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Tyranny of the Minority

Teaching Race and Gender at Harvard

Somebody must have been telling lies about Joseph K., for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one morning.

— *Franz Kafka*

On February 9, 1988, Stephan Thernstrom, Winthrop Professor of history at Harvard University, opened the campus newspaper to read the headline, "Students Criticize Class as Racially Insensitive."¹ Thernstrom discovered that the class in question was "The Peopling of America," a course on the history of ethnic groups that he jointly taught with another eminent Harvard scholar, Bernard Bailyn. Three of his black students had charged him with "racial insensitivity." Wendi Grantham, a junior and chair of the Black Students Association political action committee, alleged that Thernstrom "said Jim Crow laws were beneficial," and that he "read aloud from white plantation owners' journals" that painted a "benevolent" picture of slavery. The students took their complaints to Harvard's Committee on Race Relations, an administrative committee set up by President Derek Bok to arbitrate such matters. An unnamed source on the committee said the case was being investigated.

"I was absolutely stunned when I read this," Thernstrom recalled. "None of the students had come to me with their complaints. And the comments they attributed to me were a ridiculous distortion of what I said in class. I simply did not know what to make of it."

Many on the Harvard campus were surprised, too, because Thernstrom had a good reputation as a progressive. *Perspective*, a

campus journal, characterized Thernstrom as "one of the stars in the liberal firmament."² Thernstrom's published works, going back to the early 1960s, are specialized and highly respected in his field.³ He is identified with the "new social history" that emphasizes the experience of common people, not just the policies of kings and "makers of events." Indeed he viewed his Harvard course as a "people's history" of America, one which would enlighten students about the complexity of civil rights issues and raise their social consciousness.

Stung by what he viewed as a meretricious and baseless attack, Thernstrom wrote a letter to the *Harvard Crimson* observing that, both in class and during office hours, he was "open to any student who wants to speak with me." By attempting to adjudicate their grievances through administrative committees and in the media, Thernstrom warned, students were engaging in a "McCarthyism of the left" which could exert a "chilling effect" both on academic freedom and on freedom of expression.⁴

Undergraduate Wendi Grantham responded to Thernstrom in the newspaper.⁵ "I do not charge that Thernstrom is a racist," she said. Nevertheless,

as a black student, I am left to question his sensitivity when affirmative action is incompletely defined as "government enforcement of preferential treatment in hiring promotion and college admissions." . . . I am also left to question his sensitivity when I hear that black men get feelings of inadequacy, beat their wives, and take off. . . . I am also left to question his sensitivity after reading his letter to the editor in *The Crimson*. . . . I also find it interesting that he never once says in his letter, "I apologize if what I said was misinterpreted." Never does he question himself.

Thernstrom's colleague Bailyn came to his defense, noting that far from being a bigot, Thernstrom "spent a great deal of time disarming racist attitudes."⁶ But the episode had already ignited a campuswide debate on what forms of controversial information should be barred from courses. Carolivia Herron, head tutor of the Afro-American Studies department (who has since moved to Mount Holyoke College), told the *Harvard Independent* that "by convention there are certain things that are forbidden to be spoken in the classroom." As an extreme example, Herron cited the case of a biology teacher who maintains theories of white racial superiority, but in all cases, Herron said, professors should be wary of presenting information in a context that would offend minorities.⁷

"I presented factual material in an objective and dispassionate way," Thernstrom protested. He pleaded guilty to the charge of quoting from Southern plantation journals: "It is essential for young people to hear what justifications the slave owners supplied for their actions." Thernstrom maintained that his review of segregation and Jim Crow laws was narrative and analytical, covering the usual arguments from the textbook. "I simply described the effect of these laws, and have to assume that it is the content of the laws that the students found hurtful." Similarly, Thernstrom said he supplied the familiar claims on both sides of the affirmative action question, and it had not even been Thernstrom himself who supplied the controversial definition; it was offered by another author in a book that Thernstrom had merely edited.

Yet, reflecting on the episode, Thernstrom's main concern was not irate students, but the lack of support he received from Harvard.

I felt like a rape victim, and yet the silence of the administration seemed to give the benefit of the doubt to the students who attacked me. Maybe I was naive, but I expected the university to come to my defense. I mean, that's what academic freedom is about, isn't it? Instead I was left out there by myself, guilty without being proven guilty. I could not even defend myself, because the charge of racism or racial insensitivity is ultimately unanswerable.

On February 18, 1988, a few days after the Thernstrom incident, Dean of the College Fred Jewett issued an open letter to the Harvard community.⁸ Without mentioning Thernstrom, Jewett said that "recent events" compelled him to "speak out loudly and forcefully against all kinds of prejudice, harassment and discrimination." The most common incidents, Jewett said, "occur in comments or actions where the students or faculty members involved may be partly or wholly unaware of the import of their words." Jewett added, "While such incidents may not require formal college discipline, they should elicit from appropriate college officials and from the community warnings and clear messages about the inappropriateness and insensitivity of such behavior. Every member of this community must be alert to this most insidious kind of intolerance and be ready to state publicly that it can have no place at Harvard."

In short, far from coming to his defense, Jewett appeared to give full administrative sanction to the charges against Thernstrom.

At the same time, Harvard issued its "Procedures for Dealing with Concerns of Racial Harassment," prepared with the assistance

of the affirmative action office and the dean of minority affairs. It defined this offense as consisting of any actions or words "which cause another individual or group to feel demeaned or abused because of their racial or ethnic background."⁹ Revealingly, the emphasis seemed to be not on the objective content of the behavior or language, but on the subjective response of the self-proclaimed victim. This statement, too, was widely viewed as an administrative rebuke to Thernstrom.

It was not until a month later, on March 9, 1988, that Dean of the Faculty Michael Spence (now a graduate dean of business at Stanford) clarified that Thernstrom's academic freedom would be protected: no disciplinary action would be taken against him. Spence did, however, praise the course of action of Thernstrom's accusers as "judicious and fair," because they had followed university grievance procedures.¹⁰ A couple of weeks later, Harvard president Bok said Thernstrom had a right to teach as he wished, but professors should be aware of "possible insensitivity" in lecturing. Bok wished the whole matter hadn't got so much press, because "public controversy often leads to rigid positions."¹¹

Thernstrom read these statements as equivocal at best: according to Harvard, he had the right to be racist, if he wished; but by defending himself publicly, he was being unreasonable and inflexible; he should try to be more "sensitive" in future. Meanwhile, the integrity of his critics and their charges remained unquestioned. As for Stephan Thernstrom, he has decided, for the foreseeable future, not to offer the course. "It just isn't worth it," he said. "Professors who teach race issues encounter such a culture of hostility, among some students, that some of these questions are simply not teachable any more, at least not in an honest, critical way."

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Thernstrom's experience was not unique, as Ian Macneil, who was Robert Braucher Visiting Professor of law at Harvard in 1989, will testify. Macneil's reputation was placed on the line during the spring semester when Bonnie Savage, the student head of the Harvard Women's Law Association (HWLA), in a widely publicized "open letter" accused him of "repeated instances of sexism in both your contracts textbook and your classroom discussions."¹²

Savage's main charge was that, on page 963 of Macneil's textbook, he illustrates the legal concept of the "battle of the forms" with a line from Byron's *Don Juan*: "A little still she strove, and much repented,/ And whispering, 'I will ne'er consent'—consented." Savage commented

that "depicting a woman . . . being dominated has no place in a contracts textbook." Further, Savage suggested that by implying that "women mean yes when they say no," Macneil was "promoting a dangerous misperception" that had been discredited in "rape law."

To this Savage added what she described as several "flippant, disparaging remarks" that Macneil had allegedly made when dealing with language that might be considered sexist. Among them: "Posner was the grandfather—or should I say grandmother?—of this idea." "That would be a strawman—or do we use that word anymore?" "Sauce for the goose, sauce for the gander—I don't know, is that sexist?" Savage concluded, "Sexist language is not a joking matter. By using sexist language, you encourage sexist thought and, in essence, promote hostility against women."

At first, Macneil says, he thought the letter came from a crank, but then he realized that Savage was writing on behalf of the Harvard Women's Law Association, which claims one-third of female law students as members. Further, Savage had sent copies to five senior law school officials for their consideration in the event that he "might be considered for tenure."

Realizing that the situation could become very serious, Macneil prepared a response,¹³ accusing the Harvard Women's Law Association of publicizing the grievances of "unnamed informers." In a point-by-point rebuttal, Macneil argued that Byron's *Don Juan* quotation was "a perfect summary of what happens in the Battle of the Forms." When parties attempt to negotiate contracts on their own terms, they believe that they are not dealing on the other person's terms; yet they go ahead with the contract, knowing that both parties' initial terms cannot have been satisfied. In short, "each side consents while whispering he or she will ne'er consent," Macneil explained. The legal point had nothing to do with gender, he added. If the Harvard Women's Law Association would supply him with "an equally concise, apt and literate quotation which makes this point without sex identification," Macneil said, he would use it in future revisions of the casebook.

Macneil recalled making some of the quips that Savage documented but claimed that "the joke is about the difficulties of using the poor old common everyday English language." If he were to stop students or himself every time they used a gender-specific phrase, Macneil said, "the class would come to a grinding halt." Finally Macneil said he believed his humor was in good form and was part of his teaching style.

Again, the local media entered the fracas with such stories as

"Law Prof Denies Sexism Charge."¹⁴ And the HWLA publicized its version of the story in its newsletter distributed around campus. Finding Macneil's response "distressing," the HWLA noted, "A teacher who sought to be fair and effective would want to address the criticism, not by defensive denial, but by listening, trying to understand, and attempting to make the classroom comfortable for all. There is no use for a hidden curriculum which makes women unable to concentrate."¹⁵ The implication was that Macneil's alleged sexism was so offensive that female law students could not study in such an environment. It was a barrier to learning and therefore a form of discrimination.

As before, the administration remained silent throughout the controversy, allowing Macneil to fend for himself against his feminist adversaries. Eventually the publicity subsided, but because of the nature of the charges, their gravity, and their essential unanswerability, Macneil, like Thernstrom, felt that "I could not really clear myself."

A few months after the Macneil controversy, in September 1989, Harvard released new guidelines for sexual harassment by faculty members. A section on "Sexism in the Classroom" warned that "Alienating messages may be subtle and even unintentional, but they nevertheless tend to compromise the learning experience of both sexes." Professors were asked not to "focus attention on sex characteristics in a context in which sex would otherwise be irrelevant. . . . For example, it is condescending to make a point of calling only upon women in a class on topics such as marriage and the family, imposing the assumption that only women have a natural interest in this area."¹⁶

Macneil had little doubt on whose side the Harvard administration ended up in his dispute with the HWLA.

Macneil has chosen not to seek an extension of his teaching appointment but to move on to Northwestern University School of Law. Bitterly recounting his Harvard experience, Macneil said, "These days conscientious teachers are under constant stress trying to maintain effective student-teacher relations in the face of various forms of near-paranoia. The buzzword is sensitivity, and the intimidation is intense."

While several of his colleagues "made private supportive gestures," Macneil said, "no one at Harvard Law School or Harvard University recognized the dangers to academic freedom." He concluded, "The most common response on American campuses in general, and Harvard University in particular, to those who would destroy academic freedom is, at best, apathy and avoidance, and, at worst, cowering appeasement."¹⁷

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These are not simply two regrettable episodes of professors running into a bout of bad luck with truculent students. There is a reason why Thernstrom and Macneil encountered such bitter resentment, with the result that such instances will continue to occur, and frequently; indeed there is every reason to believe that they are happening now on campuses across the nation. American higher education has succumbed to a new politics of racial and sexual "sensitivity," which now dominates debate on all controversial questions involving race, gender, or sexual orientation.

In her article denouncing Thernstrom, Wendi Grantham observed, "This is not politics. This is personal. . . . Whites control the American power structure, thus they can listen to discussions on apartheid or race relations without feeling threatened. But in similar discussions, blacks cannot divorce their personal lives from racial theory, because racist sentiment attempts to deny their daily lives and questions their validity as human beings."¹⁸ For Grantham, "academic freedom is not truly equal, nor is freedom of speech, when the majority's freedom is greater than that of the minority."¹⁹ In short, Grantham viewed the issue not as a question of freedom, but of power; not as one of accuracy, but of sensitivity.

When professors teach about race and gender, remarked Harvard government professor Martin Kilson, "You're not talking about Ming art or ancient Greek drawings, you're talking about something that's up close for a lot of people."²⁰ Kilson's point is that minorities, especially blacks, feel a special personal engagement in issues such as slavery and segregation. These institutions may not have directly affected young blacks, but they have left a deep psychological imprint. Black students feel a strong stake in the teaching of what they consider their personal experience.

This was evident during the Thernstrom controversy when Camille Holmes, president of Harvard's Black Students Association, said that affirmative action should not be defined as preferential treatment. "That definition sounds like you're holding a gun to someone's head and saying: hire these incompetent black people."²¹ Another black student told a local newspaper that Thernstrom's main failing was that he "refused to acknowledge the way in which we experience his course." Particularly irksome was Thernstrom's failure to apologize. "This was a reaction which illegitimized my feelings, as a black student, about what was said."²²

These sensitivities seem to cover the entire agenda of civil rights issues. Even on such questions as crime rates, unemployment, illegiti-

macy, and drugs, Harvard sociologist Nathan Glazer observes, "We have to deal with some very bad news when we talk about blacks, the largest American minority. We have to talk about unpleasant matters, matters that blacks will find upsetting and depressing, and that can only make them unhappy."²³ Consequently the university has a special responsibility to ensure that professors are free to deal with controversial material without intimidation. Universities are not forced to engage these issues, but if they choose to have a curriculum that includes Afro-American Studies and Women's Studies departments, and courses on race and feminism and homosexuality, they cannot legitimately suppress debate on these questions. Yet Glazer, who teaches courses on ethnicity, remarks that "the level of sensitivity is so high, it's hard to figure out what you can and cannot say."²⁴

On many campuses, minority and feminist sensitivity translates into academic taboos. Administration officials and faculty committees seldom resist these taboos; typically they enforce them, both through regulations and through ostracism, with a rigor that puts everybody who deals with these questions on constant guard.

The Case of Murray Dolfman

Nobody in Professor Dolfman's class in legal studies at the University of Pennsylvania could identify where the term "servitude" could be found in the American Constitution, so Dolfman commented that there were "ex-slaves" in the class who should have an idea. "I don't know if I should have used the term," Dolfman recalled, "but it got students to think of the Thirteenth Amendment right away."

Shortly afterwards, a few minority students came up to Dolfman and accused him of racial insensitivity. A second charge against Dolfman was that he had once told a black student to change his pronunciation from "de" to "the." Dolfman said that he met with the students, and apologized if they had taken offense. "I told them that I understood and shared their concerns, that I am Jewish and during *seder* we pray: When we were slaves unto Pharaoh." Dolfman also pointed out that it would be important for students, in courtroom argument in later years, to speak in a clear and comprehensible manner.

"They seemed to understand," Dolfman recalled, and the matter was dropped for a few months. But after that, during Black History Month, it was brought up again and again, Dolfman said, "to illustrate just how bad things are at Penn."

The adrenalin generated by the Black History Month rhetoric

brought about a demonstration of minority students, several dozen of whom occupied Dolfman's class and prevented him from teaching. "They read a document of indictment to my students," Dolfman said. President Sheldon Hackney met with Dolfman and asked him to refrain from public comment, even to abstain from defending himself against accusations. Then Hackney joined the ranks of the accusers, telling the campus newspaper that conduct such as Dolfman's was "absolutely intolerable." Dolfman was pressured to issue what he termed a "forced apology," and to attend "racial awareness" sessions on campus. The university subsequently decided not to renew Dolfman's teaching contract for a year.

Dolfman is now back at Penn, a chastened man. "The message has been driven home very clearly," Dolfman said. "You can't open your mouth on these issues now without fear of being humiliated."²⁵

The Case of Pete Schaub

When Pete Schaub, a business major at the University of Washington at Seattle, enrolled in a Women's Studies class in early 1988, he expected to learn about "the history of women and the contributions they have made." Schaub said his mother was a 1960s' rebel who divorced his father and moved to rural Washington state to live "close to the land."

"Introduction to Women's Studies," taught by Donna Langston and Dana-Michele Brown, was not what Schaub had expected. On the first day of class Brown asserted that "the traditional American family represents a dysfunctional family unit." Students who protested that their families were functional were shouted down by teaching assistants hired by Langston and Brown. "Denial, denial," they yelled in unison. A few days later Langston brought guest speakers to talk about masturbation. "They said you don't need a man," Schaub said. "They proceeded to show how to masturbate with a feather duster, and they had dildos right there."

When Professor Brown claimed that U.S. statistics showed that lesbians could raise children better than married couples, Schaub asked for the source. "I asked after class," Schaub said. "I wasn't challenging her." But the teacher "wouldn't hear of it. She said: 'Why are you challenging me? Get away from me. Just leave me alone.'" A member of Brown's undergraduate circle called Schaub a "chauvinist goddamn bastard." The next day, Schaub was banned from class. The teacher had two campus police officers waiting in the hall to escort him away.

Schaub protested to the administration, but nothing happened for several weeks. Finally he was permitted to go back to class, but advised by Associate Dean James Nason to drop the course.²⁶

The Case of Julius Lester

A few years ago, Julius Lester, a professor of Afro-American Studies who has taught at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst for nearly two decades, published a book about his conversion to Judaism. *Lovesong* included criticism of black novelist James Baldwin, whom Lester charged with making anti-Semitic remarks.

All fifteen of Lester's Afro-American Studies colleagues collaborated on a forty-page report which called for Lester to be expelled from the department. "It was obvious that I was no longer wanted around," Lester said. "Members of the department disparaged my work, refused to speak with me, and there were overtones of anti-Semitism." Lester added that he had been suspect in the department since 1984, when he had criticized Jesse Jackson's claim to be the spokesman for the whole black community.

Lester has since been transferred to the Judaic and Near Eastern Studies department, where he now teaches. In the Afro-American Studies department, "there is a certain ideological perspective," he said, and penalties follow "if one departs too much from it, or is critical of it. I was just exercising a different perspective."²⁷

The Case of Rosalind Rosenberg

When the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) sued the Sears company for failing to hire a sufficient number of women in sales, Sears said it simply could not find women who wanted to take that kind of job, and asked Rosalind Rosenberg, a feminist scholar at Barnard, to testify about historical reasons why women preferred certain jobs over others.

By agreeing to testify, Rosenberg placed herself in opposition to Alice Kessler-Harris of Hofstra University, the main witness for the EEOC. After the trial, Judge John Nordbert of the U.S. District Court of Northern Illinois concluded that Rosenberg was "a well-informed witness who offered reasonable, well-supported opinions." By contrast, he criticized Kessler-Harris for relying on "sweeping generalizations . . . not supported by credible evidence." Sears won the case.

Rosenberg, however, suffered in the feminist community of which she had been, until then, a member in good standing. Academic journals

such as *Signs* and *Feminist Studies* denounced her decision to testify, and in an unusual move, members of the Coordinating Committee of Women in the Historical Profession and the Conference Group in Women's History passed a resolution at the American Historical Association annual meeting stating, "We believe as feminist scholars we have a responsibility not to allow our scholarship to be used against the interests of women struggling for equity in our society."²⁸ Nothing was said about any higher obligation to truth unfettered by ideological predisposition.

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The problems of teaching race and gender, especially in university departments of Afro-American Studies and Women's Studies, go back to the introduction of such programs. Beginning as an experiment initiated at San Diego State University in 1970, Women's Studies has grown to be a separate program or independent department in over five hundred American universities.²⁹ Similarly, Afro-American Studies has expanded from seventy-eight programs in 1978 to some three-hundred fifty now,³⁰ and several universities have set up major African and Afro-American research centers, such as the Center for the Study of Black Literature and Culture at the University of Pennsylvania; the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute at Harvard; the Carter G. Woodson Institute at the University of Virginia; the Africana Studies and Research Center at Cornell; and the Frederick Douglass Institute at the University of Rochester.

In many cases, universities agreed to open such departments and programs following protests and takeovers by students in the late 1960s and early 1970s.³¹ Although the 1960s' protesters insisted on the fundamental right to dissent, their enthusiasm for it evaporated shortly after they were allowed to enter the establishment. By temperament, these activists were not partisans of robust argument for its own sake; they were fierce exponents of a set of values which they characterized as peaceful and life-affirming, and hostile to alternative views which they called warlike and bigoted. Having gained a measure of power, the protesters wanted to consolidate and use it to fight the social evils they perceived all around them. Thus from the outset minority studies departments reflected the determined ideological focus of their activist founders.

The official incorporation of radical perspectives did not satisfy everyone, however. Some black leaders and intellectuals who had been active in the civil rights movement expressed concern about possible

consequences. In 1969, NAACP executive director Roy Wilkins accused college administrators of trying to "buy peace at any price" by setting up "sealed-off Black Studies centers" for "racial breast-beating."³² Around the same time, Bayard Rustin warned that "black studies should not be used to enable young black students to escape the challenges of the university by setting up a program of 'soul courses' that they can just play with and pass."³³ And educator Kenneth Clark, an authority cited by the Supreme Court to justify its desegregation ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, resigned from the board of Antioch University because the college was "silent" while black militants "intimidate, threaten and in some cases physically assault the Negro students who disagree with them"; in fact, Clark said, Antioch was "permitting a group of students to inflict their dogmatism and ideology on other students and on the total college community."³⁴

There have been changes since the 1960s: Houston Baker of the University of Pennsylvania charts four phases of the development of Afro-American Studies. The first phase was the establishment of pilot projects as a concession to the clamor of the counterculture; the second brought academics like St Clair Drake and Eileen Southern from historically black schools to supervise the newly installed Afro-American Studies programs; the third phase involved the staffing and expansion of these programs, and the development of "new paradigms"; we are now in the fourth phase, involving a further expansion of special programs as well as penetration into the mainstream disciplines.³⁵

Women's Studies has seen, if anything, more proliferation. One reason for this is the widespread availability of qualified female PhDs who enter the academy, as compared with the very small number of black PhDs. In fact, Glenn Loury, formerly of Harvard's Afro-American Studies department and now at the Kennedy School of Government there, complains that "feminists used the civil rights issue to seize power in the universities. They now have the chairs and tenured positions. Although we helped this to come about, yet we blacks have reaped very thin gains."

Both Afro-American Studies and Women's Studies claim credit for a significant corpus of work in the past two decades. It is certainly true that St Clair Drake's *Black Folk Here and There*, Nathan Huggins' *Harlem Renaissance*, and Eugene Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll* have influenced scholarship in the fields of history, sociology, and literature. So have such landmark texts such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Elaine Showalter's *The New Feminist Criticism*, and Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*.

Most of these studies, however, were not produced in Afro-American Studies and Women's Studies departments.³⁶ Two of the classic studies of the black family, W. E. B. Du Bois' *The Negro American Family*, written in 1903, and E. Franklin Frazier's *The Negro Family in the United States*, written in 1939, were produced long before the introduction of Afro-American Studies departments. The question, therefore, is not whether Afro-American Studies and Women's Studies produce important scholarship, but whether such scholarship would not have been produced in the absence of such programs. Major scholars of the black experience, such as St Clair Drake, Allison Davis, Kenneth Clark, Vivian Henderson, and W. Arthur Lewis were all trained in traditional social science fields.³⁷ Even now, many scholars who teach Afro-American Studies and Women's Studies have joint appointments in other departments.

For universities, one of the main attractions of the so-called "studies" programs is that they are means to increase the representation of female and minority faculty on the campus. Walter Allen, a sociologist at UCLA, argues that Afro-American Studies appointments are irrelevant for the likes of St Clair Drake and Carter Woodson, but essential for younger scholars of color trying to gain a foothold in the academy. "Without these programs, many campuses wouldn't have black professors. The departments have been playing an affirmative action role," Allen says.³⁸ Because the *raison d'être* of these departments and programs is less scholarly than political, however, they have developed the academic stigma of being what Harvard's former Afro-American Studies chairman Nathan Huggins called the "poor second cousin," tolerated but never fully accepted by professors in traditional or mainstream fields.

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The main academic justification for Afro-American Studies and Women's Studies is that they provide distinctive black and female "perspectives" that are otherwise ignored in the mainstream departments. Houston Baker of the University of Pennsylvania calls for a "quest to identify a Black Aesthetic, so as to break the interpretive monopoly on Afro-American expressive culture . . . held from time immemorial by a white liberal critical establishment."³⁹ In a Women's Studies text used at Harvard and other schools, feminist author Bell Hooks claims, "I write from the particular experience of living as a black woman in the United States, a white-supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal society, where small numbers of white men constitute ruling groups."⁴⁰

What exactly are these race and gender viewpoints? Usually these

are defined at a high level of generality, but occasionally academics have offered specific examples. One scholar who teaches race relations maintains that white cultural values emphasize logical argument, civility, and sexual restraint whereas black cultural values emphasize emotional argument, and social and sexual spontaneity.⁴¹ An Afro-American Studies professor at Temple University gives an exhaustive listing of "white norms"; even Santa Claus, he maintains, is an example of white "symbol imperialism" which oppresses blacks.⁴² Elaine Showalter, who teaches Women's Studies at Princeton University, argues that male researchers typically ignore women's issues; thus a feminist perspective would emphasize much-needed research into female eating disorders such as the "binge-purge syndrome."⁴³

The invocation of black and female perspectives is not restricted to speculative fields such as literature, but also to mathematics, law, and science. A feminist advocacy group, the Center for Women Policy Studies, has attacked the SAT standardized test on the grounds that most of the questions tend to be about "science, sports and war" which are masculine interests, while only a few questions are about "relationships, clothing and appearances," which are feminine strengths.⁴⁴ Some feminists have argued that science itself is a masculine discipline;⁴⁵ Harvard biology professor Ruth Hubbard criticizes the hard sciences for overvaluing systematic knowledge, such as the information obtained in laboratories, and undervaluing "orally transmitted knowledge," such as recipes and other household wisdom.⁴⁶

Two prominent legal scholars maintain that the experience of oppression gives persons of color a unique perspective on law.⁴⁷ Leslie Bender of Syracuse University School of Law argues that "the feminine voice can design a tort system that encourages behavior that is caring . . . and responsive to others' needs and hurts," far preferable to the "masculine voice of rights, autonomy and abstraction."⁴⁸ In 1988 about fifty black students seized the dean's office at the Harvard Law School, calling for "diversifying the curriculum to reflect the experience of people of color and women and to insure that these issues are properly integrated into the teaching of all first-year courses."⁴⁹ In a much-publicized incident, Harvard Law professor Derrick Bell refused to teach his courses, announcing that he would take unpaid leave until Dean Robert Clark gave a tenured appointment to a black woman. Although Bell said it was necessary for Harvard to provide students with a black female perspective, the only black woman on the law faculty, visiting professor Regina Austin, condemned Bell's protest as patronizing and "just another manifestation of patriarchy."⁵⁰

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, who heads the Women's Studies pro-

gram at Emory University in Atlanta, acknowledged that "much of this talk about white and black perspectives is pure nonsense. In fact, it degrades us to speak as though rationality and logic were entirely masculine white concepts. And black and female authors deserve better—Zora Neale Hurston, for example, didn't want to be a 'black female.' She wanted to be Shakespeare." Stephen Carter of Yale Law School questioned the widespread belief that slavery and domestic subjugation helped forge a distinctive black and female perspective. "Just because we have a shared experience of oppression as blacks doesn't mean that other people cannot understand it." And Randall Kennedy of Harvard Law School has taken on the "new minority scholarship" in a much-discussed article in the *Harvard Law Review*. "Stated bluntly," Kennedy said, advocates of a black perspective on law "fail to support persuasively their claims of racial exclusion or their claims that legal academic scholars of color produce a racially distinctive brand of valuable scholarship."⁵¹

Perhaps the worst consequence of dividing scholarship into "black" and "white," or "male and female," argues Michael O'Brien, a history professor at Miami University of Ohio, is to balkanize the academy. "Academe has become a kind of parliament, with each member a self-appointed delegate from a particular constituency. Each one struggles to be heard and seeks allies in an effort to attain power." O'Brien argues that "cultural egocentricity has replaced cosmopolitanism as the ethic."⁵² The quest for diversity thus risks its own forms of closure and parochialism.

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The distinctive perspective of the field is typified by Harvard Women's Studies professor Alice Jardine's class on "French Literary Criticism," whose November 22, 1989, session is fairly representative of numerous Women's Studies classes I attended, at Harvard and elsewhere.

The atmosphere in Jardine's course resembled a political rally. The seminar group was almost entirely female: twenty-five women versus three men. Headbands and turquoise jewelry, loose long shirts, and pins advertising various causes filled the room. There were no blacks in the class; a couple of the women were Asian. The mood in Jardine's class, while not exactly festive, was bustling, energetic. A student went to the board and put up a poster of a "Fifty Foot Woman"; everybody smiled at this emblem of female power.

Jardine, a vivacious woman who likes to sit on the front of her desk when she lectures, began with what she called "the usual announce-

ments." First, she advertised a lecture by a Marxist feminist on "Killing Patriarchy" which "should be quite fun to go to." Next, English professor Joseph Boone was giving a paper. "He's one of our few male feminists," Jardine explained. "He was recently denied tenure here on account of his feminism." Jardine said students should "show support" for Boone by attending his lecture. She also announced a rally to protest sexual harassment.

It was time for students to describe their term papers. A male student volunteered to provide "a feminist reading of Ernest Hemingway." Loud chuckles. Jardine offered a friendly jibe at "Ernest." The students weighed in, everybody commenting on "Ernest" and his famous misogyny.

A female student gave a précis of her paper on Bessie Head's novel *Maru*, which is about tribal conflict in South Africa. This brought gasps of admiration. *Maru* was about how different African tribes learned to get along, the student said, symbolized in the end by the marriage between a man and woman from different tribes. But Jardine's student thought she spotted something interesting between the tribal woman and a female friend. She didn't say it was lesbianism, but she did say it was "important." Her only regret was that "heterosexual union comes at the price of female relationships in *Maru*."

Throughout these descriptions one female student offered ribald one-liners about a man who lost his penis, penises that were cut off, accidents in which every part of the victim was recovered—except the penis. These brought loud and unembarrassed laughter from the professor and other students.

Eventually Jardine got around to the day's text, Marguerite Duras' *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*. "I am reading not for the story," she said. "I am reading for the signifiers." She proceeded to employ post-structuralist analysis, making acronyms from the first letters of sentences, adding up lines, and producing ingenious if implausible mathematical diagrams. "There are a lot of tropes in the novel: vegetable, animal, mineral, and so on," Jardine went on. "The *v* of vegetable," she said, "is perhaps the *V* which is Lol Stein's middle name." One student asked if Duras intended any of this; it seemed so remote from the language of the novel. "Duras must have been a mathematical genius," the student blurted out. "I've met Duras," Jardine said. "I think all of this was massively unconscious. Massively."

Jardine peppered the students with the names of the usual post-structuralist authorities: Foucault, Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Lacan. Her language alternated between French and English; the especially titillating

and radical quips were all in French. I was struck by the frequency of her appeals to authority, "Most feminist theorists think . . . ," "It is widely agreed by feminists that . . . ," and so on.

Talking with students after class, I found that they took all of this with extreme seriousness; there was not a hint of irony in anything they said. Comfortable, well-fed, and obviously intelligent, their conspicuous embitterment with and alienation from American society were hard to comprehend. Besides, whatever the malady, it was hard to imagine it being remedied by this sort of intellectual fare, so esoteric and yet so vulgar, so free-wheeling and yet so dogmatic, so full of political energy and yet ultimately so futile.

* * *

The unifying characteristic of race and gender education programs is that they are results-oriented; they have a point of view. It is certainly the case that individual professors in university English or history departments will incline to their own interpretations, or espouse a set of interpretations that could plausibly be termed "ideological." An English professor may identify with the New Criticism; a philosopher may think of himself as a historicist; a sociologist may apply functionalist analysis. More conventionally ideological styles, such as libertarianism or Marxism, may provide a frame of reference for particular scholars in various fields. In no other area, however, is there a shared orthodoxy for the entire department, indeed for the *entire field*. In fact, there is typically a wide range of positions within departments, and universities usually go out of their way to assure that these differences are reflected in the curriculum. But this is not the case in Women's Studies and Afro-American Studies.

Speaking at a conference of Afro-American scholars, Dona Marimba Richards of Hunter College defined the way the topics were approached: "We see ourselves as necessarily activist scholars who are committed to the self-determination of our people."⁵³ Molefi Asante, chairman of the African Studies department at Temple University, says that being black is an essential, though not sufficient, condition for presenting a truly "Afrocentric" perspective in the classroom. "You cannot call any African-American discourse, merely because it is uttered by a black person, Afro-centric. Much of so-called black discourse is essentially white or Eurocentric discourse by black people."⁵⁴ Asante's point is that Afro-American scholarship must be politically radical in order to qualify as truly black. Similarly, Harvard's Derrick Bell denounced his black faculty colleagues as "people who look black and

think white."⁵⁵ Thomas Kochman, a white professor who teaches courses in race relations at the University of Illinois, maintains that at the outset of his classes he announces his political solidarity with the black cause, otherwise he does not believe he will receive "support and cooperation" from blacks.⁵⁶

These sharply defined notions of pedagogic authenticity also obtain in history, sociology, and American studies courses dealing with race and gender. Jane DeHart, a historian at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, remarked that "many of us gravitated to the new scholarship on race, gender and class as a key to understanding, and changing, power relations in society."⁵⁷ Linda Kerber, past president of the American Studies Association, defines the outlook in her field: "Freed from the defensive constraints of cold war ideology, empowered by our new sensitivity to the distinctions of race, class and gender, we are ready to begin to understand difference as a series of power relationships involving domination and subordination, and to use our understanding of power relationships to reconceptualize both our interpretation and our teaching of American culture."⁵⁸

Perhaps nowhere are these pedagogic and ideological premises more strongly and consistently found than in Women's Studies departments and programs. Women's Studies professor Sandra Gilbert of the University of California at Davis compares feminism to a religious conversion, noting that "most feminist critics speak like people who must bear witness, people who must enact and express in their own lives and words the revisionary sense of transformation."⁵⁹ Myra Dinnerstein, director of the Southwest Institute for Research on Women at the University of Arizona, observes, "The origin of Women's Studies lies in the women's movement—there wouldn't have been women's studies if there wasn't a consciousness that women were a group that was being discriminated against." Dinnerstein maintains that feminist presuppositions lead to radical conclusions. "Learning about women is itself revolutionary."⁶⁰

Often these political implications are explicitly stated. Janet Lee, a Women's Studies professor at Mankato State University, maintains in a catalog description that in her class

a central objective is feminist praxis in action. . . . Central is the goal of integrating feminist theory and an understanding of racial inequality into a class analysis so that we may understand the status of all women under capitalist patriarchy. Also included is an analysis of poverty, social welfare, and the consequences of Reaganomics on individual women's

lives. Race is integrated throughout the course. The class is taught from a feminist perspective.

Lee adds, "Also as integration of content and process, theory and action, we have collectively participated in direct collective action for social change. This gives hands-on experience in strategies for social change." She observes that grading is based in part on "participation in the action project."⁶¹

Many scholars assert that it is simply impossible to oppose feminism and be hired to teach Women's Studies. In fact, the Committee on the Status of Women at the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) maintains that criticism of feminism or Women's Studies is impermissible because it has a "disparate impact on women faculty and chills the intellectual climate for academic women."⁶² Within the parameters of feminism, debate may be entertained, but feminism itself is not open to question. "Feminist education has become institutionalized in universities via Women's Studies programs," remarks feminist writer and teacher Bell Hooks.⁶³

Women's Studies even has its own distinctive terminology. Professors frequently speak of (*her*)story and *malestream* thought.⁶⁴ The term *freshman* is now *first-year student*, one must say *Ms* instead of *Miss*, *waiters* are *waitpersons* or *waitrons*, committees are headed by *chairpersons* or *chairs*.⁶⁵ Some feminist teachers won't spell the term *women* because it includes the word *men*; instead, they prefer *wimmin* or *wombyn*. One professor at Washington University in St. Louis refuses to use the word *seminar* because it smacks of masculinity; instead she prefers the term *ovular*;⁶⁶ a faculty women's committee at McGill cannot bring itself to say *seminal*.⁶⁷ President James Freedman of Dartmouth, who calls himself a feminist, accuses the *Dartmouth Review* of "ad hominem and ad feminem" attacks.⁶⁸ Yale historian Howard Lamar says that his course on "Cowboys and Indians" should now be called "Cowpersons and native Americans."⁶⁹ It is now commonplace, in scholarly books and journals throughout the humanities, to find the term "she" used generically, as in "When a scientist makes a discovery, she submits it for peer review."

At Harvard in the fall of 1989, an introductory course on the study of women, "Women's Studies 10 A," assigned the following texts: Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*, Hooks' *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* and *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, Banks' *Faces of Feminism*, de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Davis' *Women, Race and Class*, and Donovan's *Feminist Theory*. Some of these books

are certainly worth reading, but they all reflect a similar, if not identical, understanding of gender difference. None of these books can be described as even mildly critical of feminist ideology.

This one-sided reading list seems to falsely imply that the breadth of views about women's roles in society are reflected in the course. Certainly most women in America do not identify themselves as feminists. In fact, survey data indicate that a majority eschew the feminist label.⁷⁰ If women's studies is "political" in the sense that it speaks for women, where are non-feminist or antifeminist women to be found? Where are their arguments to be heard, or are we to assume that they are bereft of arguments?

Ironically, some of the same people who most stridently oppose a great books canon seem most active in devising their own consciously ideological and highly exclusive canon for race and gender education. This project has authoritative sanction in the form of a handbook published by the American Sociological Association for those who teach race and gender called *An Inclusive Curriculum*. It includes model course formulations and reading lists drawn from such courses across the country. In the section on gender, a rough tabulation indicates that approximately 90 percent of the texts are explicitly feminist, and the rest relate to feminist concerns; there is no text that could fairly be described as antifeminist, and there is virtually no material that falls outside the familiar feminist agenda.⁷¹

At Women's Studies conferences, not only are the ideological goals of the academic program discussed, but also how to camouflage these goals for marketing purposes. At a 1985 conference, for instance, Penny Gold of Knox College recommended that Women's Studies programs should be renamed Gender Studies:

If the goal is to reach as many people as possible, Gender Studies may be the best name. It is not immediately identifiable with a particular political movement. Related to wider student appeal is also, of course, wider faculty and administrative appeal. It may be easier to get [appropriations for] Gender Studies through faculty committees.⁷²

The trend for the future appears to be toward greater radicalism. Allison Jaggar, Women's Studies chair at the University of Cincinnati and head of the Committee on the Status of Women at the American Philosophical Association, recently denounced the nuclear family as a "cornerstone of oppression" and eagerly anticipated scientific advances to eliminate such biological functions as insemination, lactation, and

gestation. "One woman could inseminate another . . . men and nonparitutive women could lactate . . . fertilized ova could be transferred into women's or even men's bodies."⁷³ For the first time, Harvard and Yale have assembled Curriculum Committees to explore course material on "Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Studies."⁷⁴ Washington University in St. Louis now has an academic group, the Organization for Changing Men, which seeks to show students that they "are locked into homophobic constructs" in their daily life.⁷⁵ Kenyon and other colleges are beginning programs in Men's Studies, which apply feminist principles in opposition to what one professor calls "the white, male, heterosexual, able-bodied, Christian, middle-class norm."⁷⁶

One reason for this increasing radicalism is that, with the collapse of Marxism and socialism around the world, activist energies previously channelled into the championship of the proletariat are now "coming home," so to speak, and investing in the domestic liberation agenda. A good metaphor of this is that Angela Davis, former vice presidential candidate of the U.S. Communist party, is now professor of the politics of reproduction at San Francisco State University.⁷⁷

* * *

The monolithic ideological focus of the so-called "studies" programs seems to have produced a relentless, even fanatical, conformity of thought in which "diversity" loses its procedural meaning and assumes substantive content. In other words, "diversity" does not refer to a range of views on a disputed question, but rather entails enlisting in a regiment of ideological causes which are identified as being "for diversity." For instance, to be "for diversity" you must believe that homosexuality as a sexual preference is morally neutral, or that women have been victims of domestic incarceration through history; if you resist these notions, then you are "against diversity" and eligible for sanctions and abuse.

The paradox is heightened by the recognition that this campus heckling and ostracism is generated on behalf of minorities. In a democratic society, this comes as a surprise. Indeed, the American founders and later Alexis de Tocqueville feared the political and intellectual "tyranny of the majority." They assumed that in a regime of majority rule, the danger is that the majority will inflict its views on the unwilling minority. The founders considered various strategies to counter this danger.⁷⁸

But hardly anyone predicted the possibility of a tyranny of the minority, or more precisely, tyranny in the name of minority victims.

Marching under the banner of equality, the new race and gender scholarship seems in reality to promote principles of inequality—minority sentiments are placed on a pedestal while majority sentiments are placed on trial. Those who challenge this intellectual framework are accused of collaborating in the historic crimes perpetrated against minorities.

How is this bullying pedagogy carried out, and what effect does it have on students, especially minority students on whose behalf Women's Studies and Afro-American Studies claim to be working?

* * *

Afro-American Studies and Women's Studies are only part of the American university's ideological project in sensitivity training. Columbia, Brown, Dartmouth, Wayne State, Michigan, and many other colleges now have sensitivity education seminars aimed at countering the perceived resurgence of bigotry among students, notably white men. William Damon, the chairman of the education department at Brown University, argues that "racial education programs should emphasize discussions in which trained instructors . . . provide clear justification for any racially or ethnically sensitive admissions or hiring criteria that students may see on campus. . . . It is important to make such programs mandatory, so that they can reach students who otherwise might not be inclined to participate."⁷⁹

Most sensitivity programs take precisely the shape that Damon advocates. At a recent such session at Dartmouth, for example, students were urged to step forward and confess their bigoted impulses; one student broke into tears as he admitted being a homophobe, while other students sighed and clapped, welcoming him into the ranks of the enlightened. Although intended therapeutically, the sensitivity session quickly assumed a different character. Initial calls for "tolerance" of different lifestyles rapidly metamorphosed into demands that "intolerant" students be identified and punished. Students who would not endorse the substantive agenda for "diversity" were termed fascists, Ku Klux Klansmen, and cross-burners. Les Grant, a politically conservative black student who refused to support divestment of Dartmouth investments from companies doing business in South Africa, was hung in effigy in the main administration building.

Harvard's main conduit for sensitivity education outside the classroom is the university's annual AWARE week, whose main organizer is the assistant dean of minority affairs, Hilda Hernandez-Gravelle. AWARE is an acronym for Actively Working Against Racism and Ethnocentrism. "I don't want to be a racist . . . but I think I might

be," the posters emblazoned across AWARE fliers said. In the fall of 1988, political scientist Robert Detlefsen attended AWARE sessions and published an article in the *New Republic* describing an atmosphere rife with excess.⁸⁰ These are some of the statements he recorded:

Professors should have less freedom of expression than writers and artists, because professors are supposed to be creating a better community.

When delivering a lecture, one should be careful not to introduce any sort of thing that might hurt a group.

Throwing tampons at the male, sexist dogs of Dartmouth was educational.

These places [Ivy League colleges] may be the slickest form of genocide going.

This was the tone of the speakers, who were professors from Harvard and nearby colleges. The AWARE week keynote was delivered by Colgate professor John Dovidio, who spoke about "Racism among the Well Intentioned," a group of offenders that he placed at about 85 percent of the population. One professor called for racially or sexually offensive material to be edited out of lectures. Another surveyed the English language to find words like "Snow White" and "black magic" which, to him, indicated the omnipresence of racism. The only dissident voice was Harvard government professor Harvey Mansfield, who said that race and gender hypersensitivity threatened to chill free discussion of issues such as affirmative action that needed to be addressed. Although Mansfield was permitted to speak, his remarks were widely rebuked as evidence of precisely the problem faced by Harvard and other universities seeking to fight bigotry.

Although some of the AWARE rhetoric may have been simply a form of ethnic cheerleading, Detlefsen detected a mean and anti-intellectual tone running throughout the conference. For instance, some of the speakers equated legal rights for blacks in the United States with apartheid in South Africa; others compared the attitude toward minorities at Harvard with that of the Ku Klux Klan in the South. Given the magnitude of these defined evils, drastic remedies were in order. The result of the facile accusations of AWARE speakers, Detlefsen predicted, was that "innocent persons are certain to be the targets of censorship and character assassination at the hands of a zealous squadron of thought police."

Indeed such scapegoating had happened before, and would happen

again shortly after the conference. When a group of dining-hall workers at Harvard held a "Back to the Fifties" party, Minority Affairs Dean Hilda Hernandez-Gravelle denounced them for racism on the grounds that their nostalgia for the 1950s probably included segregationist sentiments.⁸¹ When Professor Ron Heifitz of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government assigned the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, he was forced to cancel the screening because black students protested that the household maid reflected a stereotype. "The portrayal was sociologically accurate, and the woman was presented with dignity," Heifitz told me. "But the students felt that blacks should not be shown doing such jobs." In December 1989 Linda Wilson, the new president of Radcliffe, Harvard's sister school, was denounced by feminists who charged that, by not calling herself a feminist, she was "doing violence to herself."⁸²

When I went to see Dean Hilda Hernandez-Gravelle, she was busy with the preparations for the 1989 AWARE week. On the notice board she had pegged the names of "designated race relations tutors," one assigned to each Harvard house. She had handpicked them for their proven opposition to conscious and unconscious bigotry, she explained. Their job was to "monitor the racial atmosphere," report "violations of community," and "raise consciousness" of the students. The presence of local sensitivity monitors had upset some students who compared them to the neighborhood spies in totalitarian countries, but Hernandez-Gravelle dismissed the analogy as absurd.

For her "house workshops" on racism, Hernandez-Gravelle said she had hired a Cambridge-based "facilitator company" called Visions, Inc. In its promotional package Visions defines racism as "the systematic oppression of people of color." Apparently there is no such thing as black racism, or racism directed against whites. Yet Visions defines a bewildering variety of forms of racism: "personal and interpersonal racism," "institutional racism," and "cultural racism"—defined as a preference for "one's cultural heritage and values over that of another." In short, Visions seems to believe that one has to be a cultural and moral relativist in order to avoid being a racist.⁸³ Another pamphlet in the AWARE packet concerned "conditions which help or hinder racial learning." Students are urged to "accept the onion theory, that they will continue to peel away layers of their own racism for the rest of their lives."⁸⁴

Hernandez-Gravelle is a small, demure woman who nevertheless speaks in a deliberate tone, conveying ideological fervor. A native of Puerto Rico with degrees in education and social psychology, she said

her "mandate" at Harvard was "to create programs that address and adjudicate issues of race relations." She reports to the dean of the college, Fred Jewett, who issued the "open letter" against Thernstrom. According to Hernandez-Gravelle, the most typical complaint she deals with is "exclusionary language in the classroom. When material is presented, the contributions of the community of color are downplayed or not treated at all."

When black and Hispanic students come to her with problems, which apparently happens on a regular basis, Hernandez-Gravelle said she "helps them to externalize their experience rather than internalize it. A minority student may fear that he is wrong, or that he deserves to suffer these indignities. I tell them: this is not your fault. You are not weak or hypersensitive." The Thernstrom case, Hernandez-Gravelle said, was "hard and yet typical." She blamed the controversy on "defensive behavior on the part of the professor." She saw her job as "to give support to the students." As for academic freedom, "The professor may invoke academic freedom and get away with it. But what about the right of the students to feel free? What about their right to be treated in a respectful way?" Too many professors, she said, "want to be in safe castles without making the effort to include other perspectives."

Hernandez-Gravelle conceded that her role was a sort of ideological monitor of the faculty, even in fields that she knew nothing about. "Of course this is a political agenda," she said. "What isn't a political agenda? Maintaining the traditional curriculum is a political agenda."

Criticizing the *New Republic* for its report on the previous year's AWARE week, Hernandez-Gravelle said it was "a unique opportunity for students to confront their own hidden prejudices. The writer of that article simply refused to expand his vision." As for the magazine's charge that all the panelists, with the exception of Harvey Mansfield, were stacked in favor of one side, Hernandez-Gravelle retorted, "Mansfield was a crazy extremist on one side. There were no extremists on the other side. Everybody else was very sensible and perceptive on the issues."

* * *

Lawrence Watson's actual title is assistant dean for academic administration in the Graduate School of Design. Because of his activist bent, however, Harvard considers him an authority on issues affecting the minority community. Watson is now cochairman of the Association of Black Faculty and Administrators, and helps to organize "racism

awareness" programs for undergraduates at Harvard. He has played a leading role in past AWARE week programs.

Watson began our conversation on a pedagogical note, citing his advanced degrees from Cornell University, whose Africana Center is considered to be a beacon of Afro-American Studies. "It is widely perceived that people of color are inferior," Watson said, a belief he traced back to the famous three-fifths clause of the U.S. Constitution. "We were considered three-fifths of human beings," Watson said incredulously. Was it his impression that the American founders thought that is what blacks are worth? "Of course," Watson said. "It was a compromise, but that's what they concluded."

We have encountered similar moral indignation over the claim that the Constitution considered blacks as partial human beings in the words of activists at Stanford and Howard. While they are right that the founders compromised on the issue of slavery, permitting it to continue, it is especially important for them to address the truth about the widely misunderstood and distorted three-fifths clause. In fact, the argument was about political representation, not the intrinsic worth of blacks. The South wanted to count blacks as whole persons, in order to increase its political power. The North wanted blacks to count for zero, not because Northerners denied the humanity of blacks, but in order to preserve and strengthen the antislavery majority in Congress.⁸⁵ Thus reducing the percentage value of blacks was the antislavery position; paradoxically, black interests would have been best served had they counted for nothing. This complication bewildered Watson, who said "I really cannot recall the circumstances now. It's been a while since I read up on all that." If an academic dean specializing in issues of race is ignorant on this point, what does this say about the way history is being taught and learned in Afro-American programs?

According to Watson, the function of programs like Afro-American Studies is "to make some sense of the fact that we still live in a society that is blatantly racist." He would not agree to specify any incidents of racism, however, saying that would "compromise" the breadth of his indictment. Instead, citing "institutional racism," Watson argued that "if we [minorities] are not an integral part of the trustees, the administration, the faculty, the students, then we are talking about Harvard carrying on a tradition of racism."

Watson said it was important that "some great works be revised" because of their portrayal of women and minorities. "We've got to take the, quote, great works, unquote, and rewrite them, although in some instances this would be impractical," Watson said.

Asked about the usual complaint about "covert racism," Watson said racism was just as overt as ever. In fact, "We are still trying to abolish slavery," he paused, "both in the physical and the psychological sense." Drawing an analogy between the United States and South Africa, Watson said that the welfare system, homelessness, and drugs constituted "American apartheid." Citing the high murder rate in American cities, Watson said, "The conditions my brothers face in South Africa are similar to the conditions my brothers face in Boston and Washington, D.C." Even if American blacks did the killing, Watson said, "the question is not who is behind the gun, but the conditions that bring this about." The prison system in this country, he said, is a "plantation system" where "90 percent of inmates are black and 70 percent of the wardens are white."

These facts and ideas, he said, were "not well known in the white curriculum" and should be presented in the minority studies programs, "at least for the benefit of the students of color."

While few will disagree with Watson's recommendation to get out the facts about race relations in this country, it is questionable whether this is, in fact, Harvard's approach. For a university whose motto is *Veritas*, I found a surprising amount of deliberate prevarication that is sponsored, or at least encouraged, by the administration.

For instance, Harvard publishes an *Affirmative Action Newsletter*, whose fall 1989 issue contains a section called "Myths and Realities."

Myth: Affirmative action means applying a double standard—one for white males and a somewhat lower standard for women and minorities.

Reality: Double standards are inconsistent with the principle and spirit of affirmative action. One standard should be applied to all candidates applying for a position. This myth implies that women and minorities are inherently less qualified than white males, a proposition that is totally baseless.⁸⁶

On affirmative action, as on other issues, people are entitled to their own opinions but they are not entitled to their own facts. As we saw in the case of Berkeley and other schools, it is unequivocally the case that affirmative action involves displacing and lowering academic standards in order to promote proportional representation for racial groups. Yet in the name of "sensitivity," Harvard seems not to be above distorting truth and disseminating information that is clearly false.

* * *

Perhaps the impact of the race and gender pedagogy is best examined by asking students who take these courses what they learn from them. Tiya Miles is a bespectacled, soft-spoken student from Cincinnati, Ohio. Eva Nelson and Michelle Duncan are both from Detroit. While Duncan speaks with a slight drawl, however, Nelson speaks in short staccato outbursts, filled with passionate intensity. All three are majoring or double-majoring in Afro-American Studies at Harvard.

"I see white culture as deviant and I expect Afro-American Studies to take up that perspective," remarked Nelson. "In order to get into Harvard we have to show a white perspective. If someone had a truly Afro-American perspective they would not have gotten into Harvard and they would not have wanted to." Duncan agreed. "We're black on the outside, but a lot of us don't have the fortitude to be black on the inside." She said she was glad she left a private school she attended, because "if I stayed in private school, I would end up a brain-dead white person." She paused. "That's okay—if you're white."

Nelson argued, "If we lose our black cultural perspective, we have nothing left—only our murder rate, infant mortality, the bad stuff. Without our culture, all we are is a bunch of pathologies." What, then, was this distinctive black perspective? "My relatives down South are offended by the way I talk," Nelson suggested. "But now I refuse to talk nice. I say what I think. White people are more genteel and fake than black people." Blacks have traditionally had a different sense of humor than whites, Nelson said. For example, a white person may walk in from the cold and say: boy, it sure is hot out there. "Now a white person will think that's funny. Ha, ha, ha. A black person will think that's stupid. We're not into the little white sarcasms. I find that smart-alecky stuff sickening myself."

Nelson and Duncan admitted that there was a price to be paid for abandoning white etiquette. "My roommates last year were put off because I would talk in black cultural language," Nelson said. Duncan added, "My roommates can't stand me. In fact, I am always getting into fights. All my friends now are black women from the sorority. You know, Alpha Kappa Alpha, the black sorority."

Both Nelson and Duncan complained about discrimination, not only at Harvard, but within Afro-American Studies. "My instructor once used the term 'subculture,'" Duncan said. "Can you believe it? That offended me." Nelson added, "There is a juxtaposition of blacks and other ethnic groups. This is very offensive. When we see that other groups have done better, the conclusion is that we haven't done anything, so we're inferior. By the way, I just hate it when the Jews

start comparing themselves to us. The other day I heard a very offensive remark about how Jews have done more for themselves than blacks."

Since they spoke frequently of Harvard as "institutionally racist," it seemed reasonable to inquire: what was the worst instance of bigotry the women had experienced at Harvard? "I once heard a white man say he could never go out with a black girl," Tiya Miles said. There was a long pause. "Look," Nelson chipped in. "Whites hide their racism very well. This is the problem with being genteel."

The students talked about why they were choosing to concentrate in Afro-American Studies. "At first, my parents were livid," Tiya Miles said. "They said I would never find a job. They said it would make me viewed as a militant." As for her friends at Harvard, "My white friends say: do it. But my black friends aren't so sure." Miles is going ahead because, as a young black from a middle-class background in the Midwest, she feels it is important to "get in touch with myself, who I really am." Down deep, she is convinced, she is not just a well-spoken, well-adjusted, middle-class woman from Cincinnati.

For Duncan and Nelson, who are both from poorer families in inner-city Detroit, the major means something quite different. "For me, it's been very liberating," said Duncan. "I have learned how racist and sexist I can be against my own people." For example, while crossing the street late at night, Duncan reported that she saw three large black men "and my first reaction was, oh shit."

Nelson pounced on that. "If they were white men, you would not have had that reaction."

"Exactly," Duncan said.

Nelson added that Afro-American Studies helped her realize how myths of black inferiority have sapped black self-confidence. Reflecting an element of hostility to Jews, she said, "Now I realize why I was insecure about some Steinberg." Duncan said Afro-American Studies majors learned to think critically. "In school you hear: I pledge allegiance to the flag. In Afro-Am you learn: it ain't my flag." Nelson said that she had learned that, even though he freed the slaves, Abraham Lincoln was a racist. "He was a joke," she said. "He himself said that if he could save the union without freeing the slaves, he would do it."

Tiya Miles hesitated. "Well, I'm not sure."

But the other two broke in. "Come on," Duncan said. "Lincoln was a mess." Nelson looked at Miles as if she wondered what had gotten into her.

Miles backed down. "Well, I haven't studied it that well."

On Jefferson the three were agreed: he was, in various descrip-

tions, a "hypocrite," a "rapist" (an apparent reference to Jefferson's alleged relationship with a dark-skinned woman), and a "total racist."

None of the three students appeared to distinguish comments and personal practices of Jefferson and Lincoln from their principles and public acts. Miles occasionally edged in that direction, but inevitability retreated when disciplined by her more radical friends.

Nelson finally gave some credence to the argument that the American founders advanced principles of equality that were ahead of their time. The abolitionist Frederick Douglass had argued that slavery was only the "scaffolding" of the founders' work, "to be removed as soon as the building was completed. . . . These masters knew that they were writing the texts in which the slaves would learn their rights."⁸⁷ Lincoln had maintained that the Declaration of Independence announced the *right* to equality whose *enforcement* would follow as soon as circumstances permitted.⁸⁸ Without the principles of equality enshrined in the founding documents, I suggested, Lincoln would have had no ground to stand on against the South, and Martin Luther King would have had to look elsewhere for a moral basis for the civil rights struggle. Thus by articulating progressive principles, even though failing to live up to them in practice, an argument can be made that Jefferson and Madison were champions of human liberty and equality.

The matter is more serious than the reputations of the American founders: during the infamous *Dred Scott* case, Justice Taney argued that the American founding was proslavery, that proslavery principles were inherent in the document. Against these arguments the abolitionist movement put up stern resistance. Ironically, a century later, young black students were defending a view of history put forward by Taney to justify a constitutional right to own slaves.⁸⁹

The more Nelson thought about it, the more she saw something there. She said, however, that she had never heard this argument made before. "Did you think of it yourself?" she asked. "You know, I too believe in those principles. I really do. I guess that's what makes us Americans." She laughed. "Really, we're pitifully American, if you think about it."

Although I left the three young women thinking that Harvard was not helping them find what they desperately sought—a principled ground on which to pattern their lives as self-conscious blacks—nevertheless there was a refreshing sharpness and candor in their views.

Nelson, for instance, freely denounced her "bearded, dashiki-wearing, flip-flop wearing liberal jerk of an instructor. He thinks that by dressing like this, and using South African pronunciations, he gets to

be thought of as black." Duncan said, "I resent white feminists jumping on our back, taking the benefits, and then taking off." Nelson said. "I resent black people being compared to gays. Don't lump us all together, please, in your book."

I could not help liking, and even admiring, these students, whose very intensity of indignation, if somewhat overblown, commanded respect. It seemed hard to see how the well-meaning appeasement of their demands, by Harvard students and administrators, would diminish their outrage, which resembled a typhoon in search of targets to destroy. Somewhere after college, one hoped, these young women would, through experience and continued reflection, find a better understanding of themselves, their heritage, and their country than they were receiving at Harvard.

* * *

The *Harvard Salient* is a conservative campus newspaper whose editor for 1989-90 was a Cuban American, Alex Acosta. Acosta protested the level of race and gender indoctrination which he said occurs both inside and outside the classroom.

Each year Harvard has a "minority orientation week" which is separate from general class orientation. Acosta attended because he is considered Hispanic. "You were assigned to someone of your own racial background," Acosta said. "Blacks were assigned to blacks, Asian freshmen to Asians, and so on." Ethnic separatism was a constant theme, especially separatism between minority groups and the larger white culture. At the end of the week, Acosta said, "everyone on campus who had gone to the mainstream orientation knew everyone else, but I didn't know anyone who was not a minority."

Another newspaper staffer, Marie Delci, said she feels constant pressure from the university-funded Hispanic group on campus, RAZA, to participate in events to demonstrate "ethnic solidarity." Although her given name is Marie, and she likes to be called that, "the RAZA people insist on calling me Maria, because that to them is Hispanic. A friend of mine is Alex, but they insist on calling him Alejandro. He doesn't want to be called Alejandro."

Barrie Greene, a female physics major who is white, remarked that "I have never encountered sexism here." A campus group called Women in Science, however, operates under the premise that the field is paradigmatically inhospitable to women, Greene said. "They are always asking me if it's tough to be a woman in science. I tell them it is tougher to be a white person in science. Many of my classmates are Asian." The feminist premise that science is a masculine field "be-

cause it is cold and empirical," Greene said, confirms stereotypes about women that "feminism is supposed to be fighting."

All three students said that while Harvard did ensure that free speech was permitted, the norms of acceptable behavior on campus outlaw open or critical expression of views on questions of race, feminism, or homosexuality. Delci said that administrators, professors, and teaching assistants constantly badgered students to use gender-neutral language. "French is considered a very backward language here, because it has masculine and feminine words," Delci explained. Whenever she sees ads now, Delci said, "I have been trained by Harvard to look for racist and sexist implications. You know, I'm not really into that. But whenever I ignore it, they tell me that I am a person of color and a woman—someone of my background should know better."

Acosta said, "The gay students here are especially powerful. That's probably because there are so many of them, and also because they're very vocal, very political. It's not as bad as Yale, but it's still pretty bad. If you are insensitive to gay rights, that really gets you into trouble at Harvard." Acosta seemed to reflect a widespread sentiment that, to avoid ostracism, students need to go along with the campus orthodoxies, although Acosta said that if the situation is implausible or absurd, "I go back and tell my roommates and we laugh about it for half an hour."

* * *

Harvard political scientist Harvey Mansfield, the villain of AWARE week, dismissed Dean Hernandez-Gravelle's description of him as a "crazy extremist"; he regards it as unworthy of comment. The problem at most universities, Mansfield said, is that sensitivity education constitutes institutional cover for preferential treatment and double standards. Mansfield maintained that these policies have reinforced, among both blacks and whites, the old stereotypes about black inadequacy; thus the "unspoken theme" of AWARE week was black inferiority. "The blacks were saying: we are not inferior, and the whites were saying: don't worry, we don't think so. The main target was not blue-collar bigots but people at Harvard like E. O. Wilson and Richard Herrnstein."

Wilson is a world-famous sociobiologist who explores the connections between nature and the environment; Herrnstein has published comparative data on intelligence tests. Both have been the object of vilification for their scholarly findings. So has Harvard political scientist Edward Banfield, author of *The Unheavenly City*, who has written frankly and critically of urban policy.

A couple of years ago, a group of Harvard scholars including

Mansfield, Wilson, Herrnstein, sociologist Nathan Glazer, philosopher Willard van Orman Quine, and economist Glenn Loury had meetings to discuss the university taboos, and how to deal with academic questions that were essentially beyond debate. "If the atmosphere was bad then," Mansfield said, "it is even worse now." Mansfield himself has become something of a pariah on the Harvard campus, but he is not unhappy about that; curiously, he argues, it exempts him from asphyxiating social pressures and gives him a certain intellectual freedom to speak his mind.

Commenting on the Thernstrom incident, Glenn Loury said "if this had happened fifteen years ago, there would have been an uproar." In fact, Afro-American Studies scholars such as Martin Kilson, W. Arthur Lewis, and Orlando Patterson used to address much more controversial material, Loury argued. A former professor of Afro-American Studies at Harvard, Loury requested to be transferred to the Kennedy School of Government in part because he found the Afro-American Studies atmosphere too restrictive and intolerant.

Similarly, Orlando Patterson, the eminent sociologist and author of *Ethnic Chauvinism*, left Harvard's Afro-American Studies department some years ago. He was initially lured to Harvard from the University of the West Indies, but according to one of his colleagues, "when he got here he had no idea of what to expect. It was only here that he saw the politicization of scholarship, and it shocked him. He got in touch with people like St Clair Drake and they confirmed his fears. Finally he just didn't want the stigma. He decided to teach in a real department." Patterson now teaches in the sociology department, but does not have a joint appointment with Afro-American Studies. He would not deny his colleague's account, saying only that he wished to pursue his academic interests without embroiling himself in political controversy.

David Riesman, professor emeritus of sociology at Harvard and author of *The Lonely Crowd*, commented that "it is very sad for me to see so many people from the sixties' cohort become enemies of true diversity. What we have now in universities is a kind of liberal closed-mindedness, a leveling impulse. Everybody is supposed to go along with the so-called virtuous position. At Harvard I have met a number of devoutly religious students—evangelical Christians, many of them—who find the atmosphere very intolerant."

Stephan Thernstrom and his wife Abigail, a political scientist who has taught at Harvard and Boston College, have concluded that Harvard and many other universities have generated a provincial and oppressive milieu which penalizes critical thought and stimulates deep if inarticulate

resentment on the part of white students. Affirmative action causes "incredible touchiness," Stephan Thernstrom said. "Minority students come to class looking for put-downs. This cuts different ways, though. If a black professor quotes from racist tracts, the students shout: More, more. But the so-called studies programs and sensitivity sessions by and large produce unchecked extremism." Abigail Thernstrom added, "Look at the world around us, and how it is changing. Our university campuses are now islands of repression in a sea of freedom."

The documented ideologically imposed intolerance seems to run directly counter to Harvard president Derek Bok's stated goal for the university: "All students at Harvard should have an equal opportunity to gain as much from their experience here as their interests and talents permit. We should endeavor to build an atmosphere in which all students feel welcome and accepted. We should encourage the fullest interchange among all students as a means of furthering their own education, mutual understanding and personal development."⁹⁰

Meanwhile, both inside and outside the classroom, the sensitivity indoctrination project proceeds at full pace, and its strongest effects are felt by the students who are the primary target. As the contempt of students such as Acosta suggests, undergraduates at Harvard and other colleges are growing weary of the intellectual double standards and social browbeating to which they are routinely subjected. Even politically progressive students who begin by adopting and promoting stated minority demands find that they have failed to assuage the seemingly insatiable anger of the activists. Consequently their initial sympathy decays into, at best, a half-hearted acquiescence; at worst, a new impatience and hostility.

Universities are making a big mistake by treating entire classes of students as bigots, Mansfield said. After all, he pointed out, no successful accusation of racism can be brought against anyone without significant support from the community. Thus the very charge that students are racist presumes that the majority are *not*. Minority activists greatly overstate their case, he said, and badly underestimate the real progress that has been made on these issues. In support of this assertion, Mansfield cited "the goodwill most white students have for blacks, the admiration for their courage and endurance, [and the] genuine longing for community with them."

But now, Mansfield added, voicing a widely held but taboo sentiment,

The victims of affirmative action are being forced to admit their guilt so the beneficiaries of affirmative action don't have to admit their inade-

quacy. After being accused time and again, people become weary of being scapegoats. Their patience cannot last forever. You can only get people to collaborate in the accusations against themselves for so long, and then you begin to lose their goodwill, and your accusation becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Every few weeks, another American campus is cast into turmoil because of allegations of bigotry. Racial harassment is getting so bad that for the first time, the *Wall Street Journal* reports, many black students are avoiding troubled institutions and applying to safe—often historically black—universities.⁹¹ Because universities have exhausted the patience of the most sympathetic advocates of the victim's revolution, the backlash against preferential treatment and sensitivity education will continue to get worse. Nobody will say so, but the truth is that a large number of students and faculty have simply *had it* with minority double standards and intimidation. Until they change their policies, universities are likely to see a dramatic increase in racial tension and racial incidents, with a corresponding upsurge of violence. The worst is yet to come.

8

Illiberal Education

Each fall some 13 million students, 2.5 million of them minorities, enroll in American colleges.¹ Most of these students living away from home for the first time. Yet their apprehension is mixed with excitement and anticipation. At the university, they hope to shape themselves as whole human beings, both intellectually and morally. Brimming with idealism, they wish to prepare themselves for full and independent lives in the workplace, at home, and as citizens who are shared rulers of a democratic society. In short, what they seek is liberal education.

By the time these students graduate, very few colleges have met their need for all-round development. Instead, by precept and example, universities have taught them that "all rules are unjust"; "all preferences are principled"; that justice is simply the will of the stronger party; that standards and values are arbitrary, and the ideal of the educated person is largely a figment of bourgeois white ideology, which should be cast aside; that individual rights are a flag signaling social privilege, and should be subordinated to the claims of group interest; that all knowledge can be reduced to politics and should be pursued not for its own sake but for the political ends of power; that convenient myths and benign lies can substitute for truth; that double standards are acceptable as long as they are enforced to the benefit of minority victims; that debates are best conducted not by rational and civil exchange of ideas, but by accusation, intimidation, and official prosecution; that the university stands for nothing in particular and has no claim to be exempt from outside pressures; and that a multiracial society cannot be based on fair rules that apply to everyone, but must rather be constructed through a forced rationing of power among separatist racial groups. In short, instead of liberal education, what American students are getting is its diametrical opposite: an education in closed-mindedness and intolerance, which is to say, illiberal education.