

PER

E

185.86

T77

V.6, NO.1 SPR/WIN 1992

(2/yr
1992-)

TROTTER INSTITUTE REVIEW

Winter/Spring 1992

Published by the
William Monroe Trotter Institute
University of Massachusetts at Boston

Volume 6, Number 1
Winter/Spring 1992

INSIDE

- 3 *Introduction*
James Jennings
- 4 *Are Today's Teachers Being Prepared for Diversity? An Analysis of School Catalogues*
James Jennings and Illene Carver
- 8 *Thoughts on Black Conservatism: A Review Essay*
Martin Kilson
- 15 *Du Bois and the Boys' Club of the 'Great Books'*
Bill Farrell
- 18 *Inside the American Stratification System: Imageries from Black Writers*
Clinton M. Jean
- 22 *An Interview with John D. O'Bryant*
Harold Horton

Trotter Institute Review

Editor

James Jennings

Associate Editor

Harold Horton

Production Editor

Leslie Bowen

Production Staff

Sue Baker

Eva Hendricks

The Trotter Institute Review is published by the William Monroe Trotter Institute, University of Massachusetts at Boston, Boston, MA 02125-3393. Subscriptions are \$6.00 per year for individuals and \$12.00 per year for institutions. Opinions expressed herein are those of the authors, or persons interviewed, and are not necessarily shared by the university or the editors. Copyright © 1992 The William Monroe Trotter Institute. ISSN 1040-6573

Introduction

by
James Jennings

This issue of the *Trotter Institute Review* is devoted to a two-part proposition. The first is that institutions, agencies, businesses, and schools must begin to reflect the increasingly diverse ethnic and racial characteristics of American society. America is in the midst of a demographic revolution. It is unfortunate that some educators have chosen to ignore the social, economic, and intellectual implications of this change and that others have even become angry and attacked efforts to create an appreciation of multiculturalism.

This unfortunate resistance to the implications of America's unfolding demography leads to the second proposition reflected in this issue of the *Trotter Institute Review*. That is, institutions of higher education have a unique professional and moral responsibility to help lead the nation to its next stage of social and economic development. This leadership will not be forthcoming if the issue of diversity is ignored. America will not develop if the contributions of people of color continue to be dismissed. We can no longer delay the building of a multiracial, multicultural society—as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “We are faced with the fact that tomorrow is here today.”¹

The articles in this issue of the *Trotter Institute Review* present information about tomorrow while offering suggestions for what can be done today to produce a stronger, healthier, and more democratic American society. The first article is based on a content analysis of catalogues from teacher preparation schools and programs in Massachusetts. The study showed that school catalogues and bulletins, important marketing and recruitment devices, virtually ignore any suggestion that future teachers should be made aware of or trained to respond professionally to the changing racial and ethnic diversity of students in the public schools.

The next article, by Martin Kilson of Harvard University, examines a recent book that is critical of affirmative action. Professor Kilson has written on the issue of race and class for more than three decades. His article highlights inconsistencies in the argument raised by law professor Stephen L. Carter in his book, *Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby*.

Bill Farrell's article suggests how contradictory it is to discuss “great books” or “great ideas” without considering the contributions of people from all ra-



James Jennings

cial and ethnic backgrounds. Unless one is simply narrow-minded, backward, or ignorant about history, how is it possible to purposefully exclude such an internationally renowned scholar and thinker as W. E. B. Du Bois? As Farrell points out, this is exactly what Encyclopedia Britannica has done in its series on the *Great Books of the Western World*.

Clinton Jean shows that the earlier lexicon defending Eurocentric arrogance has given way to new phrases. There was a time when one could speak of Aryan superiority, as did President Theodore Roosevelt, or the “Manifest Destiny” of white people, but today, use of such a lexicon is no longer acceptable—as has been realized by David Duke. Dr. Jean points out how terms like “individual freedom,” “merit,” and “reverse discrimination” are now used instead to defend an outdated social structure.

I am especially pleased to be able to offer the last article, an interview with the first black person to be elected to the Boston School Committee in this century. Mr. O'Bryant has dedicated his life to excellence in public education for the sake of *all* children. We end this issue of the *Trotter Institute Review* with this particular article because it reminds us again of Dr. King. In the final analysis, the response of American higher education to the challenge of racial and ethnic diversity will have a profound impact on the children in our society who represent our future. How we prepare them today, for the challenges of tomorrow, will affect all of us: indeed, “. . . tomorrow is here today.”

Notes

1. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Chaos or Community: Where Do We Go from Here?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968).

Are Today's Teachers Being Prepared for Diversity? An Analysis of School Catalogues

by

James Jennings and Illene Carver

The following is a summary of A Content Analysis of Racial and Ethnic Themes in Catalogues Distributed by Teacher Preparation Schools in Massachusetts, 1989 and 1990, a report issued by the Community Research and Technical Assistance Program of the William Monroe Trotter Institute in January 1991.

A recent content analysis study shows that while leading educators in Massachusetts stress the importance of preparing teachers for an increasingly diverse world, most teacher preparation schools virtually ignore the issue of racial and ethnic diversity in catalogues recruiting new students. This not only discourages people from diverse backgrounds from becoming teachers, but could also create a lack of understanding in the classroom of the black, Latino, and Asian students being taught.

Generally, there appears to be little serious attention paid to introducing future teachers in elementary and early childhood education to the growing racial and ethnic diversity in American society. While the catalogues reviewed contained hundreds of course titles and descriptions, less than 5 percent of these courses mentioned any racial, ethnic, or multicultural themes in their titles or descriptions. Few of these same courses were required for degrees.

This finding is based on a survey of 1989 and 1990 catalogues of teacher preparation programs and schools in the commonwealth of Massachusetts conducted by the Trotter Institute's Community Research and Technical Assistance (CRTA) Program and published as a report in 1991.

The study was initiated in 1990 in answer to a request by Lovell Dyett, executive curator of the Commission on the Hall of Black Achievement of Bridgewater State College, for assistance in determining the degree of prioritization given the teaching of black social and urban experiences in schools and programs preparing future teachers in the commonwealth. As Mr. Dyett requested (pers. com.

August 22, 1990), "We are interested in the amount taught, quality and depth of the material presented, methods of presentation, integration into the overall curriculum and the preparation of teachers to teach black history."

The official catalogues of these schools are a valuable resource for this kind of information, containing course listings and descriptions as well as outlining degree requirements. As important marketing devices for attracting potential students, they advise students about the philosophy and mission of the particular school or program and how certain topics will be approached in the course of their training.

Information from the Board of Regents shows a total of fifty-two schools in Massachusetts that offer various kinds of programs for the preparation of school teachers. The Trotter Institute collected catalogues from fifty of these schools. The offerings in early childhood and elementary education were carefully reviewed for the following information:¹

- Are there any courses listed in the catalogues with titles suggesting multicultural, racial, or ethnic considerations? Are any of these courses required?
- Are there any course descriptions which refer to multicultural, racial, or ethnic themes? Are any of these courses required?
- Does the catalogue include any program descriptions relating to multicultural, racial, or ethnic topics?

Code words and phrases were used as guides to determine whether or not attention was being paid to multicultural, racial, or ethnic themes and topics. These words and phrases included:

African Americans
bilingual education
blacks
busing
community studies
cross-cultural education
cultural learning styles
cultural awareness
desegregation
diversity
equal educational opportunity
equity
ethnic minorities
ethnic minorities
familiarity with urban community
Hispanic cultures
inner city
minority experiences
multiculturalism
multilingualism
poverty and cultural differences
race relations

race and ethnic relations
racial and ethnic differences
racial and cultural needs
racial heterogeneity
racism

If these terms were found in a course title or description, then it was seen as a reflection of possibly some degree of attention to preparing teachers for professional settings involving racial and ethnic diversity. A course title suggesting attention to racial and ethnic diversity does not necessarily mean the topic is adequately covered in the course. Similarly, the absence of a course title or description suggesting such attention may not be an accurate indication of course content. The former, however, may be some indication or sensitivity to the relative importance of diversity issues to a particular school.

A catalogue that suggests that a school or program reflects an appreciation of racial, linguistic, and ethnic diversity may attract a greater number of black, Latino, and Asian students.

More than two-thirds of the thirty-one schools offering degree programs in early childhood education did not suggest the importance of preparing teachers for an increasingly diverse society in any of their course titles. However, nineteen of the thirty-one catalogues—or 62 percent—did indicate some attention to racial, ethnic, and multicultural themes in their course descriptions. But, nearly half of the early childhood education courses whose titles or descriptions indicated some attention to racial, ethnic, and multicultural issues were not required.

Interestingly, large or urban teacher preparation schools and programs did not reflect any greater attention to racial, ethnic, and multicultural issues. Several of the larger schools in the greater Boston area, for example, published catalogues listing many courses, but none gave any indication in the titles or descriptions of racial, ethnic, or multicultural themes. As a matter of fact, one of the largest teacher preparation schools in Boston did not list a single course in more than one hundred graduate offerings with a title suggesting any consideration of racial, ethnic, or multicultural issues. While this particular school did have one course description that mentioned learning issues associated with racial and ethnic diversity, it was but one required course of many listed in the catalogue.

Boston University, on the other hand, listed several titles and descriptions of required courses suggesting racial, ethnic, and multicultural themes

under elementary and early childhood education for undergraduate and graduate students. The catalogue for Simmons College also reflected a serious effort to introduce students in elementary and early childhood education to racial, ethnic, and multicultural themes by requiring and strongly recommending that students in these programs take at least one course in African-American studies.

Wheelock College also listed numerous required courses with titles and descriptions suggesting attention to racial, ethnic, and multicultural themes. In fact, Wheelock College stands out among the schools in its emphasis on these themes as an integral part of its teacher preparation programs, seventeen of forty-three courses in the undergraduate curriculum having titles or descriptions strongly suggesting the importance of racial, ethnic, and multicultural themes in the preparation of future teachers.

In elementary education the situation was similar. Twenty-three of thirty-nine degree programs—57 percent—showed no indication that students would be introduced to issues touching upon race, ethnicity, or multiculturalism. Of the seventeen schools that did have listings dealing with racial and ethnic diversity, about half were not required for a degree.

To summarize, there are very few course titles or descriptions in the catalogues of teacher preparation schools suggesting an appreciation of the importance of introducing future teachers to racial, ethnic, or multicultural themes and discussions. Of the handful of courses with titles or descriptions suggesting consideration of racial, ethnic, and multicultural themes, nearly half are not required for undergraduate or graduate students to receive degrees.

In addition to recruiting and retaining a greater number of black, Latino, and Asian teachers, teacher preparation schools and programs need to prepare all teachers for the pedagogical implications of an increasingly diverse society.

As Meyer Weinberg described in *A Chance to Learn: A History of Race and Education in the United States*, there seems to be a quiet “suspension of reality” regarding the existence, impact, and history of racism in American education.² Of the hundreds of course titles and descriptions reviewed for the entire state of Massachusetts, only a very small number focused on the problem or impact of racism in American society, or within the nation’s educational institutions. Certainly future teachers and administrators, teaching and working with young peo-

ple in diverse social settings, should at least understand the historical role that race and racism has played in their profession.

The Massachusetts Board of Education recently commissioned a major report indicating the importance of recruiting, hiring, and retaining a greater number of black, Latino, and Asian teachers. The report was submitted to the board by the Statewide Committee on the Recruitment of Black, Latino, and Asian Teachers in spring 1990. The thirty-five-member statewide committee demonstrated that the presence of teachers of color in public school classrooms represented a vital resource in enabling the commonwealth to respond more effectively to its unfolding demographic, social, and economic challenges. It is clear that achieving an acceptable presence of black, Latino, and Asian teachers in the commonwealth's public schools cannot occur until more undergraduates from these racial and ethnic groups make career decisions to become teachers.

There is a gap between the kind of information and messages reported in the catalogues of teacher preparation programs and schools and the statements of leading educators — as well as the leaders of individual schools — regarding the importance of preparing new teachers for an increasingly racially and ethnically diverse state and world.

Several obstacles to greater participation and presence of black, Latino, and Asian teachers were identified by the committee. Some of these obstacles included:

- Minority undergraduate students' negative perceptions about the teaching profession;
- Inadequate outreach and marketing services to minority undergraduates who may be potential teachers; and
- Distorted curriculum messages regarding the presence of minorities in society.

These kinds of obstacles can be overcome to some degree by what potential students read in the official catalogues of these schools and programs. The messages that black, Latino, and Asian students glean from school catalogues are important in encouraging or discouraging them regarding the possibility or desirability of becoming teachers. A catalogue that suggests that a school or program reflects an appreciation of racial, linguistic, and ethnic diversity, for example, may attract a greater number of black, Latino, and Asian students. School catalogues and

bulletins are, in fact, important marketing tools for a college or university.

The analysis of school and program catalogues reveals how various schools are approaching the need to develop greater sensitivity to diversity issues in the preparation of teachers. In addition to recruiting and retaining a greater number of black, Latino, and Asian teachers, teacher preparation schools and programs need to prepare all teachers for the pedagogical implications of an increasingly diverse society. As was suggested by Dr. Peter Negroni, superintendent of the Springfield public schools, the lack of such a focus in their recruitment catalogues, while not immediate cause for criticism or condemnation, shows the need for expanded discussions regarding the messages that teacher preparation schools may be sending in their catalogues.³

School catalogues are but one yardstick for evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of teacher preparation programs. But, the official catalogue of a particular school may be the first piece of information that a potential applicant obtains in order to make a decision about whether to apply or not. If, after reviewing several official catalogues, an aspiring teacher does not get any or even a minimum indication of the importance of understanding the issue of diversity in America today, then it is possible that a mistaken attitude about the importance of race and ethnicity will be imbedded in the early phases of teacher preparation. Teacher preparation schools and programs in Massachusetts need to examine more closely the messages generated by these catalogues.

Schools should review their curriculum offerings in the context of increasing racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. The Joint Task Force on Teacher Preparation, as pointed out by Dr. James Fraser of Lesley College in an interview conducted for this study, has made recommendations to the Massachusetts Board of Education regarding major changes in how future teachers should be prepared and trained. Presently, all teacher preparation schools and programs are required to respond to new state regulations for training teachers. This presents an important opportunity for the leaders of these schools to raise questions about the range and content of required and elective courses offered to future teachers and whether or not the courses address the issue of diversity.

Administrators and faculty must begin to look at these issues as a means for recruiting minority teachers and meeting the challenges facing the commonwealth's educational system. There is a gap between the kind of information and messages reported in the catalogues of teacher preparation programs and schools and the statements of leading educators — as well as the leaders of individual schools — regarding the importance of preparing new teachers for an in-

creasingly racially and ethnically diverse state and world. At this time, too few schools and programs have utilized their school catalogues to impress upon potential black, Latino, and Asian teachers the importance of their presence in these schools. Most school catalogues continue to give the impression that the experiences of people of color in the United States are not significant in the training of teachers. It appears that it would be relatively easy for future white teachers to believe that the presence of black, Latino, and Asian colleagues is not a serious topic in their educational preparation. A potential white teacher could easily be convinced from reading a school catalogue that an understanding of the black, Latino, or Asian experiences in this society is really not that important. Black, Latino, and Asian readers of these same catalogues can easily get the message that they are welcomed in many schools and programs only as a token, not on a fully institutionalized or integrated basis.

At this time, too few schools and programs have utilized their school catalogues to impress upon potential black, Latino, and Asian teachers the importance of their presence in these schools.

Individual schools and programs need to evaluate themselves on this issue. Although school catalogues may not describe fully the kind of multicultural and multiracial education that is taking place—or, not taking place—at a particular school, they do represent some kind of indication. Since marketing of the teaching profession is important in the recruitment of black and Latino teachers, a review of curriculum guides and course outlines is needed to ensure that all future teachers are alerted to the importance of understanding the experiences of people of color. But, as Dr. Theresa Perry pointed out in an interview, the needed changes must move beyond “simply adding another course for minorities,” toward an “understanding and rethinking of the entire curriculum in order to ensure that it reflects all people and groups in our society.” Simply producing a better-looking catalogue in terms of

positive messages and rhetoric appealing to potential black and Latino teachers is not enough. Another educator on our panel, Dr. Luis Fuentes, noted that along with examining course content, efforts to integrate and diversify the faculty and personnel at teacher preparation schools is critically important. To offer courses that reflect an understanding and appreciation of racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity without attempts to reflect this same diversity on the teaching staffs may not ultimately result in the right kind of message.

As a next step, course outlines should be thoroughly reviewed by faculty and external advisory committees composed of educational, community, and civic leaders. The selection of readings and topics must ensure that an appreciation of racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity is reflected in the organization of the course. Additionally, all future teachers should be exposed to readings by and about people of color and given opportunities to analyze these readings and discuss how they are related to teaching effectiveness in public schools. Finally, textbooks used in the instruction of teachers should reflect a broad range of social experiences in the United States.

These are just a few steps that can be undertaken to make the schools a more accurate reflection of today’s rapidly changing world and to make our teachers more sensitive to the increasingly divergent needs of their students.

James Jennings is interim director of the Trotter Institute and directs the institute’s Community Resource and Technical Assistance Program. He was chair of the Statewide Committee on the Recruitment of Black, Latino, and Asian Teachers.

Illene Carver is a graduate student at Wheelock College.

Notes

1. The raw data for individual schools and programs is available upon written request to the Trotter Institute.
2. Meyer Weinberg, *A Chance to Learn: A History of Race and Education in the United States* (Cambridge University Press, 1977).
3. Dr. Negroni was among a panel of eight educators who were asked to react to a preliminary draft of this report. They included Theresa Perry, Marian Darlington-Hope, James Fraser, Lenora M. Jennings, Jean McGuire, Juanita Wade and Luis Fuentes. Some of their comments appear later in this article.

Thoughts on Black Conservatism: A Review Essay

by
Martin Kilson

Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby, by Stephen L. Carter (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 286 pp.

In *Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby*, Stephen L. Carter, an Afro-American law professor at Yale University, has written a wide-ranging book on affirmative action policy. Like numerous other books on the subject, Carter covers the issues of its legitimacy as policy, white opposition, impact on black mobility, and contradictions faced by universities in administering affirmative action. Carter also offers a new area of discussion—namely, the evolving division among Afro-Americans regarding affirmative action, allocating six of eleven chapters to facets of this issue. Carter uses his own experiences to frame these discussions—a mode of discourse that offers considerable rhetorical facility. This outcome suits his essential purpose, to highlight the downside rather than the upside of affirmative action policy. But unlike such openly conservative critics of affirmative action as Nathan Glazer and Thomas Sowell, Carter arrives at a negative position after having first embraced affirmative action. Hence, his characterization of himself as “an affirmative action baby.”

Carter's Political Demeanor

The first thing that stands out about Carter's book is the author's political and ideological posture toward affirmative action. On the one hand, Carter's purpose is clearly antithetical to affirmative action policy. He wants to demonstrate, for instance, that affirmative action has run its course as acceptable public policy, to critique illegitimate extensions of affirmative action disguised as diversity policy, and above all, to warn Afro-Americans to prepare for the demise of affirmative action, a preparation he thinks requires greater civility of debate among Afro-American intellectuals and leaders—a comity of discourse rather akin to Mrs. Finch's sewing club. As Carter says, “Sometimes I . . . have childish daydreams: Thomas Sowell and Derrick Bell shaking hands across the conference table. . . .” (p. 142)



Martin Kilson

Yet, on the other hand, Carter is insistent that his opposition to affirmative action is not tantamount to a conservative demeanor. Instead, Carter craves to be seen and understood as a friend of Afro-America's civil rights agenda—and a rather special friend at that, one who happens to have the jump on other black intellectuals in spotting the conditions bringing about the collapse of affirmative action policy. As Carter puts it:

Mine is not, I hope, a position that will be thought inauthentically black. It is not, I think, evidence of that most fatal of diseases (for a black intellectual), neoconservatism; my views on many other matters are sufficiently to the left that I do not imagine the conservative movement would want me. (Neither, I think, would the left—but that is fine with me, for it is best for intellectuals to be politically unpredictable.) The argument I present in this book is generated by reason but fired by love [for blacks]. (p. 7)

Thus, Carter wants his readers—especially Afro-American readers—to see him as ideologically neuter—without a political gender, so to speak—neither fish nor fowl, just a kind of ideologically sterile dispenser of public policy and moral insights regarding the dismantling of affirmative action practices. Carter also wants us to believe that his insights are not weighted in favor of the conservative white power structures or white working-class conservatism. He wants his insights viewed as politically neutral guidelines to a postracial America in which,

Carter hopes, Americans will surrender race-linked discourse (along with gender-linked discourse) regarding individual experiences and American institutional dynamics.

This argument, presented in humanistic terms and breezy verbiage, has a curious quality: considering his background as a law and policy analyst, his discussion is strangely lacking in what might be called policy specificity. In other words, once Afro-Americans have followed Carter's advice and willingly surrendered affirmative action policy without a fuss—a policy very much the operational centerpiece of the civil rights agenda—Carter offers not one clue as to how blacks and their allies should proceed to engage both the public and private sectors to facilitate closure of the black-white mobility gap rooted in America's racist patterns.

Moreover, Carter's claim that his discussion of affirmative action is free of any ideological tilt is politically naive and even intellectually disingenuous. Carter must surely be aware that such conservative organs as the *Wall Street Journal* and the *National Review* are intrinsically more attracted to his perspective than, say, the *New York Amsterdam News*, published by civil rights activist Wilbert Tatum. Nor would such mainstream organs of the new black bourgeoisie as *Black Enterprise* display an intrinsic openness to Carter's presumptively apolitical, anti-affirmative action perspective. Why? Because the owner and editor of *Black Enterprise*, Earl Graves, knows the impact that current efforts to dismantle affirmative action policies have had on black businesses—efforts like the 1989 Supreme Court decision in *Richmond v. Croson*, a decision clearly responsible for the sharp decline of Atlanta's contracts to minority firms from 43 percent in 1988 to 14.5 percent in 1990.¹

The Affirmative Action Issue

Basic to Carter's claim that affirmative action has run its course as acceptable public policy are three interrelated arguments: first, affirmative action is now opposed by most whites, especially when preferential treatment is the mechanism of affirmative action; second, affirmative action is flawed because it disproportionately benefits middle- and upper-class blacks (what I call the coping strata), not the poor, one-third of Afro-Americans; third, Carter believes that American upward mobility patterns are mediated by paradigms of pure achievement or pure merit, creating moral confusion regarding the mobility status of Afro-American beneficiaries of affirmative action—did they make it on their own or by racial preferences?

Carter attaches much significance to white attitudes for a very good reason—because the conservative Republican leadership under Bush manipulates

the race-linked anxiety of white voters by emphasizing the preferential aspect of affirmative action. Carter says he wants to take this issue away from the conservative Republicans, a seemingly liberal thrust on his part. From another vantage point, however, Carter's wish to appease the anxiety of whites regarding affirmative action represents a rather conservative posture, for the appeasing mechanism involves the surrender by blacks of a twenty-five-year policy. Carter suggests that this is the only road to liberalizing white voters on the overall policy needs of blacks—a suggestion put forth by other neoliberal critics of affirmative action including Thomas Edsall in *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, And Taxes On American Politics* (1991) and Jim Sleeper in *The Closest of Strangers* (1990).

Carter wants his readers—especially Afro-American readers—to see him as ideologically neuter—without a political gender, so to speak . . .

Carter's discussion of the need for blacks to appease white voters' anxiety toward affirmative action never mentions a reciprocal obligation on the part of whites, nor does he probe the possible political methodologies that might ensure this. Presumably, the injury done by affirmative action policy to whites' mobility interests and normative sensibilities—relating to presumptively pristine values of achievement and merit—negates the right of blacks to expect a reciprocal obligation. I suggest, in short, that something fundamentally conservative—and neoconservative, at that—informs Carter's critique of affirmative action, his protestations to the contrary notwithstanding.

In regard to the class bias of affirmative action toward the coping strata rather than poor Afro-Americans, Carter commences his discussion with the following observation:

What has happened in black America in the era of affirmative action is this: middle-class black people are better off and lower-class black people are worse off. Income stratification . . . in the black community has increased sharply . . . the number of black people in the higher-paying professional positions is growing faster than the number of white people. And at the elite educational institutions . . . affirmative action . . . programs are increasingly dominated by the children of the middle class. One need not argue that affirmative action is the cause of increasing income inequality in black America to understand that it is not a solution. (pp. 71–72)

Thus, Carter argues that a basic contradiction — a hypocritical dynamic — exists in the civil rights intelligentsia’s support of affirmative action. In Carter’s words, “The degree of one’s support for affirmative action in the professions bears no relation to the degree of one’s concern about the situation of the black people who are worst off, for the programs do them little good.” Because of this contradiction, Carter is willing to dismiss affirmative action as merely a sham — an ostensibly progressive policy which has been co-opted by well-to-do blacks. As Carter puts it, “All the efforts at seeking to justify racial preferences as justice or compensation mask the simple truth that among those training for business and professional careers, the benefits of affirmative action fall to those least in need of them.” (p. 72)

Carter is willing to dismiss affirmative action as merely a sham — an ostensibly progressive policy which has been co-opted by well-to-do blacks.

I agree with Carter’s characterization of the bourgeois tilt of affirmative action policy and I would like to see this tilt balanced toward the poor. However, I disagree with Carter’s implication — namely, that the bourgeois tilt is intrinsically illegitimate, an argument common among neoconservative opponents of affirmative action. Princeton University political scientist Russell Nieli wrote in a letter to the *New York Times* (24 July 1991), “Affirmative action programs . . . often benefit those who do not deserve benefits.” Such criticism lacks historical and comparative perspective. Affirmative action policy is a governmental response to the longstanding, undemocratic, racial-caste marginalization of Afro-Americans. Since middle-class blacks as well as poor blacks suffered, both sectors of Afro-Americans are legitimate potential beneficiaries of this policy. Furthermore, the bourgeois tilt of affirmative action policy is hardly unique. Other federal assistance policies for farmers, small businesses, veterans, and banks, for instance, have involved cases of those who are better off benefiting disproportionately. The bourgeois sector of white ethnic groups of Irish, Italians, and Jews also gained special benefits through what might be called defacto affirmative action — the awarding of city and state contracts, loans, and jobs through patronage since the late 19th century.²

What is the function of this argument for opponents of affirmative action like Carter? I suggest it is not to create an argument in favor of affirmative action policy to benefit poor blacks, but to create arguments detrimental to the existence of affirma-

tive assistance programs at all. This is clearly a conservative function that flows from a seemingly liberal argument, that is, a pro-poor argument. In this connection, it is interesting that professed advocates of the poor among the critics of affirmative action — like Carter — do not propose extending the definition of the poor constituency they suggest would be better served by affirmative action. In other words, why not include the over 15 million poor, white Americans as potential beneficiaries of affirmative action? I suggest that the bourgeois-tilt critics of affirmative action are not in fact intrinsically interested in the plight of the poor, but rather invoke this plight as a foil for attacking affirmative action as such.

The Pure-Merit Fetish

Overall, Carter’s antipathy to affirmative action is closely tied to his belief that black mobility under affirmative action lacks moral quality. Throughout his book, Carter displays a fervent emotional need to have what he considers his own superior intellectual and professional achievement in law measured at par with comparable achievement by white professionals. In this, Carter joins the former Harvard University economist Glenn Loury (now at Boston University) and the Stanford University economist Thomas Sowell in blaming affirmative action policies for introducing a structure for the evaluation of black professionals that, to their minds, emphasizes the helping-hand role of public policy to the detriment of the black individual’s intrinsic capability. Carter formulates this dilemma under the heading of “best black syndrome” — a valuative mode in which whites measure high achieving blacks against each other, not against comparable high achieving whites, labelling the highest achieving black “best black.” Conservative black intellectuals, in general (including Sowell, Loury, and Shelby Steele, among others), and Carter, in particular, have shown exasperation and even bitterness toward this best black syndrome. Carter formulates his position as follows:

The *best black syndrome* creates in those of us who have benefitted from racial preferences a peculiar contradiction. We are told over and over that we are among the best black people in our professions. And in part we are flattered . . . [for] those who call us the best black lawyers or doctors or investment bankers consider it a compliment. But to professionals who have worked hard to succeed, flattery of this kind carries an unsubtle insult, for we yearn to be called *what our achievements often deserve: simply the best — no qualifiers needed!* In this [race conscious] society, however, we sooner or later must accept that being viewed as the best blacks *is part of what has led us to where we are.* . . . (p. 52) (Italics added)

At another point in his account of the best black syndrome, Carter relates the thinking of economist Glenn Loury on this issue:

A few years ago, in a panel discussion on racial preferences, the economist Glenn Loury noted that the Harvard Law School had on its faculty two black professors who are also former law clerks for Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States. . . . It isn't fair, he argued, that they should be dismissed as affirmative action appointments when they are obviously strongly qualified for the positions they hold. . . . It is no diminution of the achievements of the professors Loury had in mind to point out that there is no real way to tell whether they would have risen to the top if not for the fact that faculties are on the lookout [owing to affirmative action] for highly qualified people of color. The same is surely true for many black people rising to the top of political, economic, and educational institutions. (p. 59)

It is interesting that black conservatives should think that the question of demonstrating pure-merit mobility is a special issue confronting blacks, Hispanics, and women under affirmative action policy. Loury, Steele, Carter, and other conservatives make a fetish of it. Why do black conservatives articulate this position? They do so, I think, because America's job recruitment culture is defined at the ideal level as a *pure-merit paradigm*, and opponents of affirmative action have skillfully kept this paradigm at the forefront of popular thinking about affirmative action. But this has been unfair for affirmative action, for in reality America's job recruitment culture has been a pragmatic admixture of the pure-merit paradigm and what might be called a *modified-merit paradigm*. The term modified-merit paradigm refers to a dynamic in industry, government, education, and banking wherein job entry is surrounded by extra pure-merit processes — buddy networks of lawyers, doctors, managers, academics, and others, as well as other forms of assistance based on ethnicity, veterans status, or other conditions. Contrary to conservative criticisms of affirmative action, the modified-merit paradigm under affirmative action is not anti-pure merit. The two function together enabling newcomers to job markets from which they had previously been excluded to mount the conveyor belt of experience that will prepare them for pure-merit capability. As such, this functional interface of pure- and modified-merit paradigms under affirmative action constitutes a classic expression of American pragmatism at its best. The admixture of pure- and modified-merit paradigms in job recruitment has characterized the social mobility experience of all American ethnic groups in many job markets, and efforts

by conservatives to suggest that only affirmative action policy has used this methodology are disingenuous.³

Of course, there is no denying that affirmative action policy has depended on this methodology more explicitly and formally and for good reason. Due to the institutionally tenacious racist marginalization of Afro-Americans from the 1880s to the 1960s⁴ (or the equally tenacious gender marginalization of women during the same era), federal public policy intervention was required to provide a framework for what I call modified-merit job recruitment (or contracts allocation) for blacks, Hispanics, and women. The experience of this methodology — that is, admixture of modified- and pure-merit paradigms — in the United States armed forces has been

Carter's antipathy to affirmative action is closely tied to his belief that black mobility under affirmative action lacks moral quality.

an enormous success, as demonstrated in the studies by Northwestern University sociologist Charles Moskos. Although conservative opponents of affirmative action conveniently ignore the experience of the armed forces, the data show barely 2 percent of blacks in officer ranks during the 1970s, but by the end of the 1980s some 12 percent of officers (7,000) were black, including 7 percent of generals and 11 percent of colonels. Barely 5 percent of non-commissioned officers were black during the 1970s, but by the end of the 1980s, 24 percent of master sergeants and 31 percent of sergeant majors (85,000) were black. The armed forces' affirmative action technique involves promotion boards that have the authority to set goals — "The goals for this board are to achieve a percentage of minority and female selection not less than the selection rate for all officers being considered." Professor Moskos claims that the advantage of this formula is "that if the goal is not met, the board must defend its decision [and so] the pressure to meet the goals is strong."⁵

Affirmative action clearly involves an element of mobility pump priming, but federal assistance policies had already used this strategy much earlier, especially for farmers, small businesses, and veterans. Preferential treatment — called reverse discrimination by Nathan Glazer — is basic to any federal affirmative assistance policy, for instance, when some citizens get tax cuts and abatements and others do not, or when some farmers (tobacco and dairy, for example) benefit from subsidies while others must live and die by market forces. The rationale underlying preferential treatment in any federal assistance policy is that it serves a higher public value.

Thus, the charge of reverse discrimination leveled at affirmative action is politically tendentious and even approximates race baiting, seeking to delegitimize in the public's eyes the preferential treatment accorded blacks.

It is a fascinating phenomenon that black conservatives like Carter have emerged as proponents of the delegitimation of preferential treatment under affirmative action and thus as articulators of an idealistic pure-merit paradigm, favoring the tightening-up of professional job market penetration for recently locked out groups of blacks, Hispanics, and women. Numerous and amusing contradictions surround the activities of these conservatives. For example, although Loury's above-mentioned observation has him seeking to protect two talented black professors at Harvard Law School from what he considers denigrating evaluation under the best black syndrome, the professors themselves (Christopher Edley and Randall Kennedy) are strong proponents of affirmative action. They are emotionally secure in their own intellectual and professional achievements, and they assume an essentially tough, pragmatic posture toward the presumptively affirmative-action-induced deflation of their achievements by whites (the best black syndrome). They do this, I suggest, by way of a kind of cost-benefit tradeoff with affirmative action policy. That is, whatever emotional cost they endure due to the best black syndrome, they discount in favor of the job market benefits provided by their professorships at an elite institution. Countless other Afro-Americans faced with the best black syndrome do the same (as do women faced with the best *women* syndrome). In doing so, Afro-American or women professionals are being more systematically realistic than the idealistic pure-merit proponents among black conservatives.

Interface of Black and White Conservatism

If one single factor can be identified as the primary motivation of the opposition by black conservatives to affirmative action, it is the best black syndrome. This is especially true of the highest achievers among them, including Loury, Sowell, Alan Keyes, and Carter (really best classified as *hybrid* conservative, part liberal and conservative). These are individuals with top-level intellects and thus with certain narcissistic inclinations—not in the sense of vanity, but in terms of overweening self-worth.

So in the eyes of the high achievers among black conservatives, a mobility pump-priming policy like affirmative action—clearly beneficial to many Afro-Americans—is nonetheless expendable, particularly if the attitudinal milieu surrounding that policy induces whites to deflate the full quantum of

achievement recognition due them. Yet it must be asked why certain black high achievers turn to conservatism in order to secure a right to fair achievement recognition associated with establishmentarian status patterns? Why don't they choose liberal and progressive options that seek to egalitarianize these patterns?

If one single factor can be identified as the primary motivation of the opposition by black conservatives to affirmative action, it is the best black syndrome.

As Thorstein Veblen suggested early in this century in *Theory of the Leisure Class*, newcomers to elite roles—that is, the parvenus—in American society seem compelled to utilize conservatism to fill a vacuum in their self-worth that antedates their class mobility. Put another way, conservatism offers the parvenus a sense of *substantive status identity*, contrasted to the mercurial or *tenuous status identity* connected with the ethnic or religious groups of Irish, Italians, and Jews. Even so, given the tenacious exclusiveness of longstanding WASP elites, the migration to conservatism by the parvenus nets them only an imperfect status identity. Consequently, conservatives among the parvenus still suffer some status deficiency. This compounded status anxiety is often overcome by radicalizing their new conservatism—a process rather like the catechistic activism of the religious convert.⁶ So the newcomers to conservatism often adopt an Americanistic demeanor, which includes ultrapatriotism, deference to establishmentarian policies and norms, and even nativistic patterns of assailing leftists, feminists, and civil rights activists.

Neoconservatism among black intellectuals and a growing number of the black intelligentsia is, then, not unlike this historical and generic American pattern. Its deviation from the generic pattern can be attributed to the unique dynamics that defined the racial-caste marginalization of Afro-Americans—a marginalization far more culturally vicious and more institutionally tenacious than that experienced by Irish, Jews, and Italians through ethnic-caste marginalization. This means, in turn, that once racial-caste segregation is formally vanquished institutionally, the psychocultural and ritualistic legacy of racist marginalization nonetheless exhibits strong vestigial capacity.

It is, then, precisely this vestigial racist dynamic in post-civil rights American society that conservative black intellectuals are battling when opposing the best black syndrome. They are correct, too, in this opposition. Yet I suggest that they err significantly

in not recognizing that the issue of the best black syndrome would exist whether or not affirmative action policies prevailed. Why? Because most whites—despite the new post-civil rights milieu—still sustain a fervent, psychocultural investment in neoracist interactions with Afro-Americans—a situation not unlike the psychocultural investment of males in neosexist interactions despite the postfeminist milieu of today's society. Furthermore, this neoracist, psychocultural crutch is politically sustained or manipulated by cynical, conservative, political elites (Reaganite and Bushite Republicans) and has been rekindled periodically during the crises that have populated the American social landscape during the past twenty years.⁷

Concluding Note: The Emperor's Clothes

It is the major limitation of *Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby* that Carter, a talented legal scholar, displays virtually no awareness of the systemic sources of those features of affirmative action policy he so abhors, especially the best black syndrome. He, therefore, lacks an understanding of American conservatism, as do the other black conservative intellectuals I have already mentioned. Carter virtually assumes that American conservatism is little more than an innocent refuge for ostracized black intellectuals (ostracized, that is, by emotionalistic solidarity processes among Afro-Americans). Carter calls these intellectuals “black dissenters” thereby seeking to egalitarianize their image. Carter's discussion of these so-called black dissenters—covering more than four chapters and in many ways comprising the heart of the book—will strike most serious analysts of dissenting dynamics in American history as rather bizarre.

I say bizarre for good reason. Carter packages this discussion by way of a rather curious (perhaps laughable) comparison of today's black dissenters with such historical giants among black dissenting intellectuals as W. E. B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Benjamin Davis. But, this is just too clever by half, so to speak. Note how Carter formulates this spurious comparison—“Looking at the deep rift between the [neoconservative black] dissenters and the [black leadership] mainstream, I cannot help but think back on the Niagara Movement, a forerunner of the NAACP, organized in 1905 by Du Bois and other opponents of Booker T. Washington in order to provide a platform for their dissenting ideas and a base for their burgeoning efforts to thwart Washington's ascendancy.” (pp. 139–140)

The simplistic logic here is that since A and B wear the same suit—dissenters' garb, let's say—A and B are politically the same, with the same message and purpose. Well, it just isn't so. Basically, what Carter

is talking about is two different genre of Afro-American dissenters—*activist dissenters* and *ritualistic dissenters*. While the former seek to activate popular forces—the weak, left-outs, and marginals—against greed, privilege, and oppression, the latter seek, above all, obfuscation, manipulating the dissident tradition and modalities of rhetoric, demeanor, and allusions to support established patterns of power. In short, Carter must know that Du Bois and his contemporaries were dissenting against the very grain of authoritarian, capitalist power (in the form of antitrade unionism) and racism, not just against the autocratic, black, establishment puppet Washington. Therefore, Carter surely must know that black conservative dissenters—as he refers to Steele, Loury, and Sowell—are dissenting merely in the ritualistic sense, not in the substantive, antisystemic sense of activist dissenters.

Carter's discussion of these so-called black dissenters . . . will strike most serious analysts of dissenting dynamics in American history as rather bizarre.

After all, the mainstream civil rights leadership (including Benjamin Hooks, Jesse Jackson, and Coretta King, for example) or black congressional leaders are not the all-powerful network that Carter cleverly characterizes them as being. They are an influential interest group, that is all. They have not, therefore, been capable of preventing neoconservative blacks, including Carter, from circulating their ideas—whether among blacks or whites—from gaining jobs comparable to their talents, or from penetrating major, local and national power networks, private or governmental. Thus, the ritualistic dissenting of Carter's black dissenters is little more than a facade or mask, behind which a small group of talented Afro-American intellectuals have fashioned a national platform for themselves and penetrated a range of establishmentarian capitalist networks (including, of course, obtaining lucrative rewards in the form of fellowships and honorariums) to a degree unprecedented for Afro-American intellectuals.

Moreover, black conservative intellectuals do not yet have an operational constituency among Afro-Americans—as, for instance, neoconservative Jewish intellectuals have had since the emergence in the early 1970s of the pro-Israel lobby, Jewish businesses and bureaucrats. Interestingly enough, the trail to establishmentarian power that black conservatives have followed was first blazed by neoconservative Jewish intellectuals who, like black conservatives, evolved out of an historically margin-

alized ethnic background. Jewish neoconservatives have also been the primary patrons of Carter's black dissenters putting such influential organs at their disposal as *Commentary*, the *Public Interest*, the *New Republic*, the *National Interest*, and the *American Scholar*, to name just a few.

Considering the patronage of such powerful, neo-conservative, Jewish intellectuals—linked as they have been for nearly twenty years to the establishmentarian, right-wing, WASP, corporate, and institutional networks—it is a clear distortion of the term *dissenter* to apply it as Carter does to black conservative intellectuals. Intrinsically, dissenting groups and individuals assail overweening, establishmentarian power and authority (as in Luther vs. the Vatican, Soviet dissidents vs. Stalinism, and Du Bois vs. American racism). Above all, such dissenters risk life, limbs, family safety, professional opportunities, and comfort—a pattern of risks and insecurity that black conservative intellectuals would never be forced to experience under the patronage of powerful white conservatives. In short, Carter's black dissenters are *client dissenters*, akin to client or satellite states.

Overall, Carter's argument about black dissenters (one of two central arguments in his book) is riddled with distortion—clever distortion sometimes, but distortion nonetheless. It will not, I think, survive rigorous evaluation. Carter, I believe, senses this problem of exaggerated characterization and formulation, and so he resorts to a back-up strategy of what might be called *deceptive nuance*. For instance, one chapter criticizes American conservatives for their nearly zero track record in behalf of Afro-American freedom and equality. But this criticism is more an afterthought than an intrinsic discussion. It is, in short, window dressing. In reality, *Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby* is an apology for American conservatism, in general, and for black conservatism, in particular. But it is not good apology—the dialectical kind, that is, in which the author, though tendentious, discovers self-limitations and moral discrepancies.

In *Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby*, Stephen Carter gives us two rather self-serving observations: first, that black conservative intellectuals are heroic and flawless—at least compared to the emotionalistic, solidarity-minded elements of the Afro-American mainstream; and second, that he too approaches a certain perfection as a black intellectual. Alas, he doesn't even have an ideological or political pigeonhole—" . . . it is best for intellectuals to be politically unpredictable," as he says. Carter practices an open-door policy, or so he tells us, and it is presumably merely accidental that those who enter his favor in *Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby* are establishmentarians, conservatives, and the best and brightest. To believe this is to believe in tooth fairies.

Martin Kilson teaches political science at Harvard University and is the author of *Political Change in a West African State* (1966) and *Neither Insiders Nor Outsiders: Blacks in White America* (forthcoming).

Notes

1. See Rhonda Richards, "Set-Aside Plan Cutbacks Are Key Blow," *USA Today*.
2. See Steven P. Erie, *Rainbow's End: Irish-Americans and the Dilemmas of Urban Machine Politics, 1840-1985* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).
3. On extra pure-merit dynamics in American social mobility, see Erie, *Rainbow's End*; Harold Zink, *Twenty Municipal Bosses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1930); C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956); Adolf A. Berle, Jr. and Gardiner C. Means, *The Modern Corporation and Private Property* (New York: Macmillan, 1934); Christopher Jencks, *Who Gets Ahead?: The Determinants of Economic Success in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1979).
4. See, for example, Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944). See also Herbert Shapiro, *White Violence and Black Response: From Reconstruction to Montgomery* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), and John Gunther, *Inside the U.S.A.* (New York: Harper, 1947) especially chapter 41, "Negro in the Woodpile."
5. See Charles Moskos, "How Do They Do It?: The Army's Racial Success Story," *The New Republic* (August 5, 1991), 16-20.
6. See Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Rabb, *Politics of Unreason: Right-Wing Extremism in America, 1790-1970* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).
7. See Martin Kilson and Clement Cottingham, "Thinking About Race Relations," *Dissent* (Fall 1991).

Du Bois and the Boys' Club of the 'Great Books'

by
Bill Farrell

A shorter version of the following article first appeared in the September 11–17, 1991, issue of In These Times.

During the autumn of 1990 the Encyclopedia Britannica published the *Great Books of the Western World*, its selection of Western civilization's sixty best works. Newspapers respectfully reported the event. Commentators acclaimed the set's affirmation of Western culture. A scholarly symposium at the Library of Congress celebrated the collection's publication. The National Press Club, usually concerned with major politicians and famous journalists, invited Mortimer Adler, the series editor in chief, to address it.

In his interviews and public appearances connected with the publication of the series, Adler stressed that to be a great book a work must discuss a large number of the "great ideas." But Adler's—and presumably the Britannica editorial board's—criteria present some problems.

First, Adler's approach shares an unfortunate flaw common to other canon manufacturers, one that even some conservative academics have bemoaned: It frequently excludes great works of history. A great work of history often does not discuss great ideas as such, even though its analysis may well incorporate important concepts while examining serious topics. Despite serious theoretical disputes regarding the nature of a "fact," history is limited by what actually happened. As a result, empirical data can disrupt a rigorous theoretical approach and new evidence can overturn a historian's most famous philosophical discussion.

Beyond the problems specifically limited to history, Adler's "great books" definition denies that any book discussing just one great idea can be a great book—even though that book's treatment of the concept might be the most brilliant, subtle, and insightful ever published.

Color Blinders

Amid the triumphal hoopla, a few critical voices pointed out that the series contained no books by

authors of color. Some suggested that the writings of W. E. B. Du Bois should have been included. (C. L. R. James arguably also merited inclusion.) In response, Adler said that no black American had written a great book. Specifically addressing Du Bois's exclusion, Adler argued that Du Bois's best book was his autobiography, which simply failed to meet the criteria for inclusion in the series.

Amid the triumphal hoopla, a few critical voices pointed out that the series contained no books by authors of color. . . . Adler said that no black American had written a great book.

Adler's argument reveals almost total ignorance of Du Bois's work. Adler's failure to distinguish among Du Bois's autobiographies also suggests that he is unaware that Du Bois wrote more than one. Furthermore, a number of Du Bois's books are more important than any of his autobiographies. Among these are *Black Reconstruction*, a pioneering work in American history examining the Civil War and Reconstruction; *The Souls of Black Folk*, a serious examination of the issues of race and color; *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade*, and *The Philadelphia Negro*, an important work in American sociology.

During his appearance at the National Press Club, Adler explained that a "good book" discusses, elaborates upon, or adds to the understanding of at least one great idea. Attempting to distance himself from racial controversy, Adler read the names of the black authors listed in the *Syntopicon*, all of whom, in Adler's words, had written good books. Ironically, in relying on the *Synopticon*—one of Adler's proudest achievements—Adler provided further evidence that he knows nothing about Du Bois. Adler, like the *Syntopicon*, never mentioned Du Bois. (The *Syntopicon* is an index to the great ideas as they appear in both great and good books. Adler originally wrote the *Syntopicon*, or at least supervised its writing, to guarantee that those purchasing the Britannica series would actually read the books.) Yet, some of Du Bois's work must have dealt with at least one great idea.

Reconstructing History

For example, in *Black Reconstruction* Du Bois examined such topics as slavery, freedom, abolition, the nature of property in a slave society, whether it is necessary to own property to be free, the nature of democracy, the function of land in an agricultural society, the nature and methodology of history, the roles of various classes, and the role of race in

American society. Certainly some of these constitute great ideas. Many of these ideas have interested such diverse thinkers as Aristotle, Rousseau, Locke, John Stuart Mill, and Karl Marx. Furthermore, though *Black Reconstruction* was ignored when it was first published in 1935—largely due to the racism of the intellectual establishment—the questions it raised have largely dominated most examinations of Reconstruction from the early 1960s to the present.

In fact, partially in recognition of *Black Reconstruction*'s importance and insights, the leading historian of Reconstruction, Eric Foner, dedicated his book *Nothing but Freedom* to the memory of Du Bois, using his introduction to pay tribute to the insights of *Black Reconstruction*.

Similarly, in *The World and Africa*, published in 1947, Du Bois again presaged the interests and efforts of the current generation of historians by exploring both the role of Africans as participants, not merely bystanders, in history and Africa's place in the world as an integral element in world history. The rethinking of world history that Du Bois proposed in *The World and Africa* draws upon and affects substantial issues in both the methodology and philosophy of history. Simply put, the categorization of history is either a great idea or involves a number of them. (For example, Hegel devoted some of his most important work to the conceptualization or categorization of history.) Because important historians and anthropologists now are exploring concepts and analyses that Du Bois's work suggested, it cannot be argued that Du Bois's discussion of these great ideas does not merit attention.

In view of Du Bois's substantial body of work, listing all the great ideas in his various works would quickly become tedious. Yet, the significance of *The Philadelphia Negro* in American sociology merits such discussion.

While studying at the University of Berlin between 1892–94, Du Bois attended various seminars and heard the lectures of visiting professor Max Weber, learning the sociological approaches and

An examination of Adler's credentials as a philosopher and his role as a cultural bureaucrat provides a basis for understanding Adler's dismissal of Du Bois.

concepts then being developed in Europe. Later, Du Bois's *The Philadelphia Negro* became one of the first efforts to apply the European concepts and analyses to an American context and for an American audience.

When *The Philadelphia Negro* was first published in 1899, sociology was still largely unestablished as a discipline in America. Many of today's great univer-

sity sociology departments had yet to be founded. In such circumstances, Du Bois easily could have decided to write about these ideas only in an expository work. Instead, by applying these concepts to his study of the Philadelphia black community, Du Bois furthered both the discussion and development of these ideas while presenting his own original insights.

In view of all this, Adler and company's failure to recognize Du Bois or at least realize the value of his books beyond that of his autobiographies is puzzling. It might be argued that an appreciation of Du Bois is a relatively new intellectual trend, hence the canon will need a generation to catch up. But Max Weber—arguably the greatest sociologist in that discipline's history, the patron saint of non-Marxist sociology—recognized Du Bois's gifts relatively early in Du Bois's career, when Weber invited Du Bois to contribute to the journal that Weber edited, *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, which later published a Du Bois article in 1906. Indeed, in a 1905 letter Weber enthusiastically urged a German translation of Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, which he called a "splendid work."¹ In fact, Weber offered to write the introduction, even suggesting a translator.

Try a Little Trendiness

Because important intellectuals and institutions acknowledged the value of Du Bois's work long before the appearance of either Adler's *Syntopicon* or the most recent appearance of Encyclopedia Britannica's great books series, the exclusion of Du Bois cannot be explained merely by the resistance of Adler and colleagues to recent intellectual trends. Instead, an examination of Adler's credentials as a philosopher and his role as a cultural bureaucrat provides a basis for understanding Adler's dismissal of Du Bois.

Adler's intellectual and scholarly qualification as a judge of great and good books is his background as a philosopher. Certainly, philosophy has a strong claim that it is Western culture's oldest intellectual discipline. Many independent academic fields and scientific disciplines originated as branches of philosophy.

But Adler's philosophical credentials are not terribly impressive. He has produced no significant original philosophic work. He is no great thinker, only a populizer, and has in fact been highly critical of many contemporary philosophers whom he has attacked as being too technical and specialized.

The best scientist is not the one who knows all the references and reads all the journals but makes no original contributions to science. Similarly, the best philosopher is not a mere bibliographer but a thinker whose work advances the development of philosophy.

Being an unoriginal philosopher hardly seems an impressive credential. Yet, it is a condition that Adler shares with other prominent advocates of various great books curricula, such as Allan Bloom and former Secretary of Education William Bennett.

By publicly promoting various versions of the great books, Adler and his spiritual compatriots effectively have diverted attention from their own lack of intellectual accomplishment, while obtaining both a platform for their views and a prestige that they could never obtain on the basis of their work alone. Perhaps in the future, following Adler's example, those incapable of understanding modern mathematics should attack contemporary physics for relying so heavily on calculus and other mathematical fields. Such mathematical incompetents could be given responsibility for awarding both scientific grants and the Nobel Prize in physics. Eventually, they might come to shine in the glow of the fields they presumed to judge, being seen as great physicists in the same way that Adler has become an "authority" on philosophy, literature, and a number of other fields.

Adler's attack on original philosophic thought parallels his more general resistance to knowledge contrary to his own preconceptions. In 1987, Martin Bernal published *Black Athena*, a significant work advancing controversial claims, including Bernal's views that ancient Egyptian civilization was at least partially black. Conversely, mainstream Egyptology maintains both that the ancient Egyptians did not recognize race as such and that ancient Egypt was neither white nor black, but a mixture of the two. This scholarship is neither obscure nor known only to specialists.

Despite this, Adler — as Eric Alterman quotes him in the November 19, 1990, issue of *The Nation* — continues to claim "there was nothing in Africa except Egypt and Egypt was white not black." Thus, both mainstream Egyptological scholarship and Bernal's work, which strongly oppose each other, deny Adler's claim that Egypt was white. If Adler was unaware of mainstream Egyptology's view (let alone Bernal's), then he apparently feels free to pronounce upon fields about which he is completely ignorant, proving that his dismissal of Du Bois was no aberration. If Adler knew of this scholarship, then he either decided to ignore work that did not fit his own narrow preconceptions or deemed himself competent to dismiss serious scholarship in a field in which he had done no work and has no qualifications.

To put it bluntly, Adler has no importance as a scholar, as his lack of scholarly accomplishment makes clear. Adler's only importance derives from his position as a cultural bureaucrat. Through his positions and relationships with various publishers

and editors, Adler can further the publication and job prospects of favored students, scholars, writers, and others, while promoting his own agenda. His position as a judge of the great books is due not to merit, but merely to his position as the Encyclopedia Britannica's series editor in chief.

Adler's criticism of books he has not read, including Du Bois's work, is typical of a cultural bureaucrat. Simply put, cultural bureaucrats do not need to read the books they criticize in order to perform their functions, which resemble those of the "expert" in Henry Kissinger's definition: the "expert has his constituency — those who have a vested interest in commonly held opinions: elaborating and defining its consensus at a high level has, after all, made him an expert."²

Despite the early academic recognition of Du Bois, his work rarely appeared on the assigned reading lists in American universities for several reasons. First, Du Bois was black. Second, much of his work, such as *Black Reconstruction*, challenged the racist mythology used to justify segregation. Third, during his lifetime, Du Bois moved steadily to the left politically, finally joining the Communist Party in the early 1960s, making him politically unacceptable. Fourth, for most of his career, Du Bois was not an academic.

Believing themselves to have read or at least to know the names of all (or most of) the authors of the great books, academics on book selection committees were (and remain) predisposed to reject any suggestion either that Du Bois was a great thinker or that he produced important books. Adler's own prejudices conformed to those of his audience. And even if Adler privately disagreed with his constituency's prejudices, he would not likely express his disagreement. Given Adler's scholarly shortcomings, if he lost his prestige as a cultural bureaucrat, he could not regain that prestige on the basis of his scholarship.

For these and other reasons, various versions of the canon — particularly Adler's set of the great books — have been both used and promoted by Adler and company to further an essentially anti-intellectual agenda. In the hands of Adler and his spiritual allies, the great books have become the last refuge of the third rate.

Bill Farrell is a writer and attorney living in the New York City area.

Notes

1. Herbert Aptheker, ed., *The Correspondence of W. E. B. Du Bois, Volume I, Selections 1877-1934* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1973), 106-107.

2. Noam Chomsky, *Turning the Tide: U.S. Intervention in Central America and the Struggle for Peace* (Boston: South End Press, 1985), 188, quoting Henry Kissinger, *American Foreign Policy* (Norton, 1969), 28.

Inside the American Stratification System: Imageries from Black Writers

by
Clinton M. Jean

The following paper was given at a seminar, "Teaching African-American Literature," at the Center for Literary and Cultural Studies of Harvard University in April 1991. The paper addresses several questions. If social science, as a matter of scientific principle, must choose to avoid ethical conclusions, do black novelists, poets, and essayists help fill the ethical void? But then, are they objective enough?

It is, of course, better to be just a little unbalanced before talking about anything important. Was it some irreverent insight that prompted a student who had been reading Michael Novak's *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics* to remark to me, "The term American suggests ethnic neutrality, and Anglo is silent because we want to keep quiet [about] where the dominant power is coming from. In essence, the real American has not come yet"? She was Italian.

Irreverence is not an acceptable mode in social scientific discourse. Protocol demands objectivity, as they call it. One discusses triads, religion, and social despair all in a rage of analytic dispassion. Objective distance has the virtue, so it is said, of leading to truth. It frees discussion from the pressure of partisan entanglement and polemical distortion. Would that it were so.

As a property of the world of facts, objectivity simply reflects what exists. It is indifferent. It is neither hot nor cold. But as a principle that should govern the mood or temper of research it is anything but indifferent. It has, as a worn sociological insight tells us, latent functions.

Surely, an ironic commentary from an Italian on the reality of Anglo dominance betrays something subjective—distaste perhaps? But then, does irony put the objective factualness of the commentary into question? Hardly.

Historians tell us that during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries nativist Anglos (poor whites, suffragists, abolitionists, intellectuals, statesmen, presidents) had no doubt as to who ran



Clinton M. Jean

the show in America; and no doubt as to their right to run the same show elsewhere—"in all the waste places of the earth," in Henry Cabot Lodge's phrasing.¹ Theodore Roosevelt felt that the lynching of Italians in New Orleans was "a good thing" and said so in the presence of "various dago diplomats . . . [who were] all wrought up about [it]."² "I don't go so far as to think that the only good Indians are dead Indians," Roosevelt commented another time, "but I believe nine out of every ten are, and I shouldn't like to inquire too closely into the case of the tenth. The most vicious cowboy has more moral principle than the average Indian."³ These are not the sentiments of people who need to retreat into irony—or distaste. They liked what they saw. The hegemony they enjoy is no less a fact for that.

The declamatory arrogance of Roosevelt's time has given way to a different mood, although I cannot examine here how that came to pass. There has been a change in the lexicon of terms and emotional tones that addresses Anglo-American power in America and elsewhere. One no longer speaks of Teutons and Anglo-Saxons as being among "the great masterful races." Instead, democracy, individual freedom, and free speech are the terms that now argue hegemony. Clearly, such terms do not describe Social Darwinist endowments of "masterful races," but rather are structural features of a cultural system. This cultural system was the first to conceive the vision of a world where "you could make something of yourself"; and it was the first that had the institutional inventiveness to bring such a world into being.

The new lexicon, as lexicons generally do, tells us how to see, how to do once we have seen, and how to react. Looked at from the new angle, all that being first to conceive such a vision allows is a claim to primacy; it is not necessary that it suggest hegemony—

indeed, what need is there for that? As for those straggling behind along the road to Anglo world, they are not so much peoples any more. They are just cultures. The peoples are as invisible as Anglo is silent.

Passion, sentiment could have no place here.

But what if one needs passion to be able to grasp things more fully, or even to see them? Is not objectivity then a sort of license for myopia? Perhaps one sees better if disgust is in the eye. What is it that one should not see?

Anglo power, an Italian student said. And its victims, we must add, are that large company of stragglers crowding the American landscape. Here is where the black folks live. We know, or we could know. We have merely to follow the sound of their poetic rages.

The howl of black discourse seldom breaches Anglo silence or uncloaks invisibility. To understand that, it is important to keep the context of discourse in mind.

One no longer speaks of Teutons and Anglo-Saxons as being among "the great masterful races." Instead, democracy, individual freedom, and free speech are the terms that now argue hegemony.

"An impersonal, uninvolved discussion," Thomas Kochman says, "is the kind of discussion to which whites in official positions are accustomed. . . . In discussion, one can be dispassionate; in argument, when one's own needs and views matter, it is much more difficult, and sometimes injurious to one's cause, to sound dispassionate. Moreover, it is possible that the ability to remain dispassionate can be achieved only by those who have worked long and hard to separate thought from feeling. . . . It is also possible that those who have succeeded in separating thought from feeling are able to do so only when they have nothing at stake."

For blacks, he continues, "to leave their emotions aside is not their responsibility; it is the whites' responsibility to provide them first with a reason to do so."⁴

In this context responsibility presumes power. It follows that it is not possible to claim just honor, if that's what it's all about, as the first on the road to progress. Honor and primacy, one could argue, which are all objective dispassion seems able to discern, are cover for a truth that a different age had no problem affirming. Beyond that, is there not a larger truth at stake? For, indeed, stragglers must argue that what silence dictates is political. And a question of politics is surely a question of ethics. Perhaps silence is not so secure against this kind of clamor.

Why risk that? Objectivity aborts the risk; it keeps things out of earshot.

Let us admit that the pen is not as mighty as the sword; that, in fact, it is impotent without collective action. Still, the oppressed must speak; and many blacks, resolutely non-accommodationist, have done so in the social sciences and in the literary arts. They are armed with different kinds of intellectual weaponries.

We are indebted to those paleontologists, historians, and sociologists who have rescued African life from Anglo-imposed darkness. We know, for instance, that Africans have a legitimate claim to primacy as the first humans and as inventors of the first civilization. We also know that white progress has been, and is, fueled by the rape and manipulation of black peoples; and that many blacks have acted in willing collusion with the destructiveness of white designs.

We may be sure that the impulse for these investigations, often enough, is the search for larger truth; not just what happened, but the politics and ethics of it, and the sensual human realities agonizing within the social order. Yet, social science, even a critical black science, cannot completely reveal this larger truth. The rule of objectivity prevents it.

However factual the findings of research may be, science forbids their use as grounds for moral judgment. Black people cannot demand just treatment as something that follows from the logic of objective inquiry. The social agonies that inquiry reveals do not make justice imperative. Well then, one might say, are their agonies as real and as visceral as inquiry makes them out to be? Or, in a more popular vein (and usually asked in a tone of impatient frustration): what do black people want?

There is no answer to this kind of hard-nosed skepticism, unless one can come up with something that plays on imagination. That something must put blood and muscle into history—jealousies; virtue; ugly local treacheries swallowed up by treacheries of encompassing cruelty; foresight; resolve; anxiety and despair; pathological rage in once balanced and contented spirits; insecurity and arrogance and venomous jealousy and a demonic use of power; Pilate and her opposite (let us call her Imitation Snow White). Social science does not (cannot?) exploit this option. That has been left to novelists and poets.

there's only two parties in this country
anti-nigger and pro-nigger
most of the pro-niggers are now dead
this second reconstruction is being aborted
as was the first
the pro-niggers council voting
the anti-niggers have guns . . .⁵

It is possible not to understand what Nikki Giovanni is saying. It is also possible to understand her only too well, even without a single word of explanation. Listen to Toni Morrison talk about Sethe, the main character in *Beloved*: “Sethe knew that the circle she was making around the room, him, the subject, would remain one. That she could never close in, pin it down for anybody who had to ask. If they didn’t get it right off—she could never explain. Because the truth was simple, not a long-drawn-out record of flowered shifts, tree cages, selfishness, ankle ropes and wells. Simple . . .”⁶

And what about the doubters, embattled skeptics snarling at truth winging in the nightmares of conscience? Black Herman, one of Ishmael Reed’s fictional creations in *Mumbo Jumbo*, gives the word: “1st they intimidate the intellectuals by condemning work arising out of their own experience as being 1-dimensional, enraged, non-objective, preoccupied with hate and not universal, universal being a word co-opted by the Catholic Church when the Atonists took over Rome, as a way of measuring every 1 by their ideals.”⁷

Anglo power will not promote the reunification of the rational-ethical mind. It is not in its interest to do so.

Clearly, Atonism—shifting, clutching, pushing through history—thought it found an appropriate text for its legacies in modern science, in claims to scientific universalism. But moralists, gnostics, and rhythmicists denied Atonism universalist jurisdiction in all arenas of speech. It did not even have unchallenged jurisdiction in the world of indifferent fact, a world it thought to colonize as its own.

Stone, cold truth, without any pretense of scientific genesis, could appear in the passionate musings of Sethe and in the musings of Paul D “listening to the doves in Alfred, Georgia, and having neither the right nor the permission to enjoy it because in that place mist, doves, sunlight, copper dirt, moon—everything belonged to the men who had the guns. Little men, some of them, big men too, each one of whom he could snap like a twig if he wanted to. Men who knew their manhood lay in their guns and were not even embarrassed by the knowledge that without gunshot fox would laugh at them.”⁸

No doubt, facts revealed in the hardheaded musings of muscular, agonistic historical consciousness can be questioned just as facts differently derived can also be questioned. But in this realm of hardheaded historical immediacy, an anthropologist tells us, people live in a blaze of reality.⁹ Questioning is not allowed to retreat into an endless search, sup-

posedly, for confirming facts—as in, *the facts are not all in*. Questioning is not allowed to demand the “long-drawn-out record.” There is already enough to prove the case.

All of a sudden scientific skepticism about facts comes face to face with a dialogue it always avoids. If enough of the facts are in, then there is a question that must be asked. Stamp Paid asks it: “What are these people? You tell me, Jesus. What are they?”¹⁰

Stamp Paid’s question is an ethical one. It lays the charge of injustice for historical crimes on the Anglo world and, indeed, on Western culture as a whole. The question and the charge, in American social thought, are relegated to the world of values where one ethical judgment is as good as another, where everyone is entitled to his or her own opinion. It follows that Stamp Paid’s judgment will not be accepted as final or binding. From a different angle, though, it does not follow at all.

The separation of ethical thought from factually objective analysis is not something divinely revealed. It is a socially constructed practice by people who breathe, eat, sleep, and change their underwear (thank you, Albert Camus)¹¹ just like the rest of us. Against the background of human history in its variegated multicultural expressions, such a separation is, frankly, an unusual practice. One might even say that it is a phenomenological curiosity. Perhaps it is culturally unique. What is certain is that it thrives on and feeds the malignancy of power. That is its function or, shall we say, its latent function.

Anglo power will not promote the reunification of the rational-ethical mind. It is not in its interest to do so. Under Anglo aegis, modern social science will remain morally emasculated. Behind this unhappy conclusion lies much more than the political-economic realities of the modern age. The fatal splitting of Western consciousness is rooted in ancient European history. (This has to be argued but that cannot be done here.) The reintegration of human consciousness, a consciousness that has been in the grip of the West for some time, will have to come from elsewhere. Black writers, some of them at least, show the way.

It is not implied here that people in other cultures do not commit mortal sin among themselves or against others. But there is sufficient evidence to show that they did not pretend they did not do what they did however brass-faced they might have been about not giving it up. Chaka Zulu, that formidable nineteenth-century African, was hardly surprised that he got it in the end. And everybody was a witness.

History, it has been said, is ironic. So it is. It produced Chaka. Or do we wish to think that his rise to power at the very moment of Western intrusion into his neighborhood is pure historical coincidence? His people were still African enough to judge that he

had gone too far. But there would come a time when, caught in the culturally destructive tow of the West, Africans everywhere would begin to lose this gift.

As Ayi Kwei Armah tells us in his novel, *The Healers*, the Ashanti lost the gift. Their empire was brought to ruin by the force of British arms, but not by that alone. The divisions among the Ashanti laid the groundwork for their collapse—divisions that existed before the coming of the British. The British presence, though, gave these divisions room to flourish and, ultimately, to destroy Ashanti society.

What if one needs passion to be able to grasp things more fully, or even to see them? Is not objectivity then a sort of license for myopia?

Ababio, Armah's king of Esuano, is corrupt. He has committed a heinous crime, the murder of Prince Appia and the brutalization of the Prince's mother, and is without remorse. He gloats as he puts his actions in the context of things to come. "You've always been slow to comprehend reality," he tells the young hero, Densu. "Let me describe it for your benefit. This is a new day in the land. The whites are in control. They recognize those who have helped them. They recognize me, Ababio, as king of Esuano. Whoever goes against me will have to take on the whites. They protect me. They look after me. Whatever I want from them, I can ask for it, and I'll get it."¹²

Ababio betrayed his village. The queen-mother of Ashanti was caught by the same ambitions. She betrayed her people.

Ababio is the offspring of spitlickers on the make. He bragged of this himself. The new brood of safari bourgeois in Africa, the Caribbean, and America still speaks the way he spoke. "Keep this nigger running," said Ellison's Bledsoe.¹³

The gift of rightful vision is not lost, though. It survived in Sethe's community, which is why Stamp Paid was riled up at the thought that nobody had offered shelter to Paul D. It is why he stayed riled up until he got an explanation. It is also why everybody in the community cut Sethe loose. They could understand the wretched necessity that made her do what she did. But they did not like the fact that she showed no regret for it. Even so, they refused to let Beloved destroy her. Haint or no haint. "But nothing," said Ella. "What's fair ain't necessarily right."¹⁴

Pilate is the quintessential embodiment of African consciousness enduring in the storm.¹⁵ The

spirits have blessed her. She has no umbilical attachment to white society and is beyond the blandishments of bourgeois tease. It was she who made Milkman fly. In the land beyond time she surely recognized a kindred soul in Invisible Man's grandfather. "'Son,' " he said, "'after I'm gone I want you to keep up the good fight. I never told you, but our life is a war and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy's country ever since I give up my gun back in the Reconstruction. Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open. . . . Learn it to the younguns,' he whispered fiercely; then he died."¹⁶

Our novelists and poets show us how to think in line with what is objectively factual, how to think in line with what is substantive and moral, and how to judge whether what is revealed as fact is in harmony with what is substantively reasonable. The novel and other creative forms use tools that creative fancy provides to make its arguments: it makes virtue, wrong, contradiction, and turmoil visceral and immediate. If it does not restore human consciousness, it at least brings us face to face with what is to be done.

Clinton M. Jean is a lecturer in black studies at the University of Massachusetts at Boston. He is the author of *Behind the Eurocentric Veils: The Search for African Realities*, forthcoming by University of Massachusetts Press.

Notes

1. Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), 291.
2. *Ibid.*, 291, 293.
3. Robert Allen, *Reluctant Reformers* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1983), 89.
4. Thomas Kochman, *Black and White Styles in Conflict* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 40, 41.
5. Nikki Giovanni, *Black Feeling, Black Talk* (Boston: South End Press, 1983), 169.
6. Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 163.
7. Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo* (New York: Avon Books, 1972), 153.
8. Morrison, *Beloved*, 162.
9. Paul Radin, *The World of Primitive Man* (New York: Henry Schuman, 1953).
10. Morrison, *Beloved*, 180.
11. Albert Camus, *L'Etranger* (Paris: Bordas, 1980), 119.
12. Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Healers* (London: Heinemann, 1979), 299.
13. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage Books, 1947), 191.
14. Morrison, *Beloved*, 256.
15. Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (New York: New America Library, 1977).
16. Ellison, 16.

An Interview with John D. O'Bryant

by
by Harold Horton

The following is an interview with John D. O'Bryant, vice-president for student affairs at Northeastern University and former president of the Boston School Committee. A new, appointed, school committee was sworn into office on January 6, 1992. This interview with the former president should offer a unique perspective on past achievements and future hopes for education in Boston.

Horton: Who first approached you with regard to becoming a candidate for the Boston School Committee?

O'Bryant: After I served as campaign manager for Mel King in 1959 and 1961, during the time when he was a candidate for the school committee, Mel literally drafted me to become a candidate myself. So, I campaigned for the school committee and was elected in 1977.

Horton: Looking back, what was the highlight of your experience serving on the school committee?

O'Bryant: It has been personally fulfilling to me to realize that some of the original goals which I set for my tenure on the school committee have been achieved. There has been a reduction in patronage hiring, two African-American superintendents have been employed during my tenure, and there has been an improvement in the standardized test scores of elementary and middle school students in reading and math. However, this is yet to be achieved at the high school level.

Horton: What do you consider to be the strengths of the Boston public schools?

O'Bryant: In my opinion, the current strengths of the Boston public schools are its strong and very capable superintendent and its stable school administration. However, I would like to point out that the Boston public school system has been experiencing steady improvement in all areas over the past five years.

Horton: How do you feel about having an appointed school committee?



Harold Horton



John D. O'Bryant

O'Bryant: It was most unfortunate that the voters of the city of Boston permitted such a hostile takeover of the school committee by the mayor. We have all been disenfranchised and I am not in support of any form of disenfranchisement.

Horton: What is your general attitude toward the METCO (Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity) Program?

O'Bryant: When METCO was started in 1965, there were no black members on the school committee and there were very few black teachers or administrators employed in the school system. At the time, METCO provided another free educational option for parents and their children. However, since the desegregation order, there has been an increase in the number of blacks in the school system. Today, 20 percent of teachers and 25 percent of administrators are black. I believe that the Boston school system is much more accessible to black students now. Therefore, there is less need for the METCO program.

Horton: To what extent is school reform possible in light of the current fiscal status of the school system?

O'Bryant: As a prominent educator, you know as well as I that when people speak about reform of urban school systems, all too often they are referring to cuts. We don't need to cut any more funds—if anything, we need to increase the budget to a level where we can restore programs, including music, art, and interscholastic sports competition for both boys and girls. In order to legitimately introduce reforms in the schools, there first needs to be a complete educational audit or assessment after which immediate short- and long-range citywide programs should be developed. Such an assessment would include a study of staffing concerns, multicultural curriculum programs, student services, and the status of school facilities.

Horton: Do you believe that black, all-male classes, schools, or academies should be established within the Boston public schools?

O'Bryant: Yes, if there is a need for such programs. This can be determined by a review of the rationale used for establishing similar classes, schools, and academies in other cities.

Horton: Overall, how do you rate the quality of education offered in the Boston public schools: good, satisfactory, fair, or poor?

O'Bryant: Honestly speaking, the overall quality of education that is currently offered in the Boston public schools is good. There has been too much negative misinformation disseminated about the schools because of the mayor's campaign to take over the schools. The system is doing much better educationally than it is given credit for. Superintendent Lois Harrison-Jones, through four recent town meetings, gave parents, teachers, students, and citizens a true picture of the current status of the quality of education being offered.

Horton: Are you satisfied with the extent to which parents are involved in the Boston public schools?

O'Bryant: Parental involvement in the Boston public schools really varies amongst school zones. However, if the recent town meetings are any indication, there will be a steady increase in parental participation in the schools in the near future.

Horton: What about the current fiscal crisis and the threats of possible staff cuts?

O'Bryant: The current fiscal crisis was created by Mayor Flynn by drastically underfunding the schools. The school budget for 1990-91 ended up with a \$23,000 surplus. A number of teaching and administrative positions have been eliminated over the past several years and any additional cuts will

seriously impair the educational programs currently offered to Boston's public school children.

Horton: How can colleges and universities in the Boston area be of greater assistance to the Boston public schools?

O'Bryant: Currently, a number of local colleges and universities have established collaborative relationships with the Boston public schools. These efforts are carried out through pairing an institution of higher education with a specific school. Educational expertise is provided to the participating schools by the faculty and staff of the college or university. Dr. Robert Sperber of Boston University administers this program for the Boston public schools.

Horton: In closing, I would like to thank you for taking time to hold a dialogue with me on such an important matter. I am certain that I will be back in touch with you regarding the progress of the new, appointed, Boston School Committee. It is refreshing to hear your positive attitude toward the quality of education that is offered in the public schools. Research reports on the quality of urban education are, for the most part, negative. We often read about one school's academic program which is exemplary, but one school that works is not enough. It is really ridiculous to speak about giving up on a generation of young people in our urban schools. Students in urban schools are as bright as students in suburban schools—it is a matter of caring enough about the millions of students attending urban schools to determine exactly what needs to be done in order that a quality education may be made available to them.

Dr. Harold Horton is associate director of the Trotter Institute. He holds a doctorate degree in educational administration from Ohio State University. Dr. Horton has taught as well as held administrative positions at the elementary, secondary, and university levels.

William Monroe Trotter Institute
University of Massachusetts at Boston
100 Morrissey Blvd.
Boston, MA 02125-3393

Address Correction Requested

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
Paid
Boston, MA
Permit No. 52094

Periodical Dept.
Healey Library
UMass/Boston
Boston MA 02125