

that should be undertaken with the same enthusiasm of Judge Sand and the federal judiciary's earlier experiments.

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The Dirty Fact About College Admissions

by Daniel J. Flynn

Pitting the state of Texas against four students who had been denied admission to the University of Texas School of Law because of their skin color, the recent *Hopwood v. Texas* case could spell doom for racial preferences in public education if affirmed by the Supreme Court. The 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, whose jurisdiction covers Texas, Mississippi, and Louisiana, ruled in *Hopwood* that the use of race as a factor in admissions at public educational institutions violates the 14th Amendment's Equal Protection Clause, sending into panic an academic establishment already reeling from the University of California Board of Regents' decision last July to eliminate racial preferences on state campuses. Though *Hopwood* may very well be overturned by a higher court, or like the *Bakke* case (1978), be subverted by university administrators who operate outside the law, it's already succeeded in exposing the ugly truths about affirmative action.

In the spring of 1992, Cheryl Hopwood was rejected from the University of Texas School of Law despite posting near perfect test scores and a 3.8 grade point average (GPA). This 32-year-old mother who had to raise a severely handicapped child while working her way through college apparently lacked a "diverse" enough background for UT Law admissions officers. While her test scores and GPA outranked 40 of 41 black students accepted by the school, and all but three of 55 Chicanos offered admission, Cheryl's placement on the "diversity" test lagged far behind the Mexican and African-American students, and she was denied a spot at the law school.

The general impression in academia is that affirmative action gives minorities a

"helping hand" while not really harming whites and other nonpreferred groups. The reality is quite different, as a large number of Cheryl Hopwoods across the country can attest. So disadvantaged were the nonpreferred groups at the University of Texas that approximately 700 higher-scoring whites were rejected along with Cheryl Hopwood before the first in-state black resident was denied admission.

UT Law admissions records, made public only after *Hopwood's* four plaintiffs filed suit, reveal sizable discrepancies between the grades and test scores of whites and those of preferred minorities accepted by the school. In 1992, the year Ms. Hopwood and her three coplaintiffs were rejected by UT Law, white students accepted by the school had a mean GPA of 3.56 and I.SAT scores in the 91st percentile, while black students offered admission posted a mean GPA of 3.25, with I.SAT scores below the 75th percentile; Mexican-American accepted applicants' mean GPA was 3.27, with I.SAT scores in the 78th percentile.

Texas Law admits students on a scale known as the Texas Index, which combines GPA and law school entrance exams. Students fall into three categories on this index: "presumptive admit," the "middle discretionary zone," and "presumptive deny." For whites, Texas Index scores of 192 or lower fell under the "presumptive deny" category. Preferred minorities who scored 189, three points lower than the threshold for denying admission to whites, were classified under "presumptive admit." Among applicants who fell within the 189-192 range on the Texas Index, 100 percent of blacks, 90 percent of Mexican-Americans, but only six percent of whites were offered spots at the school.

So immersed in special-interest politics is the school's admissions policy that Native Americans, Asians, non-Mexican Hispanics, and even foreign-born blacks are penalized in favor of Chicanos and blacks. Surely UT Law admissions officers do not view Nigerians as adding less diversity to its campus than American-born blacks? Or Vietnamese refugees as having experienced any less hardship and discrimination than Mexican-Americans?

Many sympathetic to the aims of affirmative action have even suggested that the University of Texas may have gotten its just due in court because of the extreme nature of the school's admissions

program. But there is no reason to believe that Texas's admissions program was any more rigged than the programs of other schools. In fact, administrators from law schools around the country refuted this argument in an effort to tilt the court to UT's side by testifying that their affirmative action policies were nearly identical to those at Texas.

Repeated assurances by "civil rights" activists that affirmative action does not discriminate against whites but rather serves as a boost to minorities in competition with whites of roughly the same qualifications have repeatedly been proven false whenever academic institutions have been forced to open their admissions policies up to outside examination. At UT Law, Georgetown Law, the University of California, and other institutions that have had their admissions data pruned open in recent years, affirmative action programs have been shown to be little more than punishment for having been born white, Asian, or any other nonpreferred group.

In those rare cases when the public is allowed to view the true nature of affirmative action programs, it is seldom the case that they do so with the approval of university administrators. More often, the reality of affirmative action is brought to light by renegade students with access to admissions data or through lawsuits. The latter was the case at both UT Law and the University of California schools of law and medicine, which released data only after being sued

LIBERAL ARTS

THE NEW GEOGRAPHY

"Western culture is based on exclusion. Its society places 'others'—women, blacks, children, the old, those with alternative lifestyles, gays, the disabled—as outsiders. At the core of this marginalization is the tendency of powerful groups to 'purify' and dominate space, to create fear of minorities and to ultimately exclude their voices and their knowledge."

—from *Geographies of Exclusion* by David Sibley,
professor of geography at the
University of Hull.

for consumer fraud by attorney Allan Favish, who misled applicants into believing that the university system did not discriminate on the basis of race.

As the affirmative action debate heats up in the coming months, it is likely that the admission practices of many more schools will be made public. In the wake of the disturbing facts revealed in *Hopwood*, is it any wonder why academics, the most vehement defenders of affirmative action, fight tooth and nail to keep admissions data from the public?

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LITERATURE

New Criticism, Old Values

by William Pratt

It was in 1942 that John Crowe Ransom coined the phrase "The New Criticism" by publishing a book under that title, a book about the most respected literary critics of the first half of the century, notably T.S. Eliot, I.A. Richards, William Empson, Yvor Winters, and R.P. Blackmur. But actually, he was criticizing the critics and asking for something better: "Wanted: An Ontological Critic," he declared in his last chapter, as if no critic including himself—and he was one of the great critics—could really satisfy the need to produce a thoroughgoing critique of literature.

In the succeeding decade, Ransom's title became the creed of a critical school, which sought to treat literary works as works of art, not as historical or sociological treatises nor as disguised autobiographies, and the term "New Criticism" became fashionable in the academy and was inevitably abused by those who wanted to seem better critics than they really were. The result was that the "New Criticism" was no longer taken as a call for profounder critics of literature, as Ransom meant it to be (and it should be remembered that Ransom was not only

the originator but the first critic of the New Criticism); it was taken instead as a call for narrower critics who sought only to look at the work itself, disregarding the author and his age. But for a time, at least, chiefly through the textbooks of Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks, *Understanding Poetry* and *Understanding Fiction*, the teaching of literature in American universities was directed toward art rather than history or biography, and the effect was salutary on a generation of college students (as I ought to know, because I was among them), who learned to read poetry and fiction for their intrinsic value as fine arts, rather than for their extrinsic value as history or biography, the prevalent approaches to literature before the New Critics came into force.

Unfortunately, the new quickly becomes the old, and so the "New Criticism" was increasingly attacked even as it became more fashionable in the academy, until, within a couple of decades, it had become a scapegoat for all the unenlightened criticism which tends to dominate any period of literary history. In short, "new" criticism was soon taken to be old hat, and another school arose to challenge it: the now dominant school of Literary Theory, which goes by other fashionable names such as poststructuralism, deconstruction, feminism, Freudianism, and Marxism. The trouble is that the *new* "new criticism" is worse than the *old* "new criticism," which for all its faults did uphold the value of literature as literature, that is, as belonging to the arts rather than the sciences.

What is now fashionable is not really criticism at all, but a variety of social science which pretends to be philosophy, and takes a subversive approach to literature, subordinating the work to the critic—or would-be critic, since none really deserve the name—who feels free to use literature to serve a social or political cause. The assumption of all literary theorists is that they are superior to their subject, which is literature, and can demolish the values on which it rests, namely, artistic judgment and religious faith, in order to put forward a "higher" set of values, such as social egalitarianism and religious skepticism, or what on today's college campus passes for "political correctness."

The pernicious effect of Literary Theory is much worse than any pernicious effect attributable to New Criticism, since it undermines the very teaching of

literature, long the bedrock of the humanities or liberal arts. It thereby attacks humane values in general, including the value of academic freedom, the lifeblood of a university. As Literary Theory has replaced New Criticism, intolerance has replaced broad-mindedness, indoctrination has replaced intellectual dialogue, racial and sexual favoritism has replaced merit, and, in general, amorality has replaced morality—for example, by what is politely termed the "sexual revolution." The old values have suffered badly, at the hands of those who would attack them in the name of various political and social causes, and suddenly "grade inflation" has become rampant everywhere in our schools, meaning that even grading standards—any kind of grading standards—are denounced as "elitist."

Obviously, the time has come to demolish Literary Theory as it once succeeded in demolishing New Criticism. But how? And to what end? Can old values beget an even newer criticism, or must we deride all schools of criticism—as the editor of this respectable magazine recently did—rather than restoring literature to its rightful place of honor as the foremost of the liberal arts?

Let us grant that the New Criticism was never what Ransom hoped it would be, genuinely "ontological," that is, a truly philosophical reading of literature in the manner of Aristotle, the first great critic. Another Aristotle would have to appear for that to happen. But let us also acknowledge that New Criticism served in its time to redirect the attention of readers to the work itself; let us not slight its good effect in decrying its bad effects. On the other hand, let us be blunt about what replaced it: in more than 20 years of dominance, Literary Theory has so far failed to produce any good effects at all, and it has had deleterious effects aplenty. Yet it continues to be popular in humanities departments—language and literature, philosophy and religion—to the detriment of its own subjects and the threat to all subjects, even the scientific subjects which should be immune to subjective personal approaches to knowledge. Attempts to discredit the Literary Theorists have so far failed, but we should not lose heart, for bad ideas eventually fail from their own weaknesses, and good ideas ultimately arise again from good values.

The question is, how do we restore those good values, and reconstitute literary criticism so that it becomes worthy