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Periscope/Letters

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And the Winner Is . . .

Jim McIntyre (German) will receive one of nine national certificates of merit (and a cash award) from the American Association of Teachers of German at an awards luncheon in Washington in November. The AATG and the Goethe-Institut have presented these awards since 1978 to honor "outstanding achievement in furthering the teaching of German in schools, colleges, and universities in the U.S."

No Women Upstairs

An anonymous 1988 grad has returned a framed photo purloined from the Cotter (then Student) Union and used to decorate his various apartments around the country ever since. The photo is labeled "ICA Open House, 1951." That would be Lambda Chi Alpha, now Trevorgy. It shows two men and a woman in the fraternity lounge. A sign in the background says: "No Women Allowed Upstairs."

Meehan Gets a Hit

Jim Meehan (economics) is quoted in the August 9 San Antonio Express-News talking about one of his subspecialties—the economics of baseball. In a story about the future of the sport, Meehan acknowledges the likelihood of labor strikes but discounts the long-term impact. "People always come back after strikes; baseball always seems to recover nicely," said Jim Mechem [sic], a professor of economics at Colby College in Waterville, Maine. "After the last strike, people said they wouldn't go to games, and maybe they didn't for a year or a year and a half. But they come back." At least they spelled "Colby" right.

Porker on the Lam

With the encouragement of a wireless electric fence, Pedro, the pet pig belonging to President Bro and his wife, Cathy, seemed content to browse the backyard of the President's House. That is, until the students arrived the first week of September and the sweet smells emanating from Dana Hall kitchen made a small jolt worth a trip to check it out. Security officers spoiled his fun and he's back taking the leavings from under the bird feeder.

Letters

Better Late Than Never

Congratulations on the summer issue feature article, "The D Word: A Reexamination of Diversity at Colby." My enthusiasm for the article is only somewhat tempered by the fact that it is four (or more) decades overdue.

The credit for the article clearly belongs to the student organizers of the Colby/Bates/ Bowdoin Conference on Diversity, and I would like to use this letter to express my gratitude and admiration for their initiative. The ideas expressed at the conference, as reported in the article are deep, complex, and on target. W.E.B. DuBois wrote in 1904, "The problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color line." This line opens and closes his essay "Of the Dawn of Freedom" in his classic The Souls of Black Folk. It is already clear, from census data, that the 21st century is better already for the leadership and example of these students.

"The Last Page" article on Dean Ernest Marriner in the same issue was ironic for me. The only conversation I ever had with Dean Marriner happened when, as a student, I made an appointment with him to ask about the shamefully small number of black people at Colby. I volunteered for this mission on behalf of the Student Christian Association (SCA). I was apprehensive because I knew how admired and revered he was. I went to the appointment alone—a strategic mistake that I understood only many years later when, in the feminist movement, I learned that you never face down "the Alan" alone.

In my class only one black student, Sylvester Todd, was enrolled. He left after our freshman year; I don't know why. Dean Marriner's explanation was that not every black person was a Vashti Boddie. Vashti was an outstanding and much-admired scholar a class or two ahead of us. Marriner was all but saying a 1950's version of "They're not qualified." Marriner, a product of the times and the place that Maine has always been, clearly had no notion of the importance of "campus climate" as it relates to interaction among representatives of diverse groups. That consciousness came to Maine campuses much later. I think Chaplain Clifford Osborne, advisor to the SCA and the one who put me up to making the appointment, may have understood.

I've never forgotten what Marriner said, and nothing ever resulted from our conversation. In those days, the predominate (WASP) culture assumed that outsiders were fine as long as they aspired to become insiders like us, and Colby was just like almost any other campus in that respect.

The sidebar article, "Diversity History
101" is inadequate; its tone is a little smug. The alumni magazine's reportage of the 1970 chapel occupation was disappointing, and the statements by and reportage of Bill Cotter's attempts to "improve the climate" were never enlightening. I hope that Colby's reflection of and participation in the wider majority culture of blindness, indifference and insensitivity as well as the first this or the first that.

As a student at Colby in the sleeping Fifties, I was happily engaged in and challenged by great serious ideas with big meaning. At each reunion I naively hoped that I'd have a chance to reflect with my classmates about the meaning of the rapid and radical changes taking place in our society. I longed for a chance to look at these changes in an academic setting. Still hoping, I returned to Colby for what I believe may have been the first alumni-seminar. I enrolled hoping that I could take a serious look with academicians at the meaning, especially to whites like me, of the civil rights movement in general and the death of Martin Luther King Jr. in particular. I was disappointed; Easy Rider got a thorough look, but not the civil rights movement.

I was delighted to read about President Adams's background after he was appointed, primarily because anyone who once wrote for Mother Jones magazine can't be all bad. I think this time I am not disappointed. Diversity does indeed belong "at the head of the agenda." It is the most important thing Colby can emphasize in the twenty-first century. It is so important that, yes, it is better late than never.

Helen Payson Seager '58
Nantucket, Mass.

Editor's Note: A page on Colby's Web site, "The Untold Story: Activism & Social Justice at Colby," is available at www.colby.edu/education/activism.

Congratulations to the students and administration for grappling head-on with the challenge of embracing human diversity on campus. Your excellent feature article ("The D Word," summer 2001 Colby) tells me exciting things are happening at Colby.

The key to combating prejudice and misunderstanding is to encounter individuals from other groups on a personal level. How many of us have never really had a conversation with a person from "that" group? When you can reach beyond your comfort zone to listen closely to another person's story, you begin to recognize and respect their humanity. But you must be willing to take that first step and Colby can create the opportunities.

The student-to-student dialogues at the CBB Diversity Conference need to take place more than once a year. Perhaps this is already in the planning, but I would suggest that every student be encouraged to take part in a facilitated, fixed-session (say four meetings) dialogue group on issues of race, culture, sexual orientation, etc. Without making it obligatory, I would hope that the College would strongly support this expericence as a component of the education of a whole person in 21st century America.

In the last two years, I've participated in two dialogue groups in which I've learned more about what it means to be white, black, Jewish and Palestinian. It isn't always easy, but my eyes, heart and mind have been opened up in more ways than I expected. My fellow dialogueus and I have heard each other's fears, sufferings and hopes. When you begin to appreciate the humanity and dignity of the other person, you want to reach out in friendship, not reject them. In the article, Ryan Swank '03 says, "I feel there are a lot of students burning to get into these kinds of conversations." Nothing could make me more hopeful than a statement like that. Colby ought to help its students channel this healthy impulse to reach out and learn by offering a facilitated dialogue experience to all who are willing.

Kudos and more power to the Colby community. You make this alum proud.

Jeff Stone '73
Milton, Mass.

Diversity Means Tolerance

Responding to a question about a diversity conference held recently, Colby magazine quoted Professor Cheryl Townsend Gilkes: "Unfortunately they discovered that not all of their fellow students agree with them. We've also seen some mischiefmaking, e.g., the invitation to [author and commentator] Dinesh D'Souza, which I found appalling. It tells us that issues of tolerance and diversity are still contested issues in our society." The last sentence is certainly true but not in the way Professor Gilkes suggests.

Whether or not one agrees with Dinesh D'Souza's conclusions, he is polite and rational as he presents his views about race from the perspective of someone born in India. Colby students should not have been criticized by Professor Gilkes for inviting him.

Professor Gilkes's comments reflect a change in the way issues are discussed since I was an undergraduate at Colby in the mid-'50s and a graduate student at Wesleyan in the mid-'60s. The good news is the increased willingness to consider seriously improving both race relations and opportunities for those unfairly treated. Unfortunately, there is more of a tendency on many campuses for authorities to preach to students, suggesting a professor's personal view is the only one to be taken seriously. As Allan Bloom wrote in The Closi111g of the American Mind: "The most successful tyranny is not the one that uses force to assure uniformity but the one that removes the awareness of other possibilities, that makes it seem inconceivable that other ways are viable, that removes the sense that there is an outside."

Richard J. Davis '56
West Suffield, Conn.

Unfortunately, the feature you ran on "The D Word" missed the most important component of diversity; diversity in thought. In the spring of 2001, author and academic, Dinesh D'Souza spoke at Colby on the topic of racism. Aside from the heckles he received while speaking, professors and students demeaned his character and misrepresented some of his views. In the presence of such acts, what is the value of having a multiracial, and otherwise heterogeneous student body, if members of the Colby community are not tolerant of scholarship that is outside of the mainstream?

Diversity is multifaceted as you point out; let us not forget that variety of ideas is what brings people together.

Zambot Zaltani '04
Lutherville, Md.