

IT'S A DUNG DEAL

New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani threatened to evict the Brooklyn Museum of Art after it hosted the "Sensation" exhibit last fall that featured a dung-stained Virgin Mary portrait. The museum struck back suing the City for violating First Amendment rights. On March 27, both sides agreed to settle their dispute by dropping their respective suits.

Though the legal battle is over, the political and moral implications endure. Mayor Giuliani scored big with Catholics for standing against Catholic bashing and Hillary Clinton failed to muster any public sentiment with her hands-off approach. Morally, the museum was embarrassed by the disclosure that its officials hustled money from those who had a commercial interest in the exhibit. That they should have been embarrassed, but clearly were not, by bringing this low-class show to New York proved to be one of the most significant aspects of the whole affair.

If there is one myth in this controversy that still needs to be debunked it is the idea that Chris Ofili, the artist of "Nigerian ancestry," really meant to make a sweet statement by throwing dung on "The Holy Virgin Mary." Nicolaus Mills, professor of American Studies at Sarah Lawrence College, kept this mythology going when he wrote in *Newsday* that the dung was placed on the portrait "in a complimentary way." He even understood the porn pictures surrounding Mary in a positive way.

William Donohue wrote to the newspaper challenging this "racist rumor" by labeling Mills' account as "bull." "I recently asked a Nigerian about this," Donohue explained, "and he was perplexed why anyone would preach such nonsense (he hasn't been exposed to the mythology of multiculturalism). Indeed, a little research disclosed that dung in Africa is not used as an honorific statement but as a measure of contempt.

If Mills isn't persuaded, let him bring a pile of excrement as a gift to one of his African friends the next time he's invited to dinner and see what happens."

Donohue added by saying that it was Ofili who "brought his elephant dung to the Brooklyn Museum of Art via the London Zoo," and that although he is of Nigerian ancestry, "he was born and raised in England." The Catholic League president closed by commenting, "He should keep his 'installation'—feces and all—on his side of the Atlantic." Now how's that for a dung deal?