpose. No actual goal. It is an end in and of itself. It was pointed out by various committee members that there are certain legal considerations that had to be considered in the hiring of instructors or administration such as the proper degree which means an M.A. Regarding this, we would like to know if the more than a score of instructors presently listed in the current college catalog with only B.A. behind their name are all "eminent scholars?" Also, if a person with an A.A. can now teach Afroamerican History in California Secondary Students could it not follow that persons with a B.A. be appointed to the City College faculty. After all, our States educational history has systematically excluded blacks up til now and the quantity of advanced degrees is not that great.

The B.S.U. and their demand for a Black lady as Dean of Women and for the establishment of a Black Curriculum is valid, "not only for the black race . . . but it might have an impact on the entire system of American education." There seems to be no real debate over the fact that our educational system needs to be changed. If those in authority continue only to act and think on those issues that have ceased to be debatable then they only preserve their antiquity. Such is the matter of department prestige which Dean Aldridge referred to in the November 24 edition of the S. F. Sunday Examiner, in which he said, "If we started a new department it would have to gain this prestige." Yet it is "this prestige" that seems to be the concern of the B.S.U. who feel that it means a white, hence negative concept of history, art and culture. A look at the history of our colleges indicates that they have been a companion of every evil, cycle, syndrome or mania in our history. Now however, we are presented with alternatives so that we won't in the future respond to a new department with the feeling that it would be 'second rate.' To do so makes one guilty of "selective attention."

City College needs a new Dean of Women. The lady selected should be Black. The College also should establish a Department of Afroamerican Studies. And if for some reason these are not done, then we suggest that it will be the administration who are really the "militants" and it will be they who have placed the "battle on the agenda."

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