

Healing wounds

Minority aid necessary for equality

Last spring, the Bush administration was blasted for its stance on scholarships for minority college students. Officials from the Department of Education had said that granting scholarships to minority students because of their race was discriminatory.

Later, bowing to the outcry, the department changed its mind, rescinded the policy and said it would study the issue.

This week, Education Secretary Lamar Alexander is expected to reveal a "new" compromise: Scholarships based strictly on race will no longer be allowed, but colleges may consider race a factor in their awards, as long as other factors also are considered.

It took eight months to come up with this policy, which carries language strikingly similar to the one rescinded by the department in April. That policy had banned scholarships aimed specifically at racial groups but allowed colleges to consider race a factor in awarding scholarships.

At first glance, such a proposal seems valid. According to The Washington Post, the new proposal asks colleges to strive for "diversity" and weigh race as "a plus factor," if other factors are considered, too.

Unfortunately, even the euphemistic terms of the new proposal convey its empty meaning.

As one higher education spokesman told The Post, "What it's telling minority students is it's a crap shoot. Basically, you're going to be thrown in with everybody else."

That doesn't mean minority students cannot compete with "everybody else." But it also doesn't guarantee that they will receive more encouragement than other potential students whose race already is adequately represented in higher education.

Responding to the needs of minorities has become such a political hot potato that important forward steps are being wiped away.

Suddenly, affirmative action has taken on negative connotations. It is no longer viewed as a positive action to repair egregious underrepresentation. It is now reverse discrimination.

Yes, restricting scholarships to students of a particular race is discriminatory. If a scholarship stipulated "Caucasians only," it would be racist. At first glance, a scholarship that stipulates "African-Americans only" receives the same gut reaction.

But minority students deserve special consideration for scholarships simply because they are underrepresented in higher education. Whites are not. That's not reverse discrimination. That's responding to a need.

The lack of such response fosters the chain of events that has caused many to view affirmative action as reverse discrimination. To hire minority candidates, employers must find qualified applicants, or they appear to be simply filling quotas.

Unless colleges work to increase the number of minority students, employers will have no larger a pool from which to select minority applicants. And the problem of underrepresentation will be intensified.

It may seem unfair to give scholarships to minority students who could otherwise afford higher education on their own. But that loophole seems slight when compared to the gaping wound of underrepresentation.

On one hand, the new education department policy can be viewed as just another euphemistic handling of a tense racial issue.

On the other hand, it may be one more sign that the positive actions of the past are being stripped away for the sake of appearances.

—J.P.

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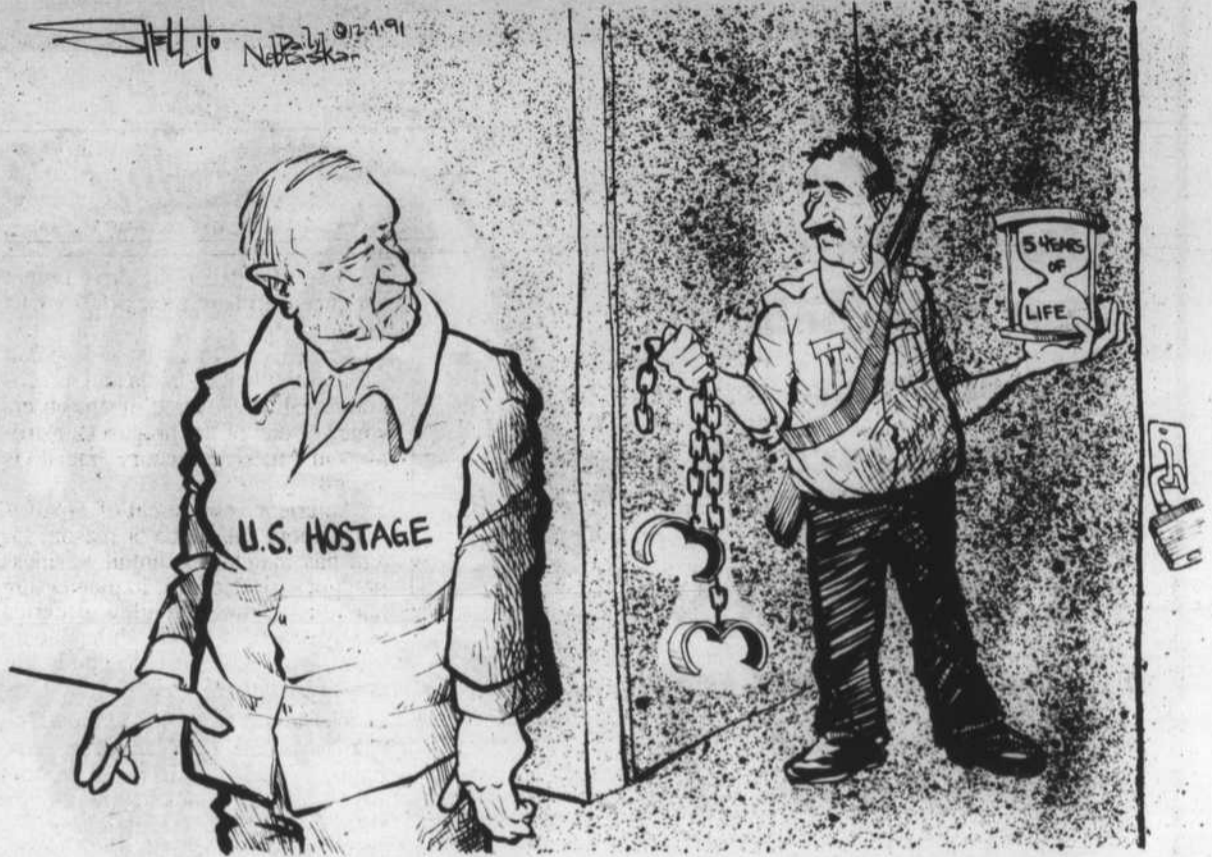
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WALTER GHOLSON

Racist's rebirth merits attention

A few weeks ago, local news media ran some stories about the miraculous rebirth of a Lincoln man. But this small-town news didn't seem to rate much national attention.

It should have received more national coverage than it did. After all, how often do we hear about a racist who changed his tune because a Jewish couple cared about him?

So where are Geraldo and Oprah? Has Phil called? But then, maybe Larry Trapp's public-appearance contract has not been finalized.

Whatever the reason, this is the most important story of the year. And anyone concerned about race relations in Nebraska should take a long, hard look at Trapp's salvation.

While I do not know him personally, I've read some of the letters he's written to people in Lincoln. I know he was a recruiter for the Invisible Empire of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. I know enough to comprehend that Trapp was not a very nice man.

But if he has truly changed from the man who gave minorities reasons to hate him, he deserves national media attention.

This could be the most important event since the birthday of Jesus Christ became commercialized into Xmas. Trapp's transformation could be heralded as the first fruit of a new world order. People would know there's a miracle happening here begging to be duplicated all across the nation.

And, if the national news hounds aren't fighting to get an exclusive interview with Trapp, we need to ask why.

After all, when a man who has spent most of his life hating is suddenly renewed, this is a miracle. When a person with a track record like Trapp's is reported to have dined with the president of the local NAACP, this is a sign from a higher order that something strange and wonderful has happened in the capital city.

Who knows? We could be witnessing the birth of a new day in race relations, complete with peace and goodwill to all people. We may be able to tell our grandchildren we were in Lincoln the day racism started to die. The transformation of Trapp could become a model for every hate group in America.

But maybe I'm rushing things. ABC is probably saving the story for its Christmas Eve special. Maybe Oprah, Phil, Sally and Geraldo have to wait until after the new year before they



The more I think about it, the more I see lights, camera, action. This could be a TV series. The "Racist and the Rabbi," or "Civil Rights Son Meets Son of Slave Master" or "The Day Love Stopped a Burning Cross."

can go into production. And then there are book contracts and those damn Hollywood agents trying to get the movie rights.

A story like this beats President Bush's budget plans, his civil rights bill saga, guns in the public schools or stories about blacks in Louisiana voting for David Duke.

But recently, I have been getting the impression that some of us aren't convinced that Trapp's instant conversion is real. The grapevine says it's a Trapp media event to introduce his new Duke image. Idle gossip says it's local media playing a delayed Halloween trick called "Change that Costume."

I prefer not to buy any of the above because I want to believe in the holiday spirit of hope. I want to believe that faith and love can conquer hate, and I truly want to believe in the miracle of Larry Trapp.

However, I will not lose my mind waiting for racists in America to turn in their sheets and swastikas or grow hair on their skinned heads.

Back in March, the Plains State Region of the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League sent me information on James W. Farrands, who it said

heads the Klan.

According to the handbook, the Invisible Empire's membership has taken a sharp nosedive since 1982.

But in 1986, Farrands, of Connecticut, was chosen to lead the Empire. He said the future of the Klan depended on "bridging the geographical and sociological gaps separating white supremacist organizations." He said he would work to refine the Klan to attract "a better class of people."

So maybe the real story here is that Trapp is not of the right class of people sought by the new-world-order, corporate Klan. Suppose the real scoop is that hate groups now recruit from the upper middle class, and you've got to be a right-wing Republican to become a member?

Suppose the real story is how the new Klan-Nazi-skinhead Aryan nationalists abandoned one of their own because he was old and handicapped and how a Jewish couple he used to harass helped him see the true path of brotherhood?

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While my intention here is not to make light of the reported change in Trapp's philosophy on racial and religious rights, it's obvious that some of us don't believe in miracles anymore. Maybe we've become so cynical that we find it hard to believe good things still happen in today's world. Perhaps we prefer to wait and see before we embrace any prodigal son returning from a long journey into the wilderness of bigotry.

In any event, someone should call all these national media folks and tell them they're passing up the story of the year out here. We've got a town full of people ready, willing and able to act in any production, and most will work below union scale.

If it's background they need, I've got a bunch of hate mail sent by Trapp over the years when he was a real, honest-to-goodness, robe-wearing racist.

Maybe we could start with a weekly public access channel program hosted by Trapp, featuring all the people he used to hate. We could call it "Absolution Televised."

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