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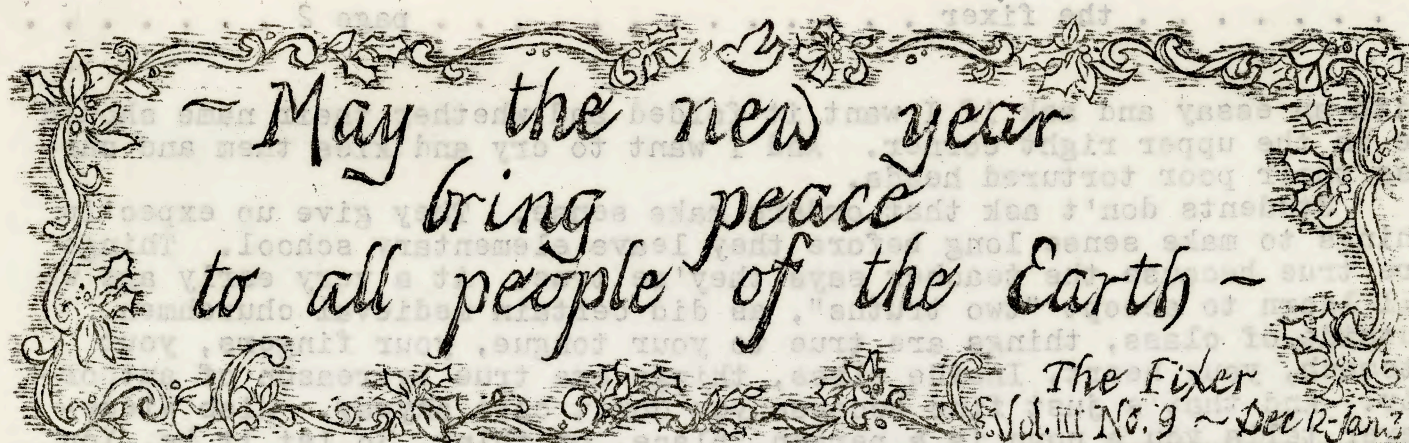
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Palmer



STUDENT AS NIGGER

Students are niggers. When you get that straight, our schools begin to make sense. It's more important, though, to understand why they're niggers. If we follow that question seriously enough, it will lead us past the zone of academic red tape, where dedicated teachers pass their knowledge on to a new generation, and into the nitty-gritty of human needs and hang-ups. And from there we can go on to consider whether it might ever be possible for students to come up from slavery.

First, let's see what's happening now. Let's look at the role students play in what we like to call education.

At Cal State, L.A., where I teach, the students have separate and unequal dining facilities. If I take them into the faculty dining room, my colleagues get uncomfortable, as though there was a bad smell. If I eat in the Student Cafeteria, I become known as the educational equivalent of a niggerlover. In at least one building there are even restrooms which students may not use.

Students at Cal State are politically disenfranchised. They are in an academic Lowndes County. Most of them can vote in national elections--their average age is about 26--but they have no voice in decisions which affect their academic lives. The students are, it is true, allowed to have a toy government of their own. It is a government run for the most part by Uncle Toms and concerned with trivia. The faculty and administration decide what courses will be offered; the students get to choose their Homecoming Queen. Occasionally, when student leaders get uppity and rebellious, they're either ignored, put off with trivial concessions, or maneuvered expertly out of position.

A student at Cal State is expected to know his place. He calls a faculty member "Sir" or "Doctor" or "Professor"--and he smiles and shuffles some as he stands outside the professor's office waiting for permission to enter. The faculty tell him what courses to take (in my department, English, even electives have to be approved by a faculty member); they tell him what to read, what to write, and frequently, where to set the margins on his typewriter. They tell him what's true and what isn't. Some teachers insist that they encourage dissent but they're almost always jiving and every student knows it. Tell the man what he wants to hear or he'll fail you out of the course.

When a teacher says "jump", students jump. I know of one professor who refused to take up class time for exams and required students to show up for tests at 6:30 in the morning. And they did! Another, at exam time, provides answer cards to be filled out--each one enclosed in a paper bag with a hole cut in the top to see through. Students stick their writing hands in the bags while taking the test. The teacher isn't a provo; I wish he were. He does it to prevent cheating. Another colleague once caught a student reading during one of his lectures and threw her book against the wall. Still another lectures his students into a stupor and then screams at them in a rage when they fall asleep.

Just last week, during the first meeting of a class, one girl got up to leave after about ten minutes had gone by. The teacher rushed over, grabbed her by the arm, saying, "This class is NOT dismissed," and led her back to her seat. On the same day another teacher began informing his class that he does not like beards, mustaches, long hair on boys, or Capri pants on girls, and will not tolerate any of that in his class. That class, incidentally, consisted mostly of high school teachers.

Even more discouraging than this Auschwitz approach to education is the fact that the students take it. They haven't gone through twelve years of public school for nothing. They've learned one thing and perhaps only one thing during those twelve years. They've forgotten their algebra. They're hopelessly vague about chemistry and physics. They've grown to fear and resent literature. They write like they've been lobotomized. But, can they follow orders! Freshmen come up to me

with an essay and ask if I want it folded and whether their name should be in the upper right corner. And I want to cry and kiss them and caress their poor tortured heads.

Students don't ask that orders make sense. They give up expecting things to make sense long before they leave elementary school. Things are true because the teacher says they're true. At a very early age we all learn to accept "two truths", as did certain medieval churchmen. Outside of class, things are true to your tongue, your fingers, your stomach, your heart. Inside class, things are true by reason of authority. And that's just fine because you don't care anyway. Miss Wiedemeyer tells you a noun is a person, place, or thing. So let it be. You don't care.

The important thing is to please her. Back in kindergarten, you found out that teachers only love children who stand in nice straight lines. And that's where it's been at ever since. Nothing changes except to get worse. School becomes more and more obviously a prison. Last year I spoke to a student assembly at Manual Arts High School and then couldn't get out of the school. I mean there was NO WAY OUT. Locked doors. High fences. One of the inmates was trying to make it over a fence when he saw me coming and froze in panic. For a moment, I expected sirens, a rattle of bullets, and him clawing the fence.

What school amounts to, then, for white and black kids alike, is a 12-year course in how to be slaves. What else could explain what I see in a freshman class? The saddest cases among both black slaves and student slaves are the ones who have so thoroughly introjected their masters' values that their anger is all turned inward. At Cal State these are the kids for whom every low grade is torture, who stammer and shake when they speak to a professor, who go through an emotional crisis every time they're called upon during class. You can recognize them easily at finals time. Their faces are festooned with fresh pimples; their bowels boil audibly across the room. If there really is a last judgment, then the parents and teachers who created these wrecks are going to burn in hell.

So students are niggers. It's time to find out why, and to do this, we have to take a long look at Mr. Charlie.

The teachers I know best are college professors. Outside the classroom and taken as a group, their most striking characteristic is timidity. They are short on guts.

Just look at their working conditions. At a time when even migrant workers have begun to fight and win, college professors are still afraid to make more than a token effort to improve their economic status. In California state colleges the faculties are messed up regularly and vigorously by the Governor and Legislature and yet they still won't offer any solid resistance. They lie flat on their stomachs mumbling catchphrases like "professional dignity" and "meaningful dialogue".

Professors were no different when I was an undergraduate at UCLA during the McCarthy era; it was like a cattle stampede as they rushed to cop out. And, in more recent years, I found that my being arrested in sit-ins brought from my colleagues not so much approval or condemnation as open-mouthed astonishment. "You could lose your job!"

Now, of course, there's the Vietnamese war. It gets some opposition from a few teachers. Some support it. But a vast number of professors, who know perfectly well what's happening, are copping out again. And in the high schools, you can forget it. Stillness reigns.

I'm not sure why teachers are so afraid. It could be that academic training itself forces a split between thought and action. It might also be that the tenured security of a teaching job attracts timid persons and, furthermore, that teaching, like police work, pulls in persons who are unsure of themselves and need weapons and the other external trappings of authority.

At any rate teachers ARE short on guts. And, as Judy Eisenstein has eloquently pointed out, the classroom offers an artificial and protected environment in which they can exercise their will to power. Your neighbors may drive a better car; gas station attendants may intimidate you; your wife may dominate you; the State Legislature may ignore you; but in the classroom--students do what you say--or else. The grade is a powerful weapon. It may not rest on your hip, potent and rigid like a cop's gun, but in the long run, it's more powerful. At your personal whim--any time you choose you can keep 35 students up for nights and have the pleasure of seeing them walk into class pasty-faced and red-eyed carrying a sheaf of typewritten pages, with the title page, MLA footnotes and margins set at 15 and 91.

The general timidity which causes teachers to make niggers of their

students usually includes a more specific fear--fear of the students themselves. After all, students are different, just like black people. You stand exposed in front of them, knowing that their interests, their values, and their language are different from yours. To make matters worse, you may suspect that you yourself are not the most engaging of persons. What then can protect you from their ridicule and scorn? Respect for Authority. That's what. It's the policeman's gun again. The white bwana's pith helmet. So you flaunt that authority. You wither whispers with a murderous glance. You crush objectors with erudition and heavy irony. And, worst of all, you make your own attainments seem not accessible but awesomely remote. You conceal your massive ignorance and parade a slender learning.

The teacher's fear is mixed with an understandable need to be admired and to feel superior, a need which also makes him cling to his "white supremacy". Ideally a teacher should minimize the distance between himself and his students. He should encourage them not to need him--eventually or even immediately. But this is rarely the case. Teachers make themselves high priests of arcane mysteries. They become masters of mumbo-jumbo. Even a more or less conscientious teacher may be torn between the desire to give and the desire to hold them in bondage. There is a kind of castration that goes on in the schools. It begins, before school years, with parents' first encroachments on their children's free unashamed sexuality and continues right up to the day when they hand you your doctoral diploma. It's not that sexuality has no place in the classroom. You'll find it there but only in certain perverted and vitiated forms.

How does sex show up in school? First of all, there's the sadomasochistic relationship between teachers and students. That's plenty sexual, although the price of enjoying it is to be unaware of what's happening. In walks the student in his Ivy League equivalent of a motor-cycle jacket. In walks with the teacher--a kind of intellectual rough trade--and flogs his students with grades, tests, sarcasm and superiority until their very brains are bleeding. In Swinburn's England, the whipped school boy frequently grew up to be a flagellant. With us, the perversion is intellectual but it's no less perverse.

So you can add sexual repression to the list of causes, along with vanity, fear, and will to power, that turn the teacher into Mr. Charlie. You might also want to keep in mind that he was once a nigger himself and has never really gotten over it. And there are more causes, some of which are better described in sociological than in psychological terms. Work them out, it's not hard. But in the meantime what we've got on our hands is a whole lot of niggers. And what makes this particularly grim is that the student has less chance than the black man of getting out of his bag. Because the student doesn't know he's in it. That, more or less, is what's happening in higher education. And the results are staggering.

For one thing, very little education takes place in the schools. How could it? You can't educate slaves; you can only train them. Or, to use an even uglier and more timely word, you can only program them.

At my school we even grade people on how they read poetry. That's like grading people on how they make love. But we do it. In fact, God help me, I do it. I'm the Adolph Eichmann of English 323. Simon Legree of the poetry plantation. "Tote that i-amb! Lift that spondee!" Even to discuss a poem in that environment is potentially dangerous because the very classroom is contaminated. As hard as I may try to turn students on to poetry, I know that the desks, the tests, the IBM cards, their own attitudes toward school, and my own residue of UCLA method are turning them off.

Another result of student slavery is equally serious. Students don't get emancipated when they graduate. As a matter of fact, we don't let them graduate until they've demonstrated their willingness--over 16 years--to remain slaves. And for important jobs, like teaching, we make them go through more years, just to make sure. What I'm getting at is that we're all more or less niggers and slaves, teachers and students alike. This is a fact you want to start with in trying to understand wider social phenomena, say, politics, in our country and in other countries.

Education oppression is trickier to fight than racial oppression. If you're a black rebel, they can't exile you; they either have to intimidate you or kill you. But in high school or college, they can just bounce you out of the fold. And they do. Rebel students and faculty members get smothered or shot down with devastating accuracy. In high school it's usually the student who gets it; in college, it's more often

the teacher. Others get tired of fighting and voluntarily leave the system. Dropping out of college, for a rebel, is like going North, for a Negro. You can't really get away from it so you might as well stay and cause trouble.

How do you cause trouble? That's a whole other article. But just for a start, why not stay with the analogy. What have black people done? They have, first of all, faced the fact of their slavery. They've stopped kidding themselves about an eventual reward in that Great Watermelon Patch in the sky. They've organized; they've decided to get freedom now and they've started taking it.

Students, like black people, have immense unused power. They could theoretically, insist on participating in their own education. They could make academic freedom bi-lateral. They could teach their teachers to thrive on love and admiration, rather than fear and respect, and to lay down their weapons. Students could discover community. And they could learn to dance by dancing on the IBM cards. They could make coloring books out of the catalogs and they could put the grading system in a museum. They could raze another set of walls and let education flow out and flood the streets. They could turn the classroom into where it's at--a "field of action" as Peter Marin describes it. And, believe it or not, they could study eagerly and learn prodigiously for the best of all possible reasons--their own reasons.

They could. Theoretically. They have the power. But only in a very few places, like Berkeley, have they even begun to think about using it. For students, as for black people, the hardest battle isn't with Mr. Charlie. It's what Mr. Charlie has done to your mind.

Jerry Farber
Professor at California State, L.A.

* * *
Do you feel treated as a nigger? Do you realize how you are given the impression of being second-rate? Could it be the segregated (students--faculty) restrooms in Harrison? We would like to hear and print those things which make you inferior at Madison College. Please let us know how you feel about being treated this way. Maybe you don't feel this way at all, tell us that. Thinking about the way in which you are treated by Madison and your teachers may help you understand the conditions which exist at this and all educational institutions. Some need to be changed, while some need to remain intact. Instead of simply accepting them because they exist, think about WHY they exist. Are things the way they are because it aids in providing educational experiences, or are they there for other, sometimes hidden reasons. To aid you in communicating your ideas to us we have provided you with an addressed piece of paper (below), all that is needed is your thoughts. Being aware of your situation has to proceed any change in that condition. Think of what Jerry Farber has said, and then compare the picture he has painted to your own environment. Any resemblance?

From: Box
Campus Mail

To: The Fixer
Box 4255
Campus Mail

MADISON'S "ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS" LIST:

A bridge for the creek and steps for the hill.

Correct clocks.

More men for the women.

Shorter lines for the "D" Halls.

Sunshine!!

Moonshine!!

A new set of earphones for WIRA.

A Fixer office.

Hair for the basketball players.

A cold turkey for Mr. McFeely.

A dry Phys. Ed. field.

Clean bathrooms.

Smiling faces!!

A clean lake.

Less litter.

More open dorms.

A few good tokes!!!

Less bureaucratic bullshit!

An SGA???!!!

More "Give-a-damn" students!!

Trees. Grass.

A wind up, walking-talking, wet its pants campus cop doll.

PEACE!! LOVE!! JOY!! JUSTICE!!

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IT'S TREATY BREAKING TIME AGAIN

Back in 1969, a few hundred Indians with red power restored in their minds, descended on Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay. They claimed the island was theirs by an old treaty guarantee they felt was still binding. The purpose of the takeover was to protest the plight of the Indians and the shoddy treatment of Indian land claims. The government in retaliation, shut off all power and water in effort to starve the invaders off government property. The Indians, many of them Sioux, remained. The conditions weren't too hard, about the same as most reservations. Little was gained from the government and after awhile, food and supplies were transported by a boat donated by Credence Clearwater.

By March 1970, after more than a year on the island, the formerly good morale of the group had changed to utter despair. Of the original 500 Indians, less than 50 were left. Their original leader left some months ago, after his infant daughter was killed falling off a stairwell, and because of the general poor feeling between

him and the rest of the group. The supply boat sank and the long winter without heat had virtually depopulated the island. The strain had created poor dispositions among the remaining Indians. Fear of a government bust made the small group suspicious of strangers. The group held out, even under the most bitter conditions. Not many white radical groups could have boasted such trying endurance. The stay on Alcatraz made these Indians as hard to the climate as their ancestors.

While overlooking their treaty rights, the government bureaucracy tried to force this peaceful group off an island it stopped using a decade ago. The feared bust did occur in Spring '70, when police arrested the remaining Indians for trespassing and removed them from the island. Almost immediately, however, two abandoned missile bases in California and Illinois were occupied by similar bands of red descendents. Perhaps by running off this band of upstarts by outwaiting them, the government had originally hoped to make an example of these radicals. Being color blind, all radicals, be they red, black or white, are the same to the government, but red radicals are still the most patient of all the three. A nagging protest against the government reservation policy and its puppet, the white controlled Bureau of Indian Affairs existed while there were Indians on Alcatraz. They are gone but red feeling over three hundred years of white abuse isn't. The Indians are off Alcatraz yet it is very hard to kill a symbol in angered of so many years of degradation.

-B.T.-

*reprinted from the "Armadillo Post", T.C. Williams H.S., Alexandria, Virginia.

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as performed by

"BLUE BIRD"

Shows will be at 8 P.M. & 10 P.M.

Admission---25¢ Donation

Beer & Coffee will be available

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With a Little Help...

from the Students, professors and other readers of the Fixer.

