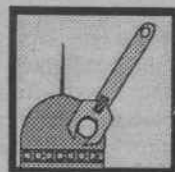


VIEWPOINTS

EDITORIAL

# Restructure

State government overhaul might lose sight of goal



In 1669, John Locke and Lord Ashley prepared for the southern half of the Carolina province an elaborate feudal system which was abhorrent even to Europeans. Colonists in the state's assembly revolted

against this notion, rejected England's proprietary control and moved to a not-so-different plantation system. From this time through slavery, civil war, reconstruction and an industrial age that more or less passed us by, not much has changed.

In the twentieth century, an agricultural aristocracy has merely been transferred over the years to a patchwork of boards and commissions that have in the past conferred on their members knighthoods in the forms of a hundred different personalized license plates.

This is the image that the current restructuring debate is fighting against — throwbacks to good ol' boy politics and elitism. This effort has come as a result of years of problems in keeping outlying agencies in check, such as the Department of Highways and Public Transportation and the Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission, who have garnered power over the years for their own bureaucratic fiefdoms.

Under the current reform plan, many of these bodies will be transferred under a cabinet system mainly controlled by the governor. Not all boards and commissions will be eliminated, but they will definitely be trimmed down.

In what is probably the remaining stumbling block to a process lasting two years, the House and Senate are arguing over who should control the Department of Health and Environmental Control. The Senate is due to take a vote when the General Assembly reconvenes June 14. Formerly under Senate control, this department comprising 76 state agencies is a coveted prize of "executive" control and way for senators to maintain their political base. Representatives have proposed the department be cut to 16 agencies and come under direct control of the governor with the possibility of some shared power with the Senate in two or more agencies.

Are we simply trading in a devil we know with one we don't?

South Carolina's state government unlike the federal government has been established as a government where the legislative body reigns supreme and where the responsibility of executing laws also may fall on their shoulders. The lines of distinction are blurred and our federal system of checks and balances does not exist.

State governments are generally held to be less important than the national government, but state governments, though not concerned with national security, are responsible for a great deal of our internal security — from establishing and maintaining public schools, to road construction and environmental control.

A government "closer to the people" is needed for these tasks but if it is not stable and focused on the people, it will become another bureaucratic morass. Whether the reform plan will lead us in that direction remains to be seen.

# USC should combat religious critics

The university as an institution exists to push our understanding of reality to its limits. It is about asking the hard questions which challenge traditional interpretations of human history, civic responsibility, and individual accountability, and finding new and better ways for societies to coexist.

Invariably, this questioning is unsettling, but only by facing those things which are unsettling to us can we continue moving in a positive direction. Religion has long had a special place in this environment of questioning and has distinguished itself as a discipline of worthy study.

But of all the disciplines in the university curriculum, religion remains the most controversial. No one can quantitatively analyze God or even prove to the satisfaction of all that there is one. But we all share some opinion about the possibility of an afterlife, the mystery of the creation, and how the unknown world affects us. Where disagreement of this magnitude exists, conflict is never far behind.

The struggle at USC that surrounded the course "Christian Fundamentalism and Public Education" found itself centered in this controversy, which raises the question: what is the controversy really about? Was the integrity of the course's objectivity the problem, or was it being contested because some people fear that the position of Christian fundamentalism in education will be presented critically, as are all subjects at the university level?

USC trustees had criticized the course as too political. William Hubbard charged that the course goes against the mission of the university which is to "enlighten and provide educa-



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Columnist

tion" not to "combat any religious group." It is interesting that Mr. Hubbard can pass this judgment on the course without having closely analyzed the course offering himself.

In fact, the uproar felt comes not from people who have experienced the course and have made legitimate charges against the professor for being unduly biased in his presentation, but

because they only assume that any course which discusses fundamentalism and its influence on public education will be a negative one. In fact this discussion was not at all about the course's objectivity, but

instead about the methodology employed at the university to analyze any religion.

The study of religion at the university begins with questions about the institution, not assumptions about its relative truth. What the study of religion in the university purports to do, however, is to analyze religion as it impacts the human condition. Religious sentiment is embodied by people who act out their belief in political ways.

While their interpretations about the nature

of God cannot be subjected to strict academic analysis to determine the ultimate validity of their position, their actions in the political realm can be subjected to critical analysis. It is these actions which students of religion seek to understand.

This same method, which is applied to Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Shintoists and atheists, is also applied to the fundamentalist movement. Here lies the rub between the detractors of the study of religion and those in the university who teach it.

Religious conservatives frequently argue that their beliefs transcend the institution of religion. They will argue that their beliefs are based on an ongoing discussion with a living God, and that their relationship with that God is personal, not academic.

Academicians are not in the business of converting people from this belief, however, they are in the business of critically analyzing how these people attempt to influence society as a whole, just as political scientists study political parties, historians study social movements, and psychologists study the impact of human behavior. It is imperative that this study be allowed to progress at the university level.

If not allowed, then we have given a large, well organized, group of like-minded individuals carte blanche in our society to think and act as they wish without fear of repercussions from the one branch of our society that traditionally has served to question the direction of its citizens and the consequences of the actions people take. No group is above criticism, and no tradition above reproach.

Martin Davis is a columnist for The Gamecock

**"No group is above criticism, and no tradition above reproach."**

# America's newsrooms need racial diversity

Having spent 10 years in newspapers before joining the faculty of the College of Journalism and Mass Communications, I have witnessed the pressing need for people of color in the newsroom and in the news report. I would like to share a few observations, some I reluctantly acknowledge.

People of color are needed in newsrooms as sources for non-minority staffers and editors on the multitude of issues, concerns and perceptions outside of the Euro-American experience.

I have been asked by eager colleagues: "Do you know of a black married couple I can call for a story on child care?" or "What are blacks saying about the Thomas/Hill hearings?"

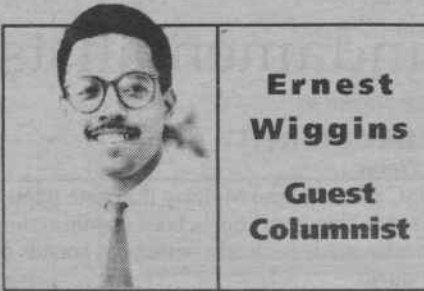
While I was willing to call some friends and associates of color to help out, I was quick to say to all who asked, "I would rather not be considered the font of all knowledge on African-Americans. But if it will help your story be more representative, I'll do it." I urged them to add the contacts I shared with them to their Rolodex.

People of color are needed in newsrooms to travel the paths heretofore inaccessible to non-minority staffers and editors.

I've had editors say to me: "We want you to move into a public housing project for a week and write a story. We can't send (white colleague), he'll stand out like a sore thumb. You're the only one who can do it."

This was different from what I heard said to my Euro-American colleagues: "We want you to go to the Statehouse to get a reading on the restructuring debate. You're the only one who can do it."

In the latter case, it appeared the decision



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Guest Columnist

was based on lines of experience, in the former, along color lines.

Though I struggled with the feelings I was considered "a good black reporter" rather than "a good reporter who is black." I accepted the assignments and sought them eagerly. But in these instances, I was not responding to the newspaper's rallying cry: "Write it or read about it!" I realized that if I didn't write these stories, they would not get written.

One of my colleagues in the college, Dr. Kenneth Campbell, and I recently published findings from a study we conducted to determine what stories about African-Americans are being published in four South Carolina dailies.

The results, which have been published in the *Columbian Urban League's* 1992-1993 edition of *The State of Black South Carolina*, stated in part, "Though there is evidence that the four newspapers did pursue local news and feature stories about community or political activities of African Americans, most were unable to find the many stories of personal accomplishments by individuals in those communities."

People of color and those of other marginalized groups are daily reminders of the richness and variety of the community. Reporters and editors should be prepared to challenge their most basic assumptions about public issues and how they impact their readers.

- Not all readers are homeowners.
- Not all readers own automobiles.
- Not all readers work from 9-to-5.
- Not all readers have children or want to have children.
- Not all readers are Christian.
- Not all readers are reared by birth parents.

Diversity is needed in newsrooms because without it newspapers will fail.

The American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1978 set a goal of having the percentage of minority journalists in their newsrooms equal the minority percentage in the population by the year 2000. The percentage of minority journalists on dailies grew from 4 percent in 1978 to 9.4 percent in 1992. But with minorities predicted to reach 25 percent of the population by the year 2000, the ASNE goal looks out of reach despite strong efforts on the part of some newspapers and the ASNE.

Rather than wait for "qualified" candidates to knock on the editor's door, those in the classroom and the newsroom have taken affirmative action to prepare a pool of journalists for entry-level positions in the print media now and for the newsrooms of the year 2000.

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