

No way! Students aren't niggers in Freshman English

Two weeks ago we ran a reprint of Jerry Farber's "Students As Niggers" article, remember? Well, we discovered that some years after that article was originally written, someone else in the world of *academia* came up with a retort (of sorts) and we've decided to proffer it to you on the pages of our humble newspaper.

It's a play by Elizabeth Christman, originally entitled "Freshman English" and published in the September-October 1971 issue of *The Critic*. It's substantially more humorous than was Farber's work, it has a tendency to exaggerate a situation out of proportion.

Be that as it may, it seems to balance some of the thoughts Farber expressed and might be useful for a laugh and a thought or two. Our apologies to *The Critic* for such blatant theft.

Scene One: A Classroom

Professor: Hey there, guys and gals. Welcome to Freshman English. I'm Sanford Gusher, the guy in charge of this section. You can start right now calling me Sandy.

This is 1976 and you're all Consciousness III people, and hell, so am I, so let's don't play Teacher-and-Pupils - let's relate to each other as individuals.

You'll notice I'm barefoot. I want you to dig right away that I've discarded my Establishment hang-ups. I'm not gonna teach you - we're gonna learn together. In fact every day I'm gonna ask one of you to step up here to the desk and teach the class and I'm gonna sit down there and learn.

You there, Beautiful - the blonde chick in the second row with the puzzled frown - what's your name and what's your problem?

Student: My name is Kimberly Klopmitz, Professor Gusher, and I...

Gusher: Bag that, Kim. Not Professor, Sandy.

Kim: It seems to me, Sandy, that instead of having *anybody* stand up at a desk and teach, we ought to get rid of that depersonalizing structure. Why don't we push these desks back against the walls and sit on the floor?

Gusher: Right on, Kim. A groovy idea. Come on, everybody, down on the floor.

Erin Monahan: I suggest that if we're really going to relate to each other in a meaningful way, we ought to group into modules, where we can like held hands or rub knees with the other members of our group.

Gusher: You said it, man! Wait a minute, though. Let me pass out this syllabus before you start holding hands. (Passes it out.)

Mohammed Brown raises his hand.

Gusher: Hey, man, don't put your hand up. That's not where it's at. Just sing out.

Brown: Mr. Gusher...

Gusher: Not Mr. Gusher, Sandy. Remember?

Brown: I prefer addressing you as Mr. Gusher, as that decadent form of address defines the decadent life style of the white power structure which you represent. Mr. Gusher, I decline to purchase this textbook on your syllabus. This book is racially oriented. It's an insult to

me as a black man.

Gusher: Racially oriented? How do you figure that?

Brown (contemptuously): "Grammar and Rhetoric." All grammar is racially oriented. Teaching grammar is the white man's subterranean campaign to destroy black culture and black life style.

Gusher: I see your point, brother. We'll bag the "Grammar and Rhetoric." Scratch that, everybody. Every man his own grammarian. I think you'll dig this anthology, "Shooting Up." It's ...

Shelley-May Byrd: I suggest we scratch the anthology too.

Other students: Right on!

Gusher: Hey, wait a minute, gang. You haven't even seen it yet. It's cool - the latest thing for the Now Generation from Random, Chance & Serendipity. It's coedited by a Black Panther, a female Palestinian guerrilla, and a member of the Gay Liberation Front. You'll really dig it.

Shelley-May: No way. Reading stories by other writers stifles my creativity. No way I'm gonna let that happen.

Other students: No way.

Gusher: Hold it. This anthology can turn you on. All the stories are based on relevant social concerns like depersonalization of prostitution in an urban center ...

Students (louder): No way.

Gusher (louder too): Drug abuse in Alcoholics Anonymous ...

Students (shouting): No way.

Gusher (trying to shout above them): Relevant ...

Students (drowning him out): No way! No way!

Gusher (flashing a conciliatory V sign): Okay kids. I mean, right on. We'll bag the anthology and concentrate on the novels.

Fabian Shawcross: Not so fast, Sandy. You've got *A Farewell to Arms* on this list. I'm not having any Hemingway, thank you very much. My conscience doesn't permit me to read a blatant glorification of war.

Gusher: But he doesn't exactly glorify ...

Debby Sypher: And I think it's terrible for you to ask us to read a book called *The Idiot*. I don't believe *anybody* ought to be labelled an idiot. A person can't help it if she's a little slower than other people, and we ought to try to understand her, not label her an idiot and ridicule her and ...

Gloria Steinmetz: *Women in Love* is definitely out. D.H. Lawrence was a jingoist for male despotism, who considered women as only sexual objects. No way I'm reading him.

Girl students: No way.

Gusher: You've sold me. You've convinced me. (He tears up the syllabus.) Everybody will make out his own syllabus - her own syllabus. Beautiful. Read the literature he - she wants to read. At each class we'll have a different discussion leader, doing his own ...

Clark Rudd: Sandy, what's with this "class" bit? You've got to be kidding.

Gusher: Class bit? Oh, I dig you. Regular classes are pretty dehumanizing, aren't they? What I had in mind was a minimum of class meetings, say one a month, in an unstructured situation ...

Kimberly Klopmitz: Personally, I reject the sterile artificiality of a monthly meeting. Formalism like this gets in the way of real

education. How can I pursue learning freely and openly when I am held to the empty ritual of monthly discussions?

Students: Right on!

Gusher: Class meetings are entirely optional. Freshman English should stress interpersonal communication and relating to literature in a meaningful way. Do this in your own way. Turn in a four-page paper every other week on any theme ...

Shelley-May Byrd: A schedule, like, paralyzes my spontaneity! I have to *feel* what I write - I can't force out four pages on a rigid schedule.

Mohammed Brown: Why should I turn in my papers to you anyway? I object to the elitist concept of human relations that allows one individual to judge another's achievement.

Students: Right on!

Gusher: But if you don't come to any classes or turn in any papers, how am I to grade you?

Students (in an indignant roar): Grade us!

Sibil Steen: We're sick of this exploitation by authority figures, Gusher. I'm much better able to judge how well I'm fulfilling my individual goal than you are. I'll grade myself.

Gusher: I dig you, man. Self-grading. Groovy! Learning completely free! Creativity totally uninhibited! There's no limit to what you guys and gals can do with this course. Beautiful! And at the end of the semester you make your own value-judgement, and give yourself the grade you've earned. It's a real breakthrough. Just leave a card in my mailbox telling me your grade and I'll pass it on to the registrar.

Shawcross: Leave a card in your mailbox? Screw that, Gusher. Why should we come running over here to your mailbox? The day of the student as nigger is over. You report to us, each of us individually, and collect the grades.

Students: Right on.

Gusher (lifting his hand for silence and speaking in a slow, husky voice): Brothers, I want to thank you for the honesty and openness of this dialogue. You have taught me something about a meaningful search for individual truth. There is an idealism in your generation that makes me feel humble. I-I hope (chokes a little) - I hope I can live up to it in my own search for meaningful truth. Peace, brothers, and I'll see you at the end of the semester.

CURTAIN

scene Two: a phone booth in the corridor outside the classroom

Gusher: Hello Marge. You can finish packing. We can get away earlier than I expected. I've just been on the blower to Travel Tex and they're putting us on a flight to Madrid tonight. Yes, the whole semester - Well, actually we'll have to come back a day or two before the end of the semester. What? - Because I have to go around to each of seventy-one students and pick up his grade and that'll take at least a day. Some of these pads are miles from the campus. What? - Hell no, I can't ask *them* to bring the grades to me. No way! This is 1976, Marge. Students aren't niggers any more, damn it!

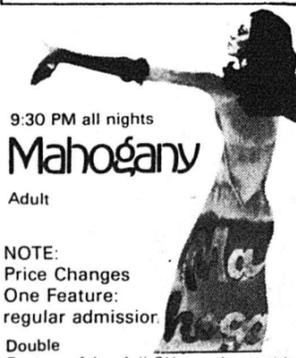
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