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ABSTRACT

The Educational Opportunity programs funded by the Federal and State Governments in response to widespread urban disorder reveal one clear element of built-in self-defeat. Educational programs were created or updated to deal with what whites believed to be the "authentic but forgotten blacks" whom educated blacks and black leadership had supposedly spurned and for whom the White Establishment had previously shown no care. These new black students came into largely alien environments with few role models of their own from whom strategies for survival could be learned. Blacks need not equal opportunity but equitable opportunity: Hundreds of thousands of blacks between the ages of 35 to 50, and even older, find themselves limited in the utilization of their talents in the quality of employment available simply because they do not have college degrees or credits. The younger, "low-achieving" blacks who were brought into higher education could have fared much better if they had had the encouragement, companionship, wisdom, and added collective strength as would be afforded by the presence of older blacks with them as peers and colleagues. This should be the goal of such programs when reorganized, now and for the future.
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Serving Black Students: For What?

By

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In 1967, less than two percent of all American students in publicly supported colleges in the United States were black. In 1971, the percentage had moved to an average of between three and four percent, with specific state enrollment percentages varying from less than one to approximately 14 percent. At the same time, the failure or drop-out rate had so increased that little more than four percent of those graduating from American colleges are estimated to be black.

I. The Educational Opportunity Syndrome

Indeed, this latter figure is generously optimistic in view of the policies of retrenchment (and/or repression) of which there are signs in cuts in state and national budgets for black student support.

This picture -- on what may be seen as an initial positive -- was generated by the racial rebellions of the late 1960's and was fueled by the alarming death or martyrdom of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. At only a superficial glance, such an impetus to increased but far from equitable black participation in higher education, as afforded by massive racial rebellions and the tragic martyrdom of our most celebrated symbol, comes at far too high a price. Viewed in this light, something is still seriously, if not perilously, wrong with what we are doing to get black students into and through American colleges and universities.

The Educational Opportunity programs funded by the federal and state governments reveal one clear element of built-in self-defeat. The racial rebellions of the late 1960's were seen -- or at least interpreted -- by the public at large as a reaction of the "leaderless and uncontrolled lower echelon" black masses. In line with this view, educational programs, both in our public schools and our colleges, were created or updated to deal with what whites believed to be the "authentic but forgotten blacks" whom black professionals (i.e., all educated blacks) and black leadership had supposedly spurned and for whom the white Establishment had previously shown no care.

The solution to this obvious problem was simple. Authentic blacks, first, had merely to be defined as those about whom educated or bourgeois blacks were thought to know little. Hence, new planning for overlooked black needs was to be made primarily by the White Establishment, as the only legitimate and caring defenders of the benighted and spurned black poor. Again, authentic blacks were not dumb, just deprived. (Unconsciously, this same characteristic of deprivation was believed to pertain to all blacks. For example, there are the glib remarks by Reich in the Greening of America where he notes, simply in passing, that recent scholarship has revealed that blacks have made no substantial contribution to American life not because they were ignorant but only because they have been deprived.)

The segment of blacks seen as most "authentic" were those with the most clear evidences of deprivation. In order to survive in the ghetto, one must become, to some extent, for sanity's sake contemptuous of authority. Again, because of a largely hostile or antagonistic educational environment, many of the "authentic" black central city youth had records of low academic

achievement. Further, there was little appreciation of -- even where there was some familiarity with -- white, middle class bourgeois ways. In terms of normal preparation specifically for collegiate adjustment, most of the black students, afforded hasty entry into most public higher education, were poles apart form traditional college students.

At the State University of New York at Albany, prior to the state-wide policy of Open Enrollment adopted in 1971, because of lack of facilities and high enrollment pressures, there was a cut-off point in Regent Scores of 92 percent for high school students to be considered for admission. Into this kind of ultra-high achievement (and also, incidentally, highly conformist) environment some six hundred authentic blacks were placed. The original criteria for black entry through the Education Opportunity Program at Albany (and changed only for the fall of 1972) were typical of such joint federal and state programs throughout the country.

These were to be students -- black, tan and white -- who had college aspiration but who lacked the financial means and the high scores for entry. Mind you, these programs could not discriminate in favor of the black poor, although it was in specific response to their ostensible needs and protest that the Educational Opportunity programs had been created.

Impressive tutorial and adjustment services were provided for these new black students. They were given non-credit math and non-credit English. They were permitted to carry a minimal semester credit hour load and were furnished with pocket money and jobs (as need and ability suggested) so that Educational Opportunity students could compete with their "non-deprived" white counterparts.

There were at least several seriously mistaken judgements involved in this undertaking which bear upon the critical -- and, indeed, tenuous -- nature of the problems which educators face in their present and anticipated responsibilities to black students.

Fallacy Number One. The myth of the "authentic" black.

In one basic and perpetually important sense, all blacks are alike. We are all members of an alienated and oppressed minority. Blacks do not fit into Eric Erikson's description of the American prototype of a "White Anglo-Saxon of mildly Protestant persuasion." Fitting blacks into such a mold would be like attempting to put a square peg into a round hole. So we are, in the most basic sense, "all alike."

Indeed, in the Educational Opportunity programs we should have been treated for purposes of admissions and support as though we were "all alike". The criteria for "need" among blacks is different from the criteria for "need" among whites. Simple mechanisms of compensation -- for the sake of sanity -- have placed proportionately greater financial burdens upon upwardly mobile blacks than upon their white counterparts. Yet the Educational Opportunity programs were conceived in such a way that most needy blacks from backgrounds more nearly consistent with that of traditional American collegiate life were omitted almost entirely from consideration.

The tragic result was that the new black students came into largely alien environments with few role models of their own from whom the "tricks of the trade" needed for survival could be learned. Coupled with this condition was the "confirmation" in the minds of the traditionally anti-black collegiate establishment that all blacks were hard to teach and essentially had no place in what it saw as an elitist high-achievement collegiate environment.

Authentic blacks are alike in opression but vary widely in specific need. The black professional was called into a situation where his constituency had been caricaturized to the point of false hood and his own role had been ridiculously proscribed.

Fallacy Number Two. The myth of "equal" opportunity.

Black student needs were perceived to be those largely of blacks in the

eighteen to twenty-one years of age category. Indeed, the greatest emphasis was upon the eighteen and nineteen year olds. The most tragic aspect of past black denial of access to higher education rests in the fact that hundreds of thousands of blacks, between the ages of 35-50, or even older, find themselves limited in the utilization of their native potential and acquired skills simply because they do not have college degrees or credits.

Educational Opportunity for blacks ought to help overcome the deficiencies of the past and -- for the good of the nation as a whole -- release and certify the resources of blacks unduly denied higher education access.

It is true that some older blacks are admitted to Educational Opportunity programs. But simple "equality between equal and unequal alike," as Plato noted, will not suffice to achieve justice. Justice for black Americans must be seen as the closing of the hitherto unclosing gap between all opportunities for black and white Americans.

Blacks need, then, <u>not equal</u> opportunity <u>but equitable</u> opportunity. Further, the younger, "low-achieving" blacks who were brought into higher education could have faired much better -- and may do so in the future -- if they had the encouragement, companionship, wisdom and added collective strength as would be afforded by the presence of older blacks with them as peers and colleagues. This should be our goal, even now, and for the future. Otherwise, our task of encouraging hope is made a hopeless one while the problem of equity for blacks remains unattained.

It is from the college-type person, whether formally trained or not, that leadership emerges. George Jackson and Malcolm X possessed critically-trained and highly-informed minds. They were recipients of collegiate-type discipline, although without the formal exposure to traditional college life. These men are rare. College life is needed by blacks not only for admittedly

dubious certification purposes which are still necessary not only for survival but also for the acquisition of skills needed for leadership. Blacks, who comprise 12-15 percent of the national population, should have 12-15 percent of the college graduates. How we use our education or how we work to re-direct the college enterprise would -- and must -- remain our option. Yet we must have the opportunity to "qualify" as nearly as we can and then to reject or alter the qualifications as we see fit.

The basic point here is that the massive numbers denied higher education opportunity in the past -- and needing at least collegiate certification at the present -- should be included in our Educational Opportunity outreach. As black educators, who at least may influence in some degree the types of services needed for black students, we should insist upon the equitable provision for those blacks denied higher educational opportunity in the past. We as black people need power <u>now</u>, not postponed power when it is too late for it to serve the nation's peaceable and orderly development.

By 1978-80, over one half of the blacks in this country may be on some form of public relief. Opportunities are not being afforded us <u>now</u> and our overall position os worsening. Many men and women on welfare -- and certainly large numbers of brilliant black minds in our prisons -- should be serving the nation's needs by serving the cause of black liberation. Our welfare adults and our prison inmates, along with those of us who are seemingly free, should be afforded the same survival and upward-mobility skills training, as others have been afforded inequitably at our expense, even though we may freely choose to reject the ends for which collegiate skills have been employed in the past.

Fallacy Number Three. The myth of the "scarcity" of black educators. The Educational Opportunity programs have been conceived in such a way as to meet, in only a limited way, our needs as black people. We have noted that blacks with "C" averages have been thrust into collegiate environments where straight "A" averages have been the rule. Consciously and unconsciously black "A" and "B" students, as well as older blacks have been largely defined out of the Educational Opportunity programs in our colleges.

Since educated blacks were perceived as not fitting into the traditional collegiate mold, blacks who have been hired to keep the new plantation in order, by and large have not been hired on primarily educational or faculty lines. The going rate for black educational opportunity administrators has been from $16-25,000 on a twelve-month basis. The black M. A. not having quite finished his Ph. D. or the black Ph. D. with little time to amass learned (or published) articles and for the writing of books is placed in a compromise position, as an Educational Opportunity director (or "Assistant Dean of Students") by the above arrangements.

Administrators can never attain tenure. They are retained at the pleasure of their superiors. Hence, no matter how impressively their portfolio may be worded, when mortgages have to be paid and children fed and sent to school, the militant mind of the black administrator (serving at the pleasure of the Establishment) may be tempered by the natural pre-disposition -- common among all creatures -- to survive.

Thus, personal integrity and student welfare both may tend, in some instances, to suffer. This is not to suggest that they most often do. We are suggesting, however, that the hiring policies for blacks who must both teach and fulfill administrative duties is too often of a tenuous and not of an ideal nature.

Black educators may serve the needs of black students best when hired on educational or faculty, instead of administrative, lines. Faculty may

earn tenure. Further, the simple lure of high salaries as administrators is a snare and a delusion. When the plantation-keeping task is over and the money runs out, where will formerly highly paid black educational administrators go? Top ranking white administrators seek pay on educational or faculty lines. Thereby, they are more nearly free agents. When the chips are down, they retain their pay -- and tenure -- and are simply relieved of their long hours and their headaches.

An able and highly paid black administrator from the mid West was promised that, upon completion of his doctorate, he would be hired on a faculty line at equivalent pay. When the time of negotiation drew near this past fall, the black administrator was reminded that, since blacks were not rebelling any longer, the heat was off and that the university need not honor its promise to rehire him on a faculty line with commersurate pay.

We are suggesting several things here. One is that the black presence on our college campuses is worth something. Without some black faculty, administrators or students, the federal loans for college building construction would not be made. We are by and large getting much too little in return for what our presence affords the universities which we serve.

Again, high salaries and no security adds up quite often to no power. I hear student complaints of the failure of administrators to back them up. In some of the repressive -- or backwoods -- situations which I come across, if a black administrator identified too closely with the perceived interest or needs of black students, he or she would be fired. Blacks can always be gotten rid of, despite the rules. For "he who gives may also take away." Yet the tenured position does allow for more days of grace. Further, and most important, the tenured faculty , being a bit more secure, have a special responsibility to the black students.

At one major university, the black students several years ago rebelled. The black faculty were asked to support the students. Thoughtfully, under the local repressive situation, the black students asked the non-tenured black faculty simply to remain silent or to stay at home. One elderly black tenured faculty member accompanied the students to the president's office. Upon arrival, the black professor was told that he was to stand at the head of the line and remind the president that he was not to enter his office. With great aplomb and dignity -- knowing that what can't be escaped must be done with the greatest grace -- he threw open his arms and told the president that he could not pass.

Well, the upshot was that within two weeks he was made a dean. He was given more duties, no more pay and no authority commensurate with his task. Yet, as the system "rewards", he was crowned a winner! The fact is that his prestige, presence and relative security was seen by him as involving a far greater responsibility to speak up for the cause of black liberation.

Everywhere, we have bills to pay on a monthly basis and we must survive from year to year. Hence, we must require such conditions of employment as will enable us to keep our families going and continue to work for the cause of freedom.

We speak in the title of this section of the myth of the scarcity of black educators. Our final point at this juncture is that when we do not demand faculty status -- together with the added pay due for added responsibilities -- we add to the myth of the scarcity and unavailability of blacks to serve the educational establishment as critical thinkers and teachers.

II. The Purposes of Education

When we as black servants of black student needs begin our task -- and especially in the unfavorable context which we have just described --, we must ask ourselves a question with which all thoughtful educators must be concerned. We must ask ourselves, "Just what is education for black -- and deeply human -- needs?"

Otherwise, we unconsciously succumb to the accepted rationale for education. In a society with pathologically pro-white values such as ours, education is not designed essentially to meet black people's needs. It has been true ever since the days of legalized human enslavement in this country that it is not the slavemaster's purpose to educate the slaves. We must be ever mindful of this fact and so, as we adapt to the traditional American educational system, be on guard that we do not further unnecessarily the process of the mis-education of the black people of America.

Here I use the word "unnecessarily" advisedly because we must be both frank and quick to admit that -- in many ways -- the system has us at least partly beaten. We are forced, by our very participation in an educational establishment of an historically exploitative society, to give at least some minor -- or even major -- sanction of the processes by which that exploitative society is given its intellectual justification. The educational system in every society is designed primarily to give intellectual undergirding to the status quo. This is the thesis of my two-part lecture entitled Racism and the Politics of the University published by the Department of Sociology of the State University of New York at Albany.

Being in the system means supporting it to some degree. We are, unwittingly, or inevitably to some extent, "plantation-keepers." to help our students we must begin by knowing just where we are. We start from

within the system, both for some good and for some ill. So do the students who may not look down at us piously with a suspicious eye. As students in an institution managed by and for the Establishment, the students -- even as the administrators -- are cooperating with what some would call "the Plantation".

This does not mean that all, or even most, is lost. It means, in the simplist possible terms, that we have a job to do. Our suggestion or thesis is that our task is to make life on the plantation so humane that it is no longer a plantation and that in so doing we must improve life for those who are white as well as for those who are black. Lest we feel that we have no time to be concerned with the larger life of our institutions, we may simply be reminded that we cannot be free in a society in which inhumane values persist among that society's majority.

The main thrust of the remainder of this paper is that our task as black professionals in the field of education is to help our younger brothers and sisters chiefly as role models for a number of specific functions and then as enabling agents to help revolutionize -- or to conserve and concretize the highest humane ideals -- of the higher or continuing education process.

Our primary role model function is that of humanizing our universities or colleges and the communities of which they are a part.

There is no reasonable distinction between the attitudes, actions or values which one holds while in a college setting and life later or life outside of it. College, in this sense, is life. It is the scene where we "do or die," where we become which later life will reveal us as having become.

In our role model function as humanizers we may be guided by four principles taught by our African forefathers and fostered also in Far Eastern

and Biblical thought. Whether we like what is called the new counter-culture or not, these counter-culturists are at least striving against or renouncing these Old and New World values which have become grossly inhumane. While our black youth rightly have reservations about simple rejection of values, there is a need to both reject and to restore.

All of true philosophy seeks for precisely the same Natural Order and Liberation from false controls which black students are striving in their sometimes halting way to find for themselves -- and incidentally, if need be, for others -- in and through their higher education experience. Not finding it, they are often understandably angry. Frequently also, instead of turning their anger upon their seemingly unconquerable oppressors, -- or upon the Establishment --, they turn their anger upon those of us who doubtless should be at their side to a far greater extent than we now are. As adult educators, we should expect and be used to this. Yet we should always be in a position to remind our younger brothers and sisters that angry fratricide is no path to nor substitute for freedom.

Four concepts in Swahili may be mentioned briefly here as guides for us in our endeavor to begin to re-shape the value system of our society as a whole and that of our universities and their surrounding communities in particular. These will give shape and substance to our role model function. The first of these concepts is that of Uhuru. Uhuru or freedon from restraint, implies liberty, independence and self-direction. Aristotle suggested that all of life should be empowered for self-directed growth into self-sufficiency and self-respect not only for personal fulfillment but also for the enrichment of the lives of others.

All institutions, in their own dynamics of self-preservation, tend to work against the attainment of uhuru. Our black students feel this keenly when they are required in effect to "be white or suffer." The issue of

uhuru, or freedom from restraint, goes far beyond our colleges to our unconsciously coercive technocratic society. Some years ago, an erascible "old kook" who was the subject of my doctoral thesis at Harvard wrote a book entitled Crowd Culture in which he warned, a generation ago, of the dangers in effect of denying liberty or uhuru to all of human life. Our black students would profit from reading what many have called this "mean old Man's" scathing and incisive critique of the society which he knew so well and of which he was a much greater foundation stone than he could have been led to understand.

As black professionals in the field of education we must know that the principle of uhuru or, as the Latins put it, dignidad, is compromised grossly and bitterly for our black youth in our colleges, as well as in our nation as a whole. I learned well in school each day by going through a game which our black youth today will not too eagerly play. Promptly at the ringing of the school bell at 8 o'clock, I pretended I was white. At recess I became "colored" again. And so on, throughout the day. On any day that I forgot to pretend to be white, I did not learn. The point here is clear. We must insist upon pluralism in education. Without it, learning cannot have catholicity, wholeness -- or the universality -- to which a university in particular is dedicated. Nor can our nation become the rich and variegated e pluribus unum which reflects the verbalized ideal which we must -- to be true to ourselves and to the nation of which we are a part -- have realized or conserved by any and all reasonable means necessary for the fulfillment of that high purpose.

Again, the swahili term Harambee is impressed in a lively way upon every visitor to eastern or southern Aftica. When the big boats are pulled into the shore and the people are tugging or pulling at the rope together, they sing, Harambee!...Harambee!...Harambee!...in a seemingly never-ending

strain. Harambee means more than "pulling together." Yet this pulling together for any oppressed people is most important. Power comes from the simple appearance of unity. Alexis de Tocqueville, the famed French social economist and perhaps the most astute observer of early American life, spoke of like-minded Americans coalescing so that they had to be dealt with as, in de Tocqueville's classic words, "a power seen from afar." Black students can't get unity by being doctrinnaire. We must know all shades of viewpoint and afford the greatest dignity to those whom we would call "colored," or "Negroes" or "what have you?" Where else, mind you, are we going to recruit committed black folks from? Power comes, so the youthful enthusiasts must learn, not from conformity but from the appearance of togetherness. A brother may refuse to accept your point of view but he can never conclusively disprove your assertion that "I'm with you, my brother!"

Harambee, then, means pulling together. But, as with many other languages, there are rich undertones which, if missed, impoverish the would-be listener. Harambee suggests, equally importantly, the joy of work. In many cultures in Africa and the Far East as well as in Northern Europe, there is no separation between work and joy. Only an inhumane mechanistic society separates productivity and pleasure. It was this false dichotomy between pleasure and productivity, or between the Pleasure Principle and the Reality Principle, which was the subject of Freud's life's work. Freud could have found, without laborious mental excursions, many clues to resolve his dilemma by simply visiting with an unbiased eye (if that were possible) parts of Asia and Africa where fulfilling nature's needs and those pertaining to the personal and group experience were perceived as one.

In our university or collegiate life, we need to begin to instill a sense of Harambee where our society as a whole -- especially with growing automation and mechanization -- may find joy in all of life. Chaucer's classic clerk of Oxford was one Old World example of this ancient and continuous African and Far Eastern ideal. Chaucer saw in this model teacher a man of whom he could write that "gladly did he learn and gladly teach."

Harambee has one further implication, that is, of the oneness of human destiny. It lets not only the brothers and sisters but also the rest of the world know that "We are in this thing together." This is a strategic point which we shall touch upon further as we consider the next concept from the Swahili which should help us as we seek to serve as role models for others, learning from them, however, even as they learn from us.

The African concept of Majimbo signifies the spirit of reconstruction. We as blacks are, to use a biblical phrase, a people set apart, a "peculiar" people -- (which is what the Bible means by the terms "holy" and "holiness"). We are a people set apart by history or by circumstance -- and not by racial biology -- and equipped best by circumstance to perform a saving, re-creative or redemptive role in our nation and our world.

Being collegiate educators, we must begin -- students, faculty, staff, administrators and community co-workers alike -- within our colleges and their surrounding communities.

Being marginal people, that is being cast out to the margins or the periphery of the society which we are in although not of, we have potentially a unique vantage point from which to examine -- for the purposes of reconstruction -- every aspect of our nation's life. Those who are removed

to the balconies of life can look down at life on the center stage and prescribe for it far better than can the actual participants at center stage. In sociological and philosophical terms, we speak of this "view of life from the margins" as marginal insight. In theological terms, we speak of this same concept as that of the Saving Remnant.

The oppressed, during the experience of seeking liberation, are by definition the most humane persons belonging to the society in which they are seeking liberation. We, as blacks, fit that bill at this precise moment. Elsewhere, I have dealt with this concept in greater detail but simply suggest here that our role model function must include exemplification of Majimbo, which is "the spirit of reconstruction." Unless thoughtful, self-aware, creative, dedicated and trained blacks take upon themselves the leadership of the re-construction of the value system and the institutions of our society -- as representing the best marginal insights in our time -- the needed task of reconstruction cannot be done. We must dedicate ourselves, then, to majimbo, to a thoroughgoing re-assessment and re-ordering of where we happen to be educationally and otherwise. Incidentally, all of our social scientific thought needs to be critically re-examined and our young black minds should be well trained for this vital task. Our contemporary social science theory was born in a period of colonialism (and of Darwinism) and has been nurtured in a period of neo-colonialism. Hence, every Black Studies program or department has had to reconstruct its own materials. All of the conventional literature about Africa, about black people, about native North and South Americans, about Asians -- and about European and Americans themselves -- has been produced from an ethnocentric and colonialist bias. It is not objective scholarship, in any sense near to what those who have produced it would like to believe it to be. We need, in this same

connection, more doctoral programs in black-led departments of Afro-American or Black Studies.

Finally, in our role model work we must help to exemplify and set forth-afresh the spirit of the Swahili term Umoja, which signifies a oneness of life's forces. Some speak of it in terms of a universality between the quick (or the living) and the dead. In briefest terms, we may speak of it as consonant with what black churchmen are saying that both Christianity and the nation as a whole need most. That is, a fresh sense of eschatology. Eschatology is the view that true life and, indeed truth itself, is life as conceived on a cosmic level. Creation on an ultimate or cosmic level, has an order to it which we less dimly perceive with each uncovering of some fresh truth. The uncovering of truth does not mean the changing of truth but simply man's fresh perception of it.

The eschaton is life as it exists upon the plane of eternity or on the level of the cosmos. If a scientist discovers that the world is no longer flat, he does not gradually accept the truth but promptly reorganizes his old theories (or discards them) to be consistent with his new understanding of reality or truth. Eschatology suggests that on the moral or ethical plane we must do likewise. Once human oneness is realized to be consistent with cosmic truth, just as the physical scientist would immediately adjust his practices and procedures, so also the social scientist and the social planner and every person of honesty and integrity must live life immediately -- in the here-and-now -- as ultimate reality reveals.

Umoja and the spirit of eschatology are one. There is no after-life, only eternal life. Eternity is that which perpetually is. Hence, we do not work for progressive improvement of wrong, since the obverse side of

that coin is the prolongation of evil. Eschatology hence knows no concept of "progress." We live every day, to the fullest extent that we can, as cosmic reality reveals. We do not demand rights and opportunities. We simply command them. We do not rush about changing things frantically, according to umoja. We simply take slow and steady giant steps, assured that life and truth must become today -- and not tomorrow or the day after -- consonant with one another.

Serving black student needs, in this sense, means serving truth, integrity and the interests of our nation's immediate internal and equitable adjustment as well as the peace and well-being of our world.