

Books, Articles, and Items of Academic Interest

Compiled, with Commentary, by Carol Iannone

Life in the Academy

“Academia . . . and the Truth,” by John Kekes, available at *frontpagemagazine.com* (2 April 2004). The Kneller Lecture, delivered to the North American Philosophy of Education Society in Toronto, Canada, on 27 March 2004, is a run-down on the “sad state of higher education in North America.”

In “Alone in the Academy,” *First Things* (February 2004), Eric Miller posits rather mournfully that the individualistic emphasis of the modern university precludes a “vision of human obligation, identity, and community.”

Issues in Scholarship and Higher Education

An arsonist regrets that the house has burned down. Matthew Price discusses literary theorist Terry Eagleton’s change of heart. “The Self-Critic,” *Boston Globe* (28 December 2003). “The man who praised literary theory to thousands of students now wants them to bury it,” the article reports.

Paul Gross reviews *Race: The Reality of Human Differences* (Westview Press), by Vincent Sarich and Frank Miele, *New Criterion* (April 2004). There seems to be a controversy in the sciences as to whether something called “race” can be said to exist at all. No doubt many *AQ* readers have seen the PBS documentary, *Journey of Man*, in which geneticist Dr. Spencer Wells concludes that it does not, since DNA reveals no differences among the races. Following the Sarich book, Paul Gross comes down on the affirmative side of the question.

Peter Wood, *National Review Online* (6 May 2004), “The Big Steal: Government Funding for Students Means Prosperity for Schools.” A useful summary of the history of federal funding for higher education along with the author’s view of the results, as indicated by the title of the piece.

Adventures in the Ivy League

A fracas over an offensive cartoon in an alternative student newspaper was among the incidents that had Columbia University’s president, Lee Bollinger, yielding to minority student demands. “Protesters Present Bollinger with

Demands: Student Leaders Seek ‘Committee on Diversity,’” by Morgan Sellers and Matthew Carhart, *Columbia Daily Spectator* (27 February 2004); “Bollinger Answers Student Demands: Proposes Multicultural Office; Students Unsatisfied,” by Morgan Sellers, *Columbia Daily Spectator* (2 March 2004).

Jonathan V. Last reports on Ruth Simmons, president of Brown University, who has created a committee to investigate Brown’s implication in slavery and to consider possible reparations. “What Can Brown Do for You?” *Daily Standard* (31 March 2004), available online.

Mike S. Adams looks at the specialties of the professors in the English Department at Cornell University and discovers something worthy of Monty Python, “English for lesbians, feminists, queers, and communists,” *Townhall.com* (3 June 2004). See also “National Association for the Academic Censorship of People,” by Joseph J. Sabia, *Townhall.com* (20 April 2004), about efforts of Cornell’s NAACP to censor the campus’s conservative newspapers.

Campus Wars

“Berkeley Intifada,” by Anneli Rufus, *frontpagemagazine.com* (24 May 2004), is a lengthy and devastating account of the profoundly anti-Semitic and anti-Western sentiment among militant Muslim students at Berkeley. Includes a report on a conference held by the Muslim Student Association in which speakers promote the need to install an Islamic government in the United States.

A student at the College of William and Mary reports on student efforts to fight race quotas on various campuses. Marcus Epstein, “No Cookies for Conservatives,” *The American Conservative* (7 June 2004).

Affirmative Action/Diversity/Grutter

John Bunzel, “Are Bush, Kerry Negative about Affirmative Action?” *San Francisco Chronicle* (18 April 2004). Noting that both candidates have mixed records on the issue, Bunzel proposes that they be pressed during the presidential campaign about their views of race-specific preferential treatment, set-asides, and preference programs, as follows:

Do they believe race and gender should be used in deciding who gets government contracts and who does not? On college admissions: Do they believe that qualified black and Hispanic students should be given a “preferential edge”? Should a person’s race be taken into account or not? On related campus questions: Do they support or oppose colleges having race-based living quarters? What about separate graduation ceremonies for students of some ethnic and racial groups? Should scholarships now offered exclusively to African American or other minority students be made available to all students?

Peter Kirsanow, *National Review Online*, “Patton & Preferences: Diversity Plans Are Vulnerable” (9 February 2004), and Roger Clegg, “You’re Not at the University of Michigan Anymore,” *National Review Online* (4 September 2003), discuss preference supporters’ efforts to expand the findings of *Grutter* to K–12 education as well as to contracting and employment. Both authors argue that such efforts are unlikely to prevail. See also Clegg’s “Let the Sunshine In,” *National Review Online* (23 February 2004), on efforts to demand transparency in admissions plans.

“The Diversity Taboo,” Heather Mac Donald, *Weekly Standard* (26 January 2004). A recent study faulted the Justice Department for employing insufficient numbers of blacks, Hispanics, and women. Mac Donald addresses the problem that the study fails to mention—“the dearth of qualified minority attorneys to fill those minutely tabulated Justice Department slots.”

A remedial math program at California State University at Northridge with an 80 percent success rate was denounced by the Pan African Studies and Chicana/o Studies departments as discriminatory. As a result, control of the program was taken from the math department. David Klein, “A Major Math Mess,” *Orange County Register* (4 April 2004)

“Still Losing the Race?” asks James McWhorter as he reviews three books by black writers who continue to present a dire picture of the situation of blacks in contemporary America. McWhorter regrets that these writers refuse to acknowledge the considerable progress that has been made. *Commentary* (February 2004).

Anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*

The celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education* was marked by relative pessimism about the developments that have resulted from the 1954 Supreme Court decision. Examples come from a *New York Times* article, “Where School Desegregation Battle Began, Victory Casts a Shadow of Defeat” (12 May 2004). One of the defendants in the decision was the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, and writer Samuel B. Freedman travels to that city to see how the education of minority youngsters is faring.

The city’s 34 public schools are all integrated now, but, unfortunately, Freedman notes a general acceptance of low achievement from black students. Even more notable are two comments from people he interviewed: “You have to ask yourself, what did it matter?” Dale Cushinberry, a Topeka high school principal, said of *Brown*. “If you listed the pluses and minuses, there’d be a lot of things on the negative side. The assumption was that black kids could sit next to white kids and become smarter. But what I knew about black schools is that those teachers were you, those principals were

you. They saw my parents at church, at the grocery, and the beauty parlor. I couldn't get away with miscreance or subpar performance."

Rev. E. Bernard Hurd, a prominent lawyer and minister in Topeka, said, "If I could go back in time, I would prefer that it was just the way it was. You had your community. You had a group of dedicated teachers. You had a lot of parental assistance. Now we're doing what we were trying to avoid in the first place—busing kids to school, bypassing the neighborhood school. Except that we're doing it to balance the ethnic makeup."

Meanwhile, entertainer Bill Cosby caused an uproar with his remarks at a *Brown* anniversary celebration. See Thomas Sowell, "Bravo for Bill Cosby," *Townhall.com* (25 May 2004), and Walter Williams, "Three Cheers for the Cos," *Townhall.com* (2 June 2004).

Lower Education

Two excerpts from "The Internet School Scam," Todd Oppenheimer, *The Nation* (16 February 2004). The first is on the usefulness of computer technology in the schools:

[M]ost computer technology has been sold to schools—especially poor schools—on little more than hype. One of the most commonly heard selling points in this campaign is to prepare youngsters for tomorrow's increasingly high-tech jobs. But when business leaders talk about what they need from new recruits, they hardly mention computer skills, which they find they can teach employees relatively easily on their own. Most employers say their priority is what are sometimes called "soft" skills: a deep knowledge base; the ability to listen and communicate; to think critically and imaginatively; to read, write and figure; and many other capabilities that schools are increasingly neglecting.

And on the value of technology in the classroom as an aid to poor children:

In Harlem, for example, teachers in overcrowded classrooms now have to spend much of their time managing technical hassles the schools can't afford to fix, and watching for cheating, instant-messaging tricks, and illicit material on screens that teachers cannot control or even see. When the computers do work, fancy software programs automate design and math functions so beautifully that students don't have to think through much of their work anymore. School papers throughout the country are so dominated by computer graphics these days that students often spend only a fraction of their time on the intellectual content of the assignment. Strangely, instead of bemoaning scenes like these, nearly everyone—teachers and parents, principals and politicians—laud them.

Mark Bauerlein reviews Oppenheimer's book, *The Flickering Mind: The False Promise of Technology in the Classroom and How Learning Can Be Saved* (Random House) in the *New Criterion* (April 2004). See also Bauerlein's "The Diversity Kit and Caboodle," *Weekly Standard* (17 May 2004), in which he details some of the spurious research being done to support diversity ideology.