In the name of equality, American universities are establishing colonial enclaves suggestive of South African apartheid

Academic Apartheid

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Until a few years ago the term “racism” seemed to have a fairly precise meaning. It meant the attribution of various forms of social inferiority or superiority to certain groups of people by virtue of their biological makeup. In its more developed and systematic form, racism was a theory of genetic determination postulating a causal link between the physical appearance (phenotype) of people and their social behavior and attitudes. While ethnocentrism (preference for one’s own culture) is universal, racism is exceptional, though not unique, to Western cultures. The overwhelming power and wealth of Western societies, however, made Western racism by far the most widespread and violent strain of the virus.

“Scientific” racism arose a little before the middle of the nineteenth century, reached the zenith of its social acceptability in the late nineteenth century and began to decline appreciably in the 1920’s. As a theory of human behavior, nineteenth-century racism followed the strong environmentalism of the eighteenth century. The dominant intellectual current of the Enlightenment explained human behavior in terms of a mixture of social and geographic or climatic determinism. The individual was a product principally of his social milieu and upbringing and of his physical environment (climate, geography, diet) rather than of his genes and hormones.

From the 1930’s the scientific pendulum swung away from the crude biological determinism and evolutionaryism represented by racism and from the equally crude geographical and climatic determinism of the eighteenth century. They were replaced by the credo of extreme social determinism that was to dominate the social sciences for the next three or four decades. Anthropologists spread the gospel of cultural relativism, and sociologists the Durkheimian doctrine of societal constraints. Man, we were told, shaped his own destiny through his social institutions, but, except for a few enlightened social scientists, he did not know it because all this happened not through the expression of individual free will but through the occult and omnipotent constraints of Society and Culture. Man had created God as a representation of his collective self, and the social scientist’s demystifying role was to tell his fellowmen that there was no need for false modesty in the scientific scheme of things because God was really society. All these intellectual arguments did not, of course, happen in a political vacuum. In fact, much of what passed for social-science theory was little more than political ideology hidden behind a smoke-screen of “value-free” jargon. Much as “scientific” racism became the legitimizing ideology of slavery and colonialism, social determinism was the ideological underpinning of laissez-faire liberalism and, on the racial front, of palliative, meliorist, gradual integration. The way in which social science acts as a weather vane in political air currents is only obscured by the social scientist’s vested interests in pretending this is not the case.

Then, around the mid-1960’s the wind shifted again, both politically and intellectually. In the social sciences, some began asking again the long-tabooed questions raised by human evolution and biology. With the rapid advances in the field of genetics, paleontology, ethnology, primatology, physiology, endocrinology and neurology it became increasingly obvious that the biological baby had been thrown away with the racist hogwash. Growing numbers of social scientists began to re-examine the evolutionary and biological parameters of man and to conclude that human behavior is the product of a complex interplay of heredity and environment, of nature and nurture.

Inevitably, this healthy corrective to dogmatic social determinism also led to the re-emergence of

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More important, there was an ideological and political shift in the larger society which can perhaps be dated most conveniently with the publication in 1967 of Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton's *Black Power, The Politics of Liberation in America*. Around the mid-sixties, as a result of mounting disillusionment with the slow pace of integration and the continued oppression of the mass of blacks, Afro-American intellectuals turned increasingly from integration to separatism. This summary statement hides the great complexity of the process and the numerous minor currents within the black "nationalist" movement, but two broad wings can be distinguished, namely, the "cultural revivalist" and the "political activist." The cultural revivalist wing argued that all black people in the world are Africans, and stressing or inventing remnants of African culture they proceeded to manufacture a pseudo-African heritage composed largely of dress styles, broken Swahili and fanciful African history. Social scientists who a generation ago had been eager to prove that Afro-Americans are really brown Anglo-Saxons, similar in all respects except color to white Americans, now combed the ghettos in search of "black culture," and, as usual, found what they had decided to find. The myth of a separate black culture became enshrined in anthropological monographs, and minor differences in dialect based on class or region were instantly elevated to the status of "black English." Once more and with alacrity, social science became the handmaiden of ideology.

The politically more militant wing of black nationalism, inspired by Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, argues that Afro-Americans are an internal colony and share with other "Third World peoples" exploitation at the hand of the capitalist, imperialist powers. In its more sophisticated neo-Marxian version, the argument stresses class and economic determinism; in its vulgar form, the conflict is defined in terms of racial polarization between white oppressors and non-white oppressed. That both brands of black nationalism were doomed to failure should have been obvious at the outset. First, there can be no black nationalism in the United States because the objective conditions for nationhood are almost completely lacking. Afro-Americans are a pariah caste group, not a nation. Unlike genuine nations, such as the French Canadians, the Navaho and countless other groups, black Americans lack a contiguous territorial basis and, to any appreciable degree, a separate cultural identity. The situation of black Americans is explainable not in terms of a separate historical tradition but of 300 to 400 years of ruthless oppression as the bottom caste of a stratified society. It takes more than oppression and degradation to create a nation. It takes a piece of turf and a culture of one's own.

Second, the move toward black separatism and "black power" is based on an extraordinary disregard of the blunt political realities of American society. It is premised on the assumption that blacks in America have the freedom and autonomy to shape their collective destiny. If only blacks develop a racial pride and group solidarity, according to this argument, they would in fact become a viable nation living, by some kind of magic, on a footing of equality with whites. This is the old separate-but-equal fallacy under a new guise. The whole of American history flies in the face of this fanciful theory. A pariah group comprising barely over one-tenth of the population, some 5 per cent of the wealth and virtually none of the power, can only perpetuate its oppression by retaining its separate group identity. For every American proud of being black there are nine who are proud of being white, and so long as Americans, white or black, continue to attach any importance to skin pigmentation, blacks will continue to get the short end of the stick. Whatever blacks might say or hope, the white definition of the social situation in the United States is far more consequential than the black one. This follows axiomatically from the enormous power disparity between whites and blacks. Whether one likes it or not, racial integration is the only solution; this, in turn, implies moving away from racial consciousness for both whites and blacks.

What seems to be happening at present is that the cultural revivalist wing of the black nationalist movement is turning into a passing fad similar to the other "alternate life styles" that swept the American scene in the 1960's. It is becoming commercialized in boutique and record shops, packaged for mass consumption in "soul" programs on television, emptied of any political significance and reduced to a form of escapism, a cheap and harmless substitute for drugs. The "political activist" wing of the movement, after a brief flurry of rhetorical militancy, is being coopted into the political mainstream in the form of conventional pressure group politics with its usual payoff in the way of petty patronage.

The disturbing thing is that the black "nationalist" movement has, at least temporarily, reversed a na-
tional trend toward integration and reactivated the dialectic of racism and counter-racism at a time when racism was slowly but surely losing its salience and its virulence. As the university campus was the most fertile ground for the development of neoracism, it is necessary to examine closely what happened there.

By the late 1950's and early 1960's, most American universities, and practically all the respectable ones, had virtually ceased to discriminate against individuals on the basis of race (though clearly not on the basis of sex). Questions about racial membership were taboo, photographs and other identifying devices were eliminated from application forms, racial or ethnic quotas were condemned, and the remnants of social segregation in dormitories, fraternities and other facilities were being finally eradicated. There was a noticeable decline in racist attitudes in successive student generations, and behavior such as interracial dating, once strongly condemned, became increasingly tolerated. The liberal credo of integration preached by the social scientists for the last quarter century was at last becoming part of the general campus culture among both faculty and students.

Then, in the mid-sixties, black militants began to challenge openly the integrationist aims of the mainstream of the civil rights movement and to draw away from coalitions with white liberals. The new slogans were black power and black pride. Black pride was a shift from Martin Luther King's fundamental concept of human dignity for all to a search for a specifically black identity in place of the demeaning negative self-image that blacks had taken over from white racist norms. Black pride, with its mystique of "soul," quickly became a black racist ideology to counteract white racist ideology. Black power, in its most pragmatic manifestations, boiled down to an advocacy of political organization and solidarity along racial lines. Underlying black power was the acceptance of the legitimacy of "race" as a social category. In short, black pride and black power were both reactions to white pride and white power, with racism as the common denominator. Even the mystique of "soul" was a transparent reformation of the nineteenth-century racist ideology: blacks supposedly had emotional qualities that went beyond the cold rationality of whites.

It now became necessary for black militants to redefine racism so that it could not be applied to their own behavior but would apply to almost anything done by whites. The trick was deftly performed by Carmichael and Hamilton when they coined the term "institutional racism." Promptly hailed by white academic liberals as a great conceptual contribution to the analysis of race relations, institutional racism was merely a new phrase for de facto discrimination. Anything which resulted in disproportionate representation of a racial group in any institutional sector of society was now defined as "institutional racism." Racism no longer had anything to do with belief, intentions, or attitudes but with statistical consequences. Racism had, by redefinition, become an impossibility for an underprivileged group; by the same redefinition, all members of the racially dominant group, irrespective of individual attitudes, are collectively guilty of racism. Thus, for example, a war in which the casualty rate is higher for black than for white soldiers is racist; so is an examination which results in a racial differential in the failure rate. From this sweeping redefinition of racism to outright paranoia is a small step indeed.

Soon we heard arguments that, for example, family planning services in black ghettos are part of a vast genocidal operation against Afro-Americans, which included pumping sterilizing agents in ghetto water supplies.
Institutional racism, besides shifting the definition from personal attitudes to social consequences, also shifted the focus from the individual to the racial collectivity. This was the step which contributed most directly to the re-escalation of genuine racism in America. Having accepted the legitimacy, indeed the desirability, of racial categorization and organization, the logic of collective ethics followed quite naturally. Just as blacks are solitary victims of oppression, whites must share the guilt for it. Since racial ancestry determines group membership, the guilt is passed on from generation to generation: today's white English teacher who commits the heinous crime of teaching standard "white" syntax to ghetto children is as surely oppressing black people as the eighteenth-century plantation overseer who whipped his slaves for the sheer fun of it. Both are agents of institutional racism.

The logic of collective ethics was most widely accepted by academic liberals, and for the universities it has had a number of consequences disturbingly similar to what happened to South Africa under the policy of apartheid. As did the proponents of apartheid in South Africa, black separatists started with the premise that people naturally gravitate toward "their own kind," that they like it that way and that racial segregation is necessary for the development of a "positive identity." The demands were no longer that individuals be evaluated on their merits but that they be looked at, first and foremost, as members of racial groups. The issue was no longer access to hitherto restricted institutions on a nondiscriminatory basis, but proportional racial representation. Under the euphemism of "affirmative action," the criteria of race, ethnicity, and more recently sex, were reintroduced as bases of admission, promotion or hiring; information on these items was specifically requested; applicants were categorized accordingly, with different levels of qualification applied to various groups; quotas and targets were assigned.

In short, the most blatant forms of racial, ethnic and sex discrimination were introduced under the guise of collective redress for past inequities. Initiated by blacks, the tactics of demanding "benign quotas" and "reverse discrimination" quickly spread to other racial and ethnic groups and were eventually adopted by militant feminists as well. Racial, ethnic or sex "militancy" became a cheap form of careerism and opportunism. Nonsense is always contagious when people are rewarded for uttering it.

Once members of minorities got admitted as students or hired as faculty or administrators under a multitude of "affirmative action" measures, it followed quite logically that they were not simply absorbed into the mainstream of the university. Tagged as members of minority groups at the outset, and admitted on the basis of particularistic standards, blacks and later other groups demanded and often obtained internal segregation within the universities. They established racially segregated student unions, dormitories, dining rooms, "cultural centers," study programs, offices of minority affairs, counseling services and the like. Underneath the pseudo-radical rhetoric of identity search, unique ethnic experiences, and taking the university to the community, many non-white students were in fact given a make-believe education in a system of tribal colleges very similar to those in South Africa. Minority administrators and faculty members were hired (often at greatly inflated salaries because of their scarcity value) as middlemen between their ascribed racial constituency and the various departments or units within the university. This created a situation of internal colonialism with the minority administrator or teacher in the position of "native chief." Black power degenerated into a comic opera of cooptation whereby black opportunists were hired by the academic establishment to keep their racial constituency quiet. Since listening to separatist bombast seems to have the greatest cathartic value for whites at this juncture, professional militants get hired for making racist noises.

The official version of what is happening has the characteristically rosy glow that one expects when the evaluators of programs are also their beneficiaries. College administrators hustling for federal grants vie with one another in whipping out skillfully doctored racial statistics on enrollments, scholastic performance and so forth. If nothing else, racial separation in the universities has created a substantial number of comfortable colonial satrapies for many persons of dubious competence. Any system of racial segregation creates a small minority of profiteers of racism among the oppressed groups. A system of racial segregation that establishes a duplicatory set of institutions creates a privileged professional class with a vested interest in segregation. If a young Ph.D. can get an extra $4,000 or $5,000 in starting salary simply for being some department's house nigger, he can be expected to espouse the rhetoric that will please the tribe he is being hired to please. Three or four years later, when he is appointed to a committee to evaluate the Black Studies Program, he can hardly be expected to pronounce it a failure and a dangerous delusion, since he lives off it.

While I cannot produce statistics to support my arguments, my fifteen years of university teaching and my academic specialization in race and ethnic relations give me, I think, sufficient reason for alarm. I am convinced that the present wave of neoracism is harmful to the integrity of American universities, to the position of minority groups and to the state of the Union. Among the phenomena I have recently observed on campuses are:
1. People of all groups cynically manipulate racial and ethnic particularism to achieve political or personal ends. Who is "minority," for example, gets defined and redefined to suit the expediency of the moment. To prove the success of a program, for instance, Asian-Americans may be included in the "minority" statistics, but when the spoils are to be distributed, their high level of achievement is said to disqualify them for underprivileged status. As the Kerner Commission gravely warned, we are increasingly moving toward a racially polarized society where civilized discourse and human relationships across color lines become ever more difficult.

2. "Affirmative action" is a competitive game, pitting minority groups against each other and greatly increasing racial tensions. Each minority group becomes suspicious and accusatory of the others and is forced to play a defensive game of staking preemptive claims to get its share of the "affirmative action." Previously unorganized groups are forced to fall into the pattern of racial or ethnic solidarity in self-defense. The process is infinitely divisive.

3. Many individuals resent the blatant inequities created by academic tribalization. Whites justifiably claim that they are being discriminated against on the basis of race and resent non-whites getting more pay for the same work. Men resent the preferential hiring of women, and women complain of male chauvinism. Asians accuse blacks of being pushy and aggressive. Chicanos complain that their low racial visibility leads whites to overlook them when seeking minority employees. Blacks resent being treated on the basis of racial group membership and channeled into race-related subjects.

4. A climate of moral blackmail and intellectual (or even physical) intimidation reigns on many campuses. Frequently the person who opposes racial discrimination and categorization is threatened, accused of racism and subjected to harassment in and out of the classroom. Attempts are made to remove professors who do not toe the black separatist line, who assign "racist" books, who have the "wrong" color or sex or who do not "relate" to certain groups of students. Conversely, appointments are made and courses created to please certain ethnic or racial groups. Academic freedom is massively attacked, especially that of minority group professors who are typically under far greater ideological, political, and even physical, pressures than whites.

5. Perhaps most insidiously of all, white academic liberals, through a combination of lack of courage, muddled racist thinking and guilt feelings, have adopted a double standard of ethical and intellectual evaluation. Under the appearance of benevolence they engage in a demeaning form of paternalism by granting non-white students higher grades than they deserve, learn to wink at cheating and plagiarism and tolerate racist behavior which they would condemn in white students.

More than any other institutional sector in American society, the academic establishment is guilty of tolerating this climate of racism and intimidation on the campuses, of suppressing evidence that apartheid policies result in mounting racial tensions, of rationalizing the suppression of nearly all universalistic standards as a temporary expedient to redress past inequities, and of itself practicing the most blatant forms of racial discrimination.

As we have noted, academic apartheid perpetuates separate and unequal education for the racial minorities. In effect, the university is being divided into a white mainstream, where universalistic standards apply, and a set of colonial enclaves for each of the minority groups, where various ethnic studies programs dispense a make-believe education. White students are admitted and evaluated on an individual, competitive, universalistic basis; non-white students are treated as members of groups in need of special remedial attention and treatment. This presumption of incompetence when dealing with non-white students, and blacks in particular, is so pervasive that it becomes virtually impossible for any scholar, however outstanding, who happens to come from a group declared to be "disadvantaged," to be treated on the basis of merit. The whole academic milieu becomes so suffused with racist thinking that inferiority (by whatever euphemism it is called—"culturally deprived," "educationally handicapped," "disadvantaged," "underprivileged") is once again collectively ascribed by race.

Try as one may, the present system makes it practically impossible to treat people as individuals. In the course of the last academic year alone, I received two requests from the Black Studies Program that I take a racial census of my classes, and a request from the Office of Minority Affairs that I drop a charge of forgery of grade records involving five minority students; two groups of students threatened me verbally in my office and accused me of racism when I refused to grant them grades other than the ones they had earned in open competition with the rest of the class; and the Black Students' Union, the Black Studies Program and the Vice President for Minority Affairs attacked me publicly in the mass media for alleged racism, petitioning the Dean of Arts and Sciences for my dismissal from the faculty. My crimes were refusing to pay any attention to my students' pigmentation and criticizing people and institutions who would force me to be a racist.

I conclude on this personal note not in a spirit of recrimination but merely to illustrate the immediacy of the problem we must all face up to. We, the self-styled academic custodians of rationality in the conduct of human affairs, dare not cave in to racism and anti-intellectualism, as we have tended to do. If we do cave in, perhaps it is true that Jupiter does indeed strike with madness those whom he would destroy.