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## Intellectual Racism

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28 More and more in social science, as in social policy, racism operates as a barrier to the effective solution of social welfare problems and, indeed, as a barrier to the clear understanding of these problems. Intellectual racism is the manner in which some learned men and women conceive of, and perceive, Black people and Black institutions in negative terms. It is the way foundation executives treat Black scholars and Black institutions as though they were inferior, not as worthy or as qualified and competent as white ones. It is the way white-dominated sociology departments refuse to change the character of their curricula in order to embrace the Black presence in America. It is the manner in which social science studies continue to grow out of the subjective experience of the investigators rather than out of the objective realities of the existing conditions.

An example of intellectual racism, which could have a crippling effect on efforts to solve the problems faced by millions of young Black people in trying to get adequate education, is represented in a massive study conducted by Christopher Jencks.

During the past year, Jencks and his associates at Harvard University have published a huge volume summarizing and interpreting a wide range of social science data which bear on the interrelationships among family background, schooling, and success in the economic areas of later life.

The Jencks study has been widely interpreted as supporting the country's current political and social trends, away from a focus on meeting the educational needs of Black youth as a means of improving the conditions of life for Black people and assuring a greater measure of equality between Blacks and whites. The study has been generally viewed as an attack on educational reform while advocating in a vague, general, and unexamined way what the authors consider more basic

# INTELLECTUAL RACISM

By Andrew Billingsley



economic reforms by means of redistribution of wealth.

The study has been repeatedly criticized by other scholars, especially Black scholars, for its rather unscientific conclusion that supports the notion: "luck," rather than education or cognitive ability, is responsible for the achievement of individuals, families and groups in the socioeconomic areas of life.

To many Black scholars, the study represents an indiscriminate manipulation of data, due to some bias against educational reform; and a great deal of ignorance of educational issues combined with an inordinate amount of arrogance on the part of the investigators which added up to form a massive anti-intellectual undertaking. Having posited the ends of education as making people rich, the study proceeds to suggest that education fails at this task; that there is no need to reform education to make it more effective. Jencks has described the major findings of the study as follows:

*Poverty is not primarily hereditary . . . While children born into poverty have a higher than average chance of ending up poor, there is still an enormous amount of economic mobility from one generation to the next. This means that inequality is recreated anew in each generation, even among people who start life in essentially identical circumstances.*

*The primary reason why some people end up richer than others is not that they have more adequate cognitive skills . . . Equalizing everyone's reading scores would not appreciably reduce the number of economic failures.*

*There is no evidence that school reform can substantially reduce the extent of cognitive inequality . . . Neither school resources nor segregation has an appreciable effect on either test scores or educational attainment.*

work, the group found itself at a loss to explain how so well trained a scholar (Jencks) could err so blatantly in the formulation of the problem, in its analysis and in its conclusions. The Black scholars resolved that: it would be hard to find an informed group of persons dedicated to the effective education of Black children who would agree with Jencks' statement of the ends of education. Likewise, it would be difficult for an unbiased group of methodologists to accept Jencks' use of path analysis and the conclusions reached, due to the limitations of path analysis and because Black children were left out of the analysis but included in the conclusions and inferences.

The conclusions and inferences Jencks drew are indicative of yet another exercise in mischief on the part of unrestrained and uninformed manipulators of data and ideas. At worst, they represent a diabolical brand of social scientific justification for racism and the status quo.

A new study published a few months ago in *Commentary Magazine* by **Ben J. Wattenburg** and **Richard M. Scammon** contends that 52 percent of Black families are now securely in the American middle class. To counter this contention, an analysis was written recently by Dr. Herrington J. Bryce, Professor of Economics at Howard University. In his analysis, Dr. Bryce raised the following simple, yet penetrating question: "What good is it that Black incomes are rising faster than those of whites when the incomes of Blacks remain only about 60 percent of that of whites?" And, he continues: "It is true, and gratifying, that Black family income grew significantly during the past decade [the 1960's]. For example, the median income of Blacks in 1960 was \$4,236. Today, it is just under \$7,000. Yet, the U. S. Department of Labor estimates that a family of four needs at least \$7,386 to maintain itself at a minimum standard of decency. Half of Black families are barely making it, if at all."

The median white family income, according to Department of Labor figures,

rose to just under \$12,000 during the 1960's. Since 1970, the income differential between Black and white families has been on the increase among Black families.

Many of these matters, which were critical social problems in the Sixties, are still critical social problems in the Seventies. Solutions based on sound, sensitive analysis coupled with strong advocacy are needed urgently. Consider, for example, the housing situation which has been in a state of crisis for Black people and other poor people since the end of World War II. Where are the social scientists who have mastered the intricacies of this problem and have developed a consistent and persistent lifetime dedication to its solution? Save the few social scientists who have dabbled in the housing field, but abandoned it soon after government grants vanished.

What is said about housing can be said about a number of other areas in which the social welfare of the Black and the poor are not vigorously pursued by social scientists, especially those concerned with the study of social problems. The same can be said for health, education and economic security. These are the critical areas of the social welfare of a people — areas where crucial social problems lie. They need enormous amount of research and study, but not isolated or idiosyncratic studies and research that are conducted primarily for the purposes of obtaining promotion for the investigator or enable him to advance to a high professorial position in one of the sociology departments of one of the nation's leading universities. And, as a result, be in a better position to continue to suppress minorities in the name of questionable scientific research.

What is needed or required from social scientists is a sustained and systematic study or research, conducted in collaboration with those actively engaged in, or affected by the problems.

30 **James Comer**, in his recent book, *Beyond Black and White*, writes: "Our social system produces too much uncertainty, fear and anxiety. This is due largely to the fact that America has a defect in its executive leadership structure, and in its ethical or moral structure, similar to ego and superego defects in an individual."

Sociologists are particularly aware of the hazards of making analogies from the individual to the collective and from the structure of personality to the structure of society. Yet, one need only read current headlines to appreciate the aptness of Professor Comer's analysis—an analysis which was written more than two years before the revelation of the Watergate scandal. Continuing his analogy, Professor Comer writes: "In fact, the behavior of too much of the leadership group resembles neurotic patterns in individuals." He classified this behavior as such: "fleeing from responsibility, failing to face up to reality, self-destructiveness."

Any established social scientist or social practitioner serving key institutions or agencies, bears a heavy burden and responsibility in finding the proper means by which to eradicate the existing level of uncertainty, fear, and anxiety in the land. Much of this anxiety and fear is being generated, primarily, by inaccurate and misleading information.

It seems that a large segment of the population, and a major portion of the student bodies in institutions of higher education, actually believe that the most severe crime problem facing the nation is crime in the streets. The reason for this could be: severe lack of useful education dealing with the insidious and pervasive nature of official, upper-class and white collar crimes.

It is a common conception that middle-class white women in the suburbs or in the affluent neighborhoods of the nation's cities actually believe that they are in constant danger of being molested by some strange Black person from the ghetto, because, they, [the women] have not been taught by social scientists that their great-

est threat lies in their own communities, their own race, among their friends, and in their homes.

Likewise, a large percentage of misinformed and miseducated individuals truly believe that Blacks have reached equality with whites in most sectors of society and that continued agitation for affirmative action is designed to discriminate against white people and take their jobs and homes and academic professions away from them. And, the reasons behind such a baseless belief could be: social scientists concerned with social problems have not done an adequate job; many of them have abandoned the struggle for equality and have joined with middle America and political conservatives in attacking Black people and other poor people as well as the few individuals advocating the cause of the poor.

Despite the deeds of the reactionary forces, there is a simple truth—the truth that Vernon Jordan of the National Urban League is striving diligently to spread across the nation. It is this: "What the average Black man wants for himself and for his family is very similar, indeed, to what all men want: good health, a good job, adequate housing, and a good education for his children." These are the basic requisites for social welfare on the part of individuals and families, and for social reform on the part of the nation. These are among the most critical problems facing social scientists. If the truth, as envisioned by Jordan, is realized, it might very well serve as the basis for rejuvenation of this society.

The following incident will illustrate the pervasive nature of intellectual racism. This writer, while browsing through the library of a friend, came upon the book: *Applied Sociology: Opportunities and Problems*, published under the auspices of the Society for the Study of Social Problems and edited by **Alvin Gouldner** and **S. M. Miller**, two of the more able and representative social scientists writing today. It was published in 1965 in the midst of the

most active decade of social reform in the United States since the end of Reconstruction one century ago. It has been utilized widely in classroom instructions and in research.

The 1960's was the decade that witnessed a massive attack by Black people—and some white people—on segregation in the South. It witnessed the birth of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the rebirth of the Congress of Racial Equality, the pinnacle of the influence of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the preeminence of the public school desegregation battles waged so relentlessly by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and other efforts at radical social reform.

Moreover, the decade of the Sixties represented the first nationally declared war on poverty which, next to racism, is the most profound and crippling social problem the nation faces. Further, the nation witnessed during the Sixties the most explosive ghetto uprisings in its history in reaction to a whole cluster of social problems which social scientists could have seen more clearly perhaps than any other group.

In short, it does not take a great deal of recollection to be reminded that the decade of the Sixties witnessed a nation in ferment with a major focus on some of the more crippling social problems to affect this nation. Therefore, it would seem reasonable to expect that a book published during the mid-Sixties under the sponsorship of the Society for the Study of Social Problems would reflect the major lines of the social development of great proportions—developments that shook the country from coast-to-coast. But, of the more than two dozen articles in the book covering the study of a variety of social problems, only one item was written by a Black person—Charles V. Willie's excellent report on the influence of community leaders on social welfare policies and practices in Syracuse, New York.



Virtually no attention was given in the book to the major social problems of the day—problems affecting the majority of Blacks in this country and other poor Americans as well.

Another typical landmark of intellectual racism in the annals of social science is presented in **Edward Banfield's** *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of Our Urban Crisis*. This study draws heavily on all of the major social science disciplines and is focused on the social problems most characteristic of life in urban America.

At the very beginning of the book, Professor Banfield presents a key clue to the book's style as well as its contents. In the initial sentence of the preface, he states: "This book will probably strike many readers as the work of an ill-tempered and mean-spirited fellow." And, he proceeds to prove the reader right.

One of the major findings Professor Banfield sets forth in the book is: that social class overshadows all other realities in urban life and accounts more than any other complex of factors for the difficulties both individuals and the society face.

Throughout the book, what many sensitive observers consider to be major social problems are minimized or deemphasized consistently. In the introductory chapter, Professor Banfield argues: "Most of the 'problems' that are generally supposed to constitute 'the urban crisis' could not conceivably lead to disaster. They (the problems) are—some of them—important in the sense that a bad cold is important, but they are not serious in the sense that a cancer is serious." Additionally, he writes, "there is still much poverty and much racial discrimination. But there is less of both than ever before." Thus, on his way to making what he considers more important observations, Professor Banfield slides right over two of the nation's most outstanding and crippling social problems—racism and poverty.

Indeed, insofar as Professor Banfield's is concerned regarding Black peo-

ple, it advances the view that the problems of racism or racial discrimination, and even racial prejudice, are not major problems. According to this hypothesis, it is not being Black that causes problems for Black people in this society, but being lower class. The major criterion for social class distinctions is—as set forth by Professor Banfield—psychological, or the individual's "orientation toward the future." "The more distant the future the individual can imagine and can discipline himself to make sacrifices for, the 'higher' is his class."

*If it were possible for social scientists to be truly objective, conclusions such as the ones reached by Professor Banfield and others who think along the same lines, could have been different. If all of them—supposedly intelligent social scientists—read the social science literature more carefully, critically and sensitively, and if they had become actively involved in the solution of the problems they write about—and more important—if they had lived and worked closely among all socio-economic sectors of the Black community as well as the white community, they might have analyzed differently the true nature of the reality of the social problems facing Blacks and other poor people in the country.*

*Because of the deep-rooted intellectual racism inherent behind the walls of academe—and in the country—adverse reports such as the ones outlined in this article will probably continue to surface from time to time unless the few social scientists of goodwill join hands and reverse the tide. □*