

# THE JEWISH OBSERVER

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Dr. Norman Lamm  
Yeshiva University  
500 West 185th St.  
New York City, NY

Dear Dr. Lamm, *CINO*

I hope this letter finds you and yours well. At the very outset I would like it to be clear that this letter is meant for you and those listed under the cc: at the end of the letter, as communication from one concerned Jew of conscience to another. This is not a dry run for a to-be-published commentary. It was prompted by an article featured in last week's *Forward* (copy enclosed). Any quotation-mark-enclosed phrases are lifted from that article.

I picture a young lady from Providence, Rhode Island, who lives around the corner from Brown University. Even though she could have stayed home and attended Brown, she elected--at great expense and personal sacrifice--to leave home and enroll in Stern College. We applauded her decision. She would thus have an opportunity to reinforce her commitment to *Yiddishkeit* while at the same time avoiding the moral quagmire of the contemporary campus scene.

She took a class in American literature, along with similarly dedicated young ladies from San Diego, Denver and Atlanta. Their teacher [REDACTED] introduced them to Nobel laureate Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, which the students instinctively rejected as "offensive... inappropriate"

When offered a Calvin Klein bus stop-ad as a standard for acceptability, the girls found that public display "disgusting... offensive."

Eventually, after a few sessions marked by "a little nervous laughter, a little blushing," they were able to leap over cultural barriers, and even identify with the enslaved blacks peopling *Beloved*, who "have sex all the time--with animals even!" By the time they finished the book, we sense the teacher's major triumph for her students' discovery of the universality of the human condition.

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And we try to swallow our shock for the loss of innocence of a *bas Yisroel*.

(I'm not sure if Calvin Klein ads are included in the turf gained for the sake of humanity.)

I certainly agree with [REDACTED] that literature is a potent force, which can create genuine empathy with people and situations that would normally be outside the pale for the usual, sheltered, middle-class Jew. But don't we, who are vested with responsibility for the next generation, have an obligation to guard the inherent, Jewish sense of shame that precludes blunt discussions of a type that would have been rejected a generation ago as disgusting, vulgar? Our assignment is too awesome to trade off for a chance to be on the "cutting edge of social change"--a mere pot of lentils when compared to values of eternity.

It would appear to me that to permit such powerful forces to be wielded by people like [REDACTED]-gifted though she may be--who fail to understand our basic attitude toward matters of *tzenius*, is a profound betrayal of our trust, even if inadvertent. I am confident that with the resources available, you and your colleagues could, with no great difficulty, come up with acceptable alternatives to widen the students' sense of humanity.

Forgive me if I sound preachy, but I'm just too upset to be diplomatic.

Most sincerely,



Rabbi Nisson Wolpin

cc: Rabbi Saul Berman  
Rabbi Zevulun Charlop  
Rabbi Tzvi Flaum

NW/crl