

## THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN THE RESOLUTION OF MAJORITY-MINORITY PROBLEMS

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### I

Let me begin by saying how much I appreciated your invitation to join you for this conference of the Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning on the Mindanao State University Marawi City campus. It was a major disappointment for me to realize that prior commitments would prevent my attending, but I do appreciate the opportunity of sending this paper and discussing with you the resolution of problems arising from majority-minority situations.

While it would be presumptuous of me to try to speak with any degree of authority on majority-minority problems in Southeast Asia, I do feel somewhat more comfortable in discussing this problem as it exists in the State of Hawaii where I have lived for the past five years. Thus, I would like to suggest from the outset that I will be dealing both with the broad concept of majority-minority problems and will be focusing to some extent on the black-white problems in the United States for the development of these remarks.

It is my belief that majority-minority problems, wherever they may occur, have more in common than the differences implied in the separate locations. In other words, I do not believe that the majority-minority problems in Southeast Asia are drastically different from those of Ireland, India, or the United States. Similar basic dynamics are in play in all of these areas when one group attempts to maintain its separate identity in the face of a larger and more powerful group located in the same area of living space.

In many parts of the United States there has developed what a Federal Commission calls "two societies" — one more or less white and the other more or less black. The implications for higher education of

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this state of affairs are obviously enormous. But they depend on judgments about whether it is good or bad for us to be developing these "two societies."

I would like to suggest from a background of empirical ignorance a possibly heretical notion: that racial distinctiveness and ethnic pride are necessary first steps in eliminating racial discrimination.

So let me start far afield from the situation of Chicago, Mindanao, Malaysia, New York, or Alabama. Let me start in the Nation's southernmost society, the 50th State of Hawaii.

For the lessons to be learned from Hawaii are more relevant to the majority-minority confrontation in the rest of the world than you might suppose. They are certainly more relevant than I had supposed, until I moved to Hawaii in 1969. Many of you have visited Hawaii, and all of you have heard and probably believed its claim to an unusual degree of racial tolerance. The claim is well justified — but paradise has its peculiarities. The newcomer to Hawaii is struck at first not so much by the advertised tolerance as by the ethnic self-consciousness. People do not say, "So-and-so is one of the best lawyers in town." They are more likely to say, "So-and-so is one of the best *Japanese* lawyers in town" — or *Chinese* businessmen, or *Filipino* politicians, or *Haole* professors, or whatever.

Maybe this widespread use of the ethnic adjective will disappear in time. With each generation, it is getting harder and more complicated to apply it. Intermarriage among ethnic groups, in every conceivable combination, is so common as to go virtually unnoticed. Two or three generations from now, the relevant ethnic adjective may be too complicated to apply: you would have to say, "He is one of the best Japanese-Polynesian-German-African-Irish-Filipino lawyers in town."

Pending further integration by genes and chromosomes, Hawaii's great achievement is the mutual respect and tolerance of several ethnic groups living and working together. There is still plenty of discrimination in Hawaii — cultural, economic and social. But by and large, it is not based on racial characteristics but on income, skill, and time of arrival in the Islands. Hawaii may eventually become a true melting pot, but that is not the way mutual tolerance has been achieved so far. It has been achieved because each of the main ethnic groups has enough

pride, enough self-confidence, enough cultural history — enough distinctiveness — of its own to establish its right to be separate — as a first step in establishing its members' right to be unified in equality in a state and nation with people of different racial aspect, different ethnic background, and different cultural heritage.

In this sense, the experience in Hawaii is of a piece with the story of the immigration of white Americans from Europe over the past century. That experience looks different only because the background of Hawaii's citizens is more exotic, and more clearly visible in the shape of the eyes, the pigmentation of the skin, and the attitudes toward human relations. In the trans-Atlantic migration, the different racial and ethnic and national groups who came steered and read a sign in the harbor saying, "Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost, to me," did not melt into the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant landscape. Quite the contrary: each new arrival cleaved to his own kind, shared the religion and language and humor and discriminatory treatment with his soul brothers, and herded into a few occupations which did not too seriously threaten the jobs of earlier-arriving ethnic groups. These tight little groups endured for several generations; some of them still endure. They went into politics. They held together for bargaining with the other groups who preceded them and for protection against those future waves of strangers that kept rolling in past the Statue of Liberty and populating a continent with a nation of foreigners.

And in time they "arrived" in a fuller sense. In New York, the symbol of their successive arrivals has been the ethnic background of Manhattan's Borough President at any given time. The waves of new Americans and the older Americans, rubbing up against each other as self-conscious groups, learned, from sometimes bitter experience, to tolerate each other as individuals. Tolerance did not mean that they had to like each other — just that they refrained from judging each other by their own narrow cultural lights. As they rubbed up against one another, in an urbanizing America, they gradually discovered not the easy old Christian lesson that all men are brothers, but the hard new multicultural lesson that all brothers are different.

They learned, too, that democracy and freedom do not require everyone to agree about the philosophy of freedom or the nature of

democracy. Indeed, the one essential thing about democracy turned out to be this paradox: that in a democratic society, no one group achieves the exclusive right to say, with authority, what democracy is.

So the lesson from Hawaii is a newer form of the lesson from New York and Buffalo and Chicago and the West — though the lesson of ethnic toleration was more quickly learned in Hawaii than in California, as it applies to Americans of Oriental ancestry. That lesson is: each ethnic group must first find its own identity, before the members of other ethnic groups will treat its members as individual human beings — as respected, valued citizens of a common polity — as brothers who are different and therefore are brothers.

What does this lesson, derived from the many societies which form the United States of America, mean for the “two societies” we talk about today? (Where I come from that is an offensively ethnocentric way to talk about America’s race problems. There are plenty of Americans of Oriental and other ancestries who think that America’s societies are more than two.) The lesson of American history has to be that black Americans who want to establish their blackness and glory in it are on the right track. It *is* important that a black child knows where he comes from, relive the history of his forefathers, feel the shame of historical failures and the pride of historic contributions, use the flexible English language in ways that are distinctive, crop his hair — and especially *her* hair — in ways that bring out its special qualities; and bring to the forceful attention of all Americans that the various colors called black can be beautiful. (The cultural and linguistic obstacles they face, in rehabilitating the word “black,” are still enormous: in West Africa, even today, an African in an ugly mood may be said by other Africans to have a “black” heart. But this wrenching and skewing of key words and concepts is crucially necessary business — because distinctiveness is the first step toward equality, and equality is prerequisite to integration.)

There is a lesson here also for the American white majority — or perhaps I should say for all Americans who are not black enough to claim blackness as their form of beauty. The assignment is deceptively simple — to stop thinking of equality as the product of similarity. White liberals, like myself, have for several generations felt strongly about

Negro rights without feeling comfortable about the difference between black people and white people. The most tolerant and generous white man, finding himself in an elevator with a black man, may still try very hard to deny the difference between the black man and himself. Too many of us still want the blacks to achieve equality the way Ralph Bunche achieved it — by passing as individuals into white society. But as black self-consciousness develops, the non-black Americans will have to admit that blacks-as-a-group are different, which will be good because that is the first step to real equality of opportunity for blacks as individuals — not just a few of them, but all of them.

## II

What does all this philosophy mean for higher education? The issues here seem to revolve around two much debated questions: Should colleges have "open admissions," and should universities offer special studies for and about minority groups?

The answer to both questions has to be yes. But since I am saying yes to my own questions, I had better explain what I mean by my answers.

"Open admissions" are inevitable anyway — the racial pressures simply reinforce the technological ones. During the next decade or two, it will become technologically necessary for nearly everybody to get some education or training beyond high school.

The reason is basic to the very nature of industrial development. Most of the kinds of jobs that can be learned on the job are being taken over by machines. The jobs people do will be more intellectual, and will therefore require more and more training of the brain to handle. New instruments, new kinds of energy, and fast computers are taking over the drudgery men and women used to handle — digging the ditches, pounding the nails, doing the arithmetic. As this process goes on, what is left for men and women to do is the interesting policy part of each task — the creative, planning, imagining, figuring-out kind of work — the kind of work that requires some understanding of science and some practice with art — and the handling of relations among people, which requires so much more complex brainwork than handling of relations

among machines. Even the machines have to be tamed and harnessed to relevant work by people; the stupid computers, which can only count up to one, have to be fed with relevant ideas from human brains, their routinized wonders to perform.

Thus, most of the work we used to call unskilled, and much of the work we used to call semi-skilled, will no longer be available to be done by people at all. And the work that does need to be done by people will have to be done by college people.

To be sure, this new condition requires a wholesale redefinition of what a college is and of what a college student can be expected to accomplish there. Community colleges have burgeoned in response to this new need; they will probably continue to be the fastest growing segment of higher education in every industrial society. "Open admissions" does not mean that every institution opens its admission to everybody. But it does mean that in our postsecondary educational system as a whole, there is going to have to be room, for anybody who enters the labor force will feel that need.

This technological imperative to universal postsecondary education is matched by the expectations of American parents. Even parents who themselves have abandoned the effort to speak clearly, spell clearly, spell correctly, or count effectively, will increasingly insist that *all* their children should be educated to the maximum of their potential and the minimum required to enable them to get and hold good jobs. The evidence is already clear in Hawaii, where the policy of the State Legislature is, in effect, "Open admissions" to the University of Hawaii.

If you go out on the street in Honolulu today and stop the first adult you see, you will find a person who wants all his or her children to go to college. The shortest route to an argument about education these days — and the most illuminating experiment a university administrator can make — is to ask a man with four children which of his two children are going to go to college. "All of *my* children are going to college," he will indignantly reply. And he and millions of other parents, and the 18-year-old voters in their families, will make the demand for universal postsecondary education politically effective in the United States. Legislators and other political leaders will ignore this demand at their peril.

So "open admissions" is going to be a fact of life for those of us who manage public systems of higher education. And even the private institutions, feeling the heat and wanting to do their part, will loosen up their admissions, lengthen, if necessary, the time for achievement of degrees, and increase the amount of relevant non-degree, work-related education they offer. My recommendation to American educators would be to stop fighting the problem, and start fitting the curriculum to the students clamoring at the gate — rather than, in accordance with tradition, *vice versa*.

The other set of questions has to do with separate curricula and separate living arrangements for ethnic groups — especially for black students who have raised the question, but the issue arises with other groups as well.

Here, I think, our preoccupation with transitory events is in some danger of misleading us. American education has survived separate living arrangements for self-selected groups of many kinds. Fraternities and sororities have long been social and racial in-groups. Dormitories have long been limited by class, by income level, by sex, and sometimes in practice by race. Even on that frontier of tolerance which is Hawaii, the State Legislature gives priority in some dormitories for students from the rural areas, which results in a very nearly 100 per cent Oriental occupancy.

But living arrangements which enforce artificial separations are less and less popular with the students themselves. A guarantee that they will find roommates of different ethnic and racial background motivates some mainland students to come all the way to the University of Hawaii. Even the tradition of monosexual student housing is giving way — for reasons which go beyond cultural tolerance, to be sure. A separate accommodation for black students, built in 1970, is likely by 1980 or 1990 to be a multi-racial facility. In such a matter, I would be inclined to be flexible rather than dogmatic — that is, to be liberal with a small rather than a capital L. Time will take care of the separateness, which is arguably bad; and what will be left will be distinctiveness, which is good.

The experience with black studies is not yet far enough along to draw conclusions; one can only have instincts. My own instinct is to

push ethnic studies programs, to dramatize and make respectable systematic knowledge and relevant history about the various strains of people who make up our big democracy. I would myself prefer these studies to be offered across ethnic lines, and to be related to each other by comparative analysis. In the March 18, 1974 issue of *Newsweek* it is reported that across the campuses of the United States there has been a definite decline in black studies. The decline has been most notable in instances where the black studies departments have attempted to remain isolated from the major disciplines. These departments have been most successful, the report suggests, when, as at Yale University, they have attempted to look at the black experience through specific developments in literature, history, and other major areas of study, thus giving the student the opportunity for the comparative analysis which I am suggesting.

At the University of Hawaii, we have developed, after much loud talk and some useful research, several parallel approaches to ethnic studies — that is, programs to dramatize and make respectable systematic knowledge and relevant history about the various strains of people who make up our big democracy. Our Ethnic Studies Program includes black studies along with courses on the experience of Hawaiian, Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino Americans. Comparable courses on Samoan and on Korean Americans have been discussed, but not yet started. I would hope that both Oriental and white Americans will find their way into the black studies classrooms, and I am sure that some of the black students will interest themselves in Hawaiian and other cultures of the Pacific — that is, indeed, why some of them come to college in a mid-Pacific university so far from home.

But even where black studies are regarded as a special intellectual and moral experience for black students, I think time and good sense will prevail over the ephemeral, politically-motivated exclusion of other Americans from these programs. For black students to learn the nature of their blackness is only a first step; the maximum number of white students should also be able to learn the value of difference, through the kind of education that takes them imaginatively out of their own white skins.

But what will ensure that black-studies-for-blacks-only are a

transitory phenomenon will be the good sense of black students who want to compete effectively in the market for interesting jobs. A practicing intellectual who already has a job can logically say — as Ashley Montague recently said — that “education should be training in the art and science of being a warm, loving human being, and all other training should be secondary.” But the student pointing toward his first paying job, will have no great incentive to spend four years on mono-racial introspection or on a single slice of cultural history, and will quickly perceive that the English language and the language of computers are going to be more relevant tools for his time and place than Hausa or Swahili.

Moreover, in the era of open admissions the educational establishment is going to have to relate its programs increasingly to the world of work. Internships, summer experience, and work-study programs cannot in the future be the exceptions; in some fields they are already becoming the rule. And the need for bringing disadvantaged students into the world of work — each year a more intellectual world for reasons I have already suggested — will require arrangements for reverse discrimination which will not seem shocking or illiberal to a nation which readily swallows the principle of veteran’s preference.

These perspectives on college education of the future go well beyond the need for drastic reform in racial policies and attitudes; it is, indeed, hard to separate the racial from some of the other reasons for predicting open admissions, more flexible time periods and degree arrangements, and more blurring of the line between education and work experience. I suppose, my point is that what we need to do in American education to make sure that ethnic self-consciousness leads to mutual tolerance is the same collection of reforms we should be thinking hard about anyway. The race issue, which like other big problems in our history has its own drama, its own heroes and villains, and its own moment of truth, has arrived at its moment of truth. It can spur us to change our educational thinking as fast as machine technology and human relations are changing the environment which we and our students will inhabit together, and together mold.

### III

And so in time, by emphasizing our ethnic differences, we may get

back to the original subject of freedom — which is, after all not the freedom of groups but the freedom of human beings. The declared racial policy of the United States is equality for individual men, women, and children.

We have been so preoccupied with our own racial problems that many Americans think of America as unusually backward in racial matters. But let me assure you that our declared racial policies look revolutionary, not to say revolting, to the establishments in every other continent. We have somehow worked out a Federal policy — if not yet its implementation — more far-reaching than many racially prejudiced citizens seem to know, more radical than black militants want to believe, more fundamental than multicolored moderates dared to hope. The revolution consist of taking seriously what the philosophers have been saying for 2,500 years.

Man, not men-in-a-group, was the subject of Greek philosophy, the center of Christianity, the focus of the Renaissance and the Reformation, the motivation for the French and American Revolutions, and the object of the Constitution of the United States. Yet, modern history has somehow featured the unshackling not of individuals but of groups — the Orientals shaking off colonial concessions, the Indians and Africans trying to push the white settlers aside, the Jews escaping persecution, the blacks seeking equality with white America. The success of racial upheavals often produces not racial equality but new structures of racial discrimination. Look around the world and you will hardly find a national society which is not built on the principle, or a least the practice, that one race of men is permanently in charge.

But the United States, the nation which is having racial trouble because it is making racial progress, says officially that it is reaching for a raceless society in which color, as well as creed, is not related to opportunity for individual men, women, and children. Our military muscle and other monetary system are pale forms of power compared with the profound impact around the world if we succeed in carrying out in America the declared racial policies of the U.S. Government. We will hardly be able to ignore the hopes, the fears, and the turbulence that result from what others watch us try to do — especially if we succeed' in doing it.