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What Was Political Correctness? Race, the Right, and Managerial Democracy in the Humanities

Christopher Newfield

If everyone gets the enemies they deserve, it doesn't seem fair that pluralistic liberal humanists last year found themselves denounced as the threat to liberty known as political correctness (PC). Did we deserve this? Overall, we've been so cooperative. Having internalized a common American dislike for political conflict, humanists who teach many sides of various debates suddenly found themselves cast as coercive ideologues. Having only rarely drawn public policy implications from their fields, humanists suffered the charge that they replace education with indoctrination. In part due to disbelief, their centrist rebuttals were reluctant and mild, largely invoking mainstream values (academic freedom, dialogue, diversity, tolerance) and tracing their opponents' arguments to the kind of moral failure that the latter had first attributed to them.¹ Some simply waited for the alarms to stop, for they seemed like the false alarms of the sort of people who might mistake AIDS education for the rejection of the family.

After more than a year of broadcasting emergencies, the national press lost interest, and we might be tempted to breathe a sigh of relief and get back to work. The conflicts the debate has expressed, however, are nowhere close to being settled, particularly on the point of whether con-

1. Teachers for a Democratic Culture, a valuable advocacy group, has characterized the Right's ideological attacks as "harassment and misrepresentation," as "hypocrisy," "intolerance," and "mischievous misrepresentation" (Teachers for a Democratic Culture, Statement of Principles, Evanston, Ill.).

flict itself is good. The value of conflict was a major stake in the debate from beginning to end, particularly when it involved social antagonisms that could not be resolved through acts of imaginative sympathy. For example, Robert King, the acting dean of the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Texas at Austin, claimed that (at least freshman) English courses should teach "writing and self-expression" rather than "politics and ideology" for no stated reason other than that politics and ideology are bound up with "division and separatism and hatred."² This kind of attack challenges the validity of teaching conflict in the period when it has been most fruitful in bringing suppressed or ignored cultures into a long-overdue dialogue with the traditional academic mainstream. Much of U.S. journalism concurred that a politicized humanities threatened a fragile national fabric with civil war.

This attack on conflict in the humanities continues to affect us. It continues to drive a wedge between "political" and "scholarly" forms of humanities research at a time when their convergence promises the revitalization of literary and cultural study as a functioning member of public discourse. And it officially rejects those forms of "political" research that threaten to go beyond affirming fundamental civil rights to engage in systemic analysis of power and knowledge. Hence, fields like Chicano studies and queer theory become increasingly unsafe when they move from offering more pieces of the cultural mosaic to criticizing that mosaic's basic design.

Conservative challenges to the presence of politics and racial difference in humanities research have not been met with a defense of political critique so much as with the rejection of the politicized form the challenge has taken. The moderate response to PC bashing has not normalized politics but has generally mirrored the Right's axiom that the free exchange of ideas has been besieged by the repressive effects of political agendas. This of course perpetuates the myth that politics, especially in the form of equal contestation in humanistic research, blocks rather than enables nontechnological knowledge. The mutual evasion of politics has the immediate practical effect of misdescribing the PC crisis as the result of the

2. "Community and Factionalism," an advertisement funded by the American Income Life Insurance Co. of Waco, Texas, *Texas Observer*, 29 Nov. 1991, p. 14. This last phrase describes a kind of multiculturalism that King contrasts with the pluralistic, "tolerant" kind; the association of politics with division is not explicit but is pervasive.

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Right's irresponsible politics. More important, it obscures the larger identity crisis in the humanities to which the Right responds.

To blame confusion or institutional weakness in the humanities entirely on the Right is inaccurate and finally self-destructive. It amounts to a form of projection that disavows the center's and even the Left's ambivalence about the role of social issues in the ongoing development of the humanistic disciplines. Blaming a vocal Right allows humanities scholars to ignore our reluctance to abandon those forms of security on which we have lately thrived, even when PC bashing has shown this security to be highly vulnerable.

The PC debates were not only political fights but were fights about the types of politics that cultural intellectuals should be allowed to present to society. The two contexts of the PC debates that I wish to stress, then, are major forms of control of the humanities' access to the outside world. The Right's "bad behavior" was an effect of a perceived crisis of control rather than its cause.

The first of these contexts is a remarkably stable type of university governance. The general format might be labeled managerial democracy: major decisions affecting one level of the institution are made by levels above it, but usually with at least formal rights of consultation and participation. The functioning of the system is thought to depend equally on the consent of the governed and the authority of management. Thus department chairs decide the teaching schedules of individual faculty and deans determine the graduate funding of individual departments, but this authority, though hierarchical, incorporates much discussion and informal rights of appeal. University governance, as in my own very routinized University of California system, often seems to incorporate the best of both worlds: it combines an efficient command structure with a great deal of reciprocity. Administrative democracy appears to be impartial and uniform on the one hand, and inclusive and open on the other. It suggests the best virtues of moderation; the clash of vibrant, creative energies on the student and faculty levels can be organized and reconciled by the comprehensive and balanced overview provided by the leadership above. It is something like this vision of creative balance that former University of California president Clark Kerr memorialized thirty years ago in his influential version of postwar university management philosophy:

To make the multiversity work really effectively, the moderates need to be in control of each power center and there needs to be an attitude of tolerance between and among the power centers, with few territorial ambitions. When the extremists get in control of the students, the faculty, or the trustees with class warfare concepts, then the "delicate balance of interests" becomes an actual war.³

3. Clark Kerr, *The Uses of the University* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), p. 39.

Kerr envisioned a synthesis of tolerance and supervision that encourages the free migration of ideas and careers while eliminating the "extremists" who wish to disrupt this controlled mobility. Under this kind of liberal management, democratic exchange has a great deal of leeway within the limits of good order.

Administrative democracy achieved remarkable stability and continuity in university life in the postwar period when well-established universities enjoyed financial security exceeding that of most of American industry. It is surprising that Dinesh D'Souza could get airtime by proclaiming a "campus revolution," since revolution is nearly the last form in which the university's intellectual changes arrive. University administrations are generally in the hands of Kerr's moderates, with the best-known exceptions being conservatives. In a decade when corporate funding for conservative think tanks exploded, no one sent money to fund new research units in postcapitalist economics. University administrators are not elected by students or faculty. Unequal pay still rewards the equal work of professors of electrical engineering and American history. People of color remain a small and sometimes shrinking minority, and universities almost never explain their presence as an openly political choice.⁴ Financial incentives are vastly more influential in creating university policy than any group's programmatic desires. Lkening the funding behind a university's government contracts or corporate partnerships to any potentially "subversive" humanities projects is like comparing a TV station to a filing cabinet. The \$10 million spent at my campus last year through Department of Defense contracts equals the amount budgeted this year by the four national humanities agencies for all national humanities research fellowships. The John M. Olin Foundation alone spent twice that sum in 1990 entirely on "helping different people from respectable strands of modern conservatism."⁵ Such radically asymmetrical commitments are built into the structure of our institutions and even our national identity.

4. For example, Chancellor Chang-Lin Tien of the University of California, Berkeley, defends his campus's admissions procedures by citing the University of California Regents' Policy on Undergraduate Admissions: "'Mindful of its mission as a public institution, . . . the University seeks to enroll, on each of its campuses, a student body that . . . encompasses the broad diversity of cultural, racial, geographic and socio-economic backgrounds characteristic of California.'" It is of course "political" to believe that a public university should reflect the demographics of taxpayers rather than, for example, the research needs of its military contracts. For good practical reasons, Tien describes a university that mirrors existing society rather than one that seems to promote one part over another (Chang-Lin Tien, "A Diverse Student Body Serves a Diverse Society," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 July 1992, p. B7).

5. James Piereson, president of the Olin Foundation, quoted in Scott Henson, "Funding the Right: Olin Provides Foundation for Conservative Infrastructure," *Texas Observer*, 20 Sept. 1991, p. 8. The four major humanities agencies to which I refer are the American Council of Learned Societies, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the National Humanities Center.

D'Souza and others fail completely in their attempt to find revolutionary opposition to them.

The humanities has a secure place in this broad and peaceful postwar consensus. Dominick LaCapra once remarked that the research university is structured like a nuclear family: the scientists are the dads, and they go out and make the money, and the humanists are the moms, and they stay home and take care of the kids. During the 1980s, staying home paid off. Humanists might have been junior partners in university governance, but we prospered along with our scientist husbands. Humanities departments began hiring again after a fifteen-year stagnation, positions for newly validated specialties expanded with the canon, and traditionally unacceptable or "minority" fields such as lesbian and gay studies, feminist studies, popular culture, and African-American literature seemed on the threshold of qualified prosperity. Perhaps as a result of these trickled-down yet hard-won gains, in ten years of graduate and faculty employment at three very different research universities I have yet to hear any sustained faculty critique of the structural features that silently determine the university's mission and products day by day. I long ago concluded that humanists were largely content with the political structures of their institutions, provided they were fiscally sound. Feelings of deprivation or neglect would be addressed through individual success, rivalry with kindred humanist groups, program development, and local struggles with specific administrators. In the foreseeable future, there would be no general questioning of funding ratios with science and other fields or calls for *glasnost* in existing forms of managerial authority.

The first context for the PC wars, then, is the humanities' general contentment with the university's managerial democracy. The second is an identity crisis at the humanities' *literary* end. During the 1980s, traditional definitions of literary study as general enlightenment yielded more than in previous decades to those defining literary study as part of a spectrum of human sciences. Literary study, particularly at larger universities, has been shifting from literary history to cultural problems, from a field defined by its object of study (the expanded literary canon) to one defined by its questions and methods.⁶ But in the 1980s this move away from the traditional mission was accelerated without becoming explicit about a general mission to replace it. Giving the humanities a new research identity, as diverse as that would inevitably be, would involve the analysis of the relation between the humanities and contemporary American society that the 1980s did not provide. The analyses that did exist were sporadic and often recriminatory. Thus the humanities still has currency with the public

6. Similarly, Jonathan Culler contrasts "two general models" for recent humanities research: "reproducing culture and the social order" and the "production of knowledge" (Jonathan Culler, *Framing the Sign: Criticism and Its Institutions* [Norman, Okla., 1988], p. 33).

through its roles as cultural curator and teacher of skills, but it lacks similar status as a field of research. PC bashing simply exploited an identity crisis that was already well along.

These two contexts for 1991's PC debates have politics in common—the politics of university governance and of the public role of critical cultural studies. The common politics is that of managerial democracy inside and outside the U.S. university, which addresses social conflicts through procedural reconciliations. With notable but rare exceptions, literary studies had not openly challenged this type of administration or its effects on its own research until the insurgence of precisely those fields—gender studies, race studies, queer theory, and others—that the Right has fingered as “political.”

Rejecting Politics: The 1980s Right

Attacks on the academic humanities have been built on the tradition refurbished in the Reagan eighties when admonishments from policy makers and education officials became part of scholars' discussions of their field. These demanded a limited compliance that could not be mistaken for a threat to civil liberties. The early requests were restricted to rehabilitating teaching functions in the humanities while posing little danger to variegated research. Thus William Bennett's relatively modest proposal “to reclaim a legacy” asks that the humanities “accept its vital role as conveyor of the accumulated wisdom of our civilization.” Lynne Cheney's 1988 National Endowment for the Humanities report on the humanities in America, while sometimes criticized for its attack on academic specialization, mostly focuses on the need for improved public access to this accumulated wisdom. These documents seemed compatible with the continued expansion of humanities funding and even with their “democratic” dissemination.⁷

Other works of that decade offered more confining descriptions of what humanities tradition should look like. I am thinking particularly of Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987) and Roger Kimball's *Tenured Radicals* (published in 1990 but whose primal scenes occur between 1986 and 1988). These books discuss an abundance of deficiencies in the modern university's treatment of the humanities: the loss of canonical texts, trendy methodologies, the fragmentation of the knowledge base, the teaching of material for reasons other than abstract quality or tradition. Rather than being exposed to the values and ideas that make Western civilization a global triumph and that undergird our

7. See William J. Bennett, *To Reclaim a Legacy: A Report on the Humanities in Higher Education* (Washington, D.C., 1984) and Lynne V. Cheney, *Humanities in America: A Report to the President, the Congress, and the American People* (Washington, D.C., 1988).

prosperity and morality as a nation, students today are likely to be taught that no values are better than any others, and that they can believe what they please. They are exposed to “nihilism, American style,” to name a section of Bloom’s book, or to “relativism,” to cite Kimball’s definition of the “New Sophistry,” or to Theory, and so on. These trends expressed themselves in the increasing internationalization of English departments under the auspices of studies of post- or neocolonial culture; they appeared in public debates about the literary canon and about the immorality of deconstruction as allegedly revealed by Paul de Man’s wartime journalism.

But this large host of concerns usually boiled down to a complaint about the presence of “politics.” In each case the problem was the infection of the nation’s representative culture by current controversies and, more pointedly, the interests of discontented groups.

The 1980s jeremiads, though often intricate, reiterate a desire to preserve art from politics that was most systematically articulated by Matthew Arnold’s nineteenth-century plan to govern the conflicts of national life with the best ideas from the past. Kimball, for example, invokes an Arnold who “looked to criticism to provide a bulwark *against* ideology, against interpretations that are subordinated to essentially political interests.”⁸ Like Bloom, Bennett, and others, Kimball demands that the modern academy regard criticism in the same way: as a realm of “truth and virtue” that remains unaffected by partiality and conflict.⁹ When these authors contemplate contemporary U.S. society they sound much as Arnold did when he gazed on the spectacle of the French Revolution. In France, Arnold saw “a whole nation . . . penetrated with an enthusiasm for pure reason,” but the wonderful “force, truth, and universality of [its] ideas” were destroyed by one thing: “the mania for giving [them] an immediate political and practical application.”¹⁰

Thus, in the Arnoldian tradition, politics corrupts reason while criticism preserves reason’s liberatory powers. It represents right, where “right is something moral, and implies inward recognition, free assent of the will.”¹¹ Society is a mess, coercive and chaotic. Politics is an enslaving anarchy without orders from above. Criticism, “the best that has been thought and known in the world,” provides those higher orders.¹² It mani-

8. Roger Kimball, *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education* (1990; New York, 1991), p. 74; hereafter abbreviated TR.

9. Arnold is absent from Bloom, but his role is played by the far more idealized rule of Neoplatonism.

10. Matthew Arnold, “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time,” *Lectures and Essays in Criticism*, ed. R. H. Super, vol. 3 of *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1962), pp. 264–65.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 266.

12. Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism*, in vol. 5 of *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, p. 113. Arnold is famously repelled at the idea of

feats itself as a rejection of political application in favor of “disinterestedness.” The purest containment of politics is found in the formal union of great poetry, and it is for this reason, in the words of I. A. Richards, that poetry is “capable of saving us; it is a perfectly possible means of overcoming chaos.”¹³ Freedom depends utterly on the absence of all politics not subordinated to the law of criticism. Disinterestedness means a willing submission to a Kantian universal. The 1980s attacks on what would later be called PC follow Arnold’s polarization of society and thought, a polarization that virtually invents “the humanities.”

But in looking at the eighties books again, I am struck by how unsuccessful they are at translating their Arnoldian view of culture into a present crisis. They pointed out the footprints of politics in the garden of the humanities and called for backup, but none arrived.

Why wasn’t there more *public* response?¹⁴ This lack of major response can be explained in part by the manifest fact that upheaval was far more dramatic outside the university than in, and that most law-and-order energies were focused there. On top of this, the attacks were anecdotal, transparently idiosyncratic, and too sweepingly rejectionist to convene more than a self-appointed rump parliament of bypassed public guardians. And much of their fire was drawn off by the de Man controversy.

Furthermore, liberal educators had two good lines of defense. They pointed out that knowledge in general and the Right’s accusations in particular are always political in a broad sense. They also noted that it is normal for humanistic knowledge to grow and change in the way that distinguishes any living set of disciplines, not to mention any democratic institution. On the first point, liberals could reiterate the long-standing pragmatist argument that knowledge is always inflected by the historical conditions and interests through which it is pursued. The Right could respond only by tilting at an imaginary reductionism that purportedly claims that knowledge reflects exactly the interests of the knower, and by searching with little success for a crudely deterministic relativism.¹⁵ On the second, the Right was unwilling or unable to elaborate the kind of methodological and conceptual changes that a truly disinterested humani-

just anyone “doing as one likes”: “For a long time . . . the strong feudal habits of subordination and deference continued to tell upon the working class. The modern spirit has now almost entirely dissolved those habits, and the anarchical tendency of our worship of freedom in and for itself . . . is becoming very manifest” (ibid., pp. 118–19).

13. I. A. Richards, *Science and Poetry* (London, 1926), pp. 82–83; quoted in Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis, 1983), p. 45.

14. Conservative institutional work was of course well under way, which included funding development, the formation of advocacy groups, and creating alliances between existing media watchdogs and new academic monitors.

15. Kimball is particularly preoccupied with political determinism; see his discussion of Stanley Fish’s antifoundationalism (*TR*, pp. 154–65).

ties *would* allow. It was unable to take the crucial step of developing its own persuasive and stable criteria for distinguishing “political” from “disinterested” knowledge. It could not explain why, for example, it is “political” to teach the theme of colonialism in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* but “disinterested” to discuss *Richard III*’s “long survey of England’s troubles in the fifteenth century.”¹⁶

Thus the Right’s fragile denunciations of all newish ideas suggested simply a creationist rejection of conceptual evolution. Barbara Herrnstein Smith, in her 1988 MLA presidential address, could plausibly reduce much of the Right’s unhappiness to a fear that “contemporary humanities education may be making students *less* complacent, *less* conformist, *less* transcendently inspired and consoled and, therefore, more critical of orthodox assumptions, conventional accounts, and established authorities and arrangements.”¹⁷ To make matters worse, the liberal enemy did not bear out the Right’s charge that they produce ideologically predetermined results, for, as Smith does in her address, they call for the kind of pluralist individualism in research that official U.S. culture expects of all its citizens. By comparison to the centrist model of how change and progress emerge from open yet highly disciplined research strategies going forward only under the continual guidance of broadly accepted professional standards, the conservative ideal of a transcendental disinterestedness was superfluous. Even its money wasn’t buying many new members. The eighties Right had all the earmarks of an outraged but doomed rear guard. Nonacademics were deeply unimpressed.

The Race Menace

Why, in 1990, did the media start to care about all this? The Right suddenly discovered its clear and present danger. In the 1980s they had offered a custodial project of conserving the traditional canon and values free of “political” challenges to their authority. In the 1990s this has become a cultural militarization proceeding along the lines of the war on drugs.

The new danger was described as a threat to freedom of thought and speech. The media had completely ignored the conservative eighties

16. Herschel Baker, introduction to *Richard III*, *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston, 1974), p. 709. Colonialism is also discussed in Hallett Smith’s introduction to *The Tempest* in the same volume (pp. 1606–10). Kimball misstates these issues almost immediately. He admits that “no one would deny that literature is often about politics; but that is a far cry from maintaining . . . that the *essence* of literature is politics,” describing a claim more sweeping than Fish and other influential critics have made (*TR*, p. 41). The more appropriate question is *how* one describes an issue like colonialism, but Kimball avoids it.

17. Barbara Herrnstein Smith, “Presidential Address 1988; Limelight: Reflections on a Public Year,” *PMLA* 104 (May 1989): 287.

canon police and related attempts to suppress controversial ideas as “political.” When told that this censorship menace had appeared on the center-left, it felt a patriotic ire. *Newsweek* ended 1990 with a cover story on the left-wing “thought police.” This article’s data, written up by Jerry Adler, suggest that the staff could find very little in the way of empirical referents for the PC movement; they cobbled it together from a series of disparate campus incidents in which a racial or sexual minority rebels against a routine slight coming from someone or some group for whom such back talk is “nontraditional.” What to these students were often acts of disputation, remedy, reform, or clarified dialogue are described by Adler as insidiously totalitarian and part of a widespread popular front falling just short of conspiracy.

How do these incidents of redress or protest get translated as attacks on freedom? Adler used a prefab anticommunism: “There are in fact some who recognize the tyranny of PC, but see it only as a transitional phase, which will no longer be necessary once the virtues of tolerance are internalized. Does that sound familiar? It’s the dictatorship of the proletariat, to be followed by the withering away of the state. These should be interesting years.”¹⁸ It is Adler himself who sounds familiar. Even if his targets do comprise reborn Leninists (strangely preaching tolerance and an end to hate speech) we might still marvel at the perfect malleability of anticommunist rhetoric as it moves to fit the projected source of almost any breach of consent. That his targets are mostly students preoccupied with antidefamation and civil rights issues—who are often simply opposing the more everyday barriers to the “common citizenship” their detractors desire and who usually oppose these barriers with the help of already existing legislation—makes it still more remarkable that language used during the cold war against an apparently expansionist nuclear superpower would be immediately redeployed against twenty-year-old members of traditionally powerless American social groups whose grievances the author admits as valid. The dangers become equivalent when the incidents involve people of color who, troublingly, convinced the authorities to side with them. Communistic and racialized others reveal the constant vulnerability of American authority.

Newsweek was not alone in comparing multiculturalism to communist militarism. Washington-based columnist Charles Krauthammer described race consciousness in the same way. He first identified a renewed “Socialist” threat to American peace in similarities between certain political trends in foreign countries and American universities. These menacing foreign trends are environmentalism and peace, which are bad enough in themselves but still worse in international solidarity with their domestic mutation, deconstruction. Deconstruction is not just a decadent nihilism that the public has prudently ignored but a trojan horse for an “intellectu-

18. Jerry Adler, “Taking Offense,” *Newsweek*, 24 Dec. 1990, p. 54.

ally bankrupt 'civil-rights community.'" This civil rights community, for Krauthammer, "poses a threat that no outside agent in this post-Soviet world can match"—"the setting of one ethnic group against another, the fracturing not just of American society but of the American idea." PC is a new form of communism because it allows for ethnic differences that are *not* subsumed into a common culture.¹⁹

A further corroboration that the Right fears racial difference rather than censorship came from syndicated columnist George Will, who demanded that America treat the politicized humanities as a covert operation. We must attend, he wrote in *Newsweek*, to

the many small skirmishes that rarely rise to public attention but cumulatively condition the nation's cultural, and then political, life. In this low-visibility, high-intensity war, Lynne Cheney is secretary of domestic defense. The foreign adversaries her husband, Dick, must keep at bay are less dangerous, in the long run, than the domestic forces with which she must deal. Those forces are fighting against the conservation of the common culture that is the nation's social cement.²⁰

Will stops short of calling on the NEH to give fellowships for organizing troop parades, but he does sound the alarm about "domestic forces," which declares a new civil war at the very moment when American sovereignty seemed most triumphant. Our only defense against this fragmentation, he suggests, has been the unifying supervision of "common culture," but this is contested by the excessive self-assertion of minority groups.

Much PC bashing is like Will's in slant if not in pitch—an Arnoldian vision of anarchy without firm rule from above. As Arnold used to say, "force till right is ready." Ideally, a different Cheney would supervise each half of this marriage of light and power. The danger they forestall is that, as Evelyn Waugh says in Kimball's concluding citation, "'once the prisons of the mind have been opened, the orgy is on'" (*TR*, p. 207). The opened mind, for the nineties Right, would produce not just a political orgy but a race orgy, a recipe for social collapse.²¹

19. Charles Krauthammer, "An Insidious Rejuvenation of the Old Left," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 Dec. 1990, p. B5. Conservatives frequently attack women's studies programs in tandem with ethnic studies. Culturally conservative journalists, during the period 1990–92, seemed more wary of the danger to national unity posed by multicultural programs, but this does not imply reconciliation with women's studies in the least. For an interesting set of responses to the PC basher's rejection of feminism, see *The Women's Review of Books* for February 1992.

20. George F. Will, "Literary Politics," *Newsweek*, 22 Apr. 1991, p. 72.

21. Kimball's text founders when it stresses the presence of politics, relativism, nihilism, and so on, and finds its focus in an epilogue on multiculturalism. Those interested in a short example of why scholars involved in studies of race, ethnicity, and nationalism are so disgusted by the Right's self-described objectivism might turn to this epilogue for illumina-

These three journalists amplify a connection between anarchy and the presence of racial difference that has temporarily culminated in the closely concurrent publications of Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Education* and Arthur Schlesinger's *The Disuniting of America*. While politics threatened truth, virtue, and freedom in the eighties, both authors see racial difference threatening national security in the nineties. D'Souza's book picks up the eighties issues of censorship and "politicizing scholarship," but grounds these and other phenomena in the "minority victim's revolution on campus."²² Readers should not think that this book is a brutal and silly mass of anecdotes simply because of the stuffy incompetence of D'Souza's paraphrasing of ideas or the boyish stupidity of his belief that no one feels impaired by "the effects of Western colonialism in the Third World, as well as race and gender discrimination in America" except to win unmerited career advantages (*IE*, p. 13). The book's structure is in fact quite precise: from the West Coast to the Midwest to the Northeast and even into the South, the invasion of coercive left-wing politics shows up best in the "racial incidents" that advance the "victim's revolution" of those who seek remedies for their (wrongly) perceived subjugation by America.

For D'Souza, almost everything new in the academic humanities in the last ten years points to race revolt—except, perhaps, a funding base that lags further and further behind that of military and scientific research.²³ "The real problem," he says, "is not reader-response theory or deconstructionism *per se*; rather it is the extent to which they serve the ends of a political movement that has propelled them to the forefront of the victim's revolution on campus" (*IE*, p. 182).²⁴ D'Souza's hodgepodge

tion, where in eight pages Kimball slides from rejecting politics (*TR*, p. 193) to race-based attacks on the unifying powers of "common culture" (pp. 194–95) to tacit declarations of the "West's" superiority (pp. 198, 206–7).

22. Dinesh D'Souza, *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (New York, 1991), pp. 185, 175; hereafter abbreviated *IE*.

23. D'Souza joins other journalists in tracking race revolution to the waning revolutionary appeal of world communism:

One reason for this increasing radicalism is that, with the collapse of Marxism and socialism around the world, activist energies previously channelled into the championship of the proletariat are now "coming home," so to speak, and investing in the domestic liberation agenda. A good metaphor of this is that Angela Davis, former vice presidential candidate of the U.S. Communist party, is now professor of the politics of reproduction at San Francisco State University. [*IE*, p. 214]

Die-hard communists, having failed to dupe the workers of the world about production, now turn to reproduction, a topic on which women and minorities are especially vulnerable to manipulation.

24. More temperately, Arthur Schlesinger links ethnic studies programs to a preference for "group rights" over "individual rights" to "the decomposition of America" (Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Disuniting of America* [1991], p. 78). This first edition,

assimilation of disparate disciplines, groups, and intellectual traditions makes sense only as moments in an overriding effort to identify civil rights with civil war. More precisely, it links revolution to any notion of civil rights based on a consciousness of racial subordination and difference. Like the other journalists, D'Souza sees racial difference as a problem because it endangers common culture or what he calls the "neutral framework," the "uniform standard," or the "shared community which transcends . . . narrower interests" (*IE*, pp. 186, 50, 55).²⁵

The examples of D'Souza and the other journalists suggest that the success of the nineties attacks on PC link a traditional anticommunist sense of a nation in peril to a galvanizing race anxiety. As such, it activates a genteel white nationalism in which the red menace is directly replaced by the rainbow menace.²⁶

Race and Political Order

If the rainbow menace has for many conservatives become the new red menace, if it raises the specter of American anarchy, disintegration, and an alien tyranny, the fact needs further explanation. This is particularly true in light of the fact that U.S. conservatives are often as devoted to the multiracial melting pot as are liberals, and regard racial or at least "ethnic" difference as proof of America's powers of cultural synthesis, its rich pluralism, its centrality to global civilization. So why is some multiracialism dangerous and not others, and why now, when changes in racial power are long-standing, slow, and uncertain?²⁷ Why does a rights-based

cleaned up by the Norton reprint, demonstrates nicely what many fear to be the Right's vision of multiculturalism. Every eight pages, it inserts a two-page advertisement for Federal Express. Each ad features a happy, service-minded employee of a different race and national origin, each dressed in the Federal Express uniform. The ads convey a corporate alternative to a "disunited America" in which cultural differences have dwindled to a range of skin colors and stereotyped postures of solicitude. The book gives no place of publication, as if the publisher, Whittle Communications L.P., is fully globalized.

25. D'Souza's dislike for racial difference is particularly striking because he claims to revere differences of nearly every other kind. He complains—sincerely, in my view—that "most American students seem to display striking agreement on all the basic questions of life. Indeed, they appear to regard a true difference of opinion, based upon convictions that are firmly and intensely held, as dangerously dogmatic and an offense against the social etiquette of tolerance" (*IE*, p. 231).

26. This last phrase is Avery Gordon's, whom I would like to thank for continual discussions and invaluable insight about the issues this paper addresses.

27. Noting that in nearly all measures the social and educational resources for African Americans have been getting worse, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., observes that "the implicitly racist rhetoric of [William] Bennett's civilizing mission has unfolded precisely as affirmative action programs on campus have become ineffective window-dressing operations, necessary 'evils' maintained to preserve the fiction of racial fairness and openness in the truly

campus multiculturalism no longer seem to conservatives like a potential showcase of healthy American diversity?

In addressing this question, one cannot simply invoke these conservatives' racism. Precisely because of its racist histories, the U.S. is as fecund as any society in proliferating variations of racialized thinking. Using the term *racism* can too easily grant it an explanatory power when its own existence and workings themselves need explanation.²⁸ Further, as an explanation, *racism* lumps together a wide range of behaviors that run from Indian killing and Jim Crow lynching to "color-blind" institutional discrimination. Racism, with its historical connection to segregationism, favors the former side of this spectrum, and tends to obscure the fact that the racist thinking of elite, educated, usually Euro-American professionals is, at least rhetorically, antisegregationist. D'Souza, for example, does not lament what he calls "the recolorization of America" but only "minority demands for self-segregation" (*IE*, p. 48). Bloom also complains not about the presence of students of color but about their "doing it by themselves."²⁹ The Right is not calling for segregationism but for the opposite, a well-governed integration, and their racial anxieties cannot be reduced to racism in its conventional sense.

Integrationism, according to Gary Peller's recent description, "identifies racial oppression in the social structure of prejudice and stereotype based on skin color, and equates progress with transcending a racial consciousness about the world." It harmonizes with the Arnoldian or Neoplatonic idealism of conservative humanists in their concern with transcending difference. Conservatives are not at all extremist in sharing a post-1960s mainstream Euro-American consensus that color blindness underwrites ideally neutral, uniform judicial procedures. "Liberals and conservatives are broadly distinguished by how far they believe the realms of bias or neutrality extend. But their understanding of racial justice is the same: achieving justice means universalizing institutional practices in order to efface the distortions of irrational factors like race, ultimately

academic environment, but deprived of the power to enforce their stated principles" (Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "On the Rhetoric of Racism in the Profession," in *Literature, Language, and Politics*, ed. Betty Jean Craige [Athens, Ga., 1988], p. 21).

28. Barbara Jeanne Fields, discussing the term *race*, rejects the widespread idea that it "explains why people of African descent have been set apart for treatment different from that accorded to others." *Race*, she writes, "is just the name assigned to the phenomenon, which it no more explains than *judicial review* 'explains' why the United States Supreme Court can declare acts of Congress unconstitutional, or than *Civil War* 'explains' why Americans fought each other between 1861 and 1865" (Barbara Jeanne Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review*, no. 181 [May-June 1990]: 100).

29. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York, 1987), p. 93; hereafter abbreviated CAM.

making social life neutral to racial identity.”³⁰ Integrationism regards racial assimilation as a prerequisite to the “common culture” that forms Will’s “social cement.”

It might seem at first that linking nineties PC-bashing conservatives to racial integrationism makes them acceptably moderate, but this is not the case. During the 1980s the Right promoted integrationist “common culturalism,” but only while simultaneously separating integrationism from any tendency toward egalitarian pluralism. Michael Omi and Howard Winant have nicely described this double movement: “In the aftermath of the 1960s, any effective challenge to the egalitarian ideals framed by the minority movements could no longer rely on the racism of the past. Racial equality had to be acknowledged as a desirable goal. But the *meaning* of equality, and the proper means for achieving it, remained matters of considerable debate.”³¹ The Right, of course, argued that equality means equality of opportunity, which it further defined as the chance to apply and compete regardless of the material disadvantages and systematic disparities that influenced the outcome. Were equality of opportunity to have suddenly produced cross-racial equality of outcome, the Right would likely have denounced it, having insistently stigmatized equality of outcome as sufficient proof of state tyranny. This was so much the case that liberal demands for equal outcomes across race (and to a lesser extent, gender) have all but vanished from public view, and even the fallback defenses of equality of opportunity were soft-pedaled by their few Euro-American defenders. For more than a decade, equal opportunity employment practices were attacked as “quotas” and “special preferences” that penalized white citizens for racial crimes they did not commit. At the same time, conservatives portrayed every kind of social equality as a danger to economic efficiency, affluence, and meritocracy. In this environment, integration formed an alliance with *inequality*. Integrationism favored top-down social discipline at least as much as it promoted racial equality.

This inequality, when linked to the idea of a common racial culture, extends to the public realm those inequalities of administrative order in which most Americans spend their working lives. Integrationism partially replaces exclusion from membership as a mechanism of producing cultural unity, but exclusion from *power* remained the common effect.³²

30. Gary Peller, “Race against Integration,” *Tikkun* 6 (Jan.-Feb. 1991): 55, 57. For a fuller, parallel account, see Richard H. Thompson, *Theories of Ethnicity: A Critical Appraisal* (New York, 1989), esp. chap. 4.

31. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (London, 1986), p. 113.

32. David Palumbo-Liu’s study of federal policy towards residents of Asian descent samples this shift from “racial” segregationism to “cultural” commonality in which both attempt to preserve a hierarchical “social order.” Palumbo-Liu represents the first type with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 2 May 1882: “in the opinion of the Government of the

Supreme Court Justice Byron White's 1989 decision in *Wards Cove Packing Co. v. Atonio* offers a convenient illustration of *antiegaltarian* integrationism. Alaskan cannery workers had brought a discrimination suit against company management on grounds that Asian and native Alaskan employees were far more likely to be found in unskilled line jobs than in better-paid, managerial positions, where white employees predominated. The cannery workers' suit did not allege deliberate discrimination but only discriminatory effects. Their suit confronted integrationist racism by claiming that ostensibly neutral and inclusive procedures can have racist effects. Justice White, writing the majority opinion favoring the company's policy, first acknowledges that the Court has interpreted Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to prohibit not only discriminatory intentions but ostensibly unintended yet discriminatory outcomes:

Griggs v. Duke Power Co., 401 U.S. 424, 431 (1971), construed Title VII to proscribe "not only overt discrimination but also practices that are fair in form but discriminatory in practice." Under this basis for liability, which is known as the "disparate-impact" theory and which is involved in this case, a facially neutral employment practice may be deemed violative of Title VII without evidence of the employer's subjective intent to discriminate that is required in a "disparate-treatment" case.³³

The concept of disparate-impact traces racist effects to institutional structure rather than to individual bigotry. It does not limit itself to anomalies of racial prejudice but challenges the normal operation of a system in which administrative power has the appearance of neutrality. It refuses to focus only on individual bias, on the intrusion of personal politics into an impartial system of business practices, for it supposes that such racial politics can be part of the "impartial" system itself.

White's opinion repudiates direct racial discrimination or segregation, and cannot be considered racist in that sense. The "employer's selec-

United States the coming of Chinese laborers to this country endangers the *good order* of *certain localities* within the territory.' The second appears in Senator Alan Simpson's defense of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1983: "A substantial portion of [these new] immigrants do not integrate fully into society; they may well create in America some of the social, political, and economic problems which exist in those countries from which they chose to depart. . . . [American] unity comes from a common language and a core public culture of shared values, beliefs, customs, which make us distinctly, "Americans."'" Spanning a century of U.S. racial developments, the language of a common culture replaces that of exclusion, but with the same effect (David Palumbo-Liu, "Discourse and Dislocation: Rhetorical Strategies of Asian-American Exclusion and Confinement," *Literature, Interpretation, Theory* 2 [July 1990]: 4, 5; emphasis added by Palumbo-Liu).

33. *Wards Cove Packing Co. vs. Atonio*, 490 U.S. 642, 645–46; hereafter abbreviated WCP.

tion mechanism," he says, may not use "barriers or practices deterring qualified nonwhites from applying for noncannery positions," and it may not result in a "percentage of selected applicants who are nonwhite [that is] significantly less than the percentage of qualified applicants who are nonwhite" (*WCP*, p. 653). But White's opinion does allow discriminatory effects which issue from a "reasonable" business practice. Business may rush in where barriers fear to tread.

White's ruling defends rational and systemic as opposed to prejudiced discrimination in two major ways. It shifts the burden of proof of disparate impact from the managers of the practice to those who challenge it (*WCP*, p. 659).³⁴ More fundamentally, it affirms the priority of the needs of business to those of employees or the general citizenry. In earlier cases, like *Griggs*, the Court had ruled that the employees' complaint would prevail over a management preference unless management could show business *necessity*; employees were granted real parity with their bosses in all but extreme circumstances. White rejects this precedent by declaring that the company need not demonstrate business necessity but only a reasonable preference.³⁵ Furthermore, though the employer must be willing to try to justify the preference, it need not actually succeed in persuading the affected persons or the courts.³⁶ White augments managerial power by allowing it to make laws out of its preferences rather than out of "necessity," and by allowing it to govern without the consent of the governed.

White makes this consolidation explicit. Though unskilled cannery workers are free to make their own governance suggestions, such as affirmative action hiring,

any alternative practices which [the cannery workers] offer in this respect must be equally effective as [management's] chosen hiring procedures in achieving petitioners' legitimate employment goals. Moreover, "factors such as the cost or other burdens of proposed alternative selection devices are relevant in determining whether they would be equally as effective as the challenged practice in serving the employer's legitimate business goals. Courts are generally

34. This aspect of White's decision was reversed by the Civil Rights Act of 1991, but this legislation did not challenge the primacy of business needs.

35. In his dissenting opinion, Justice John Paul Stevens regards this change as the crux of the disastrous majority view: "'The touchstone,' the Court said in *Griggs*, 'is business necessity.' . . . I am thus astonished to read that the 'touchstone of this inquiry is a reasoned review of the employer's justification for his use of the challenged practice.' . . . This casual—almost summary—rejection of the statutory construction that developed in the wake of *Griggs* is most disturbing" (*WCP*, pp. 672–73).

36. Justice Stevens regrets that the "Court announces that our frequent statements that the employer shoulders the burden of proof respecting business necessity 'should have been understood to mean an employer's production—but not persuasion—burden'" (*WCP*, p. 671).

less competent than employers to restructure business practices.”
[WCP, p. 661]

White is protecting the right of management’s “chosen practices” to prevail in whatever ostensibly democratic consultation they have established with the employees. Varying a phrase three times in a display of its unmistakable ascendancy in his mind, White declares “legitimate business goals” to be a principle to which the public judiciary must conform. Management also trumps the laws of economic efficiency through the priority of unspecified “other burdens.” All parties, White supposes, must submit their various claims to the laws of business as interpreted by those in management positions.

Racial difference intruded on the cannery suit as an obstacle to the free circulation of administrative prerogatives. The cannery employees made a claim about their own preferences regarding the social and economic effects of company policy and presumed their autonomous agency. They took some sovereignty from management and spread it around. The danger, for Justice White, lies not so much in damaging white supremacy as in damaging what white supremacy symbolizes to white elites: management’s exclusive power to decide about race and virtually everything else. Since managerial authority must enforce a great deal of cultural sameness, management will stay “white” as long as it stays management. The principles of management allow Justice White to maintain racial divisions without making a racial case. Managers don’t discriminate, but all good management does. White’s opinion can reject racial discrimination even as it justifies the racialized hierarchies of managerial order.

Racial outcomes cannot be judged by whether a person of color is excluded or included from a system unless the system’s structure of governance has been analyzed. In discussing the integrationist defense of managerial authority, I do not mean to suggest that U.S. racism is reducible to antidemocratic tendencies or that racism is a secondary characteristic of managerial elitism. U.S. institutions seem so frequently to be inhibited by a primal white “fear of a black planet” that forgetting that race is “a pre-eminently *social* phenomenon” is often a functional shortcut to accurate pictures of everyday interactions.³⁷ But as a phenomenon inextricably though variably related to a multitude of other social factors, racism must be learned and relearned, and for this it needs schoolrooms; in the eighties one of these schoolrooms was the hierarchical, managerial integrationism that the Reagan culture heralded as the “Freedom Road” of “minority opportunity.” It is impossible to understand racism in the

37. The first phrase is Public Enemy’s and also appears in Stuart Alan Clarke, “Fear of a Black Planet,” *Socialist Review* 21 (July–Dec. 1991): 37–60. The second is from Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, p. 90.

U.S. without understanding the abounding American faith in higher management; these intersect in the PC debates.

As it appears in the vast canon of literature on corporate power, the managerial tradition that rears its head in *Wards Cove Packing* rests on at least two symbiotic features. First, it tolerates and even encourages difference. Kerr coined the term *multiversity* to express and endorse institutionalized diversity, and White conceives the normative corporation to be multiracial, although he does not use the term. This tradition gained momentum as the 1980s renewed America's commitment to business culture while simultaneously proliferating schemes for liberalized, decentralized management like William Ouchi's "M-Form" strategy for "multidivisional" operations. Hewlett-Packard calls this ostensible democratization "MBWA (Management by Walking Around)."³⁸ This kind of management rejects essentialist notions of power flowing from a sovereign and would be best termed *postmodern* management had Michel Foucault not traced ideas of power as an economy all the way back to the sixteenth century, and had political economists like David Harvey not noted that "flexibility is not a new concept."³⁹ The flexible manager is the benevolent parent who, in one account, insures that his or her company is a "nourishing environment for personal growth."⁴⁰ The corporation becomes a family of units, each of which is celebrated for its autonomous and unique contribution.

But then, decentralized and "flexible" management retains final sovereignty over all divisions. Thus Kerr's multiversity relies on "moderates" being in control. Good management depends on the dispersion of a general economy of governance, on Kerr's "delicate balance of interests." The individual corporate sovereign has been replaced by the circulation of general rules and influences that, while encouraging diversity, maintains unity nonetheless. Flexible management systematizes sovereignty as an *economy* of power.⁴¹ Since, again in Kerr's terms, moderates are "in control of each power center," each separate unit can be trusted to resemble the others enough to insure governing power through a common culture.

38. John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene, *Re-inventing the Corporation: Transforming Your Job and Your Company for the New Information Society* (New York, 1985), p. 48.

39. David Harvey, "Flexibility: Threat or Opportunity?" *Socialist Review* 21 (Jan.–June 1991): 73.

40. Naisbitt and Aburdene, *Re-inventing the Corporation*, p. 52.

41. This idea, though it appears to different effect in the work of Weber, Parsons, Adorno, and Marcuse, is in the U.S. humanities usually associated with Michel Foucault. Foucault frequently insists that power lacks authority, so that, in contrast to my emphasis here, a system is disciplinary and constitutive without having an identifiable source or aim for its managerial directives. One implication of my argument is that it would be wrong for Foucault to claim that "techniques of government" replace or eliminate "structures of sovereignty," for they actually refine and update them. See Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (London, 1991), p. 101.

As Ouchi notes, "each division in an M-form company is not truly autonomous" and thus does not challenge a dispersed but finally universal command.⁴² Differences are encouraged so long as basic rules and values circulate through the corporation's every subculture without impedance. Diversity does not subvert this general economy; in fact, the background uniformities of the general economy depend on a recognition of diversity in order to function, for they must encourage a sense of inclusion, individuality, and participation.

This second aspect of flexible management guarantees that top-down authority, while it does not appear in the old form of sovereignty, survives, coexists, and works through the dispersal of power into a multidirectional field. As Harvey notes, "flexibility has little or nothing to do with decentralizing either political or economic power and everything to do with maintaining highly centralized control *through decentralizing tactics*."⁴³ Flexible management sponsors differentiation as a means to a more inclusive, delicate policing, and most advocates of renewed corporate management are open about this. "You have to sit back and trust your people," Lee Iacocca observes, "once you've laid down the rules."⁴⁴ The successful operation, note Tom Peters and Robert Waterman, achieves "the co-existence of firm central direction and maximum individual autonomy." It masters "simultaneous loose-tight properties." It knows how to be sure that "soft is hard."⁴⁵

An administrative democracy like ours prizes "soft" universals as the basis of an economy of order. What is soft and universal at the same time? According to Peters and Waterman, "culture is the 'softest' stuff around,"⁴⁶ and it offers universals that provide Will's "social cement." U.S. cultural systems are clearly too complex to be regarded as business firms, but the vast majority of their inhabitants are habituated to a businesslike union of diversity in commonality. The Right's furious rejection of attacks on European culture's claims to universality does not denote a nostalgia for an imperial dominance so much as a defense of a very functional form of flexible control.

Racial difference has a long American history of underwriting the paradoxical conjunction of democratic and hierarchical power. Barbara Fields has argued that as early as the seventeenth century, "racial ideol-

42. William G. Ouchi, *The M-Form Society: How American Teamwork Can Recapture the Competitive Edge* (New York, 1984), p. 23. Ouchi rejects more centralized models not because they block the creative fulfillment that democratization brings (as the more New Age corporatists Naisbitt and Aburdene would have it) but because the U-form (unity-form) is grossly inefficient (p. 18).

43. Harvey, "Flexibility," p. 73.

44. Lee Iacocca and Sonny Kleinfield, *Talking Straight* (New York, 1988), p. 79.

45. Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr., *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies* (New York, 1982), pp. 318, 319.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 319.

ogy supplied the means of explaining slavery to people whose terrain was a republic founded on radical doctrines of liberty and natural rights Race explained why some people could rightly be denied what others took for granted: namely, liberty.”⁴⁷ After the end of American slavery, racial difference was adapted to a variety of social orders where it performed the same general function of justifying the presence of subordination in a system officially dedicated to equal freedoms. At present, when racial difference does not officially mean racial inequality, the threat of unmanaged difference can justify managerial hierarchy in a system officially dedicated to democracy; it makes top-down management seem a unifying, rationalizing source of equity, fairness, and mutual understanding, one which does not contradict and in fact enhances democracy’s dispersal of power.

In *Wards Cove Packing* and much of the recent PC troubles, unmanaged racial difference is singled out as the kind of diversity that rejects managerial governance. Racial difference arguably poses the single most visible threat to these flexible resolutions. Race connotes autonomous principles that cannot be subsumed by centralized rules, a “democratic imaginary” from the management point of view (regardless of the sort of democracy a racialized group might or might not practice). Much of the tremendous racial anxiety now being felt among conservative integrationists is the old Arnoldian wine in a new bottle: the belief that racial difference would mean the lawlessness of an equality with what is different.

The Right is no longer resisting the presence of people of color per se, but has fought it bitterly when it represents a democratization of power relations. The Right repudiates segregation precisely to the extent that segregation has a separatist flip side that pushes unmanaged democracy into an “anarchic” politics of difference. Integration justifies and sustains inequalities that no longer flow from crude discrimination but from ostensibly neutral market mechanisms for allocating resources. Conservatives now approve of civil rights where this means the right of any individual to face open competition according to general rules of performance.⁴⁸ They do not approve of civil rights when that means a redistribution of economic power of the kind sought by Martin Luther King, Jr. They support a rainbow coalition when it means “Weed and Seed” for poor children but not when it challenges the management of community self-governance.

47. Fields, “Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America,” p. 114.

48. D’Souza, for example, favorably cites one observer of affirmative action at the University of California, Berkeley (John Bunzel) as saying that “‘what people at Berkeley didn’t realize is that merit admissions is an *egalitarian* principle, because it means that no matter what your background, if you are among the best qualified students, Berkeley lets you in’” (*IE*, p. 57).

Flexible Authoritarianism and the Humanities

I've been suggesting that the crisis of race among conservative integrationists has been inseparable from the crisis of hierarchical power within mass democracy. Where do the conservative humanities fit into this? Flexible management, schematically, operates through a double gesture in which hierarchical centralization coexists with egalitarian dispersal; the conservative humanities does not admit assisting either of these, but describes itself as inhabiting a realm of freedom in which management is not required. This claim is far less plausible than it first appears.

As I've already noted, the conservative attack on PC relies on a fixed opposition between the coercions of politics and the freedoms of disinterested thought. Where this distinction is in place, literature, art, and their related commentary are seen not to need to impose laws of authority in the manner of a Supreme Court justice. Politics imposes a law external to the individual while art allows the individual to give a law to him or herself. While history and "public opinion" encourage the individual to "surrender to whatever is most powerful," according to Allan Bloom, criticism in the Arnoldian sense provides a liberating "quest for knowledge and certitude" (*CAM*, p. 41). D'Souza, for example, traces his alternative to "illiberal education" to John Henry Newman's *The Idea of a University* (1852), which for him envisions "that true enlargement of mind which is the power of viewing many things at once as one whole, of referring them severally to their true place in the universal system" (*IE*, p. 23). Individual knowledge is accompanied by interpersonal harmony. Bloom sees true education as reflecting the fact that "men may live more truly and fully in reading Plato and Shakespeare than at any other time, because then they are participating in essential being and are forgetting their accidental lives." Because truth reveals the "Oneness" of "essential being," "those who seek the truth" become "absolutely one soul as they [look] at the problem" (*CAM*, pp. 380, 381). This view crosses narrowly defined political boundaries to influence the more liberal dreams of educators like Woodrow Wilson, who saw the ideal university as a place that was "used to the rough ways of democracy; and yet a place removed—calm Science seated there, recluse, ascetic, like a nun."⁴⁹ While political democracy may require supervision, thought does not. Scholars who rise above politics into calm science achieve a collective harmony, but only through mutual consent rather than external rule.

But the humanities as a search for ordered freedom has a couple of liabilities. It has tended to found its unity on exclusion, and there is little dispute at least about the basic facts of its history of celebrating universal reason even as it divides the cultural globe along lines of gender, race,

49. Woodrow Wilson, quoted in George F. Kennan et al., *Democracy and the Student Left* (Boston, 1968), p. 4.

nation, sexuality, and so on. And it does not rise above the centralizing, hierarchical aspect of management but retains and idealizes it. The conservative humanities might manage to pluralize itself by broadening its universals or reexamining previously rejected candidates for inclusion, but this would not prevent it from sustaining the comforts of authoritarian governance.

What would make the conservative humanities deserve the label “authoritarian”? One traditional criterion is the presence of arbitrary power, and Roger Kimball finds this possibility plausible enough to address. It comes up as he is trying to explain his objection to the liberal view that “the humanities are better conceived as fields of exploration and critique rather than materials for transmission.” Stating his preference for “transmission” over “exploration,” Kimball sees the resistance to receiving transmissions as a sign of “a deep suspicion of authority.” He then argues that while some authority is worthy of suspicion, the authority characterized by humanistic tradition is not. The bad kind of authority wields that “*arbitrary* power whose aim is domination.” The good kind is based on a “*legitimate* power whose aim is unity,” and this authority typifies what cultural history has found worthy of transmission. Legitimate power rests on a vision of unity while arbitrary power seeks only control (*TR*, p. 74).

But refuting the presence of arbitrary power is irrelevant in an epoch when the most successful forms of power, particularly in cultural circles, dominate through the opposite of arbitrariness: systematization, coordination, integration—in a word, unity. Kimball unwittingly confesses this feature of unity in defining it, following Arnold, as the “willing ‘deference to a standard higher than one’s own.’” The difference between unity and domination, for Kimball, boils down to the difference between “willing” and “unwilling” deference. Deference is present even in willing consent, and whatever free will is involved arises only as the freedom of an inferiority to a “higher standard.” Consent is meaningfully distinct from submission when it refers to an agreement between equals, but it is precisely this equality that Kimball’s unity denies. Under unity and tyranny alike, the subject is obliged to consent to the views of “great wise men in other places and times who can reveal the truth about life” (*CAM*, p. 34). Kimball succeeds only in showing that unity is a form of domination, “legitimate” though that may be.

By dropping the misleading issue of “arbitrary” power, the authoritarian strain in the contemporary humanities can be better described as the tacit assertion of an inherently hierarchical system in which the interpreter can best act on the basis of his or her secondariness, belatedness, or inferiority to a preestablished governing standard in relation to which freedom must be regarded as consent rather than control.

Prospective democracy is not a novel irritant for the humanistic Right. It has never been libertarian, and has never favored entrepreneurial textual interpretation, iconoclasm, new conceptual products,

self-determined promotions, or relocating intellectual production in new cultural settings. To the contrary, conservative humanists from Arnold on have emphasized law and order. At times they sound as though submission is not the means to the end of unity but an end in itself. To take one recent example, Victor Brombert, president of the Modern Languages Association in 1989, observes that

the critic who lacks humility before a work of art and refuses to accept the role of attentive mediator and interpreter is likely to assume as well a doctrinaire stance and a presumptuous critical absolutism. When criticism no longer has its roots in the love and awe of greatness, there is always the risk that the roles of artist and critic will be mixed up or reversed, so that the great text becomes a mere pretext for the critic's display of intellectual prowess or, what is perhaps even worse, for the imposition of the tyranny of abstractions.⁵⁰

These connections would be Orwellian were they not so venerable. Humility is freedom and intellectual independence is tyranny. Mediation is liberty and criticism is presumption. For Brombert, critical understanding and freedom of thought hinge on a deference that is willed yet mandatory. The position that casts deference as risk and dialogue, and that describes a "display of intellectual prowess" as authoritarian, might itself be called authoritarian for declaring subversive all ideas not cleared in advance by their connection to established "greatness."

One might prefer to read the conservative humanities as talking about the kind of respect for intellectual labors that have preceded our own, a respect that requires widely believable reasons for rejecting their findings. But this sort of critical respect requires precisely the equal footing that the Right attacks. In a piece first written in 1967 and reprinted in 1990, Bloom laments precisely such a "democratization of the university":

The most obvious, the most comprehensive, the truest explanation of what is going on in our universities today is the triumph of a radical egalitarian view of democracy over the last remnants of the liberal university. This kind of egalitarianism insists that the goal of a democratic society is not equality of opportunity but factual equality; . . . it will brook no vestige of differentiation in qualities of men and women. It would more willingly accept a totalitarian regime than a free one in which the advantages of money, position, education, and even talent are unevenly distributed. . . . the universities have become the battleground of a struggle between liberal democracy and radical, or, one might say, totalitarian, egalitarianism.⁵¹

50. Victor Brombert, "Presidential Address 1989: Mediating the Work, or, The Legitimate Aims of Criticism," *PMLA* 105 (May 1990): 395.

51. Bloom, "The Democratization of the University," *Giants and Dwarfs: Essays 1960–1990* (New York, 1990), p. 367.

Bloom never considers the possibility that the “factual equality” of a research community is a prerequisite to free discourse. He instead describes equality as the loss of individual consciousness in a totalitarian herd. Bloom of course likes loss of distinct individuality in “absolutely one soul,” but not a loss of self into equality. Oneness is freedom, but equality is totalitarian, because freedom entails a higher authority.

This specter of equality, left over from the sixties, may help explain the otherwise bizarre right-wing axiom of the nineties that civil liberties and multiculturalism are Stalinist attacks on freedom. And it exposes the politics of this equation: an unqualified hostility to the idea of a democracy that rests on some kind of egalitarianism rather than on the rule of great ideas, canonical texts, and their authorized agents in the field. Egalitarian democracy means civil war or, as a first step, undergraduates who feel no awe before the slave democracy of the Greeks.

The academic Right’s concern for submission also targets the democratized classroom. One example, citing some evidence of Lynne Cheney’s, claims that “a salient symptom of the illness of our institutions of ‘higher learning’ is the proliferation of junk courses. . . . The University of Delaware has a course in death-related issues in which a computer simulation of the student’s own death ‘puts you in touch with your own feelings.’” A course on “Tarot-Card Reading, Dowsing, Divining and Tea-Leaf Reading” at Boston University is described by a student as “one of those classic courses where you learn something about yourself.”⁵² The authors dismiss these courses not because of their particular content or methodology but because they presume the importance of the lives of their students. The predetermined truth the Right wishes to associate with political correctness is in these examples a routine component of its own definition of legitimate classroom topics, since they seek to exclude the supplements or challenges to the truth that arise from students’ active participation.

This rejection of democratic knowledge has also controlled much of the recent debate about Afrocentric curricula in public education. One tactic of critics of Afrocentricity might have been simply to accept the need to change the presently low visibility of the non-European civilizations taught in humanities courses and go on from there to help sort likely facts and hypotheses from dubious wishfulness, with the background understanding that cultural knowledges are not all readily translatable into established concepts. But this difficult collaborative project has not gotten off the ground. Many observers have categorically dismissed the Afrocentricity movement by describing it as responsive to the masses—as

52. Gerard Sirkin and Natalie Sirkin, “Oh, Where Have All the Values Gone? Thought Police and Political Correctness; Orwellian Nineties?” *UC-Santa Barbara Daily Nexus*, 15 Feb. 1991, p. 9.

teaching “‘what people think is important for [students’] self-esteem.’”⁵³ The sometimes-liberal Arthur Schlesinger claims that a New York State curricular report, authored by an advocate of Afrocentricity, has an interest in history “not as an intellectual discipline but rather as social and psychological therapy whose primary function is to raise the self-esteem of children from minority groups.”⁵⁴ The issue for Schlesinger seems not the particular errors of fact or interpretation but the idea that a community might have made their own decisions about how knowledge is to be structured and used. Reducing Afrocentricity to therapy preempts serious analysis of particular historical accounts in the new textbooks and replaces it with the a priori discrediting of the ideas of scholars mindful of a community’s cultural independence. This is obviously not to say that xenophobic Afrocentrisms should be adopted, although Afrocentricity’s tendency to mythologize is in keeping with the Euro-American tradition of whitewashing U.S. history for its children. It does indicate, however, Cheney’s and Schlesinger’s assumption that accurate scholarship, in the absence of specific empirical indicators, has been undermined through contact with the needs and interests of a particular community, with their desire for autonomy and recognition, with their desire to separate their histories from the rise of Europe.

Without demonstrating substantive problems, the Right rejects the category of “democratic knowledge” as a contradiction in terms. This idea goes beyond the uncontroversial claim that standards and beliefs are constitutive of teaching and research and must be administered by credentialed and experienced personnel, and that most standards, structures, traditions, and values always remain in place. It extends to denying some democratic truisms: that genuine knowledge emerges from the experience of subordinate or unauthorized voices, from questioning authority, or from the reciprocal interaction of untrained students and trained but receptive instructors. It denies that standards, though never absent, should be directly and indirectly, knowingly and unwittingly subject to the continual pressure of the desires and interests of those whom Thomas Jefferson called the “living generation,” of those who, within ongoing procedures of scholarly persuasion and proof, may take it upon

53. Cheney, quoted in Barbara Kantrowitz, “A Is for Ashanti, B Is for Black . . .,” *Newsweek*, 23 Sept. 1991, p. 46.

54. Schlesinger, *The Disuniting of America*, p. 35. Schlesinger is more sympathetic than this citation indicates, for the chapter that leads to this remark, “History the Weapon,” acknowledges the racialized elitism of much traditional American history: “More than Irish or Italians or Jews, black Americans, after generations of psychological and cultural evisceration, have every right to seek an affirmative definition of their past” (p. 30). Schlesinger’s understanding of the political nature of ongoing disputes within historical scholarship, and of the specificity of the African-American position there, makes his later reduction of Afrocentricity to therapy all the more remarkable a tribute to the fear among educated whites of self-directing knowledge communities.

themselves to discuss whether *The Tempest* is “about” imperialism, or debate the racial origins of ancient Greek civilization, or analyze the assumptions that allow so many white educators to dismiss out of hand any version of Afrocentric investigation. It rejects the egalitarian notion that, in a multiracial society, Euro-American interests and traditions would not be the sole judges of the relations between theirs and other American cultures—that cultural law would be decided with the help of the governed and not by “tradition” or the “secretary of domestic defense.” It rejects democracy without higher management.

It should now make more sense that part of our intellectual culture could so readily replace the communist revolution with the “victim’s revolution.” The red menace of the 1950s referred as much to domestic insurrections of the lowly as to the danger of foreign conquest; racial segregation is compatible with containment strategies justified by the existence of the Soviet Union. The rainbow menace reflects a similar fear of decisions about knowledge and power coming from below. D’Souza openly avows this threat by warning his readers that debates over literary theory and affirmative action challenge existing modes of governance. The minority revolutionaries seek “a fundamental restructuring of American society. It involves basic changes in the way economic rewards are distributed, in the way cultural and political power are exercised, and also in privately held and publicly expressed opinions” (*IE*, p. 13). Presuming this tradition to be hierarchical, D’Souza entitles his attack on affirmative action “More Equal Than Others” and calls his exposé of victim-loving theorists “The Last Shall Be First.” His complaint about teaching *I, Rigoberta Menchu* in one of Stanford’s eight “Culture, Ideas, and Values” classes is that Menchu regards history as leading toward “the final emancipation of the proletariat” (*IE*, p. 72). The ideal of a common culture prohibits this kind of secession from the top-down management on which social order is thought by the Right to depend. Here racial autonomy implies the secession at other times attributed to class war.⁵⁵

This sort of humanistic thinking is controlled by its authoritarian imaginary. It must be remembered, however, that in a nation formally consecrated to democratic ideals, authoritarian power cannot violate democratic procedures. Though power may be top-down, it must also be decentered; this is the paradoxical yet profoundly functional combination of conflicting modes that can be termed, among other names, liberal authoritarianism or managerial democracy.

From the Right’s perspective, the PC position threatened to disrupt this coordination of opposites. It marked the withdrawal of voluntary deference. PC activated the most important weakness of decentered forms of

55. This is only somewhat less true for the world order, where conflicts between rich and poor countries, in the waning of the East-West divide, have become increasingly color coordinated.

authority; amidst all the dispersal, mobility, and regulated autonomy of flexible management, unifying control might become too diffuse. Management's democratic elements might absorb enough participatory inclusion and differential input to change into something more self-directed. The conservative humanities puts the sovereignty back in flexibility by re-emphasizing the masters who do not command but only invite our love of their superiority. Rejecting simple despotism, the Right works to maintain the double-edged power of managerial supervision. Its job is to make this top-down flexibility appear more beautiful than democracy.

Post-PC

All this notwithstanding, the PC crisis recalls the humanities' conceptual resources as much as it might discourage us from using them. As the debate dwindles in its present form, it is easier to notice that the siege had little negative effect on some areas of the humanities. Race studies, queer theory, colonial and postcolonial studies, and others didn't miss a beat throughout the fitful attempts at increased discipline. Some excellent prospects can be sketchily inferred from the histories of both the PC debates and of those who evaded them.⁵⁶

Politics. Contrary to humanistic myth, politics does not block outreach but allows it to happen. Enhancing political knowledge would mean moving beyond the helpful truism that "everything we do is political" to reckoning with the effects of politics as everyday governance. This involves thinking through the actual relations in which we find ourselves (institutional positions, power differences, and so on) rather than through ideal relations (shared values, common backgrounds) with which literary study is overendowed. Some of the strongest fields in the PC period were those that looked beyond an unreal commonality at their relation to school, community, and state.

Democratic theory. Democracy is no panacea, but still needs development. This would not involve replacing our ongoing research but pursuing it with more awareness of the extent to which even oppositional work has tended to take managerial democracy for granted. The humanities is unsurpassed in knowledge of exactly the kind of double-edged mechanisms on which liberal managerial forms depend, but the most influential result of this knowledge has been to elaborate democracy's "radical impossibility."⁵⁷ Impossible, yes and no, but in any case the practicalities of increased cost-cutting and legislative intervention will likely force us to defend ourselves by defending self-management. We will need to have

56. For fuller discussions of the PC aftermath, see *After PC: Nineties Prospects for the Human Sciences*, ed. Christopher Newfield and Ron Strickland (forthcoming).

57. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London, 1989), p. 6.

much more to say about how this could work—about how to uncouple democratic and managerial power.

Democratic alliances. Healthy PC fields usually rested at least as much on mutual and public support as on administrative recognition. Faculty associations (as well as community ties) need drastic improvement, particularly across class barriers. This would include better contacts among cultural scholars, rhetoric and composition teachers, and community activists. The latter two groups could teach university faculty a great deal about democratic education and association. This is particularly important given education's potential as a major venue for replacing managerial structures with self-direction.

Diversity. The PC debates suggest that supervisory decentralization has a particularly hard time homogenizing fundamental cultural differences. Increased diversity means racial and ethnic diversification (which is proceeding at a snail's pace) combined with the ideological kind. We should not be satisfied with a variety of racial or cultural backgrounds that is managed through the political restrictions that result when Clark Kerr's "moderates [are] in control of each power center." Cultural, intellectual, and political diversity depend on each other.

Disunity. We live in the disunited state of America. Our national "disuniting" began with our inception, and it's not too soon to get over our regret about this. Our "pluralistic," "consensual" union, however one feels about it, has always rested on a divided, antagonistic multiplicity of cultures whose overlap has been sporadic, conflictual, or incomplete. The burden of providing a unifying cultural government has for too long interfered with our ability to understand cultural actuality. Even our defensiveness about this has blocked a more creative contribution to public life. Disunity is not a problem—in fact, it is usually preferable to more efficient resolutions. *Disunity* is another word for *democracy*.

Gore Vidal has remarked that the U.S. has elections instead of politics; in the humanities we have managerial ideals instead of politics. For this reason only a few of us have been better than scientists at making culture democratic. Democracy—often evoked and seldom applied, its defeats as opaque as they are denied. Whatever it still might be, it involves the restoration of politics. If they have helped put politics back in the place of governance, the PC debates have been well worth the trouble.