

The letter below contains a very serious error, which, if I recall correctly, I discovered about a week after the letter was printed. I seem to recall that I had glossed over it in the paper, not imagining that there would be such a misrepresentation of my thought.

The error is the phrase “intended, I’m sure” in the sentence “In fact, this exercise in noblesse oblige defines the citizenry of Los Angeles as one massive charity case, which in itself has the character — intended, I’m sure — of an insult.” In the letter I submitted, I wrote “unintended, I’m sure.”

I informed the Daily News about the error, but the editor said that too much time had passed to print an acknowledgment of error or a corrected version. In case Mayor-elect Riordan had read the letter, I wrote to him explaining the mistake, saying that I had no intention of insulting him. I also probably sent him a copy of the original letter. I did not receive a reply, and I do not know whether he saw either of my letters.

The nature of the error is so egregious that I always wondered if it might have been a Freudian slip by an unfriendly copy editor, toward making a liberal letter-writer look mean-spirited.

JUNE 29, 1993 DAILY NEWS

Home delivery information on Page 2

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Daily News, P.O. Box 4200, Woodland Hills, CA 91365
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Take the pay and earn it

Except for meaning well, I can't think of a single positive aspect to Mayor-elect Richard Riordan's symbolic gesture to accept only \$1 per year in salary.

In fact, this exercise in noblesse oblige defines the citizenry of Los Angeles as one

massive charity case, which in itself has the character — intended, I'm sure — of an insult. The portion of the mayor's salary saved — \$117,883 — is meaningless in Los Angeles' multi-billion dollar budget, and its effect on L.A.'s taxpayers would not strain even the poorest. As much as we might complain about the fees charged by lawyers and plumbers, for example, not many of us would welcome the message, even from them, that we are so needy that we should be pleased to accept their services for nothing. Neither should we be pleased to accept the services of our mayor essentially for nothing.

Riordan pledges to enlist all sectors of our diverse population in "turning L.A. around," but future wealthy benefactors might well think instead that a populace which accepts charity should be told what to do — rather than given an opportunity to participate in the decision-making. A particularly unappealing scenario would be that of a wealthy mayor and equally wealthy council members, each working for \$1 a year "for our own good." Thus might a new feudalism replace L.A.'s democratic form of government.

I call on Mayor-elect Riordan to accept his allocated salary in the same spirit as does every other civil servant. Then earn it.

— Bill Becker
Woodland Hills