

COMMENTARY

Race-Think: A Stanford Phenomenon?

During my years in our Multicultural Garden of Eden, I have often marveled at the odd strategies that some of the more strident racial factions of the student body employ in their attempts to "heighten consciousness," "build tolerance," "promote diversity," and otherwise convince us to partake of that fruit which promises to open our eyes to a PC version of the knowledge of good and evil. I am mystified because these



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tactics seem always to contribute more to restricting consciousness, aggravating intolerance, and pigeonholing cultural identities than many a Nazi bookburning. Strangely, the Multiculturalists don't seem to catch on to the inevitable non-efficacy of their rallies, protests, whinnings, demands, and vitriolic brickbats towards all printed policies not incorporating the language of the 1964 Civil Rights Act in their preambles.

Luckily, my \$100,000 fuzzy education — good for nothing else — has equipped me to turn to the annals of social science for an answer to why multicultural demagogues have

trouble devising policies that might enhance intergroup understanding, cooperation, and appreciation (if, indeed, that is their aim). I have found a theory that, with the slightest of modifications, might explain this mind boggling phenomenon. With this, I illuminate a path along which all of social science will surely follow.

In 1971, a psychologist named Irving Janis articulated the influential concept of "group-think" to describe the remarkably flawed decision-making process behind such historical disasters as Pearl Harbor, the Bay of Pigs Invasion, and the escalation of the Vietnam war. It is a very enlightening concept, because it contributes to our solution of a pervasive and familiar mystery: how and why do groups of otherwise rational people get together and act stupidly? Janis's answer is elegantly simple: cohesive groups that place a priority on concurrence when making decisions fall into socially induced behaviors that squelch rational opposition and reservation, leading to predictably thoughtless decisions.

Group-think goes a long way in explaining such questions as why President Lyndon Johnson and his cronies surmised that they could bring a determined North Vietnam to its knees with scant American losses and why baseball players and team owners refuse to agree to a mutually beneficial compromise. I propose that the group-think phenomenon is behind our multicultural mystery as well.

There are eight fundamental behaviors that Janis described as components of group-think. These behaviors tend to enhance close-

mindedness, pressures to conform, and delusions of superiority within groups (already the discerning reader will see the applicability of this theory to the multicultural elite). Briefly, the behaviors that Janis described are: 1) believing in the group's invulnerability 2) believing in the group's unquestionable morality 3) rationalizing the group's actions 4) stereotyping the group's opponents 5) pressuring dissenting members to conform 6) censoring of personal disapproval 7) maintaining an illusion of unanimity 8) posting "mindguards" to ensure that leaders are not exposed to unwanted information and opposition.

I submit that the Multiculturalists, when they divide up by race for their feel-good ethnic hoedowns, engage in nearly all of these behaviors. Of course, group-think in Janis's conception refers to very small policy groups that band together through common interests and shared influence. So, in order to devise a theory for our groups of interest, which are larger and self-selected largely by skin color, I propose a modified conception of group-think which I shall call "race-think."

Race-think is an insidious phenomenon that skews decision-making in ways similar to group-think, but there are a couple of differences between the behaviors that Janis documented and the activities of the multicultural apparatchiks. First and foremost, Multiculturalists band together not into tight cliques of mutual interests and complementary powers, but rather into social clubs of ostensibly common racial heritage. Second, members do not tend to see themselves as invulnerable, but in-

stead as universally and unbearably persecuted. Other than these two differences, however, I hypothesize that group-think and race-think engender the same irrational behaviors and results.

A brief survey of the eight behaviors of race-think reveals how ingrained the phenomenon is. The first behavior — and by far the most pervasive and deleterious — is a perception, embraced by Multiculturalists who are not white males, of themselves as beset on all sides by hostile intrigues, cabals, and conspiracies. Several examples of race-think paranoia spring immediately to mind. When Cecilia Burcisa's high-ranking administrative position was terminated last spring, Chicano students decried the "institutional racism" at Stanford that allowed one of the few Chicano administrators here to be perfunctorily dismissed. The response, where it should have been a condemnation of the provost's clumsy personnel-management style, was an accusation that the president and provost were colluding to ignore, neglect, and oppress Chicano members of the community.

This is not to suggest by any means, however, that the Chicano faction has cornered the market on paranoia. All of the ethnic elites were out in force a year ago to forestall any hint of budget cuts to their student-enclaves, once again accusing the president and provost of conspiring, in their worship of the lily-white dollar, against minorities. As with all paranoia, this accusation had its obviously delusional un-

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derpinnings. Black students were particularly fond of impugning Provost Rice with a severe lack of racial sensitivity, apparently because she, although black, refused [alas, only at first] to see things their way.

The second behavior of race-think is believing that the moral superiority of the group is unquestionable. Truly, the Stanford Multiculturalists are heavy hitters in the big-leagues of sanctimony; few would dispute that. A letter to the editor of the *Daily* last week says it all. Deriding a fundraising scheme cooked up by the athletic department called the "Sixth Man Club", two characters named Michael Jones and Joshua Croban complained that selling prime seats to students who could then show up and be seated right before each basketball game is "contemptible" and an "abomination." Why is selling seats reprehensible all of a sudden? Because the people who have purchased these seats are "practically all white, all male, and fraternity-dominated..." This is multicultural rectitude at its zenith. Whenever a group of white males happens to be at the same place at the same time, you can be sure that the foul stench of oppression and exploitation lingers in the air. In contrast, ethnic centers, whose sole purpose is to bring together exclusive cliques of students to revel in racial purity, are so righteous that the mere mention of cutting their budgets incites turmoil on the grandest scale.

The third behavior behind the race-think phenomenon is rationalization of the racially activist agenda. Most groups — indeed most people — engage in rationalization. The great thing about the rationalizations of the ethnic moral minority is that they are often diametrically opposed to the actions for which they are developed. Ask the leaders of the BSU or EI Centro or AAC why they sponsor racially exclusive activities and meetings and they are sure to let loose with a high-minded stream of drivel about promoting harmony and intergroup appreciation. There seems to be more than a little tension between rationalization and action when you suffer from race-think.

The fourth race-think symptom is stereotyping the opponent, and the Stanford Multiculturalists have this one down to a science. The opponent is the white male and his criteria of misperceived lackies: "brocs," "twinkies," "coconuts," and the like. The opponent is intrinsically incapable of understanding the enlightened viewpoint; any disagreement he offers is due to insensitivity, and any agreement he grants springs from well-chosen, but insincere, deference to the morally superior race-thinkers. He enjoys making money and buying material things, just to make sure that people with darker skin don't have access to them. He enjoys killing children and revels in the death of minorities (if you are white, male, and pro-choice, for instance, it is often ascribed to your desire for poor black and Hispanic women to abort their children as frequently as possible). He exploits foreign nationals through capitalistic imperialism, by paying them for their services. He is hopelessly unable to understand the cultural and political conditions that exist among persons who are not white. And he is incapable of seeing another person as an individual of equal status unless that person is white (any tan confuses him). Such is the opponent, and, if you are a white male, you are the opponent.

The last four behaviors that inhere in race-think form acute pressures toward conformity. First, there is a strong pressure by race-thinkers on their racial cohorts to conform to a transcendent standard of what belonging to such-and-such a minority means. If a black person is an individualist and a thoroughgoing capitalist who eschews victimhood status and its concomitant entitlements, race-thinkers are quick to brand him "broc," "Uncle Tom," or "sell-out." This is a beloved tool for consensus-building at Stanford, land of multicultural toleration. A conservative black editor of this newspaper, Ed Malone, could always count on the black ethnic elite for some searing dismissal of his personhood...this is unfortunate only because

many other minority individuals are now that much more motivated to keep their reservations to themselves, fearing ideological excoriation similar to what Mr. Malone experienced.

Mr. Malone is not an isolated example, sadly. I have had at least two "Chicano" individuals admit to me that they resent the enormous pressure on them to play the Chicano role. One of them is Chicano only in obscure facial and dermal characteristics: she has no affinity for Mexico, is not Catholic, does not speak Spanish, prefers to date fair men, and is utterly unconcerned with the legacy of Poncho Villa. She has been branded a "coconut" by some of those ultra-tolerant Stanford race-thinkers.

Such public disapprobation of individual identities that differ from "race-identity" has led to the sixth symptom of race-think: self-censorship. Minorities who associate even superficially with the rabid ethnic elite of Stanford are extremely hesitant to stand up and denounce racially exclusive tactics or racially-motivated judgments of selves and others. The "Chicans" I described above is certainly not going to risk user ostracism by saying that what a lot of her friends do is silly. Hence, the Stanford Multiculturalists march blithely around campus, conveniently unaware of how many of their racial cohorts disapprove of their tactics.

Pressures to conform to external "race-identity" standards and the self-censorship that springs from these pressures result in the seventh symptom of race-think: an illusion of unanimity. Since the vast numbers of minority individuals who disagree with the practices of racial exclusion and racial identification on this campus are too tremulous to speak out, Stanford's multicultural generalizations maintain (and nurture) the delusion that they speak for the interests of all minorities. They can and do claim, to themselves as well as others, that the disagreement that they do confront comes from the racist opposition and its brainwashed minority lackies.

To keep awareness of rational opposition to a minimum, race-thinkers engage in one final behavior: they institute "mind-guard" procedures to preclude the effective vocalization of differences. Stanford's ethnic elite have this tool mastered. My personal experience provides an apt illustration of mind-guarding. I wanted to attend a publicly announced meeting of students, organized by bigwigs at the Black Student Union among others, who were concerned (don't ask me why) about the loss of university support for a separate orientation weekend for prospective black students. Perhaps their barbo-

cus are more scintillating than the run-of-the-mill barbecues to which the rest of the prospective freshmen are invited. Maybe the special black recruitment program ensures an opportunity to start early in the institution of race-think... Anyway, I was promptly booted from the meeting because my fair complexion could these race-think champions to view me as the opponent, unable and unwilling to understand their perspective. They en-owed, of course, that I never will. But then, I am the opponent.

So next time you marvel at the continuing lack of consensus and cooperation on race issues in our multicultural haven, thank social science for shedding light into some of its darker corners. The source of persistent tension is not that the Multiculturalists are stupid or silly or ill-willed when they make unproductive demands and policies to promote "diversity," "cooperation," and "toleration." Instead, antagonism arises when they separate into groups extremely hostile to rational agendas. Race-focused groups foster race-think, and the only way to rid our multicultural community of race-think is to rid it of these invidious factions. We should be cheered, however, to know that our task is not impossible. The existence of ethnic organizations is no inevitable prerequisite to maintaining a diverse university community — white students, after all, seem to be doing all right without an Aryan Student Union.

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RECORD

- ✓ For some reason, we just can't get excited about letting the ASSU take over the duties of the Post Office. Kinda like letting Socks take over for Bill.
- ✓ Word is that Ujanna sent representatives to dorm meetings last week hoping to collect a cool \$100 per house. The noble cause? Last Friday's "Club UJ" party, of course! Why, forget grapes and AIDS patchwork; this is something worth my money. Our check for next year's party is in the mail.
- ✓ Actually, we're surprised the ASSU hasn't added mandatory funding for the UJ party to their Ultra-Slim-Fast-Guaranteed-Take-Off-The-Pounds Diet Plan for your wallet (also known as the Special Fee System). Ooops! Better hope the Senate's not reading this.
- ✓ Speaking of grapes, Building 10 has been keeping a lower profile than Miss Piggy at a spin factory regarding the Grape Policy Committee report. Their excuse: we haven't had time to read it. Come on guys, it's time to snap out of it — the O.J. trial isn't that interesting.
- ✓ Update from Sunken Diamond: as of last Thursday, Cardinal bats are still slumbering. In fact, Clinton political nominees are having an easier time with the Senate than our lineup is with opposing pitching.
- ✓ You know you're in for a long night when five minutes into an Allen Ginsberg poetry reading you find yourself longing for the verso of that modern-day Milton, Jimmy Carter. Don't worry, we were only there for the free food.
- ✓ Last Tuesday's *Daily* editorial ingeniously suggested that the ID system be scrapped entirely in favor of a network of less primitive thumb-print readers. Naturally, anything that drags Stanford out of the stone age is fine by us, so why not issue passers to campus security and replace the SURE escort service with matter-energy transport devices. Beam us up, Dworkin.
- ✓ Sam Edwards' "Procrastination Workshop" couldn't have come a moment too soon. Sign us up — well, maybe later. We're all pretty busy right now and, uh, we'll get back to you on this one.
- ✓ Dining Services Operations Manager Craig Mitchell checks in with the quote of the week. Mitchell, commenting on the wholesale price of Snapple and the relative high price dorms charge, explained "Our costs are very strange." No comment necessary.

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This confusion drives grade inflation.

When some professors give everyone or nearly everyone an A, students who enroll in a course taught by a professor old-fashioned enough to give C's, D's and F's are at a competitive disadvantage. A "C" in that course can ruin their averages and jeopardize their chances of getting into law or medical school even though it does not mean what readers of the transcript think. This tempts many students to take courses with professors with the lowest grading standards, and tougher professors are tempted to sell out to the enrollment votes of student consumers.

A more pointed attack on grade inflation will begin this fall at Dartmouth. To reduce the incentive to give and to receive

inflated grades, Dartmouth will start to include on the student's transcript not only the grade in the class but the size of the class and the median grade of all of its students. Predictably, some professors objected. Prof. Delo Mack of the physics department said this would "pit one student against another. I don't think it [competition] is something we want to encourage."

But one of the main reasons for going to schools and colleges instead of being educated by one's parents is to find out how one compares with agemates in the ability to learn what society thinks it is important to know. This grading system has to be consistent, however, for the competition to be fair. Without compelling professors to change their previous grading practices, the new Dartmouth policy, used also by a few other colleges and universities, seeks to return grading to a more hon-

est evaluation of students, which is what grades are intended to be.

Students need to discover early whether they are wasting their time in college because they lack either the intellectual ability or the motivation to learn enough to justify taking four years out of their lives. An "A" should encourage the students to continue studying; he is learning what he is supposed to be learning; a "D" or an "F" should tell him that he may be in the wrong field or the wrong college. Or maybe a low grade tells him that he should stop fooling around and start studying.

Society — and society includes parents — also needs grades. Is the enormous expense of sending a student to college for four years — as much as \$100,000 — likely to pay off? It is now almost impossible for a student to work his way through college without a subsidy from parents, government or the college itself. Shouldn't stu-

dents justify the subsidy to their sponsors? Several low grades suggest that the student may be better off quitting and taking a full-time job, or shifting his studies to a school or program where he will do better.

Postscript: I discovered the identity of the angry student. A computer check showed only one student with a B+ in ornithology and two previous semesters with a straight A average: a graduating senior with a double major in economics and computer science. Had my evaluation of his work cost him an award at graduation? No, it hadn't. Although his cumulative average was very good, grade inflation had eroded the value of his achievements; many of his classmates had even higher averages.

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