

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### **Don't mention race unless it is relevant**

Dear Editor:

Your lead Verdict & Settlement report in the Dec. 31, 2018 issue, about a \$4M verdict for a botched surgery, begins with the following sentence: "An African-American male, 46, presented to Dr. Dalton for a hip replacement." If this were an article on substandard treatment being meted out more frequently to non-whites than whites, the racial identity of the plaintiff would be pertinent. But what appeared was a presentation of a straightforward medical malpractice case. Nothing is claimed to have happened on account of the plaintiff's race. So why mention it? (It is not a response that the reporting lawyer may have specified his client's race. What is at issue in a publication is editorial judgment.)

The gratuitous racial identification of persons – almost always non-white persons – when there is no contention that their race has anything to do with what is at issue, is a plague. It will continue to oppress us and divide us until we stop assuming that the default identity of human beings is "white," and understand that one's racial (or ethnic, or religious) identity has no place in a discussion, much less an analysis, unless it matters. Please exercise editorial judgment accordingly. Thank you.

Victor M. Glasberg  
Alexandria

*Editor's Note: The AP Stylebook, which Virginia Lawyers Weekly follows, counsels that the race of the subject of a story should not be mentioned unless it is relevant to the story. While the identification of the plaintiff's race in this case came in a verdict report, it should have been removed from the item before publication. Mr. Glasberg's point is well-taken and we appreciate the AP Style refresher.*