

Bald facts: A new hair color

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [July 13, 2004](#) issue

Montana is to be envied for its great Great Plains, its purple mountain majesties, and its celebration of color. The state motto is colorfully *Oro y Plata*, gold and silver. Its flower is the bitterroot, a delicious pink and white bloom. And, on fishing- and driver's-license applications, Montana cites "bald" as a color preference.

After reading about Montana, I, along with fellow baldies in other color-impooverished states, examined my driver's license. Having just passed my drivers-senility test in Illinois, I figured the data would be up-to-date. Not quite: my listed weight, at 150, is two decades of pounds too light. The eyes remain GRAY and I still have a restriction: "Must wear corrective lenses." But when I checked my hair color, I found there was no such category.

Why the disappearance of the hair color category? Some speculate that we are all chameleons these years, and yesterday's gray is today's ebony among men, while hundreds of other hues make their appearance among women. Maybe the attending clerk when I applied as much as 50 years ago, when my hair first dropped to the ground, despaired in efforts to describe the color, and discreetly left the blank empty.

I did find discrimination, however, on the Montana Drivers Training Instructors applications. First is "bald," followed by "black, blond/ strawberry, brown, gray, part gray, red/auburn, sandy, white." Bald is first. Why don't we Illinoisans get publicity for our ecumenical approach to colors, as Montana does? There they can sing "Bald, bald, bald is the color of my true love's hair / Her lips are something sweet and rare." (No color for lips on Montana licenses.) The Associated Press story says that you *can* declare your shiny pate there, and that bald is simply a newer color "option, along with other hair colors, such as sandy."

Philosophically, we have *ignoratio elenchi*, the logical fallacy of "arguing to the wrong point." Thus, Q: "Is your hair auburn or red?" A: "Yes, my color is bald." A species of this genus is "a category mistake," as when Basil Fawlty, angered that his car engine has died, takes counteraction, grabs a tree branch, and pounds the hood.

Theologically? The concordance guides me to Leviticus 13, which offers color directions for priests examining bald people. Verse 40: "If anyone loses the hair from his head, he is bald but he is clean." But if the inspectee's bald head is reddish-white, darker, of course, than bitterroot, he has leprosy and is unclean.

The Bible also contributes to the "don't mess with us" theme. In that "gentle book," lacking horror stories and images of the sort the Qur'an sports, we read in 2 Kings 2:23-23 about a bunch of kids hollering, "Go up, thou baldhead" to Elisha, the prophet of God. The angered prophet cursed them, so two she-bears came out of the woods and tore up 42 of them. When we first read that as children we learned to keep our distance from bald-headed men, fearing we might say the wrong thing.

For instance, at the foot of a mountain in Glacier Park, a ranger doing identification checks might read "Hair color: bald" on a license and authorize a mountain climb with: "Go up, thou baldhead." And then? They do have wild she-bears in Montana. One more thing we lack in Illinois.