

RACISM, THE WAR AND THE UNIVERSITY

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Evidence that the war in Asia is to a large extent a racist war is plentiful. As such, it represents an extension of racism and institutional violence in America. Universities, including my own, are deeply involved in the war through research and consulting. Social scientists, including anthropologists, are among the war workers. It is important that this complicity be ended for intellectual reasons as well as for the overriding human and moral reasons. [American culture, counter-insurgency, genocide, racism, Southeast Asia, Thailand, role of the University, University of California, war]

The following statement was given as an address on May 27, 1970, at the second Greek Theatre convocation at Berkeley following the United States' invasion of Cambodia. It was written for that event, and for the format of a mass meeting with many speakers and severe limitations on time. It was given in the context of the "reconstitution" of the University in response to the Cambodian invasion and, more broadly, in response to the continuation of the war. It is presented here as it was given. It seems to the author and to the editors that it remains relevant despite the fatigue, discouragement and repression which have overtaken the campus, and the consequent diminution of activity toward the ends advocated here. This is an anthropologist's statement on his society and his university, expressing his understanding and his commitment.

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In March 1965 at the first Teach-in against the war in Vietnam here at Berkeley, I made the point that this was a racist war. It is a tragedy of our time that 5 years later I must come here to say it again.

Now as then it is a war of white America against Asians. Now as then it is a genocidal war because it comprises systematic extermination of cultures and peoples. Now it is spreading like a cancer. The pretense of adherence to international law and to the Constitution of the United States has been largely dropped. Our leaders are war criminals objects of horror and contempt before the world. All Americans share guilt in our country's crimes against humanity.

Now as five years ago, the racism of the war is manifest in words as well as deeds. We kill more easily, I think, because those we kill are not children, women and men, but "dinks", "gooks", "slopes", Viet Cong and Communists. In fact we don't kill them, we "zap" them, "terminate them with extreme prejudice", subject them to the effects of "free fire zones", and we reduce them to a body count. They don't even live and die in houses, but in "hootches". They are, in short, so alien as to be scarcely human. To most Americans their lives are incomprehensible as human lives; their persons scarcely recognizable as human persons; their deaths unidentifiable as the deaths of people who live, love, fear, hope and sacrifice. The semantics of dehumanization is an important part of the American prosecution of the war as it is in repression wherever we practice it--it makes it palatable to our citizens.

Realistic reporting, as has occurred in the case of the Mai Lai massacre, takes on special importance in this context, as Spiro Agnew has recognized in his attacks on the press, for it has a tendency to bring Americans to their senses and thereby endangers the war effort.

The semantics of the war depends heavily upon the deep-seated and long extant racism in American culture, and in Western civilization generally. It is based not on race as biologists define the term, but on differences between groups which are regarded as intrinsic and significant, be they genetic, learned or imposed, be they racial, cultural, economic, religious or sexual. Racism is a generic term for all. Such racism has been the rationale for violence and oppression throughout the history of the Western world. It was manifest by Europeans in America when they dispossessed and murdered the Native

Americans; it was manifest throughout the brutal history of colonization and slave trade in Africa and elsewhere; it was manifest in the genocide and extinction of such forgotten peoples as the Tasmanians. It was manifest in the Nazi annihilation of Jews and Gypsies. Ironically, it is manifest today in the glorification of Israel's Western culture, technical efficiency and military might, as against the long-despised and almost totally unknown Arabs. Whatever the merits of the opponents in that hopeless conflict, the racism is blunt and unadorned.

Most of all, our racism is manifest in the oppression of our internal minorities, and in our war in Asia. There, the might of our technology is aimed not just at Vietnamese, but at Southeast Asians generally as it moves into Cambodia, Laos and (no doubt) Thailand. Our chiefs of staff have evidently defined China as the ultimate target--the most populous nation on earth, populated by Asians. If there is not a drastic turnabout, and an immediate one, we will be catapulted into the greatest pre-emptive race war in history--and the last one.

But that it is a racist war does not mean that whites are simply killing Asians. All one has to do is to look at the statistics to see that our 50,000 dead are to a disproportionately large extent, black people and brown people, and that most of the rest are poor whites, (another oppressed minority). Racist America is not above using others in implementing its racism--in fact, that is routine. And now we hear of Vietnamization of the war, not only in Vietnam, but in Cambodia as well. Vietnamization does not mean Vietnam for the Vietnamese-- that is the program of the National Liberation Front, not the United States or its South Vietnamese puppets. Rather, it means puppet rule. We let Vietnamese kill one another, provided we are certain the survivors (whom we call victors) will do our bidding.

Those whom we hold in contempt and whom we oppress, we co-opt when we can, to do our dirty work. In this context, it is not surprising that even the most racist police forces recruit a few carefully selected black and brown officers. This is not simply tokenism; it is,

again,cooptation. It doesn't imply respect for those people, only recognition of their usefulness as Vietnamization does in Asia.

Racism is often denied by those who practice it--it comes so easily as to go unnoticed. But though it may be subtle to those who perpetrate it; it is brutal to those who suffer it. It can be as subtle and as brutal as the decision during World War II to put in concentration camps Americans of Japanese ancestry, but not those of German ancestry; as subtle and brutal as the fact that the only atomic bombs ever dropped on people were dropped on Asians; as subtle and brutal as Nixon's southern strategy, Reagan's economizing on welfare and public services (including imposition of university tuition) and Agnew's call (echoed by many academics) for uniform admissions standards in our universities. The results of such political expediency is the inaccessibility to millions of people of economic, political and social emancipation, and a secure life. Most of those people are members of our internal minorities. Racism is as subtle and brutal as the the conspicuous difference in public attention and soul-searching directed to the shooting of four middle-class white students at Kent State as contrasted to that of the shooting of two black students at Jackson State--and even less concern expressed at the deaths of six black non-students shot in Augusta. All of these deaths were tragic; all represented oppression; it is the differential response to them which reflects our racism--the fact that black murders are routine and familiar, white middle-class murders are news.

Genocide is a common concomitant of racism--its logical extension. How routinely was the nationwide manhunt and massacre of Black Panthers treated by the press and accepted by the public until it had run its course for many months. How routinely are the hundreds of thousands of Asian deaths in Southeast Asia accepted in this country. Genocide, too, is often unrecognized by those who perpetrate it. Since it is made up of many discrete acts, it is too abstract and too remote for them to recognize or admit; but it is concrete and immediate to those who suffer the individual and cumulative effects of those acts.

Genocide is as remote as pushing a bomb release at 50,000 feet, unseen, unheard, and unseeing, on supersonic flights from distant, comfortable and safe sanctuaries against an enemy without aircraft or other effective defense. Genocide is as immediate and brutal as tons of explosives falling into the homes and schools of people like you and me; as brutal as thousands of anti-personnel fragments piercing the brains and hearts of children like ours. Genocide is as subtle as the voices of command which order and authorize the release of those bombs, the deaths of those people, and the expansion of the war; as subtle, too, as the actions of a citizenry which casts the votes and pays the taxes which endorse and enable these murders and murderers.

Genocide is also as subtle as the academic institutions which prostitute themselves to the war-making of this nation. In the case of the University of California this is done, for example, via the Los Alamos and Livermore laboratories where the architects and technicians of atomic holocaust do their filthy work under the concealing mantle of academic affiliation. It is done through ROTC on campus where the officers of war are trained, but not educated. In the case of social science, the prostitutes are the hirelings of the Department of Defense, and in Southeast Asia, the hirelings of the Agency for International Development and other agencies engaged in counterinsurgency activities-- activities which express in the words of a colleague, "organized contempt" for the peoples of those nations by nakedly suppressing their efforts at reform in their own nations. These anti-social scientists do their inhuman work, in secret or in public, not as independent scholars but as hirelings. They are war profiteers parading under a false banner of academic freedom.

Let me bring this point home, and relate racism at home and abroad to institutional violence at home and abroad, by briefly describing some research which is being done by social scientists in the employ of our government.

A good example of which I have some knowledge is a project which I understand has been carried out by social scientists, including as

a consultant at least one from the University of California (not Berkeley). This is a project submitted by the American Institutes for Research in Pittsburgh, to the Advanced Research Projects Agency of the Department of Defense, on Counter-Insurgency in Thailand. It is an utterly obscene document, but it bears quoting because it is enlightening. (I might note, that the reports of research accomplished are said to be classified and are hence unavailable for scrutiny. The proposal from which I quote, is unclassified as are the agenda of some of their consultative board meetings in Thailand.) Defining the problem for research, the proposal says:

The struggle between an established government and subversive or insurgent forces involves three different types of operations....The social scientist can make significant contributions to the design of all three types. . .

What are these types of operations social scientists can help design?

The first is to make inputs into the social system what will gain the active support of an ever-increasing proportion of the local population. Threats, promises, ideological appeals, and tangible benefits are the kinds of inputs that are frequently used. The second is to reduce. . . the flow of the competing inputs being made by the opposing side by installing anti-infiltration devices, cutting communication lines, assassinating key spokesmen, strengthening retaliatory mechanisms, and similar preventive measures.

The third is to counteract or neutralize the political successes already achieved by groups committed to the 'wrong' side. This typically involves direct military confrontation.

This proposal is spelled out in 33 hair-raising pages (a useful summary is contained in The Student Mobilizer of April 2, 1970 available from SMC, 1029 Vermont Avenue N.W., Room 907, Washington D.C., 20005). But it is the final paragraph of the proposal, on page 34, which gets it all together and out front for our consideration of racism. Let me quote that final paragraph, and listen well.

The potential applicability of the findings to the United States will also receive special attention. In many of our key domestic programs, especially those directed at disadvantaged sub-cultures [note: this means Blacks, Chicanos, Native Americans, and the poor of all colors] the methodological problems are highly similar to those described in this proposal, and the applications of the Thai findings at home constitutes a potentially most significant project contribution.

This is applied social science. Now we are designing counter-insurgency in America as well as in Southeast Asia. Will it too involve "selective assassination"? Did this project's findings prove useful in dealing with the Black Panthers? Will they prove helpful in dealing with student unrest? Your guess is as good as mine--and I am afraid that it will be the same guess as mine.

The Regents of the University of California are currently contractors with quite a different government agency: the Agency for International Development (AID)--one which is usually regarded as an innocuous sort of high-powered peace corps. But let me quote from a 1968 AID pamphlet on "The U.S./A.I.D. Program in Thailand:"

The U.S. A I D program in Thailand is concentrated upon a single objective: supporting the Royal Thai Government in its efforts to contain, control, and eliminate the Communist insurgency in rural areas.

We have access to a copy of the Amendment which renewed the contract between the University of California and AID in September, 1968, because it was "liberated" from the files of one of the participants. This contractual agreement is not such heady stuff as the AIR one, but let me quote three segments:

The Operations Plan says (p 2):

The overall objective of this contract is to make available the resources of the Contractor, including personnel, to support and strengthen the operations of the U.S. aid program in Thailand, particularly with respect to the research activities undertaken by the Research Division of USOM (US Operations Mission)

Thailand. In so doing, the Contractor will provide support to facilitate the effective functioning of the Academic Advisory Council for Thailand (AACT) to insure its maximum contribution to accomplishment of the goals of the A.I.D. program in Thailand. [Note: AACT is made up of scholars from several universities.]

Then it goes on:

The Contractor, in conjunction with AACT, will provide the following services (p 2):

Two of the eight services are of special interest here, for both mention counterinsurgency.

1) Identify research that is being, has been, or will be conducted in universities, foundations and other institutions that may relate to developmental and counterinsurgency activities in Thailand; evaluate, index and make such research available to A.I.D.; suggest and solicit research proposals relevant to A.I.D. activity in Thailand for consideration by A.I.D./W [Washington] and USOM/Thailand.

6) Organize, coordinate and conduct meetings, seminars, or conferences, under AACT auspices, dealing with development and counterinsurgency problems, issues and activities, including research, relating to A.I.D. operations in Thailand.

This is your university--and you are asked to keep the University out of politics!

This project has no place in a University. It is another manifestation of organized contempt for the aspirations and self-determination of the Thai people, and of academic complicity therein. That contempt is tantamount to racism; and it is a direct adjunct of our war machine in SE Asia.

I have been told that this project, out of UCLA, is up for renewal. I hope that it will be dropped. Efforts are being made to see that this is done. The Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars is one group working on this. I urge support for these efforts.

This is one aspect of reconstitution of this University which is essential and urgent.

Let me close with some words about reconstitution of the University. The war in Southeast Asia, together with racism at home and abroad, has made it clear to increasing numbers of people that traditional university education has been compatible with domestic and international racism and violence. The faculty, employees and students of the University of California, have therefore begun to reconstitute this University. We propose to end business as usual because war and racism are business as usual, and they are incompatible with education in a free society.

We are taking the initiative ourselves, as the academic community, to pursue education by defining for ourselves what is relevant to learn and teach, and how to go about it. We are, after all, the University. We will be addressing many of the problems of our society directly; often we will be doing so in novel ways; we will be involving ourselves with the broader community. We will be learning and disseminating the truth as we discover it, wherever we can discover it. We will reconstitute our educational functions, not abandon them; we will invigorate them, not attenuate them; we will bring them out of the ivory tower and out of the war machine (which, to a significant extent is in the ivory tower), into the world. We will work to make that world a more humane one.

As we attempt to educate ourselves and others, we hope the university will change--that it will never be the same again. We hope the country will never be the same again. We hope racism and violence, and the hypocrisy which nurtures them will never be the same again.

To realize these ambitious hopes, we will engage in hard, practical work; this will entail sacrifice and risks, but it is our only hope for a viable academic community in this political world. It is our contribution toward the widespread determination to turn this country away from the current course of war and racism, genocide and oppression.