

Flies in Amber

*How Aging Radicals Use Race On Campus To Revive
The Confrontational Fire of the '60s.*

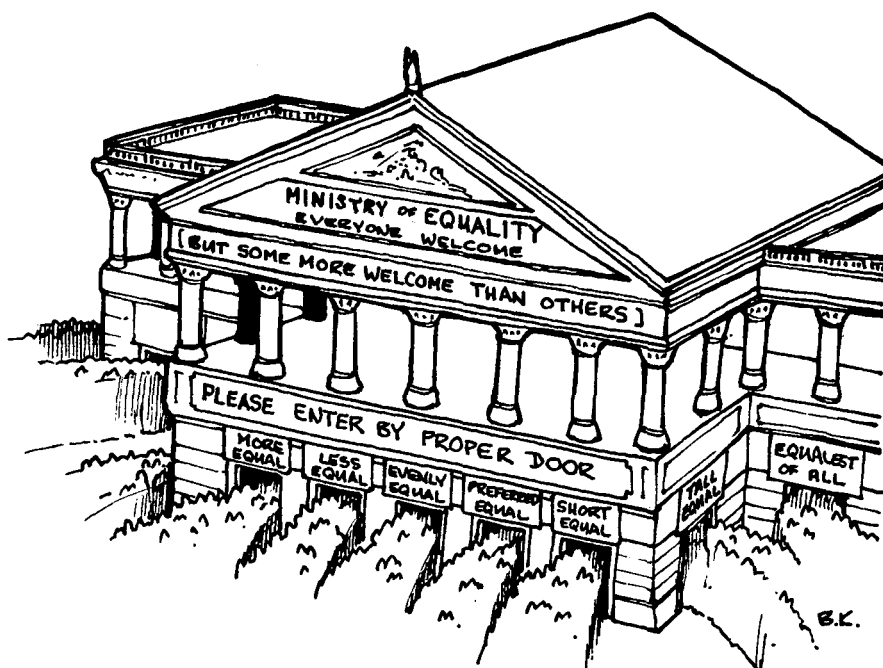
by
Glynn Custred

ON NOV. 7, 1990, a group of students burst into the classroom of Professor Vincent Sarich at the University of California, Berkeley, disrupting the class and accusing the professor of racism. The reason given was that Sarich, in his introductory anthropology course, had discussed the uneven distribution of abilities among different groups in society. The real reason, however, was an article recently published in the Cal Berkeley alumni magazine, *California Monthly*. In that article Sarich had criticized the university's affirmative action policy for student admission, procedures that operate on a two-track system of selection — one based on merit, and the other on race and ethnicity. Most of the minority students admitted under this program are only marginally qualified by UC standards, and thus stand out sharply against all the others. In fact, the gap between the two groups is generally four years, by no means a trivial difference at this level, especially in a fast-paced academic environment like that of Berkeley.

The result, wrote Sarich, is that two distinct student bodies are now developing on the Berkeley campus. These groups are distinguished not only by preferential treatment and by different levels of preparation and performance, but are also clearly differentiated from one another by race and ethnicity. No policy, said Sarich, could be better designed to create and intensify divisiveness in an already competitive atmosphere than this one. It was the publication of such views, especially in a maga-

zine that reaches so many influential readers, that brought disruption to Sarich's classroom and subsequent campus-wide vilification.

THIS CONFRONTATION in the classroom was not, however, an isolated incident. At the beginning of the 1990 fall semester student protesters at San Francisco State University disrupted the class of political scientist Robert Smith demanding that his course, which dealt with black activism in American politics, be canceled. Neither the subject of the course nor the professor's perspective on the material covered were at issue. And race was not a consideration since both student demonstrators and the professor are black. What was at issue was whether topics dealing with blacks could be taught outside the black studies department. In other words, it was, simply, a battle over turf. What brings these



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two incidents together is the introduction of street tactics into the classroom; in the Sarich case to enforce politically correct thinking, and in the Smith case to protect the monopoly of a department where political correctness is defined. Both incidents are manifestations of a single movement growing on college and university campuses nationally. This movement goes under the rubric of "diversity" or "multiculturalism," and its goals are to transform higher education according to a political agenda whose roots go back to the '60s. This agenda calls for the establishment of:

- 1) a two-track system of student admissions and graduation, one based on merit and the other on race,
- 2) a two-track system of faculty hiring and promotion also based on race and ethnicity,
- 3) curriculum revisions designed to change students' view of the world, to influence their thinking, and, later, their decisions as voters and as professionals.

NOT ONLY are campuses in California now establishing such quotas in student admissions, but advertisements are appearing in academic publications across the country announcing special "targets of opportunity" openings on the faculties of several institutions within the California State University system. This amounts to a set-aside policy of faculty recruitment whereby no white males need apply. In fact, no blacks need apply in those cases where a Hispanic last name is required to fill out the balance sheet.

Curricular changes are also underway where exceptional thinkers and writers of the past, such as Plato and Shakespeare, are coming under review. The argument here is that such "dead old white men" are not only increasingly irrelevant in our new "multicultural" society, but that they also somehow offend and harm the psyches of women and minorities. The new curriculum must, it is said, represent, in the proper affirmative action style, thinkers and writers whose contributions are less important than the color of their skin and their gender. And even when the classics are taught, activists advocate "deconstructing" them (that is, subvert their original meaning) so they either come out affirming revisionist ideology, or as a foil against which ideological points are made. In response to pressure from those who clamor for such changes, curriculum committees at all the state's institutions of higher learning are now busy reconsidering the appropriateness of "Western Civilization" for the minds of our youth.

Those who have provoked this movement are small in number. They are in part '60s radicals, now among

the tenured faculty and administrators of all our institutions of higher education, together with a small number of minority faculty who are lodged primarily in ethnic studies departments. These radicals have never departed from the Marxist-based thinking current in the '60s but now discredited everywhere in the world except the cloistered halls of the academy. Also the minorities

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involved are still fixed, like flies in amber, in the confrontational strategies of the '60s, apparently oblivious of the fact that that battle has been won and the front in the struggle for minority success has shifted venue. In order to extend their hold on their jobs, and to extend their power in general, such faculty perpetuate a doctrine of divisiveness by teaching, in courses required for all students, that minorities should hustle the victimization of their parents and grandparents while majority students should feel guilty about the sins of theirs.

Revisionists are backed by a much larger number of faculty whose sensibilities were formed in the '60s, and who accept uncritically the rationalizations given for these radically different policies without bothering to examine the corrosive nature of the changes they entail. And then there are others, perhaps even the majority, who recognize the darker side of "diversity," and are disturbed by it, but who shy away from the automatic and inevitable charge of "racism" if they attempt to initiate a rational debate on the subject, or fear intimidation, like that served out to Sarich, Smith, and many others around the country, if they persist in their politically incorrect behavior.

EFFORTS AT redefining the university are not limited to college campuses. In the 1990 session of the California Legislature, Tom Hayden introduced a bill (AB 462) designed to change the state's Post Secondary Education Code, the legal framework in which California's publicly-funded institutions of higher education operate. This bill would have required that university administrators specify "goals, targets, and timelines" for increasing, by the year 2000, admission of students

from “historically underrepresented” minorities in proportion to their numbers in the state’s high school graduating classes. To facilitate this increase, the bill called for special admissions policies that would allow non-traditional criteria, including race, to be employed when deciding admission to the university.

A policy that would allow an influx of unprepared students to enter college would only increase the already high drop-out rate of minority students. To avoid this increase Hayden’s bill also mandated that the *graduating* classes of schools in both the University of California and California State University systems mirror in racial and ethnic composition that of the state’s high school graduating classes. This would have exerted pressure on administrators and faculty to insure the graduation of those poorly-prepared minorities who had been admitted on the basis of affirmative action criteria, in effect, extending quotas all the way from the admissions process to graduation.

THE BILL did not specify how these graduation quotas were to be met. One might assume that some kind of special program to help deficient students was intended, yet the legislation mentioned no such program. (And in any case we might ask just how much remedial training colleges and universities can reasonably assume and still remain institutions of *higher* education.) The only measure specified in the bill for carrying out this policy was a provision that would have held administrators accountable for their institutions’ success in meeting these quotas, tying their job performance, and thus their advancement and job security, to the achievement of the mandated goals. Pressure would have been exerted on all concerned which would have led to the development of a double standard throughout the system, eventually demoralizing both majority and minority students, devaluing minority diplomas, and in the end, decreasing academic standards across the board.

In order to protect these provisions during the legislative process, some of them were inserted in education bills introduced by others. One such bill was Willie Brown’s AB 3993 which, like the Hayden bill, would have mandated that UC and CSU student admissions reflect the ethnic

and racial make-up of the state’s high school graduating classes, and that administrators be held responsible for seeing to it that these same proportions be preserved in the graduating classes of state funded colleges and universities.

Another piece of legislation, introduced by Sens. Hart and Killea (SB 507), stipulated that preference be given to students from “historically underrepresented minorities” when transferring from community colleges to four-year institutions. Since “economically disadvantaged students” were listed as a separate category the effect of the legislation was to introduce racial and ethnic quotas in the transfer process, criteria that would have taken priority over the student’s academic achievement.

And finally there was the Torres bill (SB 2843) which called for the implementation of a full-scale plan, with specific goals and timetables, for achieving diversity in faculty hiring in both the UC and CSU systems. The problem is that there are simply not enough qualified minority candidates to satisfy the affirmative action requirements of all the colleges and universities of the country. In order to meet the terms of this mandate, pressure would have been exerted on search committees to reduce standards, thereby establishing a double track for faculty hiring. Besides creating a dual system of faculty quality within the university, such a policy would also be discriminatory, since it excludes more highly qualified whites and Asians from some jobs simply because of the color of their skin and their ethnic background. “Diversity,” in this sense, therefore, is just a code word for reverse discrimination.



IN ORDER to retain and promote such affirmative action hires the bill would also have required that faculty committees and administrators be sensitive to such new and vaguely formulated criteria as “non-traditional research” and “public service” when evaluating candidates for retention, tenure, and promotion. This would have opened up the entire process to serious abuse thus threatening the standards and the morale of the faculty. Moreover, college and university administrators would have been held accountable for the success of the program in the

same way they would have been responsible for maintaining the double standards of affirmative action student admission policies.

All four bills were passed by the Legislature but were vetoed by the governor. Willie Brown, however, is still the most powerful man in the Assembly and Tom Hayden has been given the chairmanship of a new Assembly committee that will deal with UC and CSU matters. These two legislators, together with their allies in the Assembly and the Senate, are certain to reintroduce all these measures in 1991. As one Sacramento insider put it, "Hayden has already played his hand, so we know what he intends to do *and* that he and his friends have the votes to pass these bills."

HIGHER EDUCATION is no longer the prerogative of a privileged elite. Instead it constitutes an essential component of a dynamic and competitive economy. This means that the greatest number of people must be educated to the highest degree possible in a modern, forward-looking society. And this, in turn, means a commitment to mass public higher education, not only for obvious economic reasons, but also since an informed citizenry, able to exercise critical judgement, is essential for the proper functioning of a democratic nation.

With these needs in mind, planners after the Second World War devised and set in place a system of colleges and universities in California operating on all levels designed to provide high quality education at low cost and with maximum accessibility; a system that in fact is a model for modern countries everywhere in the world.

The problem of minority "underrepresentation" is not the fault of this system, and it is not due to racism on the part of the faculty and administration. In fact, no segment of society is as liberal as is the academic community. The reason for "underrepresentation" is simply that minority students leave high school with greater academic disadvantages than do others. For example, the National Endowment of Educational Progress reported in 1988 that Hispanics possess literacy skills half a standard deviation point below white youths, and that blacks score a full standard deviation point below whites, a substantial difference indeed. The report goes on to say that, on average, black high school graduates score lower on literacy tests than do white high school dropouts, and that the scores of black college graduates are similar to those of white high school graduates. Also blacks on average are a full 100 points

lower on SAT scores than are whites. These deficiencies are the results of many factors that have already had their effect before such students reach college age. Statistical proportionality at the college level, achieved without regard for the academic preparation and ability of those admitted in the name of diversity, is thus not an educator's solution to a serious problem, but rather a bookkeeper's solution, and a dishonest one at that.

This lag in preparation and performance is indeed a very serious problem since newly created jobs on all

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levels require ever greater intellectual skills. Skirting this problem through the quick fix of statistical parity works to the disadvantage of the very people it is supposed to help. In fact bringing someone to the university simply to have his color represented on campus is not much different from bringing an athlete to college to play football for the school then dropping him once his eligibility runs out without the education he was ill-prepared to receive in the first place. Also, to mandate that such students be given diplomas anyway, as the Brown and Hayden bills would have done, is even more shocking, for it reveals a cynical attitude towards the university, viewing it not as an institution where people learn facts and intellectual skills, but instead treating it as nothing more than a credential mill. If that is all the university is why spend billions of dollars a year to maintain it?

THE MOST disturbing thing about such policies, however, is that they are inherently racist since they reveal a tacit assumption that minorities really cannot do any better. Minorities must therefore be given the benefits that others must earn through hard work and merit. Faculty and administrators thus seem to be saying, "save the standards and the rigor for those who are capable, namely those who really count." The implication of innate inadequacy that these policies instill in minority students is the worst of its many bad features. It ex-

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Affirmative Action's Textbook Case

Half a world away in a cultural and historical setting completely unlike our own, race-based preferential policies in the once-peaceful island nation of Sri Lanka still produced the usual tragic results.

by
Thomas Sowell

THE INTERNATIONAL nature of the issue of preferential policies was unintentionally dramatized for me one evening by a well-educated Maori woman who was part of a group having dinner together in an expensive hotel restaurant in Auckland, New Zealand. The central theme of her explicit argument was the historical uniqueness of the Maoris in New Zealand — and how that uniqueness justified and required preferential policies. But the key concepts she used, her general attitude, the intonations of her voice, her facial expressions and gestures, the body language, the buzzwords, her evasive, accusatory, and retaliatory responses to any serious questions or criticisms, all could have been found in almost any large city in the United States, among the representatives of any of a long list of groups having or seeking preferential treatment. With local variations, similar arguments and attitudes can be encountered from Britain to Malaysia to Fiji, and at many points in between. Whatever the uniqueness of the Maoris in New Zealand, the arguments and connotations were closer to being universal than unique.

Groups receiving preferential treatment are indeed as disparate as can be imagined — from untouchables in India to whites in South Africa. This makes any common patterns among them all the more striking and deserving of closer scrutiny. One of these patterns is that preferential programs, even when explicitly and repeatedly defined as “temporary,” have tended not only to persist but also to expand in scope. Another is that both official and unofficial writings on preferential pro-

grams tend to abound in discussions of the rationales, mechanics, and resource inputs of such programs, with a dearth — or even total absence — of data on the actual outcomes. A third is that those outcomes typically include an increase in group polarization in the wake of preferential programs, with non-preferred groups reacting adversely, in ways ranging from political backlash to mob violence and civil war. On this last point, Sri Lanka provides a textbook case.

The island nation of Sri Lanka, off the southeast coast of India, began its independence in 1948 with a much more hopeful prognosis for intergroup relations than did most Third World countries. As a Sri Lankan scholar described the situation:

“In striking contrast to other parts of South Asia (including Burma), Sri Lanka in 1948 was an oasis of stability, peace, and order. The transfer of power was smooth and peaceful, a reflection of the moderate tone of the dominant strand in the country’s nationalistic movement. More important, one saw very little of the divisions and bitterness which were tearing at the recent independence of the South Asian countries. In general, the situation seemed to provide an impressive basis for a solid start in nation-building and national regeneration.”

YET THIS optimism, shared both by outside observers and by Sri Lankans themselves, proved to be painfully and disastrously mistaken. The worsening of relations between the Sinhalese majority (about 70 percent of the population) and the Tamil minority (about 20 percent) began with preferential policies.

When the British colony of Ceylon became the independent nation of Sri Lanka, the leaders of its Sinhalese and Tamil communities were both committed to

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