

OUTLAW

Affirmative action scrutiny aggravates American society



JOHN LEMONS
columnist

It was one of the uglier media circuses in recent memory. Charges of racism, calls to boycott class and even a protest by the Rev. Jesse Jackson surrounded the comments made by University of Texas law School Professor Lino Graglia about minority groups. In the aftermath of last week's dramatic events, affirmative action is once again on the minds of the public. As these recent events show, it is a subject that cannot be breached without causing considerable trauma. While affirmative action offers a chance to increase the fortunes of under-represented minorities, it offers little peace of mind for Americans. Graglia made his comments at the announcement of a new student organization, Students for Equal Opportunity, for which he is the faculty advisor. "Blacks and Mexican-Americans are not academically competitive with whites in selective institutions," Graglia said. "They have a culture that seems to encourage achievement. Failure is not looked upon with disgrace."

In a statement released last week, Graglia said that his comments were taken out of context and misconstrued. He also said that he regrets the incident. Graglia said, "I realize now, especially after being called by some cordial Mexican-American and parent groups, that [the comments] were careless and I regret it."

Indeed, while the comments were ugly and ignorant, and across they were taken out of context, Graglia made the comment in response to a reporter's question of whether the gap in performance between white and minority students on standardized tests was "cultural or genetic." Nonetheless, to attribute the difference in performance on standardized tests between whites and minorities to cultural differences is a gross oversimplification of the problem. It is a problem that owes more to socioeconomic status and history than to culture.

The problem with attributing a cause for this gap in performance is that it is a dangerous question to ask. As Professor Graglia learned, it is a question

only safely answered by awkward silence.

The long accepted solution to bridging the gap in experiences between whites and minorities has been affirmative action. For the past three decades, affirmative action has been the dominant means of leveling the playing-field for all ethnic groups. Unfortunately, it also has been a bitter pill for many Americans to swallow.

Many non-minorities consider affirmative action to be reverse discrimination. Some minorities feel that it is demeaning to recipients because it lowers their performance expectations.

There is a lot of anger surrounding affirmative action today. Graglia's comments offer insight to this anger. Consider where the comments were made — at the announcement of a club formed solely for the purpose of opposing affirmative action. But, why does UT need an organization that opposes affirmative action? After all, it was the UT law school that was ordered to stop affirmative action programs by the *Hopwood* decision. Affirmative action at UT is dead. Creating a student group to oppose it is overkill.

Furthermore, the United States is in a catch-22 situation — as the existence of affirmative action angers some people, its removal only upsets others. Ten months ago, Californians approved Proposition 209 to end state-supported affirmative action. The controversial law touched off a fire storm of criticism and debate culminating in a protest led by Jesse Jackson (sound familiar?) at the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco.

Affirmative action is on shaky ground these days. After being completely repealed in California and partially in Texas, surely it will suffer losses in other states. Over the next years, as it is debated, affirmative action will ignite more episodes such as the Graglia debacle.

While three decades of affirmative action programs have done much to move the United States toward racial equality, they have done little to relieve racial tensions. Affirmative action is not the overall cure to equality, but a jury-rig solution to the United States' racial problems.

As the Graglia episode shows, people who are willing to speak their minds on the subject should expect to get burned. That is a trend that affords Americans little peace of mind.

John Lemons is an electrical engineering graduate student.

Encouraging boycotts misses point of a higher education



DAVID JOHNSTON
columnist

Last week Jesse Jackson and about 5,000 t-shirts protested a University of Texas law professor. The instructor, Lino Graglia, made remarks about the academic abilities of minority students.

While Graglia's defenders and opponents argue over his statements (and cannot even agree on exactly what he said), no one has criticized the protesters for the way they are voicing their complaints.

Everyone has opinions, and most people have a few views that do not make much sense. As people grow and develop, they should be allowed to hear other opinions, defend their own and, as the need arises, change an opinion or two. Most people grow up harboring a few biases, but as they mature, they should shed them. By applying rational thought and gaining a better understanding of the world, false stereotypes should be eliminated from at least the well-educated.

The university environment is a wonderful place for students to come into contact with conflicting views and gain confidence in their own beliefs. When students are exposed to foreign viewpoints, they broaden their minds and begin to understand their own beliefs better.

Students should be trained that an unpopular opinion is not necessarily wrong.

When Galileo announced his theory that the earth revolved around the sun, it was hardly politically correct. His opponents insisted that he recant, and they refused to examine his scientific evidence.

If a law professor insists that minority students are academically inferior, his opponents should demand an analysis of the facts. His statements should be held to scientific scrutiny, and they will either fall or stand on their own. Instead, protesters complain because Graglia's remarks are socially unacceptable.

Many notions are socially unacceptable, but an idea is not wrong just because it is outside of the social norm. Hopefully many of the students currently winding through college will one day present challenging ideas that are unconventional.

When these students watch displays such as

Jesse Jackson's in Austin, they will be too intimidated to espouse their out-of-the-mainstream notions. Tomorrow's Galileo will be afraid of Jesse Jackson and thousands of chanting students.

Students should witness as scholars evaluate a statement's value on its merit — not on its acceptability.

In the case of Graglia's remarks, instead of merely labeling them politically incorrect, he should be presented with scientific studies that soundly refute his claims.

Protesting an unpopular opinion is a poor precedent, and it sets a bad example for our future leaders.

After Jackson condemned Graglia, he urged students to boycott the instructor's classes. This presents even more problems.

Students should never be encouraged to boycott Graglia's class. These are mature students who are not likely to be warped by the opinions of a professor. Instead, class members should be warned to be alert and be encouraged to evaluate Graglia's views on their merit or their basis in fact.

Boycotting a lecturer has several drawbacks. Once the monitors have left, there is no telling what he might begin to say. The few students who stay behind might hear awful fallacies, but no one else would ever hear about it.

A class boycott also sends a message to students that they do not have to listen to objectionable views. While many rights are guaranteed in our constitution, freedom from offense is not one of them. Everyone will work with disagreeable people from time to time. Bosses, coworkers and family members will eventually do something irritating. Maybe they cannot get along with other people, maybe they harbor stereotypes or maybe they cannot match their socks. Life is full of offenses — from racism to being cut off in traffic. Each situation should be handled appropriately.

The university setting is a place where students should learn how to think. They should be taught how to develop their own views and how to evaluate the views of others. Jackson is teaching students to judge people's opinions by how well they tickle their ears, not by whether the facts are correct.

College campuses have traditionally been a place for new ideas and critical, rational thought. Jackson is trying to turn it into a place full of closed-minded critics.

David Johnston is a senior mathematics major.

Public education system fails students with racial barriers



DONNY FERGUSON
columnist

It is no secret the education gods at Texas A&M are giving trouble cop-land with a post-affirmative action Texas. In fact, 20% of this year, African-American enrollment dropped 23 percent and Hispanic enrollment 15 percent.

While Texas A&M President Ray Bowen attempts to blame the *Hopwood* decision, affirmative action backers fail to realize the problem with racially disproportionate enrollment is caused, not the government's failure to engineer a socially diverse university, but by a failed public education system.

While Bowen is correct in noting, "A diverse student body is critical to ... high quality education," true racial equality and educational excellence will never be realized until America privatizes the education system and parents are given true school choice. The reason that A&M has so few minority students is because poor,

mostly minority, students are being cheated out of opportunities by an oppressive, incompetent public education monopoly.

One out of every four Texas children live in poverty. These inner-city school-children (who are mainly Hispanic and African-American) are held hostage by radical so-called "teachers' unions more obsessed with big salaries and bigger government than they are with nurturing young minds to greatness. Education expert Mario Fantini notes, "For many black and Puerto Rican parents, the teachers' unions now represent the enemy." Teachers' unions and public education are such colossal failures. Of the 55 percent of Americans who support school vouchers for poor children to attend private schools, most are poor, black and female.

Simply put, the public schools most minority children are forced into are light years behind the private schools more affluent white children attend. Inner-city public schools suck up ridiculous amounts of taxpayer money, only to churn out illiterate, unprepared students. Despite what certain University of Texas law professors claim, African-American and Hispanic students are more than

competitive with white students, unfortunately their schools are not. The public education system fails to prepare minority students for a college education.

It is no secret that private schools do more with less than do public schools. While Texas spends an average of \$6,000 per student on public education, the average tuition for a private school is under \$3,000, a number that will drop when public schools are abolished and competition increases.

The privatization of education will amount to a \$316 billion tax cut. The yacht club crowd may not notice, but a South Dallas family making just above the poverty line could use the money to send its children to a reputable private school. Under the public education system, poor children are forced to attend the local public school; rich children can go to private schools. Public education is inherently elitist and racist.

If education were privatized, an estimated 16 million children would need some financial assistance (most private schools offer scholarships to poor children worth close to \$1,500, or 50 percent of tuition). If only eight percent of the

\$316 billion tax cut from education privatization were donated to private school scholarship funds, all poor, inner-city minority children could attend the same private schools as rich white children.

Chances are that more than that amount will be dedicated to education. In 1993, \$126.2 billion was donated to charity. From 1994 to 1995, another \$12.4 billion was donated directly to colleges and universities. In 1994, the private sector donated \$24.9 million in private scholarships, fellowships and partnerships between schools and businesses where firms donated equipment. Money and services more than tripled from 1983 to 1998.

The immense fundraising success of already-existent school choice programs is more than evident. When a Milwaukee judge shut down the city's wildly popular inner-city school choice program, over \$1.6 million was raised in only 10 days to keep Milwaukee's disadvantaged children in private school. The privatization of education is not a question of whether minority children can attend better schools, it is a question of just how overachieving will they be.

The best and only way to ensure a racially diverse university is to give all

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MAIL CALL

Graglia controversy proves misleading

The controversy surrounding The University of Texas law professor, Lino Graglia, is misguided, and his remarks have been misinterpreted.

His comments were not racist, but simply truthful. Many African-American and

Mexican-American students are not as competitive in selective schools as white students.

The proof to support his statements is evident in the number of minority students attending Ivy League schools, or even the numbers at our own university after the *Hopwood* decision.

Graglia did not state that minorities are less intelligent than whites, but that many minority families do not strongly encourage superior academic achievement.

If Michael Jordan were to say that Asians generally are not encouraged as children to develop the skills needed to compete in the National Basketball Association, and thus are seldom seen playing professional basketball, he would not be

racist, but simply be stating the truth. So why should Graglia be persecuted for doing the same?

*Michael Sawilowsky
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