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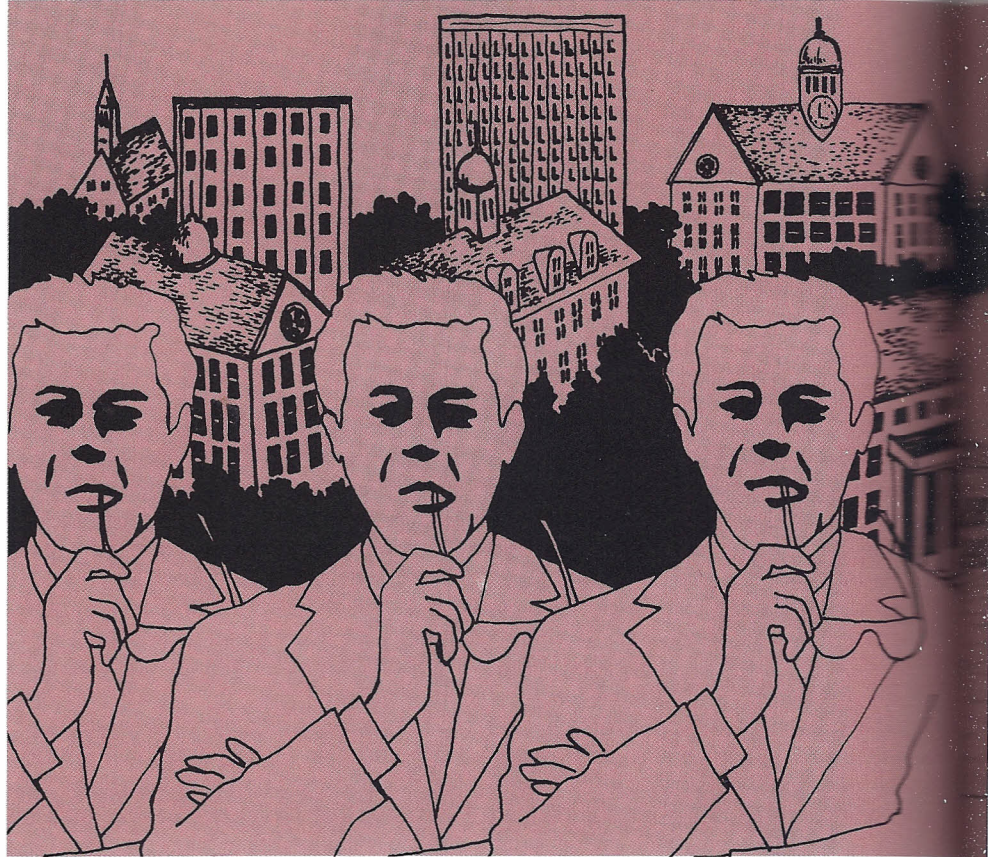
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# Waiting for The Cavalry

## Confessions of an Affirmative Action Coordinator

By Art Lathan

First of all I'd like to make it known that I don't plan to leave my job as the coordinate point for affirmative actions on a university campus. The Peter Principle has come home to roost. Where else can I make such a handsome salary by just leaving people alone? I wish the same luxury on all my children and their children too until the need for affirmative action no longer exists or until Bakke wins, whichever comes sooner. But first I must gather my offspring into a circle and career orient them. A suitable, straight forward explanation of my duties is hard to come by. My children cannot understand what I have to do with jobs if I can't hire or fire. *I sometimes find it difficult to comprehend myself.*

I must explain that my job is lonely, frustrating, and more often unrewarding yet I recommend it highly. The only rationale that I can put forward with any confidence is that a university campus is the best laboratory of human behavior imaginable in such concentration. Observing human behavior is my hobby. Better still, I discovered—after a few months on campus—that I need not be a passive observer of human behavior, as I could participate if I wanted to and play it to my liking. It's easy here. I could stroke it or provoke it depending on what response I desired for that day.

Let me explain. I'm talking primarily about university faculty members. The non-teaching staff personnel are fine. They go along with the program, but the faculty will go along with nothing. This is called academic freedom. It is this difference that makes faculty behavior so predictable and manipulable. I stroke it by leaving them alone and provoke it by asking them what have they done for me lately. They don't want to do anything for anybody. Their mission is to teach you how to do it yourself. This is called self-actualization.

Truthfully, if faculty behavior was entirely predictable, the job would soon become dull. However, it's the stratagems and little games we play together that keep things happening for me. Their attempts to abort or subvert the program range from ignoring my entreaties to broad frontal assaults interspersed with "holier than thou" pronouncements. My scores come from my counter-ignorances, up to full exposure of their intransigence, mixed with a few wicked barbs here and there. I particularly enjoy the one about the best brains in the country being unable to produce graduates who can read and write well, which suggests a creative change is due. Illiterate faculty might possibly generate literate students. That is called one-ups-man-ship. Very often I lose, but the few wins keep me playing.

I attribute my losses to my isolation and



the David versus Goliath dimensions of the fight. My isolation is like no other contagion. I have no counterpart on campus, besides the janitor with whom I can commiserate, and no authority except that vested in me by "The Boss." To invoke that authority too often is to risk either embarrassment or being fired so I try to keep the decisions in the lower courts to maintain some credibility for my position. Even the minority faculty members look upon me with some wariness, trying to decide whether I'm fish or fowl. I happen to be a Black male. With all my isolation and lack of line authority, I am still expected to have access to confidential information, ordinarily available only to top administrators. If information is golden, confidential information is like diamonds and my inquisitiveness quite often evokes the reminder that I am tolerated only through the grace of the "Feds." Consequently, I judiciously use the threat of the cavalry galloping to my rescue. Of course, the cavalry never arrives but the diversion allows for a little face saving for both sides.

I am fully aware that federal legislation created my job, outlined my duties, and gave me everything I needed to successfully implement affirmative action except for a slingshot. I was a little naive when I first arrived a few years ago. I knew that affirmative action had successfully operated in the private sector for more than

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five years and I deduced from this that institutions of higher education need only be reminded that a problem existed and they would brainstorm an even more effective affirmative action course. I had even done a little research beforehand on the problems so that I could be a helpful partner. I knew all about the relative positions of women and minorities. I knew, for instance, that the Chinese were the highest academic achievers—by all measurements—of any other ethnic groups, including whites. I fully expected merit to be awarded accordingly. Imagine my surprise then to discover that the Chinese faculty was no better represented on campus than the Black faculty.

Gradually, I became aware that something was awry. The faculty already was more aware about the problem than I, for they had created both the problem and the awareness. I then began to ask questions and get educated. Why? Professional sports has already broken the barrier of Black head coaches, why wasn't higher education first? Or, concurrently, are there any minority head coaches at major colleges still? I was amazed that in fields where Blacks were well-represented out-

side the walls, they were practically nonexistent inside. Where are the students and teachers in music? When fully one-fourth of the current hits on Broadway are Black productions, one would think dramatic arts departments would have significant Black talent. Not so. Why? Is it the supply problem? That's the answer—and also the solution—I'm told. But who controls supply? "We do," I'm admonished. I was astonished.

Within a few months of my arrival, most spent in a daze within the maze, I discovered that academicians are a clever bunch. I was liberated by this revelation. They've one-upped the blue-suede-shoe crowd by devising a way to have their cake and sell it too. While remaining the most segregated public institution, they have sold the idea that they are liberal, the bastion of freedom, free thought, democracy and all those wonderful things. They got the good housekeeping seal of approval for a commodity they never put on the market but denounced instead.

I'm somewhat wiser now but I should have been suspicious of their record prior to federal intervention when faculties doubled during the sixties and women and minority faculty *lost* ground? And did you know that in support of their solution of a better supply, academicians are busily at work to *restrict* the supply of minority students coming into the pipe-

line? To understand this is to understand the dichotomy of faculty action—their cleverness. Their preachment/sales pitch is to do what's right, and uphold quality standards. Academicians see a conflict in the twin objectives but they won't reveal this to you directly. Nevertheless, the message has been coming through obliquely for decades. It's another one of their do-it-yourself projects, i.e. we make the knowledge available and you do what you must with it.

Now comes one of my most earthshaking discoveries. Let me return to my previous assertion that academicians created both the problem and the awareness. If you are made aware that minorities are inherently incapable of rising to the standards necessary to a quality institution you won't insist on their inclusion. The problem then becomes yours on what to do with these rejects, and social costs must be paid elsewhere leaving universities free and clear. Would you believe that I found out that academicians have led the enlightened world in advancing theories of racial superiority?

The demi-gods of science have taken over where the bible left off. On every campus there are pretenders to the thrones of William Shockley, Arthur Jensen, Hans Eysenck and a legion of others. Yet no one aspires to be a Gunnar Myrdal. How can we play cops and robbers if everybody wants to be the cops? Money seems to be no barrier to their blunderbuss like thrusts for enlightenment. Hardly a semester goes by that all administrators are not provided free copies of the latest anti-affirmative action tract, usually well-researched, expensive, and full of facts, figures, and documented condemnations. Reverse discrimination is the visible argument but beneath it is the holy grail—I.Q. tests and the inability of salvation for minorities. Little doubts invade my convictions from time to time and I check figures again. You won't believe this but if reverse discrimination were a dreaded disease, there would not be enough

around to provide one professor an application for a federal research grant.

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**“Race ratings on the scientific scale probably began with the recapitulation theories of the late 1800s.”**

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My education remains incomplete because I can never understand why one race must be superior to all others except that the search for truth must go forward and the proof must be discovered, again and again. Oh yes, the proof changes from time to time, yet the conclusions never vary. Race ratings on the scientific scale probably began with the recapitulation theories of the late 1800s. Recapitulation means that each baby in its mother's womb, during its nine months development, repeats the adult stages of all its evolutionary ancestors including the fish. As best as I can understand this, a Professor Daniel Brinton read (1890) the sequence of human development as obvious proof of African inferiority since Africans were still children i.e. retained more juvenile traits. Then comes along a later demi-god, Professor L. Bolk, who in 1926 interpreted the process (Neotony) in just the opposite manner. It was retention of our ancestors' juvenile stages that led to the higher human evolution. In other words, if your embryo resembled an undeveloped fish, rather than a fully developed fish, you are now prime material. Did this change reverse the hierarchy of race superiority? No indeed, it now meant that Africans' development regressed beyond the coveted juvenile stages which of course made them inferior still. And all this was *science* held to just as firmly as the current holy grail, I.Q. tests.

A proliferation of proofs of inferiority has marched by, some discarded, some changing shapes depending on the size of brains, lengths of leg calves, you name it. One of the better ones, developed in 1860s by the French Anatomist Etienne Serres, was that Black males were more

primitive because the distance between their belly button and their penis was relatively shorter than that of white males.

If the relationships between belly buttons and brains have you confused, I hope you are not shaken to learn that there have been reversals in interpretations of I.Q. tests. You bet. Changes never cease, even in our cognition. The Stanford Binet (the Cadillac of I.Q. tests) was first used in 1912 as an instrument to limit immigration to the United States of certain European stock. Then as now, it successfully met its objective. More than 80% of all Jews, Hungarians, and Russians tested as “feeble-minded” and thus not welcome to the club. The test targets have now changed but the test results remain the same.

Any hopes that I.Q. tests, which survived the historical role change, would persevere to become the ultimate proof of racial superiority were severely hurt recently by the revelation that another late, impeccable demi-god, Sir Cyril Burt, had falsified important data. I'll be damned if this wasn't the data that Jensen et al. had based most of their racial premises on. Wonders never cease. The hardships of the struggle for enlightenment on the white man's burden has not been borne by the behaviorists alone. Historians, artists, electronic engineers, all have contributed. Given these transient race theories, coupled with a Plessy vs. Ferguson or an Alan Bakke, the media, the Gallup Poll, and eventually the courts topple over like dominoes behind one complaint that a white man's rights were in jeopardy. The next theory just has to be the right one.

Through the discovery method, I was able to finally analyze one of my problems as affirmative action coordinator was that I had no status in a status-conscious circus of academicians. At the top of the rings are the widely published professors while part-time lecturers support the bottom. My level is subterranean. Since most of the academicians' time is spent upholding standards, they have little time for social discourse other than with peers.

Most save my limited share of their social amenities for the few times I can corner them in closed door official sessions where there are no ready exits. Then they turn it on. I'm captivated by their charming wit, amiable banter, when I'm Art they're Bob, Jim, or Jeff. I constantly miss the opportunity for a kiss and farewell when these sessions break up, for the next day I may never see them again. They have walked within a few inches of me across campus without so much as a glance that I could detect. They have perfected the technique of simultaneously avoiding eye contact and forcing you to scurry out of their way to avoid a collision. Their cleverness never ceases to amaze me.

Fortunately, this behavior of the standard bearers of the enlightened world is attended by my passionate belief in their privacy—mine too. Yet I wish they would resort to seeing-eye dogs which I could pat on the head as their owners walked by. It helps though to have a full social life outside the wall if you are wanting for human contact. An outside social life spares you the ordeal of what I call the broken-record question, "What do you do?" In any campus social gathering this is usually your introduction to a stranger. And the question can come before you reveal your name. "What do you—what do you do—what do you doo—?" I'm in personnel administration, I coordinate action, oh, affirmative action, yes I like it, no its not reverse action, oh hell!" I'm especially sensitive to this question, as I mentioned before, because I'm still trying to sort it out for my children's needs. I realize it's an anxious attempt to discover if what you do makes you interesting enough to spend a few moments with; however, most of us Blacks are accustomed to popping the question of a living only after the interest gets heavy. Perhaps ours is an inefficient use of time but why rush to make or break an alliance?

I have digressed considerably. Social contacts or avoidance thereof is just a side game to the really high rollers. The real

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dramatics are played out over the telephone, usually. I once spent a whole day trying to convince an eminent professor that it was possible to provide an ethnic breakdown of his department. He gave me 11 dozen reasons why a woman with 1/4th Croatian blood would not fit on any chart. I responded with 11 dozen and 1 reasons on how it could be done. The professor followed up our telephone conversation with a bristling memo underscoring his incredulity—something about 18th century English tax accountants who forgot that statistics must come from the figures gathered by the village watchman who puts down what he damn well pleases. I ignored the missile for a suitable interval and was about to resort to full exposure when his report came in. His department of 75 faculty was composed completely of "Native Americans." As I said earlier, quite often I lose.

Then there was the time I was elated after a telephone call detailing how extensively minorities had been notified of a particular job vacancy. Elated, that is, until I got a letter from a gent in Bangalore, India, inquiring why his name was being considered for a job he never applied for nor even heard of. By then the recruitment process had already been blessed by me and the white male hired. I had been had again.

You may ask what are some of my victories. I suppose my ongoing victory is the free education unwittingly provided by my mentors and I am stimulated every morning just thinking about what the game of the day will be. I began each morning with a short meditation, may the games of this day bring clear victories or clean defeats—no ties, no indignities. I continue to demand my reports, the village watchmen continue to put down what they

damn well please, my figures prove that we are an affirmative action employer. I know, they know, and now you know because I'm confessing. And the cavalry never arrives. □

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*Art Lathan is affirmative action coordinator at San Francisco State University.*