

Kenneth Clark's Reconsideration

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Names such as Armor, Pettigrew, Glazer, Jencks, Herrnstein, Clark and Moynihan have not yet appeared in the pages of *Ring* magazine, but it seems only a matter of time. It is no secret, after all, that these men, all intellectual heavyweights, are engaged in an ongoing, fierce slugging match over a host of issues related to the "limits of social policy." Their verbal fisticuffs have been characterized by a good deal of fancy footwork, plenty of hard hitting, some low blows and inevitable cries of foul. For some time *Public Interest* was booking the best cards, but with more than 150 pages of its February, 1973, issue devoted to a detailed critique of Jencks's *Inequality*, it may be assumed that the *Harvard Educational Review* became, as it was during the Jensen brawl, the main arena of conflict. The bulk of recent attention was focused on the hard punching of Jencks's critics, but it would be a pity if the brilliant footwork of Kenneth Clark went unnoticed. His performance is simply remarkable.

Clark's contribution to the discussion of *Inequality* is entitled "Social Policy, Power, and Social Science Research," and it elaborates a line of argument which he had already expressed publicly in June, 1972: "Courts and political bodies should decide questions of school spending and integration, not on the basis of uncertain research findings, but on the basis of the constitutional and equity rights of human beings." This statement was cited by the *New York Times* in the context of a report about a press conference that was called by a group of lawyers and educators to denounce those social scientists who are questioning the efficacy of such cherished liberal educational strategies as increased school spending and forced busing. For Clark, it appears, Jencks's volume, which negates education as a vehicle for upward economic mobility, is the last straw, and "Social Policy, Power,

and Social Science Research" thus bristles with anger that masks a profound frustration.

Clark refers scornfully to "celebrity social scientist[s]" who exploit "Madison Avenue advertising techniques" in order to promote the "sophisticated intellectual fashion" that "all avenues of social and economic mobility . . . are closed to [minority-group] children, thus dooming them to intellectual and personal inferiority." These "skillful social scientist-public relations experts[s]" are preoccupied with "hawking their findings" to those policy-makers who desire to "maintain the status quo—or to reverse positive changes which have already been made." The "congruence between regressive educational policy and . . . prestigious, and well-publicized social science reports" suggests that the latter are a "sophisticated intellectual form of white backlash" that "reflect[s] and reinforce[s] the pervasive racism of America." Social scientists who offer a "counsel of despair" are, in sum, "indistinguishable from the active agents of injustice."

Given Clark's interpretation of the intent and import of what he regards as the dominant trend in social science research today, it is understandable that he is prepared to question "whether social scientists and the type of research for which they are responsible should be permitted to have any direct role in decisions on important matters of equity, justice, and equality among human beings." As "follower[s] of the political mood," who are dependent on public officials for "consultant favors," "public exposure" and "political influence," Clark maintains, social scientists are themselves "politicians, using scientific jargon, methodology, and computers in an attempt to disguise an essentially political role. . . ." Furthermore, all their research efforts are tainted by "class and racial biases which distort their interpretations." Thus, in spite of their "scientific pretensions," social scientists are "no more dependable in the quest for social justice than are other citizens." Society,

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Clark concludes, must therefore rely "upon the political, the legislative, and the judicial apparatuses—in spite of their imperfections—for determinations on matters of equity and justice."

What is one to make of all this? Certainly Clark is expressing a legitimate point of view on the proper relationship between social science research and important public policy decisions. He correctly notes that since 1954 there has been a "question among social scientists of the propriety of their involvement [in policy decisions and] the validity of their contribution. . . ." Remarkably enough, however, Clark fails to mention the fact that a good deal of this "questioning" has centered on his own role in the historic decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. It is difficult to know if Clark is being ironic or slyly clever when he cites Ernest van den Haag's "Social Science Testimony in the Desegregation Cases" (*Villanova Law Review*, Fall, 1960) as the source to document his point about a tradition of skepticism concerning social science involvement in public policy decisions. One would think it appropriate for Clark to indicate that van den Haag wrote his article specifically to challenge the staunch defense Clark made in "The Desegregation Cases: Criticism of the Social Scientists' Role" (*Villanova Law Review*, Winter, 1959-60) of his own efforts in this area.

Reading Clark's article in *Villanova Law Review* against the background of his piece in *Harvard Educational Review* is an eye-opening experience, for the two essays stand in total opposition. The former, written in the afterglow of the *Brown* ruling, exudes boundless enthusiasm relative to social science involvement in policy decisions. For Clark in 1959 social science is Truth, and he frankly states his inability to take seriously "the validity of the question which is implicit in the criticisms . . . of the role of . . . social scientists. . . ." Indeed, he suggests that such criticisms are expressed by individuals who "identif[y] with and seek to perpetuate the racial

status quo and . . . related power controls." Clark is certain that social scientists are "outstanding experts" and "men of integrity" who would never make "a single concession to expediency." It is absurd, he declares, to maintain that "the law and the courts of the land should be isolated in Olympian grandeur from the intellectual and scientific activities of man," since "there cannot be a 'legal fact' or a 'fact of common knowledge' which is not at the same time a 'scientific fact.'" Policy decisions "involve matters far too grave and crucial to be left to lawyers and judges alone."

Clark concludes his *apologia pro vita sua* with the prophetic and, in retrospect, ironic statement: "Those who question the propriety of [social science] collaboration [in determining policy matters] will probably increase the intensity of their criticism—particularly as social controversy and conflict increase. Nevertheless, some social scientists will continue to play a role in this aspect of the legal and judicial process because as scientists they cannot do otherwise."

Clark's total failure in "Social Policy, Power, and Social Science Research" to so much as acknowledge that there has been a shift (and what a shift!) in his views is a clear indication of his desire to bury the past. Having been a central, if not *the* central, advocate of active social science involvement in public policy decisions, Clark now completely negates any such idea—or almost so. After all, he continues to serve as president of the Metropolitan Applied Research Center, which seeks to "influence social policy on behalf of neglected and powerless groups in our society."

For the moment, therefore, Clark is willing to limit himself to a demand that social scientists "set up an apparatus to monitor scrupulously their own work and involvement in matters affecting social policy." Only thus, he insists, will it be possible to protect a "gullible public" from "seductive pretensions of scientific infallibility." But haven't we heard that before?