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As of 2 February 2004, 2:27 AM

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NEWS

Controversy Straight From the Oven
by Declan Gould, DSJ Staff Reporter

At the height of the anti-affirmative action bake sale on Tuesday, four white males stood facing a largely African American crowd of about fifteen debating various sides of this many-faced issue. On the table between them were signs announcing: Sons of Liberty Affirmative Action Bake Sale. *Satirical Protest. A few tables down sat a group of pro-affirmative action students, many from the African American Male Coalition.

The January 27 bake sale was the second the Sons of Liberty (SOL), a libertarian group, has held this year. It was intended to protest the censorship of free speech by way of protesting affirmative action, said group founder William Coggin.

The issue is free speech, not the bake sale, he said.

The first sale was held November 8 in the University Center, where SOL members protested affirmative action by charging whites \$1 for cookies, Asians 75 cents, blacks and Hispanics 50 cents, and Native Americans 25 cents. After being notified about the protest by the Office of Multicultural Affairs, Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs Mark Constantine told the SOL to stop selling the cookies at different prices. Rather than alter their protest, which Coggin saw as a violation of freedom of speech, the group ended the sale.

The November bake sale fueled an ongoing debate within the Sons of Liberty, the College community, and the state. The executive and legislative branches of the Student Assembly condemned the bake sale, and Sociology Department chair Deirdre A. Royster held an open forum in which to debate affirmative action. President Sullivan scorned one Charlottesville man who in an e-mail expressed his disapproval of the bake sale being shut down.

Some fool has sent me an e-mail and signed your name to it. You should do what you can to discover the identity of the person. He or she is doing real harm to your reputation, wrote Sullivan. Sullivan released a further statement on Tuesdays bake sale.

The right to freedom of expression belongs to every member of this

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Students on both sides of the affirmative action issue debate the merits and faults of the institution. Photo by Evan Davis.

community, including the President. Members of the Sons of Liberty have announced their views on the subject of affirmative action, which I do not share. They are entitled to their opinion, however mistaken I believe it to be, he stated. Sullivan clarified that this bake sale met the administrative requirements imposed on campus activities, whereas the previous bake sale had not. He framed his opposition to the event in terms of its means.

The bake sale with racially differentiated prices that they hold today is inexcusably hurtful to members of this community whose presence here is welcome and critically important to the quality of our life together, said Sullivan.

Richmond Times-Dispatch columnist A. Martin Hinkle wrote an article criticizing affirmative action and what he sees as the suppression of protest against it, using the College as his prime example.

Meanwhile the Sons of Liberty obtained approval to have a satirical protest. According to Coggin the group discussed having a free speech bake sale, but ultimately decided to practice their right to free speech by once again protesting a controversial issue affirmative action.

If the College hadnt shut it down the first time we wouldnt have done it again, said freshman Adam McCool, member of the SOL.

While many oppose the SOLs anti-affirmative action message and call the bake sale form of the organizations protest discriminatory and offensive, few dispute the value of free speech.

I dont think the College handled it the right way. Its promoting a lot of discussion and they have a valid reason, said sophomore Shelley Devereaux. Free speech is perfectly valid.

Others question the SOLs motivation in holding a second bake sale.

Its not really about affirmative action, said junior Colin Mukubwa, a member of the AAMC.

Mukubwa noted that during the first bake sale SOL members were unable to give a definition of affirmative action. We hope they will actually do something constructive this time, said Mukubwa.

Mukubwa was one of some ten or fifteen pro-affirmative action students who rallied behind the pro-affirmative action table on Tuesday. Their display argued that affirmative action is a way to right past wrongs done to minorities, raised questions of gender and the legacy tradition, and suggested that in a state that is 20 percent black, the College, only six percent black, is like taxation without representation.

Things were quiet at the University Center until around 12:30 when lunchtime traffic picked up and Student Assembly president, senior Brian Cannon, arrived with unity cookies for the pro-affirmative action table.

You cant put a price on unity, so were giving them away, said Cannon, who added that his presence at the protest was completely separate from the Student Assembly.

Whether or not they satisfied Mukubwa and other opponents of the sale, the SOL made changes to the bake sale the second time around: instead of the previous price tier, the new pricings read: Black/Hispanic/Native American-50 cents, White/Asian/Indian-75 cents, Human-\$1 (If you prefer to be judged by the content of your character rather than by the color of your skin).

Coggin explained that the change in pricing reflected research the SOL had done with the help of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE.) Pricings for the first bake sale were not approved or created by Coggin, who was not present when the sale began and who got the pricings, along with the idea to hold the sale, from Southern Methodist University.

The controversy surrounding affirmative action is seemingly endless, and it is apparent that questions still linger: a spontaneous debate that began between the SOL and a passerby won the quiet attention of many and would have gone on for hours if one of its principle speakers hadnt decided it was time for a lunch break.

This is an issue that should be spoken about, said freshman Maame Boakye. People should be educated [so they can] decide where they stand.

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