

FORUM

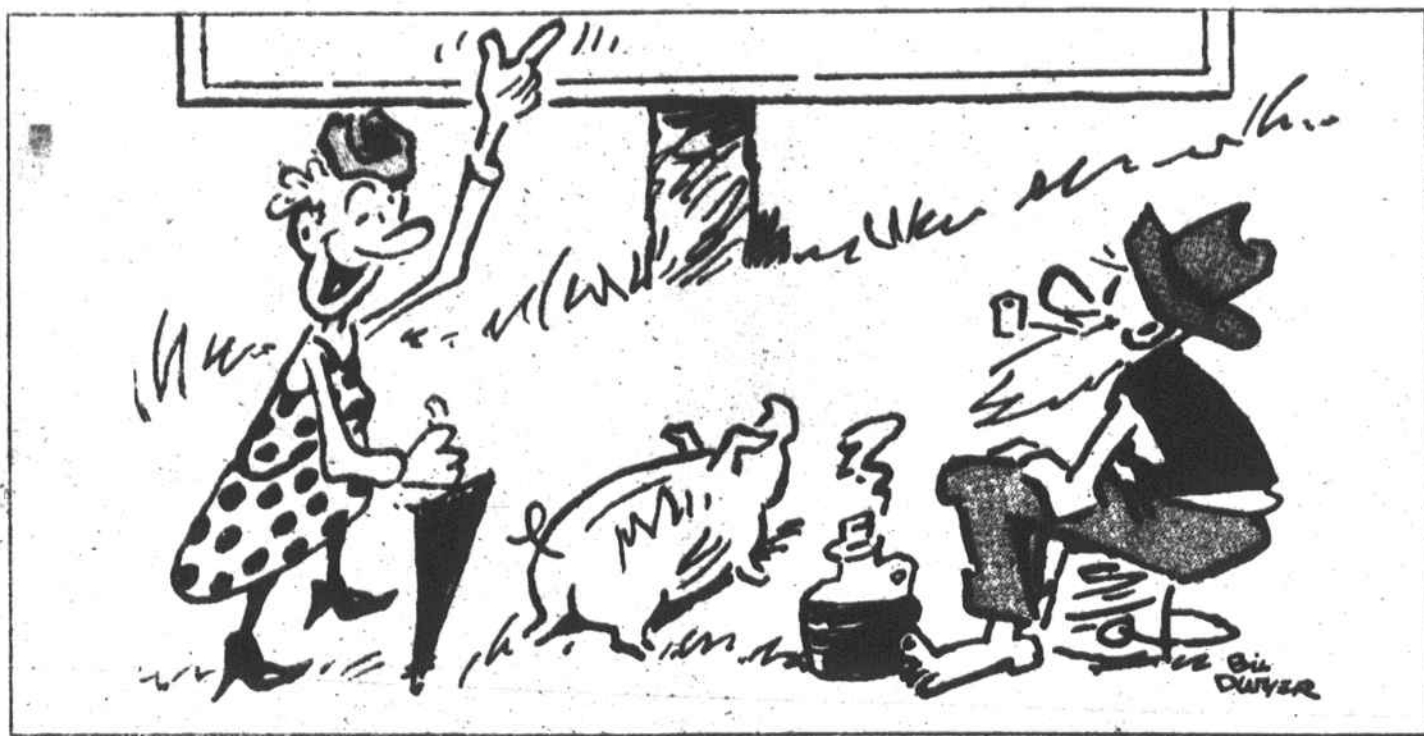
Redneck! Sanitizing the White "N" Word

Popular culture in America is a real dizzying thing. Our language and the ebb and flow and changes of word usage can confound and confuse those who like me might not be the sharpest knife in the drawer."

Words and phrase usage, including the distinction between that which is sacred or profane or that which is politically correct or not, is like the weather in NC: if you don't like it, wait five minutes and it will change.

Thus, the ascendancy of the red-white-and-blue Jeff Foxworthy, who knows how to make the best out of bad words, Foxworthy, smart like a fox, has good what used to be an ethnic slur on its ugly head, made it chic, and turned it into a cash cow.

Foxworthy, a smug Atlanta suburbanite, is no redneck. His double-platinum CD, "You Might Be a Redneck If..." was, just



Angeles, there are 200 million rednecks." Everything has a price.

I choose to be happy that my beleaguered "black folk in white

class culture, where good old boys and girls—true patriots—drink beer the same way "brothers in the inner city" of Detroit do, and manipulate people the same way, laughing all the way to their "pick-em up" trucks or their "rides."

This requiem for rednecks, what *Newsweek* called *Bubba-palooza*, USA, describes the best of true White Americana. Junior Johnson's progeny. Those whom author Roy Blount dubbed the same as "mensch." Yiddish for a person of integrity and honor.

That being so, I grew up with—and some of my best friends—are rednecks. These are the salt-of-the-earth white men with whom my father exited the bowels of the earth every day—black like he—the very ones whom he'd tell me, "Say what you will about some white folks, but Rusty's Daddy is a good old boy!" Some of these good folks, however, are preyed-upon by the likes of Pat Buchanan, or represented by LAPD officer Furhman

that his Daddy walked with him to school each day and not be ashamed that they were in the fifth grade together. Say it loud! He's a Redneck and he's Proud!

Truth be told, the stereotype of the "Southern Redneck" has to do with "Southern Hillbillies," and that favored term of my Grandmother, "Crackers." It has to do with clannishness, a proclivity to violence, love of hillbilly music, moonshine and NASCAR, and low standards of sexual morality, household cleanliness, and personal hygiene.

Onan's Mom was once heard to say, "take that dish towel and wipe that child's nose, y'all know I can't stand no filth!"

When Foxworthy's *Rednecks* is debuted next month, there is something that ABC will not let on to the rest of America. Some of the writers of the sitcom are ex-Cheers types. "You might be a redneck if" you know something about ethnically distinct food preferences, language, and music. Urban chic has nothing to do with white West Virginia working-

Most were, to me, as P.W.T. America's White N's. Before we know it, PBS will air an hour-long documentary titled *Cracker Culture in America!* Only in America. We'll sanitize it, without even knowing we did it.

Is the "N" word not far behind Rednecks? Stay tuned. Only in America!

(Dr. William H. Turner is a freelance columnist for the Chronicle).

LIFT EVERY VOICE

By Dr. WILLIAM H. TURNER

three years ago, rejected by the cultural gatekeepers in Hollywood for being "too Southern." Now he has six best-selling books and a sitcom scheduled for debut on ABC next month. "You can be a Redneck. Only in America! Well, maybe not you!"

To me, this phenomenon is very close to my Appalachian heritage. In the Eastern Kentucky hill country, we always knew that there wasn't much difference in the lifeways of the Bubbas and the stereotypes of us Sambos! According to ABC execs, "You Might Be a Redneck If..."

skin" (the Clampetts, the Dukes of Hazard, and the Fiee Haw clan) will become, by Foxworthy's genius, hip and *en vogue*.

Onan Klendennen, a white boy I hunted and fished with in the 50's, can come out of the closet and proudly proclaim the authenticity and legitimacy of his roots. I can see it now: the all-white basketball team in Red Foxx, Kentucky—now the Redskins (not politically correct)—can now call themselves the Red Foxx Rednecks, and be smug about it. Onan can take pleasure in the fact

One Step Beyond: A Reasonable Goal

Well, vacation time is over! It fully accomplished its goal when I got what I needed most—rest. Sleeping until I awakened naturally, and then being contentedly unconcerned with whatever dishes that would of course eventually find their way into the dish washer. Trips to markets and the new mall in my home project around the house, conversation, reading the same book for the entire week—peace for the soul and the body. Stillness and rest adequately prepare one to go on. I am renewed.

I anticipate an eventful fall. Mere thoughts of the chill that will soon evade and of orange-hued leaves invigorate. My mother makes her much-anticipated annual visit. School starts, always exciting. I am a student for the first time in twenty-five years. Oh yes, I sat in a class last fall, and I began graduate work in January. Neither nighttime classes on a wintry campus nor summer school on a semi-deserted one can simulate the autumnal thrill that is somehow incomplete, without giddy-cool freshmen. I enjoy positive emotions, such as these, that encourage me to "keep up the good work." For that is how I show my present life. I can accomplish so much when my attitude is right—when I envision God and people as good and positive beings—and when I am physically refreshed. Don't misunderstand: I do realize that our world contains much that is negative, bad, ugly, hateful—sinful, if you will. But life (human life especially) should be revered because it is life. Life is good.

I sense the need to prepare myself emotionally and spiritually for what I hope will be an intense adventure—one in which it is my desire to experience, momentarily, the life of a Black slave. Just for a moment, for the length of time it takes for an educated mental image to reach its maturity, I wish to be that slave.

And then... I hope I will know something that I do not yet know. And I want my vicarious experience to make a difference in the way I live my life. I hope I will see, or sort of see, what it means to have a great-grandmother who was a slave.

Honesty is important to me. I feel it is important to be as honest as possible at all times. As human beings sometimes we don't grasp the truth, but as far as we do, I believe it is important to speak it.

In this column I try to express what I feel is the truth. Yet I am aware that I do not have all the facts nor am I capable of assimilating all of the facts that I do possess. Sometimes I fear that I will get carried away and that my words and ideas will greatly exceed my ability to make use of them. Yet making use of ideas is my goal. What good are facts if they do not alter the way we live—the way we perceive others and our treatment of and relationship to them?

For growth to occur and progress to be made, one must always be will to step beyond one's present position. We must stretch ourselves: our beliefs and our actions. Change and growth must occur if there is to be progress in any area of our lives—intellectual, emotional, physical, or spiritual. But I believe a willingness to step beyond one's current stance is especially important to the progress of race relations. Progress in this area will eventually require both Black and White Americans to change



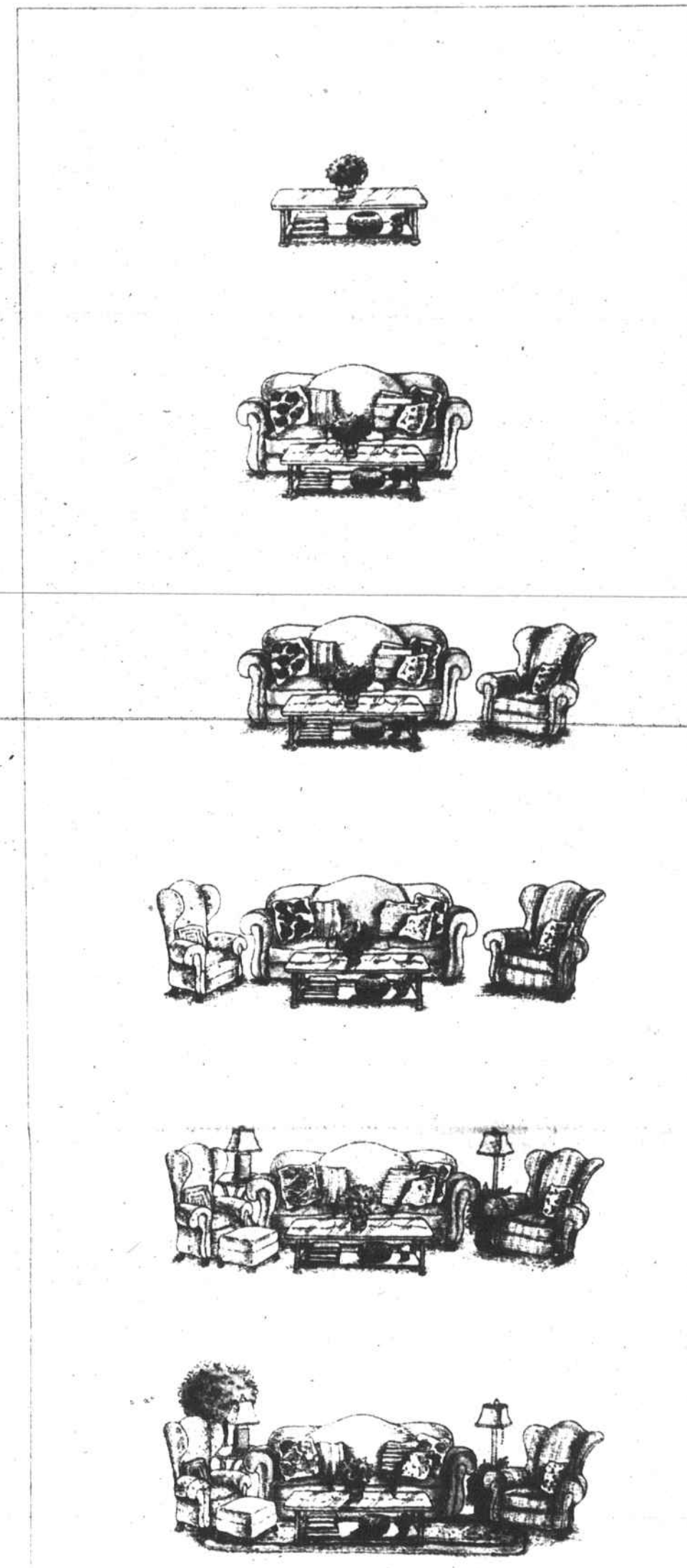
ONE STEP BEYOND

By HELEN LOSSE

their attitudes and their actions toward each other. I have set a personal goal this fall: I hope learn, experience, and integrate into my life something that will enable me to exceed my present position.

I hope to go forward—to go one step beyond my current stance. I said truth was important to me. In truth, I can only learn—learn so that I can use—a little at a time. One step beyond: I believe this is a reasonable goal.

(Helen Losse is a student at Wake Forest University).



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