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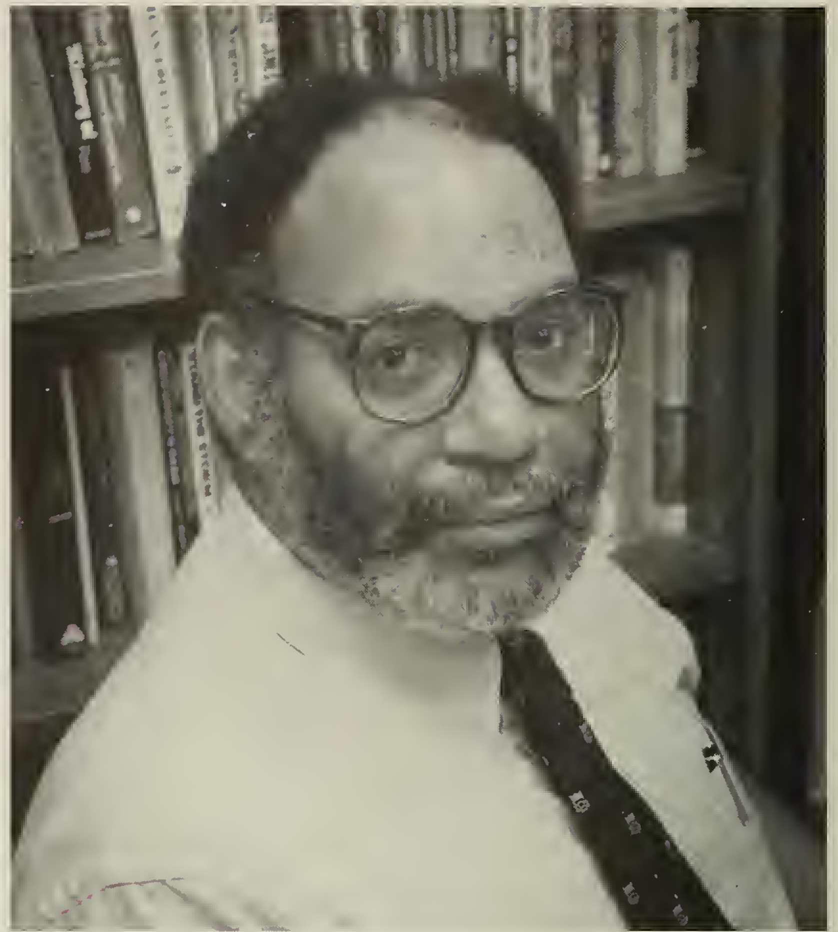
# The Faculty of the Sixties: A Reappraisal

by
Monroe H. Little



Between 1967 and 1969 the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education initiated and substantially funded several national surveys of U.S. higher education. One such study of faculty employed a questionnaire that was mailed to approximately 100,000 full-time college and university faculty at 303 schools nationwide. The results of this survey, which solicited more than 300 items of information from each respondent and enjoyed an unusually high response rate of over 60%, contain a wealth of data on a variety of political and social issues that has rarely been subjected to careful analysis by scholars.

This is especially unfortunate in retrospect. The Carnegie survey of faculty was conducted during a period of tremendous political and social upheaval in the United States—much of which is often closely associated with the academic community. The 1960s were characterized in part by the verbal bashing of academics who were variously denounced as left-wing theoreticians, ivory-tower guideline writers, pointy-headed professors, and so on. In addition, accusations were made that college professors not only aided and abetted the wrongdoings of student activists, but also gave their unreserved support to school desegregation and other social engineering efforts by the federal government.[1] When results from the Carnegie survey are examined, however, a somewhat different picture of the faculty of the 1960s emerges.

When examined, these data can be interpreted as evidence that the predominantly white faculty of the 1960s was in basic agreement with established authority, both in and outside of the academy. They also show that on nearly all important issues, political or academic, this country's faculty was generally at loggerheads with African-American students, intellectuals, and civil rights leaders, and that the academic mind of the 1960s was neither progressive nor liberal in the sense that it was popularly assumed to be.

According to the Carnegie survey, the percentage of professors who were involved in or supported the student protests and demonstrations that rocked U.S. college and university campuses during the 1960s was very small. Less than one-half of one percent of faculty members helped plan, organize, or lead such activities, and only 0.7% actually joined students in protest. Just 5.8% openly supported student demonstrations, while 2.3% were openly opposed, and 4.2% tried to mediate.[2]

Nor did faculty participate to a great extent in other forms of politics. Of those polled, less than 5% described themselves as "very active" in political campaigns either before or after the 1968 Democratic and Republican national conventions, while no more than 16% reported being "fairly active." Interestingly, the largest percentage of academics, ranging from 43% to 49%, were not active politically at all.

With so few faculty willing to become active politically either on or off campus, it should come as no surprise that they were rather conventional in their attitude toward politics and political change. Just over 32% agreed, either wholly or in part, with the statement "Meaningful social changes cannot be achieved through traditional American politics." Nearly 73% were of the opinion that in the United States there was no justification for the use of violence to achieve political goals.

To a large degree, the academic men and women of the 1960s were fearful of disruption and violence. Only 24.2% approved of student demonstrators' aims *and* methods; while slightly more (26.2%) approved of demonstrators' aims, but not their methods. Interestingly, over 51% of those sampled were convinced that radical left-wing agitators were responsible for most campus demonstrations. An even larger majority (82.6%) believed that campus

disruptions by militant students were a threat to academic freedom; and 79.9% would have expelled or suspended students who disrupted the normal functioning of a college. They took this position despite the fact that between 70.2% and 81.9% of faculty reported that campus demonstrations had no effect whatsoever on either their teaching or relations with colleagues and students. Over 91% said that campus student protests had no effect on their research.

Though many of the faculty in the Carnegie study were opposed to disruption and violence in the United States, they were not nearly so squeamish about the violence and disruption in South Vietnam. Only 18.2% thought the United States should withdraw from Vietnam immediately; while approximately 40% supported a reduction of American involvement and the formation of a coalition government. The remaining 41% were willing to expend more American lives and dollars to prevent a Communist "take-over" in South Vietnam, as the questionnaire phrased it. The latent anticommunism of the academics polled becomes even more evident in the fact that only 19.1% of the respondents believed "some form of Communist regime is probably necessary for progress in underdeveloped countries."

It would appear then that sixties faculty were strong on law and order at home and weak on military restraint abroad. While not exactly Richard Nixon's soulmates (only 33.8% voted for him in 1968), they could easily be described as his kissing cousins. Except for 4.6% who were self-described radicals, 40.8% characterized themselves as liberals, 26.8% as "middle-of-the-roaders," 24.9% as moderately conservative, and 2.9% strongly conservative.

Faculty opinion on racial matters helps further clarify their leanings on social and political issues. For instance, one year after the *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* concluded that white society was "deeply implicated" in creating, maintaining, and condoning the ghetto, less than one half (46.1%) of the academic men and women polled believed that racism was the main cause of riots in the nation's cities.[3] At the same time, more than 61% opposed busing to achieve racial balance in public elementary schools. On only one issue was their supposed political and social progressivism on the subject of race relations apparent: 64.6% supported African-American control of their own schools where de facto segregation existed.

The middle 1960s is usually thought of as the beginning of an egalitarian period in U.S. higher education during which, increasingly, the American public "assumed that everyone should have a chance at a college education."[4] Whether this equality was actually achieved will not be debated here; however, judging from the Carnegie data, it appears that faculty were at best ambivalent about the issue of equal student access to the nation's colleges and universities. For instance, while over 70% believed a college education should be available to every high school graduate who wanted one, it does not appear that many members of our nation's faculty gave much thought about where these additional students would receive a college education. When asked about undergraduate admissions at their own institution, 55.2% felt they should be "left as they are." More faculty preferred to increase the number of graduate students in their own department, but most were satisfied with current graduate enrollments.

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Equally revealing are faculty attitudes toward minority admissions and faculty appointments. At the time of the Carnegie survey, African-Americans accounted for only 6.6% of total college enrollment. The situation for African-American faculty was even worse: they totaled a mere 2.2% of the nation's professoriate—a figure that included the faculty of historically black colleges.[5] Despite the situation these figures illustrate, only 37.6% of faculty sampled by the Carnegie Commission agreed with the statement "American colleges are racist whether they mean to be or not." At the same time, a majority (61%) opposed relaxing normal academic standards at their own college or university to admit more minority undergraduates. More demonstratively, 78.6% disapproved of any attempt to relax normal academic requirements to appoint members of minority groups to the faculty of their respective institutions.

Faculty of the 1960s were overall not only quite traditional in their attitudes toward student admissions and faculty appointments, but also about curriculum. For instance, over 56% believed that undergraduate education would be improved if more emphasis was placed on broad liberal education. Approximately 60% ranked providing students with a broad liberal education as their number one personal priority, while 55.1% listed this as the most important function of their respective institutions. By contrast, vocational concerns almost always placed a poor second. An even larger majority (75.9%) believed that their respective schools "should be as concerned about students' personal values as it is with their intellectual development." Thus, the criticism by William Bennett and Allan Bloom that 1960s faculty lacked a clear sense of the importance

of the liberal arts and moral standards was unfounded.[6]

Faculty concern about liberal education or students' values did not extend to black studies, however. Over 67% either wholly or partially favored establishing black studies programs, but *only* if a college or university had a substantial number of African-American students who wanted such courses. To the academic men and women of the 1960s black studies was clearly for African-Americans only. At the same time, less than 25% of those surveyed believed that such programs should be controlled and administered by African-Americans.

Although 82.5% of 1960s faculty believed that academics should be free to present in class any ideas they considered relevant, they regarded it as a privilege belonging to them alone. While 68.9% believed that most undergraduates were mature enough to be given more responsibility for their own education, only about 20% thought that all courses should be elective, and approximately 33% believed grades should be abolished. Almost 6% thought undergraduates should have control or voting power in the hiring and promotion of faculty; 14.6% thought students should have power in selecting curriculum content; and 13.1% thought they should have a hand in setting degree requirements. These statistics suggest that academics of the 1960s did not define academic freedom as students' freedom to choose who would teach them or what they would learn.

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Turning to academia's own realm, the faculty of the 1960s was also complacent on most academic issues. For the serious scholar, it is a delight to note the consistency between professors' own sense of success and their sense of college students' satisfaction with their education. Much smug self-congratulation lurks in these statistics. Among faculty sampled, 93.8% saw themselves as either very or fairly successful; 72.7% believed that undergraduates at their respective schools were basically satisfied with the education they were getting; and 71.9% thought that graduate education in their own subject was doing a good job of training students. Only 28.3% believed that graduate students could no longer find meaning in science and scholarship and that the best graduate students dropped out because they did not want to play the games of academic life (36.8%). Over three-quarters of faculty were convinced that graduate students did best if their undergraduate major was in the same general field. Approximately 62% maintained that their colleagues were strongly interested in the academic problems of undergraduates.

All in all, the predominantly white faculty of the 1960s was not in a very combative or inquisitive mood. Although 69.6% considered themselves intellectuals, their definition of intellectuals had nothing to do with the aggressive inquisitiveness that Voltaire, W.E.B. Du Bois, or E. Franklin Frazier took to be the essential feature of intellect. The faculty of the 1960s not only displayed an abysmal ignorance about some of the great social and political issues of their day, but were also cautious—and at times even reactionary—in their response to them. They did not insist, like Diderot, that *everything* be examined—without exception or circumspection. If the university of the 1960s was little more than a highly refined, all-purpose brothel, as its critics have charged, faculty were willing members of the world's oldest profession.

The Carnegie survey also raises serious doubts about the extent of support among academics for the civil rights gains of African-Americans. It appears that whatever support existed among faculty for the extension of democracy in the United States, it was not very widespread nor solidly based. On almost every key civil rights issue, they were at odds with the African-American community. Although faculty might have favored the civil rights gains of African-Americans in the abstract, they were unwilling to support the use of specific policies such as court-ordered school busing or other vigorous government efforts to eradicate racial inequality. Many faculty, like most whites, were unprepared to share the rights and privileges of citizenship with African-Americans that such policies implied; to do so would have destroyed the distinctiveness of their position.

Overall, the picture one gets of faculty from the 1969 Carnegie survey is that of an organization of men and women who lived and worked in a benumbing society without living or working in protest and in tension with its moral or cultural insensibilities. They used the liberal label and rhetoric to disguise their conservative default. They were pint-sized pundits who had lost touch with the essential mean-

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ing of both democracy and intellect and who were equally guilty of an academic delinquency that transcended the comprehension of both. Theirs was a life that, in the final analysis, may have been personally satisfying, but was not, alas, socially ennobling.


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[2]Carnegie Commission on Higher Education. (1969). *Carnegie Higher Education Study: Faculty Subset*. Used with permission of the Roper Center, University of Connecticut, Storrs, and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. All statistical information presented in this article, unless otherwise indicated, is from this source.

[3]National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. (1968). *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*. New York: Bantam Books. P. 2.

[4]Newman, F., et al. (1973). *The Second Newman Report: National Policy and Higher Education*. Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press. P. 3.

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# Book Review Essay

## Brazilian Race Relations in Hemispheric Perspective


by
Rhett S. Jones


**The Abolition of Slavery and the Aftermath of Emancipation in Brazil**, by Rebecca J. Scott et al. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1988.

**Luso-Brazilian Review**, Volume 25, 1988. Guest Editor, Stuart B. Schwartz.

**Race, Class, and Power in Brazil**, Pierre-Michel Fontaine (Ed.). Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California, Los Angeles, 1985.

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The late Oliver C. Cox, one of the most insightful black Americans from the leftist tradition, was not often fooled. In his classic 1948 work, *Caste, Class, and Race*,[1] Cox, a long-time professor of sociology at Lincoln University in Missouri, revealed the nonsensical underpinnings of what then passed for the serious study of comparative race relations among sociologists in the United States. So successful was Cox that his book was thoroughly and deeply buried by the sociological establishment. When Pierre L. van den Berghe published *Race and Racism: A Comparative Perspective*[2] in 1967, sociologists hailed his work as the first of its kind, thereby demonstrating that they had forgotten Cox's work, or at least managed to convince themselves that they had forgotten it.

But, while Cox was not taken in by the pretensions of white sociologists (whether born in the United States or imported from Sweden by white sociologists born in the United States) or by the black elites in such varied places as Liberia and Haiti, he *was* fooled by the Brazilians. He wrote of the "Portuguese's remarkable freedom from race prejudice in Brazil."[3] In reality, of course, neither the Portuguese nor their Brazilian descendants were free from race prejudice. But Cox was not the only Afro-American to conclude that Brazilian society was free of racism. Such astute North American black observers as E. Franklin Frazier and Robert S. Abbott were also taken in.

I ought to say at this point that my approach to this review essay is the same as that of Cox, Frazier, and Abbott in that I do not read Portuguese and my interest in Brazil is that of a black North American concerned with the comparative study of race in this hemisphere. I have been fortunate in team-teaching courses at Brown University with two distinguished scholars on race who are from Brazil: Anani Dzidzienyo, chair of the Afro-American Studies Program and associate professor of Portuguese-Brazilian studies and Afro-American studies; and Thomas Skidmore, chair of the Latin American Studies Program and professor of history. In talking with them and through eavesdropping on their dialogues with our students I have gleaned many insights into Brazilian race relations. While Dzidzienyo is black and Skidmore is white, each takes a no-nonsense approach to race in Brazil and each has a great love of that sprawling nation and its racially diverse peoples. Each is remarkably tolerant of a scholar such as myself who views the study of race in Brazil not as an end in itself, but as grist for his comparative history mill.