

## Topics

### Minority Report

It started as a terminology problem, a decade ago, as Hispanics and American Indians followed blacks onto the political stage. Victims of many of the same prejudices, all were content with the umbrella term "minorities." The only drawback seemed to be an occasional awkward usage, like "majority minority" schools — meaning schools in which more than 50 percent of the students were black, Hispanic, etc.

Soon the meaning of "etc." expanded as feminists collected under the umbrella, then veterans, then the handicapped. All their claims were worthy; but measures intended for the original "minorities" soon were bent, or diluted. What started as an issue of terminology became one of law and money. Consider the number of "minorities" for which the New York City schools now provide bilingual education: Soviet Jews, Chinese, Greeks, Koreans and Vietnamese, not to mention speakers of Spanish and four other languages.

So it was understandable, even inevitable, that someone would finally say what the National Association of Black Social Workers has now said: stop using "minority" to mean "black." Other groups are scooping up increasingly limited Federal dollars

## Uniformities

"like parasites," the association says.

The association has a point. However worthy, the claims of boat people or of working white women are different from those of people who live with the effects of long and pervasive discrimination. Blacks have reason to want to remain a distinct minority, by any other name.

### Suitable Fringe

The Internal Revenue Service says the uniform that a nurse or policeman must wear is a deductible business expense. But the business dress of, say, bankers or account executives, though just as much a uniform, is not. A test of that inconsistency may now be at hand. According to *Forbes* Magazine, some 500 British firms are buying appropriate suits, shirts and ties for their senior employees — to augment their incomes without making them liable for yet higher taxes.

How can Americans resist importing this fringe benefit — and the I.R.S. resist approving it? Compared with the three-martini lunch, the suit dodge has a lot going for it. Like an expensive meal, good tailoring impresses clients. If expense-account restaurants provide jobs for the poor, so surely does the garment district. And no medical

research has yet implicated Oxford or Halston in liver disease.

### Fashion Flower

Violets, shrinking or otherwise, are out of style. The last large commercial grower of violets in Rhinebeck, N.Y., once known as the violet capital of the world, is going out of business. "There is no demand for them anymore," says a wholesale flower dealer.

Cultural indicators are where you find them, and the status of violets is as good a measure as any. Their cultivation was spurred by the demise of the great estates along the Hudson; commercial growers took over the greenhouses. The taste for violets bloomed in Victorian parlors and reached its peak at pre-World War I tea dances. Eliza Doolittle sold them and street vendors always had nose-gays ready for lovers. A bunch of the woody-fresh, purple velvet blossoms surrounded by smooth green leaves evoked a world of gentle sensibilities.

But violets with blue jeans? Violets are sincere, shy, subtle. The new style is bold, and the fashionable flower right now is a single deathlike stalk of lilies. Press the violets in Bulwer-Lytton; they have gone the way of the fan and flirtation in the conservatory.