

The enduring evil of racism

A middle-aged man deplored the possibility of sharing a whites-only beach with "filthy" blacks.

A grandmotherly woman vowed to shoot herself and her grandchildren before she'd live under black domination.

These white South Africans were astoundingly candid when asked to react in front of network TV cameras to the Feb. 11 release of Nelson Mandela and the prospect of change in South Africa's system of racial separation.

The footage was painfully fascinating to watch. Coming from "folks-next-door" faces, such venomous words seemed oddly incongruous, like hearing the bellow of a bull emerge from the throat of a songbird.

Here in the United States, we have grudgingly condemned South Africa for apartheid, secure in the belief that we have relegated such blatantly racist public behavior to history, except for some token demonstrations by white supremacists and the Ku Klux Klan — activities we dismiss as feeble enough that we can protect them as free speech.

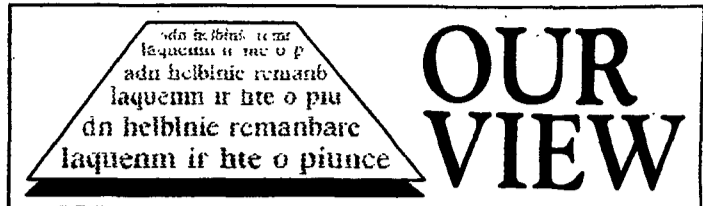
We upstate New Yorkers have similarly dismissed as "downstate neurosis" the racially motivated kill-

ings at Bensonhurst and Howard Beach.

But witness what happened at the McQuaid-East High School Section 5 basketball semifinals February 28. Overshadowing the intense rivalry on court at the War Memorial was an apparently race- and class-motivated clash among fans, who traded racial slurs, punches and kicks.

A few days earlier, according to a March 8 column in the Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle*, a punch was thrown during a University of Rochester-St. John Fisher basketball game after a U of R student in the crowd reportedly hoisted a sign bearing a racially demeaning message about the mother of black Fisher player Wakili Moore.

What's most disturbing about these incidents is that the students involved are not dead-end kids whose lives revolve around fights over gang turf and varying shades of skin color. McQuaid and the U of R are widely regarded as elite institutions, representing the best academic — and in McQuaid's case, moral — formation our society has to offer. How could such a combination of quality education and Catholic values not dispel myths of racial superiority?



Our failure lies in assuming that racism is someone else's sin. "Brothers and Sisters to Us," the U.S. bishops' 1979 pastoral letter on the subject, warned that we have not overcome, but have merely masked racism, making it all the more virulent through our complacency.

"Racism is an evil which endures in our society and in our church," the bishops wrote. "Despite apparent advances and even significant changes in the last two decades, the reality of racism remains. In large part it is only the external appearances which have changed."

And before we point a finger at McQuaid, the University of Rochester or South Africa, let's remember something else the bishops' letter said: "All of us in some measure are accomplices... We must resist and undo injustices we have not caused, lest we become bystanders who tacitly endorse evil and so share in guilt for it."

— The Editors

Pro-life rescues break wrong laws

To the editor:

Your front-page article, "Pro-lifers' civil disobedience tactics questioned," in the March 1 issue begs a response to Judge Regan's logic.

"Thoreau believed in violating unjust laws in order to persuade society to change them, the judge noted, ..."

"Pro-life activists engaging in 'rescues' at abortion clinics are well within the mainstream of American political life... like suffragists and civil rights demonstrators before them, pro-lifers are simply challenging 'unjust' laws by breaking them, he said."

Pro-lifers are not breaking "unjust" laws. Look at what the judge said, "like suffragists and civil rights demonstrators..."

The suffragists (women) broke the unjust law, which limited the right to vote to men alone, by voting. The civil rights demonstrators broke the unjust law (Jim Crow laws) that forbade negroes (African-Americans) from sitting at public lunch counters and in the forward section of public transportation by "sitting-in" at lunch counters and taking seats in the forward sections. In both the examples, specific actions, which were forbidden by laws, were taken to break the unjust laws. Clearly, these were acts of civil disobedience in the tradition of Thoreau.

Now, tell me again, Judge, which unjust law did the pro-lifers break? I know what it is the pro-lifers want (as do I) — they want the Supreme Court decision permitting abortion-on-demand to be turned over. If that's the "unjust" law, how does one break that law through civil disobedience? It appears to me pro-lifers are breaking other laws, not abortions on-demand.

I'm for life, as evidenced by raising 10 children, but, I'm also for fair play — picketing and lobbying, for example, as protests in a non-violent way. Con-

sciousness raising through education and lawful demonstration is commendable, but reckless law-breaking should not be condoned.

If I'm unhappy with the 35-mph speed limit on Lake Avenue, I don't try to get that law changed by driving through red lights.

Karl V. Denninger
Alexander St.
Rochester

Family center thanks county's legislators

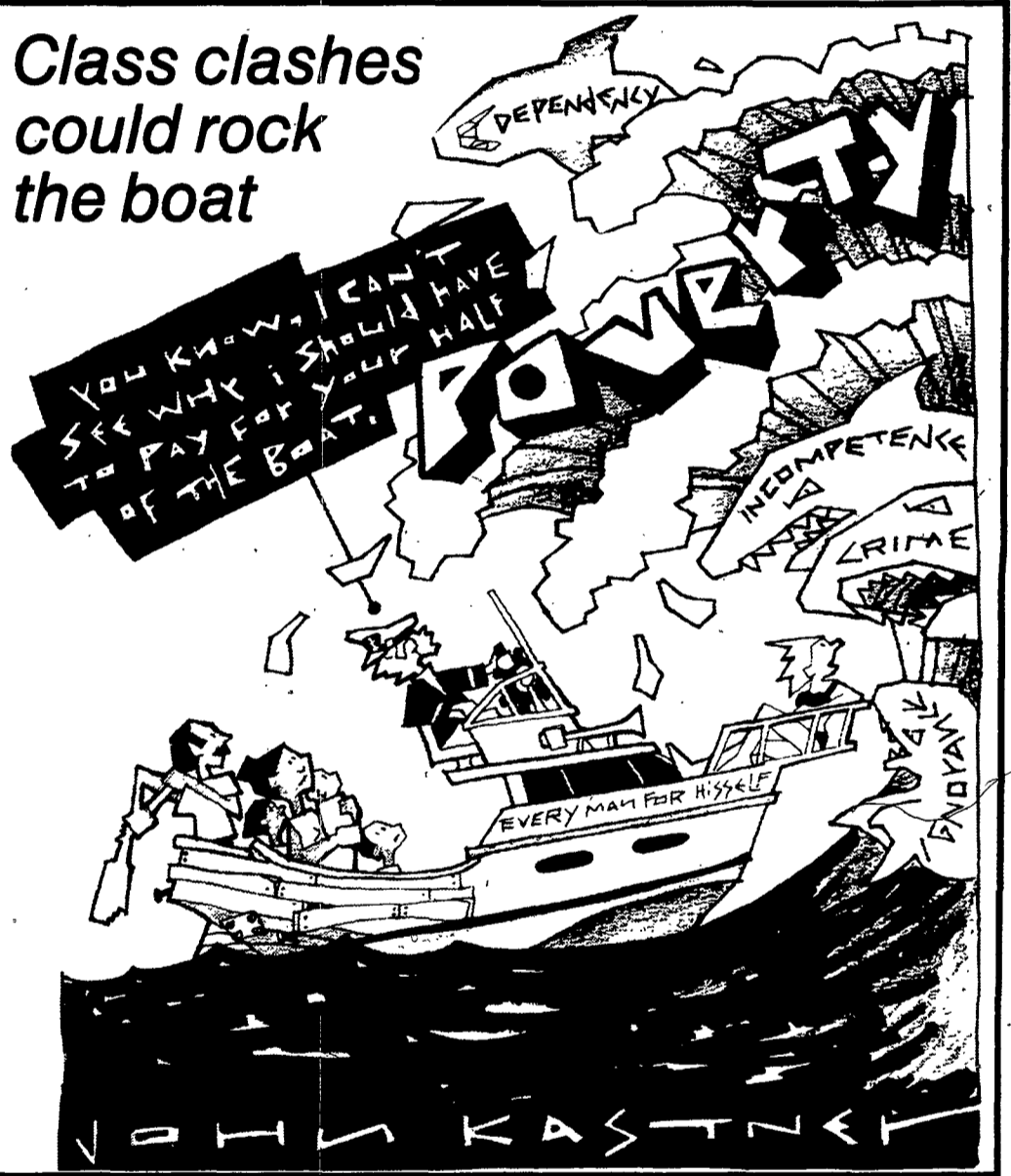
To the editor:

As a follow up to the Feb. 13, 1990, full Monroe County Legislature meeting, I would like to publicly thank the Democrats for their support and efforts as well as the Monroe County Legislature as a whole. After five tense months of trying to get funds restored for Catholic Family Center's Senior Housing Service Program, a decision was made to restore funds. I would like to thank, more specifically: Joseph Morelle — chairman of the Special Committee on the Elderly; Nan Johnson — chairwoman of the Human Services Committee; Richard Dollinger — 14th District; and Samuel Colombo — 20th District.

It was the efforts of these legislative members that brought home the understanding that the Senior Housing Program of Catholic Family Center is a much-needed community service. As a result, low income, vulnerable and frail elderly in Monroe County can be assured that their need for comprehensive housing assistance will not go unmet nor will the delivery of service be scattered. ...

Paula E. Smith
Elder Services Dept.
Catholic Family Center

Class clashes could rock the boat



U.S. clergy, nuns, are spoiled by easy living

To the editor:

Priest's salaries are low you say? From \$9,000-\$14,000 a year? I'm a 60-year-old displaced homemaker, making it (and not in squalor either) on from \$4,000-\$6,000 a year! I pay my rent out of that — \$300 per month. I also pay my car insurance (my '78 Olds is paid for). I don't have my housing, food provided, nor do I receive monetary gifts on any and all occasions. I have never; I repeat, never had a real vacation in the last 40 years of my life.

I do not; will not buy a Mass from an American priest. It's against my principles, and I know I can speak for the founder of our faith, Jesus, himself, and assure you it is against His, principles as well. If I do want a Mass said, I feel much more comfortable (less uncomfortable, that is) having it said by a priest in a missionary situation, where I feel my "offering" is truly an offering from the heart, with the belief that he may have different priorities than our own American, spoiled clergy.

It is truly a wonder to me, sometimes, how I am still a Catholic. It is only because I am a perfect illustration of my own contentions regarding Catholicism — i.e.,

truth stands alone. Truth remains and always is, regardless of how badly distorted it becomes by those who are supposed to know it and explain it and defend it, no matter what. The problem, of course is, Human Nature. I mean to say that the fact that so few Catholics live their alleged "faith" is discouraging and confusing, to say the least. To say the "most" would take awhile.

I have come through 20 years of the "above mentioned," with my love for and desire to believe, still strong. But I must speak out against what I see as nothing but crass human greed — or should I say "desire," among the clergy, especially, and even among the nuns.

The church seems to me, to be in dire straits; a crisis situation. While I see many good signs, I feel perhaps it is time to "tell it like we lay Catholics see it" and we must be listened to!!

If I had it to do over, I might be sorely "tempted" to have a sex change, become an American secular priest and live it up, American style.

Velma Hart Nicholson
Clarendon

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