

# WHERE HAVE ALL THE FLOWERS GONE? RACISM IN THE COUNTERCULTURE

There is a deep, unsettling and increasing problem of race-segregation in the "counter-culture." It is one of the open, and unhappy, secrets in the New Left: one which, for several years now, a number of us have tried to hide, transcend or by-pass.

The secret is out: it is something we shall have to find the willingness to talk about and to confront head-on. The exploitation and oppression of the adult world receives its ironical mirror-image in the race-segregation and class-exploitation of the counter-culture: much of this unfortunately, and flagrantly, encouraged by fashionable white authors.

The matter achieves its most specific and most vivid manifestation in the rapidly spreading cancer of the segregated two-thousand-dollar "Free School" for white children. The issue at stake in this is neither abstract nor gratuitous. We hear now every day of small, exquisite Summerhillian replicas in the United States, charging tuition of between two hundred and four hundred dollars monthly. The question is posed, but seldom answered, in straightforward and explicit terms. What does a phrase like "Free School"—or a word, indeed, like "freedom"—come to mean if it can be purveyed alone to those who have the cash, the

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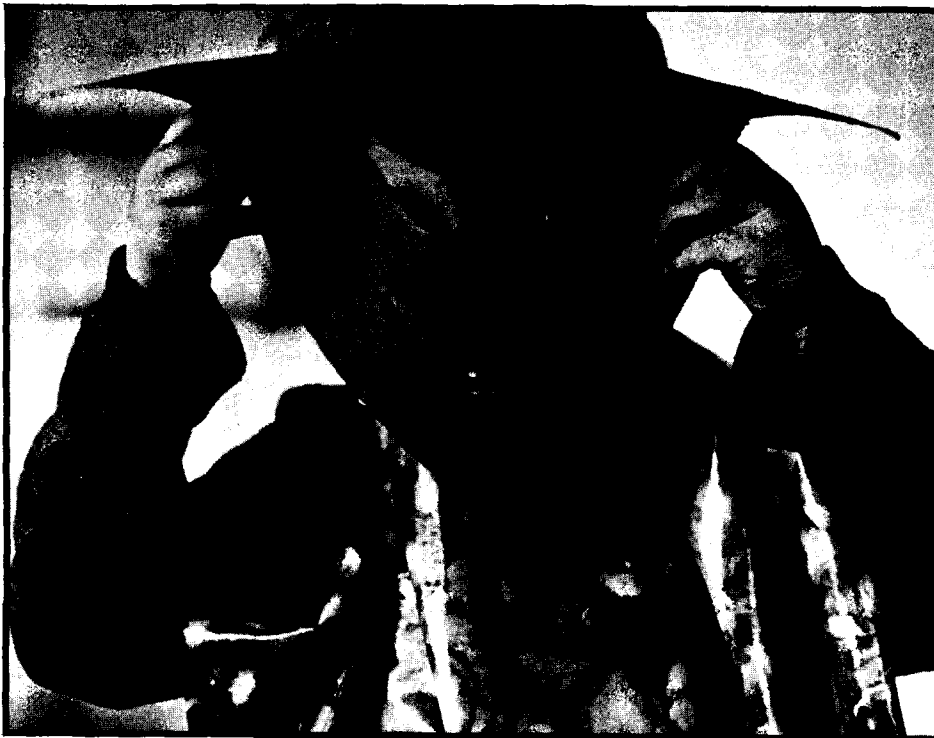
class and the right pigmentation to buy this kind of insulated option: utopia by ticket of admission only? Is "Free School," then, like jazz, soul-food, work-shirt and cartridge-belt, soon to be lifted up out of the hands and aspirations and symbolic yearnings of the black and poor to become once more the marketable prize of those who have the cash and clever access to be fashionable, rich and innovative at the same time? Lord and Taylor sells the cartridge-belts; does the Summerhill Society now market freedom?

In the past twelve months, after much hesitation, I have begun to raise this issue in various contexts. The manner of self-defense, and even of quite vigorous retaliation, which is adopted very often by those men and women who believe themselves to be in vulnerable positions in regard to the exclusion of poor people, now follows a pattern which appears increasingly predictable. One of my close co-workers speaks of this pattern in the apt, if rather unforgiving, phrase: The Gifted Evasion of the Central Point.

There is a formula that runs somewhat in these terms: "Nobody gives you, men and women who are working in the cities, any bad times for the fact that you have chosen to conduct your labors among the black or Puerto Rican children. In the same way, no one has the right to give us trouble because we have decided to do our work here among white people. Isn't the education of white children

of importance also? Isn't the oppression and the exploitation of a poor-white miner's child in Kentucky just as significant, just as regrettable, just as much worthy of our toil and opposition as the exploitation of a black or Puerto Rican child? Is the ghetto the only place where it is honorable or permissible for us to struggle?"

The issue, obviously, as these people know quite well, is *not* the issue of white man vs. black; Kentucky coal-mine vs. South Side of Chicago. The issue, for that matter, is not even rural village vs. urban slum. The issue is far more serious, more obvious and more direct: It is the willful decision, on the part of many serious, well-informed, and otherwise earnest white adults, to build a high-priced pedagogic



## BY JONATHAN KOZOL

“compound” for the education of their children, in which there will be *neither* blacks *nor* Puerto Ricans, *neither* Chicanos *nor* poor-whites of any stamp or breed or ethnic background. Instead, there will be one race, one style, one economic level only: wealthy, whimsical, academic, self-concerned, all-white.

Serious Free Schools that intend to deal with problems of this character know well, by now, a number of the means by which to obviate these dangers. They know the means by which to draw in diverse portions of the economic and the social spectrum. They also know the ways by which to guarantee the *real participation* of the mothers and the fathers of poor children from the first year onward. They do not *begin* as little colonies of privilege, of self-satisfaction, balance-scales, bare feet—and then, as an ethical afterthought, go out in search of children of the local poor. They *start* by ringing doorbells, going to town meetings, talking with storeowner, factory-laborer, policeman, postman, fisherman, radio-repairman, gas-station manager, welfare mother, priest or minister, farm-worker, garbage-collector, train-conductor, miner, union-organizer, taxi-driver. In such a manner—similar, I think, in its essential operations, to the door-to-door solicitations of the parent-leaders who began the first Free Schools in Boston—they manage to build in democratic process and an exciting mix of class and character, of wealth and academic preparation, from the earliest hour. In many cases, the people who have organized these kinds of serious and democratic schools have found, within two years, that some of their most powerful leaders, most competent organizers and long-lasting backers, boosters, money-hustlers, teachers, emerge from the numbers of those whom they have first enlisted in their ranks by walking door-to-door.

The opposite example is, however, equally important to pin down, if only in order to serve us as an object-lesson in self-segregation. The Free School that first erects its walls, enrolls its children, hires its teachers, establishes its goals, buys its supplies, paints its door, decorates its rooms and lays out cushions on the floor, and then, in the middle of the second or third year, goes out in search of a “more democratic pupil-mix,” seldom if ever is able to transcend or overcome its basically aristocratic and self-serving character. Teachers and parents in a number of small Free Schools of white academic origin speak to me, frequently, and with a good deal of distress, of just how difficult it proves to be to draw in any substantial numbers of poor people: “They don’t seem to believe that what we do within this school can be of real use to their children. . .”

The poor, of course, are correct in this belief. By the time these Free Schools start to think about a “broader pupil-mix,” they already have defined their style in terms so elegant, so whimsical, so anti-serious, and non-combative as to impose a wall of cultural signal flags stronger by far than the strongest chain-link fence that they could put up at the borders of their property.

If schools like this do sometimes manage, despite such powerful but unseen walls, to bring in serious numbers of poor children or, as in some areas like Cambridge, Evanston or St. Paul, children of the blue-collar middle-class, they frequently find the parents of these kids reluctant to participate in something which already has such obvious and

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formidable lines. The *prior definition*, both of the purposes and of the atmosphere within the school, in terms of hand-made sandals, Mexican blouses, in-group jargon, knee-jerk references to certain sets of books and authors and the like, creates uneasiness in the mothers and the fathers of poor children—an *awe and inhibition they do not experience if they have been given an opportunity to share in the creation and the definition of that atmosphere two years before*.

Four years ago, in Boston, it could be said with little fear of imprecision that the single most segregated, and nonpublic, school within a thirty-mile range was an upper-class prep school for rich girls called Dana Hall. In an area plentiful and abounding with exclusive prep schools for rich children, Dana Hall had the remarkable distinction of having admitted no more than six black children into a student population of four hundred. Today, it is bitter and painful to confess, a number of the upper-class Free

Schools do a more effective job than this of keeping their precincts free from black or lower-class contamination. There is, in this, more than a little cause for sadness; for the children in these kinds of schools are drawn, by and large, from those among the liberal and intellectual upper-middle-class who, if they were still back within the public high schools where they first began, would find themselves in school beside at least a moderate representation of black children, Latin-American children, children of the lower middle-class and of the working-class. In the breed of exclusive Free Schools which their parents now sometimes unwittingly create, they are in a social setting of such whiteness, aristocracy and in-bred excellence of blood and breeding as would do honor to the student population of St. Paul's or Eton of the early 1940s.

These schools are racist, if the word means anything, and ironically, those who create them are doing today just what our old foes, Louise Day Hicks and Governor George Wallace, were doing ten years ago. They do run, are running, and seem content to keep on running racist institutions. The sudden surprise with which they answer us demonstrates too well how bitter and fast the downhill fall has been. They speak, for example, if often with a note of desperation, of "processes of natural decency" and of "organic love" that build up gradually (as they believe) from child to classmate and from friend to friend, embracing at last a whole community of good and decent people in this school, or in this one suburban neighborhood in which they dwell, and then expanding outward (as they say) to take into its realm all people in the neighboring towns, the cities and the nation, and the whole of mankind. Anyone who visits in the Free Schools that proliferate out in the rich suburban areas surrounding Boston and New York, or even more within the mountains of California or in the green hills of Vermont, knows very well that this is not what really happens. Too often, however, they are afraid to say so. They keep right on with all the old clichés and all the old familiar incantations about "process," "love," "community" and "natural organic patterns." Little by little they lose the will to find the line between the denotations of their optimistic words and the bitter truth of straightforward segregation and class-exploitation which they learn to live by.

To certain people, who tell us they are able to "out-grow" the sense of struggle, and to "transcend" their own original concern with social issues like racism and class-exploitation, the fact that they are running segregated and class-insulated schools does not appear to be a matter worth regret or serious discussion. To me, it seems a cause for infinite sadness. Just children, in my own opinion, cannot be educated in an unjust school. Any school, no matter of what character, which constitutes an island of self-interest and of contrived euphoria within a sea of pain, especially one to which admission is, by reason of geography, class or wealth, selective and elite, is not a just school—no matter how experimental, earnest, innovative and enlightened it may strive to be. Segregation remains segregation, class-privilege and economic exploitation remain both privilege and exploitation, whether they exist beneath the traditional banner of George Wallace or under the innovative polysyllables of modern authors. Too many people have fought

and died, too many lives have been invested, risked and taken from us, for us to look without alarm, without deep sorrow and a sense of bitter outrage, too, on processes of self-deception of this character. The rise in sale of pacification literature, such as *The Whole Earth Catalog*, which panders to the narcissistic gratification of the children of the ruling class, parallels directly the decline in sales of books by men like Eldridge Cleaver, C. Wright Mills or Malcolm X. Month after month, the counter-culture publications—the obvious examples are *Mother Earth*, the *Modern Utopian*, and *New Schools Exchange*—run photographs of beautiful children learning under ecstatic circumstances in the Free Schools of the West and Southwest. For months at a time, there is not once a photograph of any child who is not white and, also, obviously privileged, well-born, well-fed, and well-rewarded. How can they have forgotten quite so soon?

There are these final points:

1. The casual but remorseless exploitation, by a certain number of white people, of selected items of black rhetoric will just no longer function as a method of self-exculpation and release from clear obligations. Every Free School that now opens up its doors, in the right spirit and at an early stage, to children of black people or of poor people of whatever origin, discovers a vigorous and alert response. So long as there are hundreds of thousands of poor people who still believe in the good faith and straightforward candor even of limited numbers of white people, then it is the obligation of those who labor in this field to see to it that this confidence receives a strong, inventive and risk-taking answer.

2. The intellectual construction by which white women and white men sometimes attempt to justify class-privilege and class-segregation runs somewhat in these terms: "The children of the oppressed classes of this nation need, above all else, to make it *into* power, cash, the system. The children of the oppressor-class, i.e., kids like our own, need to go in just the opposite direction. They do not need to make it *in*, but make it *out*. Each is honorable, legitimate and just. The two, however, are entirely incompatible. . . ."

This kind of presentation is no longer valid. It does not wash because it is no longer true. Dozens of schools now serve the interests of black, white, rich, poor and Spanish-speaking children: people of diverse needs and diverse inclinations. Children who already read when they are six or eight years old do not sit down in classes planned for ten-year-old illiterates. Children who are good in numbers and in mathematical calculations of all kinds do not waste time in classes, or in "crashes," in math-basics. Children who experience little need for paper-credits and traditional credentials do not prepare for College Board Examinations. Those who still believe there is no other way, for now, outside the universities, to shatter the glass and to expropriate the skills, do join in tough crash-sessions of this character.

The important thing, however, is that it should happen in one place and all together. It should happen in camaraderie and in deep sisterhood and brotherhood and shared endeavor. Little by little the two sides tend to move together. The "de-schooled consciousness," so often the

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# Kissinger:

## THE SWINGING SPHINX

Dear Henry: A Confession, by Danielle Hunebelle, Berkeley-Medallion, paper, \$1.25.

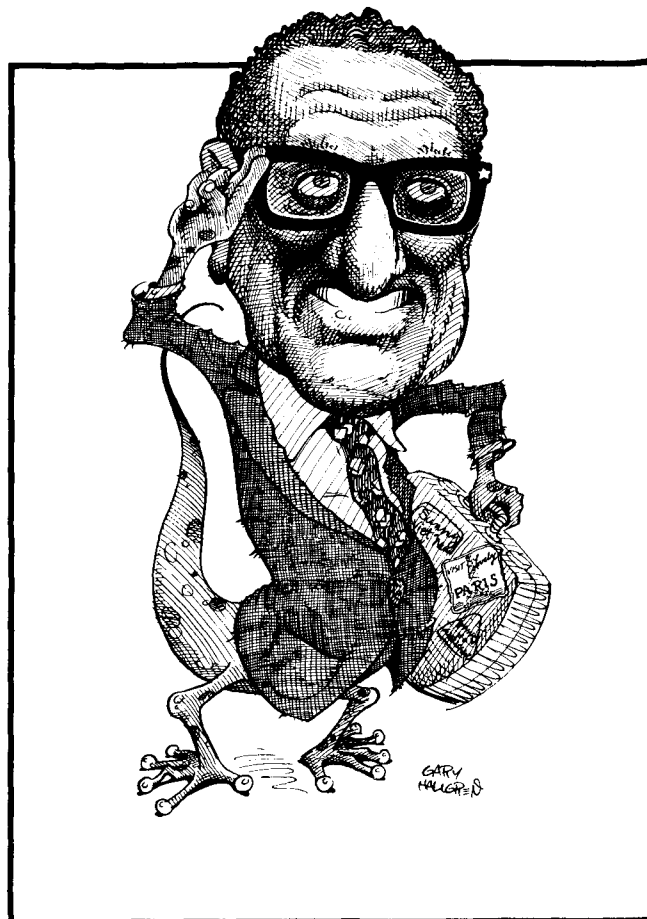
Kissinger: The Uses of Power, by David Landau, Houghton Mifflin, \$5.95.

Most current anatomies of love have been too carnal for my taste. Focusing on cock and cunt, on the thrill of physical conquest, on the transient kick of maleness or femaleness proved, they have failed to celebrate the cerebrality of love. They have tended to overlook the fact that infatuation can be an intellectual exercise motivated by the need to decode another human and pierce through his/her mysteries and contradictions. The polemics of feminism have further obscured the ecstasy of psychological defloration while illuminating the vagaries of physiology. Ironically, it is the French, so renowned for the ways of the flesh, who can restore our perspective by their extremely rational theories of love's process—one of the most cerebral of which was Stendhal's conclusion that "love crystallizes around a sentiment of admiration."

Stendhal's statement is pertinent to the spell that short, ungainly men in power often exercise over women and the public at large. We are compulsively impelled to admire power, and we are equally impelled to decode the working of a magnetic faculty that is highly irrational in nature. Henry Kissinger is a perfect case in point. His ascendancy to high post behind the throne is all the more fascinating—because more clandestine and harder to decipher—than power acquired by birthright or election. And the seduction that Henry Kissinger weaves is intensified by the fact that he is the most powerful grey eminence in American history.

Compared to other nations, the United States has been relatively devoid of grey eminences. Wilson's Colonel House and F.D.R.'s Harry Hopkins come to mind. They are small fry compared to the power over history held by Richelieu, Mazarin, and, in our time, Kissinger, who shares with Mazarin the common traits of unctuous charm and a heavy foreign accent. In the masterly fashion of all grey eminences, it is the enigmatic Henry Kissinger, ballet-lover, captain of Nixon's palace guard, sole sex symbol of the barren Nixon entourage, and escort of mascara-laden starlets, who has been most responsible for isolating our chief

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of state from the weight of public opinion and of appointed branches of government.

Although Kissinger's media image has become as rich and as air-filled as a Bavarian cream puff, only two book-length works have been published on him to date. *Kissinger: The Uses of Power*, by David Landau, a 22-year-old former editor of the *Harvard Crimson*, is an extensive analysis of his ideology, and a remarkably lucid study of the foreign policy that has devolved from it. *Dear Henry: A Confession* is by Danielle Hunebelle, a French journalist with an impressive record of reporting in Indochina, Algeria, and other troubled territory. It is the only public account of a woman's infatuation for Washington's most famous divorcé, and a curious document on the pretensions and confusions of a so-called liberated woman floundering in the pangs of an infatuation that is as old-fashioned as it is Gallically cerebral. I prefer to deal first with Hunebelle's infinitely slighter book, since it would come as a sad letdown after Landau's masterly study.

A few biographical facts: Heinz Alfred Kissinger was born and raised in Fürth, Germany, where his father, a schoolteacher, was harassed by the Nazi regime. He came with his parents to the United States at the age of fifteen and began his undergraduate studies at the City College of New York while working in a brush factory to pay for his education. After serving in the American army he went on to Harvard, where he did his graduate work, summa cum laude, and where he later taught. He is divorced from his only wife, a German-born refugee who bore him two children. His first prominence was achieved by the publication of his book *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*. He

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by francine du plessix gray