

# Haverford College

Al Williams, Jr.

TO: Administrators and Faculty FROM: Adolphus L. Williams, Jr.  
RE: A Concern DATE: March 27, 1978

Initially, I was angry and surprised to learn of the BLACK CAT remark. Later (upon careful reflection) I was even angrier and dismayed to realize that many of you chose to laugh at the comment. To my way of thinking, the comment and response can only be characterized as RACIST. And not, as one of my "friends" suggested, a kind of humor which I failed to appreciate!

What follows is an article by Claude Lewis from the March 10, 1978 edition of the Evening Bulletin. The article coupled with the BLACK CAT comment made me think of the many Haverford discussions on diversity. I end with a query: ARE YOU REALLY SERIOUS ABOUT DIVERSITY OR IS IT JUST SOMETHING NICE TO DISCUSS? Remember, for all the talk, articles and memoranda--the College has a very poor track record. Indeed, one might argue that the discussions are part of a contrived scenario designed to forestall any real diversification.

Or is it possible, that those professing an interest in diversity are like the Claude Lewis definition of a liberal!

'Liberal' Lenore?

"Can you imagine it?" Judge Charlie Wright fumed.

"Not one black on the entire 40-member panel. "I can't believe it. The great liberal, Lenore Berson," he lamented with more than a trace of sarcasm in his voice.

Lenore Berson, assistant to the director of faculty of arts and sciences in the college of general studies at the University of Pennsylvania, had been asked to put together something called "The Philadelphia Affairs Seminar." She gathered a number of well-known people and somehow--maybe through an oversight--she failed to include a single black or a single Italian.

The whole thing was hard to believe. But Judge Wright showed me her response to his letter of criticism. It was short and to the point and read in part:

"Regrettably we do not have minority representation among the lecturers in the course, 'Justice in Philadelphia.' Unfortunately this lack of representation is largely reflective of the fact that minorities are gravely under-represented in the leadership of the Philadelphia justice community."

Then Lenore Berson went on to say something about what she hoped to do about minority representation in future seminars. It read very much like what blacks and others who are often ignored have grown used to hearing. It was a line from the "we will try to include you in the future" syndrome. That kind of an apology has become institutionalized.

As chairperson of the Philadelphia chapter of Americans for Democratic Action she has always been the kind of "liberal do-gooder" that caused Frank Rizzo to fume. And when he became really enraged, he described the Lenore Bersons of the area as "phonies and frauds." Everybody sort of laughed Frank Rizzo off. But maybe he was slightly more perceptive than most realized.

The leadership in the "Philadelphia Justice Community" is replete with minority representation. "If Judges Bradley and Spaeth are leaders then certainly their superiors Justice Nix of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court and Judge Higginbotham of the United States Circuit Court are no less leaders and are both pre-eminent in the 'Justice Community,'" Wright reasoned.

He correctly cited Judge Clifford Scott Green, Judge Juanita Kidd Stout and attorney Charles Bowser, among several others as leaders. Then he moved on to other disciplines covered in the lecture series. He pointed out that in the field of health, there is former Pennsylvania Secretary of Health Dr. John Speller and his wife, who comprise one of the most notable husband-wife medical teams in the area. In the media, he was kind enough to cite me, along with my colleagues Acel Moore of the Philadelphia Inquirer (who recently won a Pulitzer Prize); Al Morris, president of the Philadelphia Tribune and Chuck Stone, columnist for the Philadelphia Daily News. Maybe Lenore Berson didn't mean anything when she went out of town to pick up a journalist, who happens to be white, while ignoring any number of qualified blacks in Philadelphia, Camden and Wilmington. I don't agree with those who suggest that maybe she regards all blacks who achieve as merely "tokens" or "exceptions."

"In this series on 'Money,' you have selected an economist from this Federal Reserve Bank, but not the vice president, Hillary Holloway, who happens to be black," Wright pointed out.

Perhaps she didn't mean to omit the Italians, either. Maybe their names were just too long to fit on the brochure announcing the series of lectures, so she just chose others with shorter names. Or maybe Lenore Berson simply forgot there were people among the leadership with names like Richette, Peruto, and Rizzo.

When I reached Lenore Berson, she was not in a good mood. She was even a little touchy; no, downright rude. When I asked, as politely as I could, about the series of "oversights," she jumped all over me.

"Maybe it was unconscious racism," she said. "So why don't you re-write Chuck Stone's column and call me a racist, too," she said tearfully. That came from a friend of more than 10 years.

If almost anybody else in the city had done this, I might have expected it. But not Lenore Berson, author of a book I reviewed several years ago concerning the relationship between blacks and Jews.

One of the things that blacks remember about liberals is that while many of them were willing to march with Dr. King in Selma, pointing fingers at the South, huge numbers of them didn't attempt to improve conditions for blacks in northern communities.

I want to believe Lenore Berson, but when you simply ask a friend a question and she gets nasty, it makes you wonder; especially when she gets so uptight about the question that she begins talking about quitting the job.

The whole thing might sound like much ado about nothing, but I don't think it is. It is enormously insulting that people who have become leaders after long and difficult struggle are totally ignored. The fact that so much leadership could be overlooked is precisely why the image of blacks and other minorities remains so poor in the minds of the masses. As a general rule, black criminals get more attention than black achievers.

This thing that Judge Wright points out goes right to the heart of the long-standing suspicion by blacks about northern liberals. This is precisely the kind of thing which promoted me to observe, some time ago, that "a liberal is a person who doesn't want the slaves whipped."

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Haverford College

TO: The Faculty FROM: Vernon J. Dixon UJP.  
RE: Future Faculty Discussions on Minority Faculty Appointments DATE: March 27, 1978

After seven years as a member of the Haverford community and after having accepted tenured faculty position among you, I always felt that if I wrote to you it would be in the form of letter which would begin, "Dear Friends" or "Dear Colleagues." However, after our last faculty meeting, I find it necessary to write this in memorandum form which begins, "To The Faculty."

Just as Isaac Sharpless, whose quotation is present in the Common Room, admonished the Class of 1888, "...to do righteousness...and not to have their consciences bound," I must tell you (my contractual obligations notwithstanding) that I shall no longer sit with you during your discussions concerning minority faculty appointments. I cannot, in the Quaker sense, call my decision a confrontation. Confrontation implies (or should imply) that two sides are in disagreement over some issue. This memorandum, however, was not precipitated by disagreement over an issue, but rather by a statement--the racist "BLACK CAT" slur.

There is the prophetic story from Nazi Germany of one who witnessed innumerable injustices done. However, since he was not directly involved, he saw no need to speak against these injustices. Finally, he was carried away and, by that time, there was no one to speak out for him. While I, as indeed we all do, may have different and strong opinions about issues, I do not consider myself a racist, for I simply would not be a member of the Haverford community. If I and others would sit, listen and laugh about BLACK CAT slurs, then how long would it be before the slurs were about RED CATS, YELLOW CATS, AND FEMALE CATS. As people of conscience, we must, at some point, say like Chicanos to Anglo injustices, Ya Basta! And for me this is, enough already! Just as Messrs. Robert Mugabe and Josuah Nkomo, the two Black African leaders of the Zimbabwe liberation movement will not sit and discuss issues with the racist, White Prime Minister of Rhodesia, Mr. Ian Smith, I will not sit with you in your future discussions concerning faculty appointments.

Undoubtedly, some of you may feel it unfair to compare our faculty meetings and my presence/participation with the Zimbabwe leaders and the Rhodesian Prime Minister. But remember that both discussions involve people discriminated against and wronged. And if changes are to be made, then they, as I, must be ever vigilant to undertake any necessary action. Just as the "final solution" was a euphemistic code word for the horror that became the holocaust, I must act now in order that "BLACK CAT" does not become a code word which euphemistically represents the "gutting" of our present affirmative action program at Haverford.

Franz Fanon observed that, at one point in the course of struggles for liberation, silence becomes dishonest. A corollary is that, at one point, participation also becomes dishonest. One case in point is the aforementioned refusal of Messrs. Mugabe and Nkomo to sit in discussion with the racist Mr. Smith, even though I suspect that Mr. Smith believes himself to be dedicated, fair, principled and well-intentioned.

Personal integrity, honesty and an ethical sense of human rights preclude my sitting with you in future faculty discussions concerning minority faculty appointments. You may ask, why now? The answer is this: THE CONSCIOUS AND OVERTLY, RACIST "BLACK CAT" SLUR MADE AT THE LAST FACULTY MEETING HAS CATALYZED MY HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE IN RACE RELATIONS AT HAVERFORD COLLEGE.

This historical experience has two dimensions. First, I have not been a silent participant among you. In 1972, our minority students raised the issue of cultural diversity at Haverford. Again in 1977, a new generation of our minority students confronted you with the same issue. In both instances, I participated in meetings, in writing documents (1972 only, see statement, "Institutionalization of Cultural Diversity, April 1972) and in marathon discussions (for example, see Horizons, May, 1972, pp. 17-21) in an attempt to bring together our minority students, faculty and administrators and to focus the issue. More important, however, is that in 1972 and 1977, I debated with you the issues of the meaning of cultural diversity, standards of excellence, size of the potential Haverford minority faculty pool, necessity of an effective Affirmative Action program, etc. Sadly, as I listen to your current discussions about the "proper process" of adding minority faculty, I know this: THE SUBSTANCE OF YOUR CURRENT DEBATE HAS NOT CHANGED (EVEN MARGINALLY!) SINCE 1972.

Moreover, it is the same debate (with only different faces) that I have heard continually since 1954. It is the same debate that I had at Princeton University in 1968 with senior faculty and administrators. That debate, however, resulted in immediate direct, effective actions, one being the acquisition of some regular Black faculty. At Haverford in 1978, you should say, at some point, "we will increase the number of minority faculty here" or have the courage and integrity to say "we would like minorities here but have no intention of effectively trying to recruit them." Intellectual honesty (and not intellectual and rationalization) and moral integrity should suggest that you pursue at least one course of action. Haverford College and its embodiment of Quakerism should be above verbal hypocrisy. Esse quam videre--To be rather than seem to be.

The second dimension of my historical racial experience at Haverford involves the pre-CCFA hiring process. Over the years, I have been usually invited personally to have some form of contact with Black faculty candidates, even when I was not an official member of a given ad hoc search committee. Based on these contacts, there was no doubt in my mind that a few of those Black candidates had the academic credentials, intellectual competence and pedagogical ability to do a superb job at Haverford. Yet, none were ideal to me, such that I could foresee a unanimous consensus springing forth spontaneously. But then (and being intellectually honest!) such candidates Black or White are very rare. However, my own experience on several ad hoc committees and my conversations with some faculty and student members of other ad hoc committees revealed that the successful White candidates emerged from a forged consensus and, in this context, were also non-ideal candidates. Historically then, BLACK NON-IDEAL CANDIDATES HAVE VIRTUALLY NEVER EMERGED FROM A FORGED CONSENSUS, UNLESS THE SLOT WAS A SO-CALLED BLACK ONE, AS IN LITERATURE.

By analogy, racially restrictive housing covenants are no longer legal. However, and as we all know, racially restrictive housing continues. Just as the non-ideal Black faculty candidate may be eliminated, so also may an apartment or a house not be rented or sold to a Black person. And in both cases, there will never be any specific or overt mention of race. Rather the message not to reach consensus or not to lease or sell will be conveyed via subtle signs or code words.

It was the two-fold experience of the failure of a few Black candidates to emerge from open search procedures and, after six years, the same substantive debate upon which the racist "BLACK CAT" slur had its catalyzing effect. It is also interesting to note that after the "BLACK CAT" slur many of you chose to chuckle and to laugh. It is this reaction that leads me to the conclusion that there is institutional racism and a gross insensitivity to minorities at Haverford similar to that in virtually all American institutions. By institutional racism, I refer to any behavior (attitude, action or institutional structure) that does not use color itself as the subordinating mechanism, but instead uses other covert mechanisms indirectly related to color for the purposes of placing or keeping Black persons in a position or status of inferiority.

Let me offer two other concrete examples of institutional racism and insensitivity at Haverford. First, a few years ago, Dean Al Williams was invited to a Haverford meeting at the Union League Club of Philadelphia. Second, last week, I, and a few others, were invited to a dinner party at the Joshua Tree--the Joshua Tree which is owned by the Marriot Corporation, which, in turn, is owned by the Mormon Church. I might add that the Joshua Tree even has printed on its menu South African lobster tails!

I, the sole, regular, full-time Black faculty member, sat with you in the last faculty meeting and heard a racist slur during comments endorsing a position that purports to be inherently color-free. At that time, I knew that, with very few exceptions, this irony would not be perceived by many of you. I wondered this: if such racists comments accompanied by chuckling could be made comfortably in my presence, then what must be said in the homes and other gatherings where I am absent?

Then, I, the sole Black faculty member, recalled again the comments that Stokely Carmichael made during the civil rights debate of the early sixties. He said to me: "I know I can eat, live, study and go anywhere. The civil rights debate is simply one group of whites in power trying to convince the other group of whites in power that it is all right for me to do these things." I would re-phrase his statement to include the depiction of the two groups as dedicated, moral, principled and well-intentioned, and concerned with the "proper process" for achieving his goals.

In effect, then, the racist "BLACK CAT" slur was similar to the teapot breaking in Ethan Frome or to a raisin too long in the sun, or to Rosa Parks saying "no" in a Birmingham bus or to Martin Luther King's Why We Can't Wait. For me to sit with you in your future discussions, even as a silent presence, would, at this point, be dishonest to the struggle of Black liberation and it would compromise my personal and moral integrity. I cannot do either!

Finally, the aspect of minority presence at Haverford which causes me the greatest dismay and sadness is this: TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, QUAKERISM AND ITS EMBODIMENT IN HAVERFORD COLLEGE WERE KNOWN AMONG THE BLACK COMMUNITY HERE AND ABROAD AS REPRESENTATIVE OF THE VANGUARD OF DIRECT, EFFECTIVE ACTIONS ON BEHALF OF THE LIBERATION OF BLACK PEOPLE. TODAY, TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER, HAVERFORD COLLEGE AND ITS EMBODIMENT OF QUAKERISM ARE NOW BECOMING RAPIDLY KNOWN HERE AND ABROAD AS REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REARGUARD OF INDIRECT, INEFFECTUAL ACTIONS IN THE AREA OF BLACK LIBERATION STRUGGLES.

Thank you.

cc: Minority Coalition  
Administrators