

November 1, 1990 (Vol. 6, no. 5)

Dear Colleague:

Sometimes I learn more about society, particularly its quirks, from a rag sheet than from another portentous volume on the ideas of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim. Consider the following three news items in the national college paper called "U" (vol. 4, October, 1990), which I picked up at the Union.

A gay fraternity (Delta Lambda Phi) is about to be established at UC-Berkeley. It will be a part of the Greek system, which, until a few years ago, was virulently anti-gay. A mainstream college tradition, by accepting a formerly marginal (and indeed despised) group into its midst, can hardly remain the same as before. This is how dominant culture is modified, and even radically transformed, by an openness to other points of view--to diversity. How sad to read that some of the leaders of the gay community object to the integration. They fear for the loss of their identity, as though identity can be retained only in a ghettoized environment. They do not seem to see integration as the enrichment of the larger society--for the good of all, including gays--by bringing into it something (deep affection between members of the same sex) that they themselves consider of great value.

The second item is also from Berkeley. That campus remains a hotbed of social innovation. Apparently some male students are working at a job that offers a flexible schedule and a pay rate of as much as \$70 an hour. It calls for the donation of sperm at a designated place, equipped with appropriately stimulating magazines, two to three times a week. Eric is such a donor. "During the semester, I consider it a job like any other." The search for knowledge among American youngsters is truly heroic: they are willing to do anything to get the money to put themselves through college--drive a cab at ghoulish hours, be a bouncer at the local tavern, and now, masturbate at the sperm bank. What kind of society is it that forces its young to go to such extremes?

Trust the Midwest to be corny and traditional. Students at the University of Iowa have a "new" game at their Riverfest. It requires freshmen to strip and dive into a dumpster filled with breakfast food--squishy oatmeal courtesy of Quaker Oats. Now, accepting as I am--in my wishy-washy way--of just about every custom under the sun, I nevertheless find this ostentatious disrespect for the value of food utterly repellent.

Best wishes,

