The Discontent of our Character

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Manuel N. Gomez
Vice President for Student Affairs
University of California-Irvine
Irvine, CA 92717
714-824-4804

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The Discontent of our Character

Manuel N. Gómez

There is indeed a manly and legitimate passion for equality which rouses in all men a desire to be strong and respected. This passion tends to elevate the little man to the rank of the great. But the human heart also nourishes a debased taste for equality, which leads the weak to want to drag the strong down to their level and which induces men to prefer equality in servitude to inequality in freedom. (Alexis de Tocqueville, 1835)

American democracy has always cut both ways. As Americans have imbued the ideals of liberty and equality and abhorred the tyranny of autocracy, we have also imbued a suspicion of equality and its potential to curtail personal liberty. This suspicion expresses a subtle but expansive fear that equality is itself a tyrannical, oppressive force, which, if unchecked by the exercise of personal liberty, will cast its weight upon American society, rendering it an "incoherent, distracted mass." This "incoherence" is threatened through the hybridization of the American body politic. As the number and variety of immigrants increases, the argument goes, the values that characterize American democracy will be challenged and ultimately rendered powerless, irreparably confusing a coherent American identity. Many current debates over cultural diversity and American democracy echo Thomas Jefferson's conviction that immigrants will "warp and bias" the principles of democracy and will ultimately weaken American liberalism.¹

Truth be told, Americans possess a sustained unwillingness to imagine a balance between liberty and equality; torn between anxiety over
our belief in natural differences between people and a desire to maintain those distinctions, we have pulled and twisted the fabric of democracy to find some middle ground. As *The Bell Curve* (1994), flack over an interracial prom in Alabama, resistance to school integration in Georgia, the California Civil Rights Initiative, and Proposition 187 demonstrate, that middle ground continues to elude us.

Perhaps it is our very ambivalence over what equality really means and pragmatically entails that keeps us from achieving this middle ground. And perhaps ambivalence is inherent in a philosophical and bureaucratic system which was engendered by a revolution that was for many a civil war. After all, democracy is messy business, and part of its messiness is its promise of inclusiveness and the reality of majority rule. However, while the balance between liberty and equality might sometimes seem impossible to reach, more reflection on the terms of mediation is crucial. In California alone, the stakes of this process encompass the legal, economic, educational and political infrastructures. In terms of education, the recent and impending threats to affirmative action and to what many perceive to be a system driven by politically correct, practically incorrect demagogues make this project crucial. With the legislative victory of Proposition 187, citizenship and residency have merged with race, foreshadowing a promiscuous re-racialization of American national identity. Without a more direct and rigorous discussion of the darker sides of democracy, Tocqueville's eulogy for democracy may be bitterly prophetic.

Pressure exerted from many sides has recently reached critical mass at the level of UC admissions policy. Regarded as the pinnacle of higher education in California, UC has been rigorously scrutinized, both within and without, from the right and the left, in regards to how well it is
maintaining its responsibilities to the California Master Plan, its reputation as a first-rate research institution, and its status as a public university. Within these sometimes competitive, sometimes collaborative obligations, UC has become the focus of an ideological quagmire which subsumes questions as practical as the size of the eligibility pool and as abstract as the meaning of a public university within a democratic structure. And because the tension between liberty and equality so vexes democratic rhetoric, our investment in the practical policies of the University becomes steeped in larger ideological concerns.

In his July farewell address to the Board of Regents, Arnold Binder, former chair of the UC Academic Senate, worried over the effect of student affirmative action programs on the quality of the University of California. He endorsed a position articulated by Roy Shults, who characterized the question as one of "access versus quality." Binder, via Shults, went on to caution the Regents that ",[w]e cannot permit [these forces] to dictate that we must make an inferior university in order to make it accessible to all, because if it is, it is no longer the university that we seek to preserve" (1994, pg. 1).

Binder's concern goes to the heart of one of the most difficult problems facing the University of California: how do we accommodate an increasingly diverse student population without compromising the superior quality of the University? The question of equity and excellence that Binder articulates is often enunciated in the context of the guidelines of the California Master Plan and what some see to be the changing role of California public higher education. Proposals to reduce the UC eligibility pool to 10% from 12.5% have vied with efforts to bolster early academic outreach and experiment with alternative admissions assessment to
accommodate students who may not meet some of the standardized criteria for UC admission. On all sides, however, remains a commitment to a superior and diverse academic environment.

Beyond demographic and economic concerns, Binder's comments resonate with a growing chorus of voices who question the role that diversity plays in the enrichment of the intellectual environment of higher education. Increasingly, diversity planning and affirmative action initiatives at the University are coming under attack for violating the meritocratic promise of liberal democracy. John Fonte (1995) characterizes this tension as a struggle between "liberal democracy" and "cultural democracy." According to Fonte, cultural democrats ascribe to the agenda of multiculturalism, and are therefore "extremely uncomfortable with any form of majoritarianism and even with the very idea of an American people" (p. 49). Fonte presses his distinction further, arguing that cultural democrats "not only de-emphasize the role of the individual citizen but weaken the concept of citizenship itself by blurring the distinctions between citizens and non-citizens" (p. 49). This alleged privileging of the group over the interests of the individual, of some misdirected version of equality over the sanctity of liberty, is manifested in, among other things, affirmative action programs which further weaken the liberal democratic principles upon which America was founded. For critics like Fonte, cultural democrats and their progeny, affirmative action, are, in some fundamental sense, anti-American. Arthur Schlesinger goes so far as to warn that "[t]he ethnic upsurge...began as a gesture of protest against the Anglocentric culture. It became a cult, and today it threatens to become a counterrevolution against the original theory of America as 'one people,' a common culture, a single nation"( 1992, p. 43).
At the heart of recent critiques of affirmative action and UC admissions is the backlash against diversity and multiculturalism. Whether they be couched in language calling for "merit" or "common values," these critiques reflect a suspicion of affirmative action policies from the perspective of liberal American democracy, which has traditionally promoted the primacy of the rights of the individual and minimal governmental interference in the pursuit of those rights. For many proponents of affirmative action, merit is not the issue; the merit of individual minority candidates to employment positions and elite universities and colleges is rightly taken for granted. Rather, many defenders of affirmative action argue that group-based policies are necessary to meliorate years of discriminatory policies that were themselves group-based. The logic behind these arguments contradicts that of John Fonte and others who charge that affirmative action policies have generated rather than reacted to (and in turn regenerated) a privileging of group interests over the rights of individuals who are "equal under the law."

While individual responses to affirmative action run a gamut that defies predictable partisan politics, arguments for and against turn on the tension between equity and liberty, and ultimately the question, as Arthur Schlesinger posits it, of "what it means to be an American" (1992, p. 17) Applied specifically to student affirmative action policies at the University of California, questions over the responsibilities of public education intersect with those regarding the responsibilities of a democratic American government towards ensuring equal opportunity for an increasingly diverse population.
Regardless of whether affirmative action proves to be a viable check in the short term, it is now clear that at the University of California we must begin to rethink our own relationship to the diversity issue. As a public university we have an ethical responsibility to exemplify the highest values of a democratic society, values which include both the exercise of individual liberty and the building of a diverse, egalitarian community. At the same time, we must be more sensitive to the fact that socio-economic class may be a more accurate yardstick on which to measure deprivation of educational opportunities. But most importantly, we must openly discuss and debate the political implications of affirmative action policies and the conditions that have contributed to the need for these policies at the University, namely our failure to solidify effective collaborations between educational sectors. We can no longer rest on the legislative flexibility of affirmative action; it is time for us to find more effective means to ensure an intellectually prepared diverse student body and thus sustain and ultimately advance our status as one of the preeminent American academic institutions.

Education and the Public Good: The Meaning of the Public University

As we enter the last five years of the 20th century, the challenges facing UC are significant: a diverse population consisting of a large proportion of first generation Americans and first generation college students and scathing budget cuts necessitated by the sluggish economy. These pressures have imperiled California's original commitment to
provide quality higher education to all of the state's residents. Simultaneously, a growing anxiety over the impact of diversity on traditionally defined academic standards has culminated in Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray's "report" *The Bell Curve*, in which they argue that things should be "made simpler" for those who do not have the intellectual sophistication to "follow the moral compass" in the ideologically complex American territory (1994, p. 544). Everything from intellectual "dullness" to moral incontinence is imposed upon ethnic minorities and immigrants with the exception of Asians. Herrnstein and Murray argue that certain ethnic groups, including African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans, have so internalized the cultural heritage of inferiority that it has become genetically encoded. Dismissed as shoddy science and blatant racism, *The Bell Curve* has lighted on the underbelly of American intellectual life. Pushing the environmentalist envelope, Herrnstein and Murray's book reflects a growing suspicion of what some believe to be a national shift towards democratic socialism. While other critics like Christopher Lasch have chastised an American caste system run by a socially mobile elite who "are in revolt against 'Middle America'" (1995, p. 5), none have attempted to encode intelligence so brashly in racial and cultural identity. Whether or not Herrnstein and Murray know it, they have stoked the political fires of those who implicitly depend on the values of scientific racialism to endorse and guide public policy. Such arguments, largely still taboo but gaining more strength, work subtly on the American imagination and its preoccupation with the defense of meritocracy. Were we to endorse and pursue Herrnstein and Murray's logic, what once seemed artificial and even unethical distributions of wealth and power will gradually become naturalized, privileging only those individuals who have
access to both cultural and financial capital. At this point, merit will be thoroughly fused with cultural and economic factors, debilitating the very principles of liberal democracy that many conservative arguments currently espouse.

For Their Own Good:
Social Utility and Public Education

While the Cold War may be over, the values and rhetoric of that era are very much alive both within and outside the academy. California public education at all levels has been influenced, if not driven by the paradigm of social functionalism (Ravitch, 1983), resulting in an increased vocationalism that diminishes the intellectual development of students. The great "sorting machine" of education, as Joel Spring calls it (1976), has even claimed higher education in the form of increased professionalization and corporatization of curricula and administrative structure. The inclination towards homogenization on the K - 12 level, along with the critical distance many college and university educators and administrators view the system from which their students come, has created powerful antagonisms between educational sectors.

The public education system in general, and the K - 12 system specifically, comprise what Louis Althusser (1970) calls the educational ideological state apparatus, within which students are inculcated with the dominant ideological suppositions of the nation. As Jacques Barzun argues, "schools are run by adults - and run to suit other adults in political, intellectual, or business life. The schools are as much a product of our
politics, business, and public opinion as these are the products of our schools. It is because this link is so close that the schools are so hard to change" (1959, p. 88). Therefore, in addition to the skills and knowledge that students acquire, they also acquire a sense of identity and place within the larger framework of American society. Ethnic, racial, and gender identities are formed and solidified through the process of education. As Joel Spring argues, the nationalism of post-WWII America ensured that American education would serve four main purposes:

- maintaining a political community through the education of a democratic citizen, as a way to increase morality and reduce crime, as a method of Americanizing immigrant populations and preparing the population as a whole for an industrialized society. (1976, p. 1 - 2)

Strategic elisions between ethics and politics, assimilation and vocationalism engendered an educational policy which "sorted" students into vocational, college-preparatory, or "life adjustment" tracks. The development of "life-adjustment" education is, according to Richard Hofstadter, part of a larger anti-intellectual movement in America which worked on the premise that the "plain sense of the common man, especially if tested by success in some demanding line of practical work, is an altogether adequate substitute for, if not actually much superior to, formal knowledge and expertise acquired in the schools" (1963, p. 19). A distinction between intelligence and intellect and a belief that intellect is somehow subversive through its interrogation of the superstructural level of the "idea," has guided the work of primary and secondary education and its attempt to help students fit into the social mainstream.

In an ideal sense, education is the facilitator of democratic freedoms. Enlightenment liberalism has infused the rhetoric of education, suggesting
that the better an understanding students have of the structure of a
democratic society, the more responsible they will be as American citizens.
The "natural rights" that are encoded in the democratic ideal seem to
transcend ideological complexities. The supposition of equality in creation
(not in manifestation of potential) has helped to expand and diversify
educational opportunities for students across national, ethnic, and socio-
economic lines. At the same time, however, the notion of equal opportunity
has, ironically, sustained and bolstered educational sorting. In reality, the
ambivalence of democracy has, on the one hand, held onto the notion that
individuals can improve themselves through education, while on the other
hand, welcomed gatekeepers to monitor and direct the flow of individuals
through the educational system. These "gatekeepers" stand in the form of
IQ and other standardized testing, teachers who determine the academic
progress of students, and policy makers who direct resources and
legislation. In looking at the role of education in the formation of social
identity, educational gatekeepers contribute to identity as much, if not more,
than they become the custodians of it. Assumptions about individuals and
groups then contribute to the educational sorting process.

Attitudes about individuals from certain ethnic, cultural, and
economic backgrounds do not generally emerge from a monolithic and
racist social structure; rather, they are subtle and complex responses to the
tensions in American democracy between the rights of the individual and
the collective values of groups. A desire for common values or a common
nation is, however, complicated by confusion over the origin and stability of
such cultural and national values. The belief that American cultural
identity is inextricably linked to democratic values, that cultural identity is
the product of political identity, eclipses the fact that those very political
values are themselves culturally encoded. However, it is still the case that American democracy, in theory, offers the greatest amount of flexibility and mobility for citizens who accept the basic political tenets of liberty and equality. More and more, however, conservative voices have attempted to conflate national and cultural identity such that national identity is seen to be threatened by cultural diversity in much the same way that Jefferson imagined it to be.

The assimilative function of the school system has been targeted in the recent debates over the newly proposed national standards for the instruction of American history. Almost unanimously rejected by the U.S. Senate, these standards have come under attack because they "disparaged Western civilization and neglected major figures in American history" (Ravitch, 1995, p. 52). Diane Ravitch best sums up the conservative response to these standards: "I don't believe that one can teach civic values, as the standards claim to do, or explain our society's successes and failures without emphasizing the Western democratic tradition." What this means pedagogically, then, is that cultural difference is fine as long as it does not usurp political traditions which are founded upon a Western model of civic virtue. Consequently, intellectual inquiry must take place within limits that ensure the predominance of this model.

Higher education has, to some degree, transformed the ideological imperatives of primary and secondary education through its commitment to an intellectual community that demands self-reflexivity and diversity of thought. The connections that Socrates articulated between citizenship and the search for wisdom allow for a more generous intellectual territory in which to create meaning. However, the University is also beholden to the other strata of education in the sense that we inherit those students, whose
value we determine using many of the same tools which are used to sort students on the primary and secondary levels. We rely on standardized tests and grades, curricular tracks, and extracurricular activities that demonstrate leadership.\textsuperscript{11}

Quarrels over the efficacy of such measures have focused on the level of bias and cultural encoding existent in these measures. Advocates of the present admissions policies and their emphasis on standardized criteria point to the predictive value that such measures have to college success. Detractors point to the fact that many students have not had the adequate academic training to meet these criteria, that tracking and other forms of negative reinforcement have ensured lower achievement on measures that many believe reflect inherent ability, not intellectual conditioning. Further, the validity of intergroup comparisons using standardized testing is questioned even by those who design the tests.\textsuperscript{12} In the case of the SAT, test-takers both comprise one group, college-bound students, and many groups divided along cultural, linguistic, socio-economic, ethnic, and educational backgrounds. Thus questions about validity are complex and measured trends easily and even logically disputed.

In a sense, debates over the use of standardized testing as either a measure of intelligence or potential for academic success are useful only if we accept the cultural assumptions that predicate the creation and use of such measures. In other words, the complex set of criteria used to measure academic potential and achievement do not reflect what some simplistically call cultural bias; rather, they reflect an entrenched and historically evolved series of cultural assumptions that form a constitutive paradigm for American education. Further, level of educational opportunity radically affects student performance, and educational opportunity tends to distribute
itself along lines of class, ethnicity, and culture. While not yet an axiom, many students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds find that the school system reinvigorates this disadvantage through tracking and sorting.

The social service that American education performs in its designation of intellectual strata and vocational guidance through curricular tracking shapes and is shaped by assumptions about social value. A post-industrial, post-modern society whose national status is connected to a market-driven economy will measure intelligence by the terms on which that society functions. Individuals who have been socialized differently are often seen as intellectually inferior because they do not fall within the cultural mainstream. Although the novelty of alternative systems of knowledge and cogitation are often embraced by the mainstream, transformation of the status quo is a long evolutionary process.

E Pluribus Unum:
With Liberty and Justice for All

When the framers of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution put their faith in a monogenetic theory of humanity, which guaranteed equality in creation and later political equality for all those who successfully internalized the moral imperatives of Enlightenment humanism, they did not have racial taxonomies to qualify their promise. This is not to say that they failed to make racial distinctions, but the profoundly Christian foundations of American democracy precluded the
genetic sorting that was popularized by the rise of scientific racism, phrenology, and eugenics. Consequently, there was a flexibility in the system which tended to view cultural and racial characteristics through the lens of political institutions. In other words, the architects of early American identity tended to fuse political and social identity to the point at which one emanated from the other. As John Adams urged, in relation to British law, "Let them search for the foundations of British laws and government in the frame of human nature, in the constitution of the intellectual and moral world. There let us see that truth, liberty, justice, and benevolence are its everlasting basis; and if these could be removed, the superstructure is overthrown of course" (1764, p. 22)

The coincidence of democratic values with governmental superstructure justified both the American Revolution and the constitution of the colonial government in the form of a republic. Yet as the concept of race evolved and the realities of immigration tested the coherence of democratic liberalism, the confluence of racial, ethnic, cultural, social, and political identity vexed the American imagination in a multitude of ways. American education responded with the creation of an assimilative model that demanded the correspondence of individual identity to group identity in such a way that educators could recognize and transform characteristics and behaviors that challenged the European-American model of democracy infused into school curricula. Individuals who resisted or escaped socialization could either successfully challenge the process of Americanization or they could find themselves sorted out of the educational process altogether.

The tension between individual and group identity has paralleled the tension between inclusive and exclusive theories of democracy. The
dependence upon majority rule and consensus in America has demanded, to some degree, the privileging of group identity over individual identity. Acceptance of or resistance to those cultural modes viewed as dominant has created group centrism that has often coalesced with racial identity. Questions posed around the notion of cultural value usually assume a binary relationship between majority and minority groups. We often forget that group identity is the product of a core of shared values, some of which are shared between groups. It is the more inclusive values, those related to justice, equality and liberty that allow for both coalition building and the construction of a national community. However, it is still the case that these more abstract and more widely shared values are often lost in arguments which posit an oppositional relationship between minority and majority groups. What often makes this tension between a national community and smaller enclaves within that community so difficult is the way in which the terms of this relationship collide with the categories of political and social identity.

Race Under Pressure:
UC Admissions and Affirmative Action

Given the fact that American democracy has a fundamentally European foundation, both intellectually and bureaucratically, it is not surprising that efforts to eliminate governmental policies that turn on the question of racial identity have invoked the idealistic democratic rhetoric that figures an organic connection between political and social identity, and by extension, equality. Proponents of this model of democracy put their faith
in the belief that human beings are naturally inclined towards the good and that given liberal and humane laws will generally evolve those tendencies "of course." The idealism of this position has often been associated with racism and cultural hegemony. And certainly, the rhetoric of the "color-blind" constitution has been co-opted by factions of individuals who have a certain investment in an Anglo-American status quo. On the other side, many proponents of race-based policies point to a split between political and social identity that solidified in the Supreme Court ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson*:

> If the two races are to meet upon terms of social equality, it must be the result of natural affinities, a mutual appreciation of each other's merits, and a voluntary consent of individuals...If the civil and political rights of both races be equal, one cannot be inferior to the other civilly or politically. If one race be inferior to the other socially, the constitution of the United States cannot put them upon the same plane. (1896, p.1143)

Justice Brown's contention that social identity is both separate from and subordinate to political identity provides the ideological grounds on which *Brown v. Board of Education* and *Lau v. Nichols* were later decided. Closing the chasm between social and political equality has been the focus of integration and affirmative action efforts since the *Brown* decision. As Justice Douglas argued in the 1974 *Lau* decision, which guaranteed English instruction to Chinese-speaking students in the San Francisco public school district, "there is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education" (p. 566). Bolstered by a recognition that the public pressure exerted on the formulation of political policies is often engendered
by social attitudes, proponents of affirmative action programs have appealed to the promise of egalitarianism as adjudicated through legislation. As both Brown and Lau demonstrate, legislative action alone cannot ensure equality, but it does provide a check against the separate but equal logic that continues to pervade American attitudes towards diversity.

Most proponents and opponents of affirmative action share the ideal of political and social equality of opportunity; however, the vehement polarization of advocacy and opposition has become so entwined with partisan politics that we have had a difficult time actively pursuing reconciliation. Perhaps it is America's ambivalence over the relationship between equality and personal liberty that has made coalition driven by a commitment to balance and to the establishment of a middle ground rather than partisan politics so difficult to accomplish. The increased polarization of opinion over affirmative action is, however, unfortunate because the phenomenological fact of cultural diversity and the need to reinvest ourselves in American educational excellence make such an oppositional structure increasingly unrealistic. Polarization only perpetuates a logic of binarism that distracts us from the multiplicity of perspectives that emerge from the diversity of the American populous. It is time to move towards a balancing of perspectives in a way that is not conciliatory nor apolitical; not conservative nor liberal. Rather, as educators, legislators, citizens, and residents we must be able to envision an educational system that attempts to balance liberty and equality and which might give us the means with which to release ourselves from the destruction promised by a consolidation of racial hierarchies.
Beyond Manifest Destiny, or
Towards an Affirmative American Identity

The University of California is a fitting place to play out the political struggle over affirmative action policies in relation to student admissions. Our mission, granted to us in the good faith of the Morrill Act (1862) and the California Master Plan (1960) is one of the highest services entrusted to a democratic society. These two documents remain landmark attempts to diversify higher education both in terms of enrollment and curricula. In different ways, the Master Plan and the Morrill Act represent important and influential compromises to the contentious demands placed on higher education by an increasingly diverse, increasingly stratified, and increasingly professionalized culture. While the Morrill Act protected both the liberal arts and the mechanical and agricultural arts, the California Master Plan attempted to sustain and promote public access to higher education in California. The notion that students could pursue a diversified curriculum in an educational setting that guaranteed them a space according to their achievement and ambition remains crucial to California public education at all levels. We must be guided by our charter as a public institution in our creation of policies that affect the diversity of our campuses.

America has enjoyed a unique privilege in its ability to imagine diversity within a democratic structure that has its roots in Western humanism. Many would argue that this is a contradiction that must resolve itself either in conciliation to Western domination or revolution against such domination. However, given the reality of our diversity, and
the open debates we engage in over such questions, perhaps it is time to give up the terms of domination and oppression that have made our efforts to square our ideals with our experience so uncoordinated and lumbering. The fact that American democracy was borne through a European model does not exclude the possibility of maintaining the humane ideals of that model through a transformation of the cultural baggage that drags behind it. After all, many of the members of cultural groups presently under suspicion for "warping" American national identity believe strongly and fundamentally in those values which some see threatened. In this expression of American nationalism, the distinction between political and cultural values which is theoretically embodied in America's founding documents allow for both cultural diversity and national unity.

To some degree, then, our task as educators begins with a hard look at our nation's response to diversity and our tendency to conflate cultural and political identity to claim either solidity or disunification for America. We are in a particularly problematic position here because the tension between the individual and the group, and democracy's promise to balance the demands of these two entities belies the fact that we have never been able to sustain fully such a balance. Even those who argue most vehemently for individual rights do so on the basis of the efficacy of majority rule. Appeal to group interests has always been a fundamental condition of the exercise of individual autonomy. The difficulty now is recognizing that group interests are inevitably tied to an historically specific set of cultural values. Cultural values are not static, nor do they remain the property of one group, but are shared and exchanged and evolved through their translation between communities. This sharing is what worried Thomas Jefferson in the 18th century and continues to worry contemporary
conservative critics who see this fluidity of cultural values as a threat to national identity. However, these changes do not necessarily signal the destruction of a coherent American national identity. A government "by the people and for the people" has such flexibility built into it in order to guard against the reification of values that characterizes many dictatorships.

In general, it is time to reconsider our understanding of diversity and the role that national attitudes about diversity play in the evolution of the educational infrastructure. We know that diversity is no longer limited to ethnicity, and we must also understand that group-based policies that cater to obsolete categories of identity are no longer valid. The possibility of escaping group-based policies seems, and perhaps rightfully so, dim; however, the belief that such policies are needed to right historical wrongs is equally untenable. We must not allow the persuasive pathos of such appeals to obscure their flawed logic. Affirmative action policies, while they exist at the University, should exist because the University has an ethical responsibility to model the highest values of a democratic society, values reflected in an environment that encourages intellectual inquiry of all sorts and intellectual achievement of all students.

What this means practically, in terms of admissions policies, is not as simple. For it seems unlikely that we will be able to move very quickly or easily away from standardized admissions criteria that currently privilege certain students over others. It is also the case that the stigma attached to the special action category of admissions, while it claims only a small proportion of minority and economically disadvantaged students, will not diminish in the near future. Therefore, a more broadly based solution must be fashioned, one that fosters cultural diversity and dialogue about the
evolving faces of American identity. The pressure on schools, colleges, and universities to maintain an assimilative model of education is great, particularly in the wake of fears that America is losing ground as an international heavyweight. Simultaneously, amid these growing fears of diminished standards, more and more of our students find themselves at a disadvantage in attempting to secure educational opportunities at all levels.¹⁸

It is incumbent on the University to foster egalitarian collaborations with schools and community colleges and to develop a collective agenda that would foster intellectual achievement at all levels for all students.¹⁹ Such an agenda would not, as is sometimes argued, create an intellectually top heavy society of people ill-prepared for "real life." As Barzun defines it, "[i]ntellect is the capitalized and communal form of live intelligence; it is intelligence stored up and made into habits of discipline, signs and symbols of meaning, chains of reasoning and spurs to emotion....Intellect is community property and can be handed down" (4). In this sense, intellect is the adhesive that binds a community together and allows its members to speak and understand a common language of civic values and national virtues. As such, intellect is a public good in much the same way equality and liberty are designated as public goods in a democratic society.²⁰ Ideas generated out of what Barzun calls the "house of intellect" are then entered into the realm of the sensis communis for debate and evaluation. Rather than ripping the national fabric, intellectual development weaves it more tightly, allowing for the creation of a viable democratic community based on shared values within which a wide range of cultural and philosophical values can flourish.
In the end, equality can only degenerate into tyranny through ignorance and exclusion from intellectual life, a life made possible through the democratic promise of liberty. As Christopher Lasch puts it, "[i]n the absence of democratic exchange, most people have no incentive to master the knowledge that would make them into capable citizens" (12). Lasch draws a sharp distinction between information and knowledge, the latter being communicated through active dialogue and debate. Thus knowledge becomes the product of intellectual inquiry, which in turn facilitates the rejuvenation of democratic values necessary in our national search for balance and coherence. Without the cooperation of all levels of education in the preservation of an intellectual democracy, we shall all certainly be debased and will be doomed to suffer inequality in servitude. Søren Kierkegaard defined education as "the curriculum the individual ran through in order to catch up with himself; and anyone who does not want to go through this curriculum will be little helped by being born into the most enlightened age" (75). If we do not "catch up to ourselves" by working to fulfill the ethical imperative of egalitarian democracy, what we perceive to be our own enlightenment will prove to be nothing more than the uncertain wavering of a dull lamp.
Every species of government has its specific principles. Ours perhaps are more peculiar than those of any other in the universe. It is a composition of the freest principles of the English constitution, with others derived from natural right and natural reason. To these nothing can be more opposed than the maxims of absolute monarchies. Yet from such we are to expect the greatest number of emigrants. They will bring with them the principles of the governments they leave, imbied in their early youth; or, if able to throw them off, it will be in exchange for an unbounded licentiousness, passing, as is usual, from one extreme to another. It would be a miracle were they to stop precisely at the point of temperate liberty. These principles, with their language, they will transmit to their children. In proportion to their numbers, they will share with us the legislation. They will infuse it into their spirit, warp and bias its directions, and render it a heterogeneous, incoherent, distracted mass. (Thomas Jefferson, 1781)

The latest of these analyses is a report by David Breneman (1995), an economics professor at Harvard, who suggests that UC shift its educational emphasis to undergraduate students at the expense of graduate students, whose enrollment should be diminished to free up resources for the accommodation of more undergraduates. Given the fact that UC is the only public Ph.D. granting institution in California, this proposal directly contradicts the charge of the Master Plan. UC President Jack Peltason contested Breneman's suggestion to cut back in graduate education and research. He points out that "[i]ronically, UC undergraduates would be among the principle losers under Breneman's proposal, because if it were enacted some of our best faculty would undoubtedly go elsewhere" (p. 8). Peltason also points out the numerous efforts that UC institutions make to "work routinely and regularly with the California State University, the Community Colleges, California's independent institutions, and K-12 schools to expand educational opportunity so there will be room for what we know will be a growing number of students" (p. 8). In 1994, Clark Kerr urged the preservation of the academic Master Plan and the additional creation of a resource Master Plan which would support the academic Master Plan and allow the University to maintain its charge: "service to equality of opportunity (student access) and to the discovery and dissemination of knowledge (academic quality), with higher education taking the main responsibility for guiding its own future (institutional autonomy)" (p. 8).

We have gone way beyond questions raised by Bakke (1978). The current backlash against affirmative action raises fundamental questions about the notion of identity and the viability of categories that identify individuals on the basis of ethnicity, race, or gender.

Legally endowing the University with the jurisdiction to "provide instruction in the liberal arts and sciences, and in the professions" (1960, pg. 2), the Master Plan outlined a vertical relationship between the University, the state college system, and the community college system.

The University of California, Irvine presently has the Alternative Assessment Project, a pilot program coordinated by the Partnership Network, a collaborative of 14 school districts, the Orange County Department of Education, five community colleges, and UCI. Under the project, schools targeted potential students and recommended them for
admission to UC based on a portfolio of work that weighted non-quantifiable criteria more heavily. The University of Wisconsin is in the process of instituting a parallel alternative admissions track systemwide. Based on competencies created that will allow admissions officers to measure student achievement by means other than Carnegie Units, but by discreet criteria which can be converted to quantifiable data in the admissions process. Additionally, Oklahoma and Wyoming are experimenting with competency-based programs (National Governor's Association, 1993). Although such a system might be untenable for UC and its enormous applicant pool, the shift away from Carnegie Units on the part of Wisconsin and other systems demonstrates a general awareness that current modes of assessment are in need of reform.

6In terms of admissions policies at the University of California, arguments about representation are usually framed in relationship to demographic distribution versus representational equity at the University. While the California population is 25% Latino (Statistical Abstract, 1991), the percentage of Latino students at UC hovers around 14% (UCOP, 1994). Similarly, African Americans represent approximately 7% of Californians and about 4% of UC students. White students at UC also do not represent their demographic representation (68% to 47%). The population which has experienced the greatest gains in enrollment at UC is Asian Americans, increasing from 14.3% in 1983 to 25.7% in 1993.

7California Assembly Speaker Willie Brown has been one of the most vocal proponents of affirmative action policies, arguing that "everybody in here [at a press conference] has been the beneficiary of preferential treatment at my expense -- at every level in your life, at every level in your life" (1995, p.1).

8Shelby Steele has popularized this argument, saying that affirmative action programs have "allowed us to offer the remediation of preference on the basis of mere color rather than actual injury. By making black the color of preference, these mandates have reburdened society with the very marriage of color and preference (in reverse) that we set out to eradicate. The old sin is reaffirmed in a new guise" (1990, p. 115).

9See Solorzano (1991), whose research demonstrates that "regardless of ethnic group status, student educational aspirations rise as their SES rises" (p. 184). Others have demonstrated that minority children are often concentrated in impoverished school districts which employ more inexperienced teachers (Orland, 1990), and that many of these students are tracked into a course of study that does not prepare them for college admissions or is strictly vocational (Ballesteros, 1986). As Oakes and Lipton argue, the result of tracking is that too often students "who need more time to learn appear to get less; those who have the most difficulty succeeding have fewer of the best teachers; those who could benefit from the richest intellectual resources...get the poorest" (1990, p. 195).

10According to K.C. Cole (1995) and Gould (1982), Herrnstein and Murray have made the mistake of confusing correlation with causality. A positive correlation can exist between two factors, but that does not necessarily guarantee causation. Combined with the invalid practice of comparing scores between groups (the tests are designed to measure differences within groups), their conclusions are more myth than reality.

11UC has formulated a Selection Index which is calculated as follows: academic GPA x 1000 + SAT I or ACT scores + three required SAT II scores. However, UCOP admissions guidelines stipulate that as much as 60% of full-qualified candidates (those within the top 12.5% of high school graduates) can be admitted with consideration to extracurricular activities and other non-academic criteria in addition to quantifiable academic criteria.

12Standardized testing occurs in many forms and at many levels of education. Beginning with IQ and general achievement tests to measure school success at teaching
to basic standards, and culminating with the SAT, GRE, MCAT and other post-
secondary achievement and aptitude tests, these measures carry a great deal of weight
in determining the educational direction of students.

In terms of the SAT, questions have been raised about the fairness of the test and
its ability to predict college success. Crouse and Trusheim (1988) argue that admissions
decisions without the SAT will correlate with at least 84% of students judged with the
SAT. American colleges, they contend, make only 1 to 3 "clearly correct admissions
forecasts" out of each hundred by using the SAT (p. 99). Further, Walter Jacobs (1995)
has argued that "the SAT measures reasoning skills that develop over time with study
in the wide range of college preparatory courses" (p. 25). Students who are not tracked
into these courses, namely economically disadvantaged and ethnic students, will
ultimately score lower on the exam. High scoring minorities are often recruited via a
list sold by ETS of such students (Navarette Jr., 1994 and Owen, 1966). Some, like Gary
Keller, advocate for standardized tests, arguing that "tests have been used more often to
open doors rather than to close them" (1991, p. 5). He puts responsibility for the
disenfranchisement of minorities on "the establishment of educational policies for [the
tests'] use" (p. 5). Blaming the SAT for the underrepresentation of minority students in
higher education is convenient, but it does not productively address the fact that
underrepresentation is the result of a confluence of factors, which include parental
education and socio-economic level, inequitable educational opportunities and resources,
and the acquisition of English as a second language (Schmitt, 1988; Angoff and Cook,
1991; Gaire, 1991; Durán, 1994; Darling-Hammond, 1994; LaCelle-Peterson and Rivera,

In terms of IQ tests, now widely debated because of The Bell Curve, Stephen Jay
Gould (1981) and others have warned of the problems with using IQ tests to predict
academic achievement. He argues that "much of the elaborate statistical work
performed by testers during the past fifty years provides no independent confirmation
for the proposition that tests measure intelligence, but merely establishes correlation
with a preconceived and unchallenged standard" (p. 177). According to Gould, Binet,
creator of the IQ test, worried that IQ tests would be used to label students, not to help
them achieve their greatest potential (p. 152). Gould also points out that Spearman's g,
or the symbol for general intelligence that these tests supposedly measure, is a
mathematical concoction that disappears with the rotation of axes on a graph of test
results (pp. 252-255). Further, he points out that the distribution of scores within each
group is greater than the average differences in scores between groups (p. 156, see also

13See Reginald Horsman (1981), who argues that until the term Manifest Destiny was
coined in the 1840's, Anglo-Saxonism was predominantly thought of in terms of
institutional purity. Both monogeneticism and environmental determinism perpetuated
this notion until the widespread rise of scientific racism in the second half of the 19th
century.

14The most eloquent expression of this is perhaps UC Regent Ward Connerly's recent
plea to the board that the University look to end affirmative action policies. He argues
that

At the core of what we do as Regents is the notion that we have to
be fair. One of the things that has allowed us to integrate this society
as much as we have, and we still need to do more, is, I think,
the basic fairness of people. You have to drag them sometimes.
You have to coax them into doing the right thing. But given the
right choices, people are basically fair. If I didn't believe that,
I think I'd probably jump off the bridge because I think people
are basically fair. (1995, p. 1)
The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development concluded that "the California Master Plan and its revisions can be interpreted as a distinctive attempt to reconcile populism with elitism" (1991, p. 36).

Willie Brown has argued this point persuasively, stating, "Now that the system is being challenged to let Willie's relatives in...suddenly there is something wrong, or unconstitutional, or unacceptable...I'm telling you, you've got no clue what it is like...every day in your life to know that this is the system you are in...I'm telling you, it gnaws at you day in and day out" (1995, pp. 1, 29). Despite the moral force of Brown's statement, his humiliation mirrors that of Ward Connerly, who remembers drinking at a colored-only water fountain, but who wants to place more faith in the goodness of people (1995, p. 2). The contrast between the views of Brown and Connerly underscores the important fact that discussions about affirmative action cross racial boundaries, making arguments relying on historical injustices problematic. No longer are these arguments fully representative of group attitudes.

For Fall 1993, whites composed 14% of those students admitted by exception, in contrast to the common assumption that only underrepresented minorities benefit from such policies (UCOP, 1994, p.7). The admission by exception category includes student athletes and musicians, as well as students who have been educationally or financially disadvantaged, but who possess a "reasonable potential for success at the University" (UCOP, 1990).

Evidence of this is found in the dismal transfer rates of students to the University from California Community Colleges. In 1993 alone, 249,308 students graduated from California high schools. Of those, 36.9% went straight to California Community Colleges. That same year, only 8,834 students transferred to the UC system, less than ten percent of the number who entered that year. Cumulatively, this imbalance means that a disproportionate number of students remain in the CCC system, which has been criticized for failing to provide effective transfer programs (OECD, 1991). For those students who do manage to transfer, Bauer and Bauer (1994) found that many of these students drop out quickly because they are unaware of the expectations of the University.

This paper represents a first step in a long-term project to develop and implement more coordinated collaborations between educational sectors. Such partnerships are vital in any effort to reinvigorate public education. Faculty and administrators must be brought together to begin to reinvigorate efforts to bolster the intellectual engagement and enthusiasm of both teachers and students. In the past, the University has approached collaborations with a certain degree of condescension. Vital to the strength of future collaborations is a more egalitarian structure in which members of the University community recognize their debt to other educational strata.

In their review of the California higher education system, the OECD confirmed that education, as opposed to training, is "a public good: in a post-industrial and multi-cultural society, education is an essential feature for both the integration and further progress of any country which lives by it" (1991, p. 84). Debates over the philosophical paradigm of public education have echoed the suspicion of intellect that Hofstadter traces.
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