

## UT Law minority applications decline, total number also falls

AUSTIN (AP) — The number of black applicants to the University of Texas Law School next fall dropped half from last year. But UT officials say the number could be offset by applicants who did not identify their race.

A total of 3,157 first-year law student applications were submitted for the fall semester. Of those, 484 did not identify their race or ethnicity.

Overall, first-year applications were down in all other ethnic categories, including whites.

By contrast, applications from freshman undergraduates are up in all racial categories, prompting admissions director Bruce Walker to declare, "We're headed back in the right direction, aren't we?"

At the law school, associate dean Cynthia Estlund said she found it "extremely disappointing" that just 10 people identified themselves as black, down from 24 last year.

"These figures are disappointing in spite of some very rigorous recruitment efforts," Estlund said.

UT's law school experienced a steep drop in black and Hispanic applicants last fall after a federal court

ruled that race could not be considered in admission or financial aid decisions.

Just four blacks enrolled in the first-year class of 475, down from 31 in 1996. First-year Hispanic enrollments were 26 in the fall, down from 42 a year earlier.

"We're all very disappointed" in the application numbers, said David Greenstone, president of UT's Student Bar Association. "We recognize how important diversity is to a quality legal education."

"I know they're trying everything they can under the restrictions they're living with to maintain their diversity," said Philip Shelton, executive director of the Law School Admission Council. "The drop in applicants makes it all the more difficult for them to do that."

At the undergraduate level at UT, freshman applications are up 15 percent overall, to 15,558.

The increases include 14 percent more applications from whites, 7 percent more from African Americans, 21 percent more from Hispanics, 16 percent more from Asians, 55 percent more from American Indians and 6 percent more from international students.

## Oprah jury begins deliberations in Amarillo beef disparagement trial

AMARILLO, Texas (AP) — The multimillion-dollar question of whether Oprah Winfrey intentionally disparaged a group of Texas cattlemen with her talk show about mad cow disease on Wednesday went to the jury.

Jurors impaneled to referee the West Texas showdown between the cattle feeders and Winfrey began deliberating at high noon after hearing two hours' of closing arguments. After a brief lunch break, they resumed work at 1:15 p.m. CST.

The cattle raiser's attorneys told jurors that Winfrey's talk show should be found liable for intentionally disregarding the truth about the risk of mad cow disease in U.S. beef.

"They were on notice. They knew the truth. They broadcast it anyway because they were reckless," Joe Coyne said during closing arguments.

Mad cow disease has never been detected in this country. Cattlemen charge that the April 16, 1996, program made it sound like an imminent threat to beef-eaters and caused the cattle market to plunge to 10-year lows.

In response, defense attorney Charles Babcock told the eight-woman, four-man panel their decision will have a major impact on free speech rights

in the United States.

"This case is about the First Amendment," he said. "It's about robust debate and it's about the unfettered interchange of ideas."

Just as Winfrey has a right to freedom of speech, co-counsel David Mullin said, "we have the right not to have our business damaged by a bunch of falsehoods shot out of Chicago."

Mullin and Coyne represent a group of Texas cattlemen suing Winfrey, her production company and show guest Howard Lyman for business disparagement they say cost them \$11 million.

They said said all the statements broadcast during the show were either true facts, opinions, hyperbole or rhetoric and therefore not actionable under the Constitution.

Argued Coyne: "You look at that transcript all day. The word 'opinion' is not there."



Winfrey



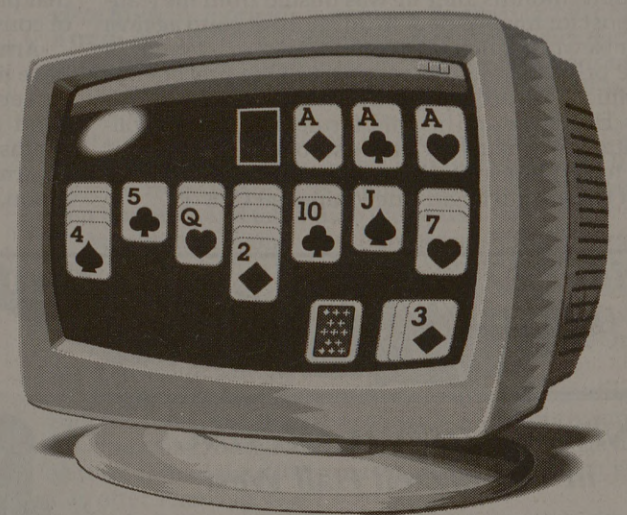
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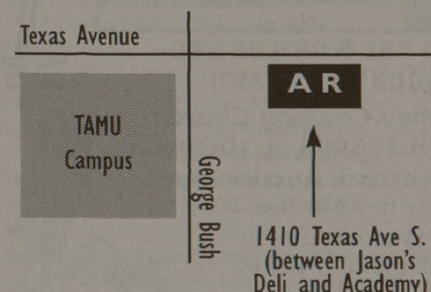
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