

# O Tempora, O Mores!

## Strange Fruit in Idaho

On July 30, a dark-skinned man was found hanged with his hands tied, in the arboretum at the University of Idaho at Moscow. Since northern Idaho is home to the minuscule but much-reviled Aryan Nations white racist group, the press immediately concluded that a black man had been lynched by vicious whites. The story, and the accompanying public breast-beating, were front-page news in the Northwest, and Moscow officials got hundreds of telephone calls from worried citizens. Every available black "leader" had a microphone thrust in his face and was asked his views. Non-whites started talking about the need to buy guns and to travel in groups.

The story soon began to unravel. The dead man turned out to be an Iranian, who had become dark and bloated after several days of exposure. Friends explained that he had tried to hang himself once before, but had used his hands to save himself. His hands were tied with a slip knot that he seems to have rigged himself. A suicide note was discovered.

None of this put an immediate stop to press reports about a probable lynching—the story was just too good to drop. When the evidence of suicide became overwhelming, some papers lapsed into disappointed silence rather than publish a correction. Many people in Idaho probably still think there was a lynching.

The suicide, and the reaction it provoked, are vivid symbols of what America officially believes about race: when things go wrong for non-whites, whites must be the cause.

## Strange Loot in Massachusetts

In a country where people will believe the worst of whites even without evidence, it is always a temptation to supply some.

Last spring, a black man named Andrew Denton decided to burgle the home of his Aunt Mornell, one of the

few blacks who live in the rich, white, Boston suburb of Milton. He and accomplices made off with diamond jewelry, three VCRs, liquor, and stereo equipment, and made a shambles of the house. Before they left, they tried to pin the job on whites, by writing anti-black graffiti on the walls.

One town official was suspicious from the start. As he explained: "Racist attacks usually involve malicious vandalism. The perpetrators don't usually pick through belongings looking for valuables. I've never seen a racial incident like this." This didn't prevent the usual hand-wringing, and the town of Milton issued a statement condemning "bigotry." No one appears to have been embarrassed to learn that it was all a fraud.

Most states now have special penalties for people convicted of "hate crimes." We know of no state that punishes someone for faking a "hate crime."

## Crime Wave Hits Orange County

Orange County, not far from Los Angeles, has a population that is still 65 percent white. Like most wealthy white suburbs, it is obsessed with racial correctness, and horrified that "hate crimes" are on a sharp upswing. In the first seven months of 1991, the county had 38 of them, more than double the number for all of 1990. Andy Romero, the county Sheriff, announced in August that police efforts to combat "hate crimes" were "on a par with homicides, officer assistance calls and disaster responses."

What sort of horrors have put Orange County into such a state of racial emergency? On July 22, the *Orange County Register* published a complete list of the year's crop of "hate crimes." Herewith, verbatim and *in toto*, are the "hate crimes" for the months of April and May.

\* A black woman, who with her white husband was featured in a newspaper article, receives phone calls asking, "What are you doing mar-

ried to a white man?" [Race of caller(s) not specified.]

\* A black woman hears racial epithets as she jogs in her neighborhood.

\* A woman reports that her elementary school-age son is being harassed at school by a white child.

\* A Cypress City Council member tells a League of Cities meeting, "I thought when they killed (openly gay San Francisco Supervisor) Harvey Milk, they would finally put some men back on the board."

\* White students at a Fullerton high school throw golf balls into the campus quad, hitting Asian students.

\* An Iranian family's home in Saddleback Valley is burglarized, and a swastika is scratched on their new BMW car.



Dangerous hate criminal with victim.

Residents of Orange County are no doubt comforted to know that if grade school children call each other bad names, the Sheriff will leap into action just as swiftly as if there were a murder. We can't help wondering what the penalty is for that "crime."

## Talk is Not Cheap

Calling people bad names is a punishable offense, at least when adults do it. One hot day in 1990, a black truck driver named James Wells walked into a fast food chain store called El Pollo Loco and ordered a large soft drink. The manager (race

unspecified) gave him five ice cubes but Mr. Wells wanted more. The manager refused. When Mr. Wells insisted, the manager said, "get out of here, you black nigger."

Mr. Wells sued in Los Angeles Superior Court, claiming that his civil rights had been violated. This August, he won the case and El Pollo Loco was ordered to pay him \$3,000 for discrimination, and \$10,000 because the judge found that Mr. Wells was "victim of an act of violence or intimidation based on race." The company had to pay another \$3,000 for the astonishing reason that calling Mr. Wells a black nigger was found to be slander.

A similar case recently went to trial in Fort Lauderdale (FL). James Tribble, a blue-collar white man, was displeased when a realtor offered to sell the house next door to a black. He called the realtor and left the following message on an answering machine:



"People in the neighborhood would like to give you a message—the niggers are looking at that house; they're not going to be very happy whatsoever if one does move in, and neither will you. Goodbye." The realtor called a detective, and Mr. Tribble met him at the realtor's office. "Yeah, I made the phone call," he said, and screamed that he didn't want any niggers or Cubans or Puerto Ricans moving in next door.

For expressing his opinion—admittedly very rudely—Mr. Tribble was sentenced to three months in jail and to 100 hours of community service. Free speech can cost a great deal in the United States.

## The Joys of the Open Road

By strange coincidence, America's flagship black city and its premier Hispanic city have both become more dangerous for motorists this summer.

Detroit has had to invent a new category of crime, "Robbery Armed, Unlawful Driving Away an Auto," for the recently fashionable caper of stealing cars from their drivers at gunpoint. This summer, "carjacking" is up 400 percent over the previous year. As many as ten people a day lose their cars to gunmen, and in August, two people who resisted were shot and killed.

Police are warning drivers not to stop at gas stations at night, and to be



careful at stop lights. Police also say that a particularly low breed of criminal commits these crimes; they can't figure out how to break into a car and hotwire it.

In Miami, "roadside robbers" are less interested in cars than in money. They lurk at stop signs, traffic lights, or drive-through windows, and wait for a car to stop. Then they smash the windows with a brick and steal purses and wallets. Another trick is to bump a car from behind, and loot it when the driver steps out to inspect the damage. At one Miami intersection, Third Avenue and Northeast 200th street, there were so many robberies that police doctored the stop lights. Now they blink yellow or red so that drivers need not stop for so long.

This summer, there are more than ten such robberies a day—twice as many as there were two years ago. Police are telling motorists to lock their valuables in the trunk and to run a red light rather than sit still for dubious characters.

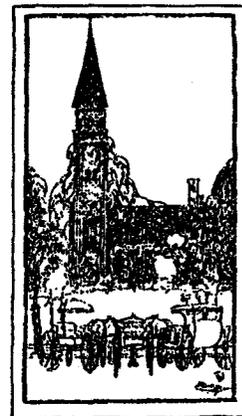
## Asian Clergyman Learns the Old Racial Con Game

St. Luke's Episcopal, serving the parish of Pacific Heights, is one of the wealthiest churches in one of the wealthiest parts of San Francisco. It was therefore fertile territory for swindles practiced by Victor Wei, the Chinese-born rector. Church officials recently

discovered that over the past several years, Rev. Wei has extracted as much as \$150,000 from parishioners by telling them that he needed money for important good works. Some 30 people gave him up to \$10,000 each for what they thought were clandestine missions to save Chinese and North Korean Christians from persecution. Rev. Wei simply pocketed the money.

There is no telling how long Pacific Heights parishioners might have gone on rescuing imaginary Asians if Rev. Wei had not come under scrutiny for a different reason: a former seminarian reported that a counselling session had led to an adulterous, four-month liaison. When some of Rev. Wei's other curious practices began to come to light, he threatened to kill a member of the vestry committee who was calling for closer financial scrutiny. "I may have to kill her," he said, "I may have to cut her head off."

Even when the extent of Rev. Wei's malfeasance became known, St. Luke's was reluctant to dismiss him. The church's two assistant clergy and



two other staffers resigned in protest over Rev. Wei's continued tenure, and other San Francisco-area Episcopalians began to call for his removal. In August, St. Luke's finally suspended him for three years. Rather than press criminal charges, church officials asked him to return the money. Rev. Wei did not do so, and said he was considering filing for bankruptcy.

According to latest reports, St. Luke's was negotiating with the rector over continuing benefits, such as whether Rev. Wei would be allowed to keep on living, rent-free, in the rectory. In return, Rev. Wei would sign a declaration that he would not sue the church for racial discrimination. ●