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A Forward Glance in a Mirror: Diversity Challenged—Access, Equity, and Success in Higher Education

by Walter R. Allen

Affirmative action addresses disparities in higher education. Recent trends threaten gains, resegregation is underway nationally. California outlawed affirmative action, the quality of K–12 education is declining, and prison construction is soaring. African American and Latino participation in higher education has declined; both groups are overrepresented in prisons and among the poor. Opponents pretend affirmative action threatens academic quality and promotes reverse discrimination. In fact, economic instability spurs efforts to defend status quo privilege. There is a clash of national ideologies, the American Dream versus White supremacy. Higher education must be a model for society in promoting equity, excellence, and diversity.

On July 23, 2003, the U.S. Supreme Court decided two major affirmative action cases from the University of Michigan, one involving Law School admissions procedures (*Grutter v. Bollinger*) and the other, admissions to the undergraduate college (*Gratz v. Bollinger*). Both White female plaintiffs had charged that the University of Michigan discriminated against Whites by granting Black, Latino/Latina, and Native American applicants special consideration under a race-conscious admissions system. The battle lines were drawn for a struggle that engaged the nation’s attention. At root were core sociocultural beliefs, values, and ideals about race, equity, and fairness in America. In this sense, the court cases symbolized a long national debate, joining *Dred Scott*; *Plessy v. Ferguson*; *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*; *Bakke v. Regents of the University of California*; and a plethora of other court cases that wrestled with race, equity, and opportunity in America (Byrd-Chichester, 2000). The court’s decisions (to support the Law School in *Grutter* and to overturn the college in *Gratz*) briefly quieted the storm but failed to fully resolve ongoing debates over fairness, equity, affirmative action, and race-conscious admissions in American higher education. As the racial gap in academic achievement and relative socioeconomic status persists, myriad questions remain about race, opportunity, equity, and public policy, in higher education specifically and more generally in the larger society.

The American Dream lies at the very heart of the American cultural ethos. At the center of the American Dream is the emphatic conviction that, in this society, education opens doors to

success and that, with talent and hard work, even the poorest American—of no matter what race, creed, or culture—can achieve greatness (Hochschild, 1995). In many instances, talent has been equated with the level of education attained. Education and educational opportunity are therefore part of the essential foundation of democracy; the extent to which citizens are afforded equal educational opportunity speaks volumes about openness and power relations in American society. America’s Dream, along with her contribution to world civilization, is embodied in the promise that all who arrive on the shores of this unique society will be allowed unfettered pursuit of their “happiness” (read “success and prosperity”).

Racial discrimination has also been an integral part of the American cultural ethos—it represents the darker part of this country’s heritage and soul (Mills, 1997; Takaki, 2000). The American nightmare is revealed in this country’s stubborn core cultural belief that Whites are innately superior to Blacks—and, to be sure, other people of color, but especially, definitively, White trumps Black. The United States of America was founded upon a system that institutionalized racial slavery in the customs, mores, and laws of the land. White supremacy, the belief in innate White superiority and the commitment to achieving or maintaining White dominance over non-Whites, is woven deeply in the very fabric of this society (Mills, 1997; Takaki, 2000). Over history, this nation has grown prosperous and powerful through racial exploitation, racial conquest, and racial domination. The persistence of racism and the effects of organized racial advantage—also known as “White privilege”—have left “marks of oppression” on all the major institutions in our society, profoundly limiting life options for Blacks and other people of color (Brown et al., 2003). America’s social, political, economic, cultural, and educational institutions have been shaped (should we say warped?) by beliefs, values, and practices established and evolved in defense of racial hierarchy. Racial hierarchy is not merely a part of this nation’s distant, painful past—it is also a fact of the present and prologue to our future.

Race and Higher Education in America: A Brief Historical View

Education has been an elusive, long-denied dream for African Americans—first as slaves forbidden to read and write at risk of death or maiming, and later through various societal machinations blocking access to schools and educational resources. Yet despite stereotypes of Blacks as lazy, ignorant, and mentally deficient, and despite being faced with history’s most elaborate

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system of institutional barriers to schooling, Black people continued to pursue education. The Holy Grails of education in general, and higher education in particular, have long embodied the hope and frustration of a people seeking the Promised Land of freedom and equality. For Black people, the centuries-old struggle for access and success in higher education has been emblematic of a larger fight for personhood and equality in America. In this struggle, progress has come in fits and starts, interspersed with rollbacks and lost ground, as White backlash periodically reared its ugly head, intent on reversing Black educational gains and in the process defending White superiority (Allen & Jewell, 1995).

For two centuries, the yoke of legalized slavery dominated people of African ancestry in this country. Reflecting this national consensus, the U.S. Supreme Court declared in the *Dred Scott* case (1857) that Blacks were “beings of an inferior order” and thus that they “had no rights which the White man was bound to respect.” The North’s victory over the South in the Civil War signaled the dawning of a new day—or so it seemed. Congress ratified constitutional amendments that outlawed slavery (the Thirteenth Amendment); granted freed slaves citizenship (the Fourteenth Amendment); and extended the right to vote to Black males (the Fifteenth Amendment). But these advances were soon overshadowed by the implementation of restrictive “Black Codes” across the country. These codes enshrined in state laws a racial caste system that stripped Blacks of their newly won freedoms. Ultimately, the racial caste system was given legal support by the U.S. Supreme Court and federal law in the case *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), which validated the concept of “legal equality” or “separate, but equal.” For the next 50 years, the legitimate aspirations of African Americans for equal educational opportunity sagged under the weight of an oppressive Jim Crow, racial apartheid system.

In 1954, the Supreme Court decided in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* that separate facilities meant inherently unequal, inferior facilities, and declared all racial segregation illegal. In the decade following *Brown*, many of the country’s universities and colleges stubbornly resisted the Court’s order to desegregate. The resistance was especially fierce across the Deep South, where White citizens, governors and state legislatures in Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia defied federal law. In the wake of riots and bloodshed, federal troops had to be mobilized. Congress, the president, and federal agencies passed legislation, issued orders, and enforced laws to overturn the entrenched customs and practices of racial discrimination in education. Even with active federal intervention, progress toward educational desegregation and expanded educational opportunities for Blacks in K–12 and in higher education was excruciatingly slow. As Blacks became more impatient and insistent on full citizenship rights, the country was on the verge of a second Civil War (Franklin & Moss, 1994; Harding, 1983; Morris, 1984). Across the nation, one city after another went up in flames, ignited by racial tensions and conflict. Meanwhile, the world watched intently to see how America, the self-proclaimed leader of the “free world,” would address racial injustice at home. Something had to be done to save the Union . . . and America’s international image.

Affirmative Action in Higher Education

The looming national crisis of racial inequality and civil disorder was addressed by government intervention in the form of a patchwork of temporary, narrowly focused, relatively weak “equal opportunity programs.” As predecessors of affirmative action programs, equal opportunity programs were rooted in Fourteenth Amendment constitutional guarantees of equal rights to all U.S. citizens. Despite this ideal, for generations Blacks had been denied equal protection under the law. From 1619 to 1865, Black slavery was legal and protected by the U.S. Constitution. For 250 years, persons of African descent were labeled as chattel property, to be bartered, branded, brutalized, dehumanized, and murdered in the twin causes of economic greed and White supremacy. From 1865 to 1965, another 100 years, Blacks were legally segregated, stripped of human rights and dignity, humiliated, defined as inferior beings, and denied citizenship rights of equal opportunities and participation in society. By 1965 the formal legal barriers to Black progress were finally torn down, only to be replaced with more subtle forms of oppression, no less potent in denying Blacks full opportunity and equity. What remained firmly entrenched were the “not-so-blind” laissez-faire forces of durable, structured inequality, multigenerational poverty, race stereotyping, racial discrimination, and inferior educations. To this day, these powerful factors and forces continue to ensure the subordinate status of the masses of African Americans (Oliver & Shapiro, 1995; Omi & Winant, 1994; Wilson, 1996).

President Lyndon B. Johnson’s executive order mandating affirmative action attempted to address the twin heritages of slavery and Jim Crow segregation—historical and contemporary racial oppression—which kept African Americans mired in poverty and despair (Executive Order No. 11246, 1965). The United States Kerner Commission report (1968), issued after a period of racial unrest across the nation, made official what everyone already knew: America continued to be a society divided by race, “separate and unequal.”

Johnson invoked the powerful metaphor of a people in chains for 350 years, or ten generations, being required to engage in a foot race with other people who were (and had been) free of restraints. Over the years, the unchained person of course built up quite an advantage or head start. Therefore, Johnson argued, it was not sufficient in 1965 to finally unchain African Americans and declare the contest fair and even from that point. Johnson (1965) said, “You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, ‘You are free to compete with all the others,’ and still justly believe that you have been completely fair” (p. 2). Instead, special, systematic corrective actions were required to compensate for the accumulated disadvantages. After years of vigorously enforcing the exclusion of Blacks, as well as women and other people of color, then, it was not enough for agencies and institutions to merely adopt the passive stance of “come if you want (or must).” Rather, Johnson’s Executive Order called for vigorous, proactive steps—*affirmative action*—to broaden and increase access to previously excluded, underrepresented groups.

In one sense, affirmative action as a policy recognized the “root and branch” nature of racism (personal, institutional, and systemic) in America. Absent extraordinary efforts, U.S. institutions

would continue to do “business as usual,” which translated into continued discrimination against Blacks, women, and other people of color. In response to this situation, equal opportunity legislation and policies evolved into “affirmative action” policies and the subordinate, degraded status of African Americans was inverted. Since the U.S. racial caste system located Whites at the top and Blacks at the bottom (historically, other groups were arranged between these poles on the basis of various factors, e.g., skin color, physical features, culture, language, and U.S. geopolitical interests), a paradoxical national consensus arose. It declared that “what you would do for the *least* of us [i.e., Blacks], you most certainly should do for the *rest* of us.” Thus the affirmative action tent was broadened to incorporate White women, Asians, Latinos/Latinas, the physically impaired, those with different sexual orientations, non-native English speakers, and many, many others. What this shift signaled was the eventual redefinition of affirmative action away from a remedy or compensation for historical, legally sanctioned racial discrimination to the status of a tool for increasing “diversity” or the participation of “underrepresented” groups.

From 1965 to 1995, equal opportunity programs (and later affirmative action programs) represented rays of hope for the disenfranchised. For a relatively brief, shining moment, the doors of opportunity cracked open as never before. Blacks and others (Latinos/Latinas, women, Asians, poor Whites, the physically challenged, gays) previously excluded from prestigious universities, corporations, and organizations slipped in, although not necessarily in massive numbers. Under the imperatives of equity, inclusiveness, and diversity, these institutions recruited African Americans and other previously excluded groups from North Carolina tobacco fields, Newark ghettos, California orchards, Oklahoma reservations, and Chicago suburbs. Equal opportunity and affirmative action programs gave people of color, women, and others routinely pushed to society’s fringes the chance to prove their worth. These programs did not guarantee success; they only provided the chance to compete and the opportunity to succeed (or fail).

Having proved their value and effectiveness, affirmative action programs came under withering attack. Affirmative action had made, and promised further, significant inroads against the established status quo of racial, patriarchal, and economic hierarchy. Predictably, powerful vested interests, under the banner of high societal ideals—colorblind society, ending reverse discrimination, competitive testing—mounted devastating challenges to these programs. In many cases, affirmative action programs were weakened or discontinued, justified if not by unsupported claims of “reverse discrimination” (Pincus, 2003) then by the absurd claim that America had become a colorblind society, no longer discriminating on the basis of race (Brown et al., 2003; Omi & Winant, 1994).

Race, Equity, and Higher Education in California

America’s cultural waters continue to roil from periodic national debates over race, educational inequity, and affirmative action. California led the rush to roll back expanded access to higher education, passing a Regental ban against affirmative action in higher education in 1993, followed by a statewide proposition also banning affirmative action in higher education in 1995.

Wardell Connerly, a regent for the University of California system and the chief architect of this anti-affirmative action movement, was a Black man who readily admits that he personally benefited from affirmative action programs (Wallace, 1995). Nevertheless, Connerly and others found reasons to deny similar benefits to deserving Black and Latino/Latina students. Various rationales are used to justify attacks on affirmative action: Some say that affirmative action has accomplished its purpose and is no longer necessary in our “colorblind” society; others say that affirmative action is unfair, that it represents “reverse discrimination” against guiltless Whites; and still others suggest that the poor and disenfranchised need simply to take responsibility and pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. In the final analysis, none of these arguments is satisfactory or sufficient.

Affirmative action (and the equal opportunity programs that preceded it) changed the face of America by tearing down barriers that had systematically blocked access and prevented the full participation of Blacks, people of color, and women. Although the primary agenda of affirmative action was to break down discriminatory structures so that these groups would *all* be represented in the many sectors of American society, the actual outcomes have been skewed. In fact, White women have been by far the greatest beneficiaries of affirmative action (Wise, 1998). As a result of affirmative action, White females also realized significant gains in many areas of education, employment, contracting, and professions. In addition, Asian Americans have made disproportionate gains in higher education, due in part to affirmative action. Several campuses in the University of California and the California State University systems now have Asian-Pacific Islander majorities or pluralities and qualify as “Asian-Serving Institutions,” that is, as having Asian enrollment of 25% or higher (Allen, Bonous-Hammarth, & Teranishi, 2001).

This is the history that brings us to the present moment, when American higher education is in a process of resegregation (Orfield, 2004). For African Americans in particular, low rates of college enrollment, retention, and degree attainment have caused concern. Since the rollback of affirmative action in 1995, Black and Latino/Latina enrollments at the University of California’s most prestigious campuses (Berkeley and Los Angeles) have dropped by roughly 50% (Allen, Bonous-Hammarth, & Teranishi, 2001). A season of gains for Blacks in college enrollment and earned degrees has been reversed. More generally, since the early 1960s, African Americans had made significant gains in enrollment and degree attainment at the university level. The percentage of African Americans who completed 4 years of college or more rose from 4% in 1962 to 18.1% by 2002 (Harvey, 2003; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Although this is positive news, the representation of African Americans in this category as compared with other racial groups is relatively poor. The 8.3% increase in undergraduate enrollment for African Americans since 1993 is less than half the rates of increase for Latinos/Latinas, Asian Americans, and Native Americans during the same period (Wilds, 2000). The disparity between White and Black enrollment is even more extreme. If we removed the positive and disproportionate contributions of historically Black colleges and universities to total Black student enrollment and earned degrees, these figures would be much more troubling.

College enrollment rates for Latinos/Latinas follow a pattern similar to that of African Americans. Since 1974, the percentage of both Latinos and Latinas who completed 4 years of college or more rose from 5.5% in 1974 to 11% in 1999 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Moreover, Latino/Latina total enrollment in higher education increased 79.2% from 1988 to 1997 (Wilds, 2000), the highest gain of the four major racial groups. However, although Latinos/Latinas have a 45% completion rate at Division I colleges and their enrollment rates have increased 8 percentage points since 1990, they continue to trail both Whites and African Americans in the completion of 4-year degrees. Further, although Latinos/Latinas represent 9% of undergraduate students, they were awarded only 5.3% of all bachelor's degrees in 1997 (Wilds, 2000). Asian Americans have made significant gains in enrollment, degree attainment, and participation in higher education over the period. Their enrollment in higher education increased 73% from 1988 to 1997, and they were awarded 6% of all bachelor's degrees in 1997 (Wilds, 2000).

In California, the effects of anti-affirmative action legislation have dramatically decreased Black and Latino/Latina participation in the University of California system. For example, whereas in 1997 nearly 50 Blacks and 50 Latinos/Latinas enrolled in the UCLA Law School, the entering class in 2000 counted only 2 Black students and 17 Latinos/Latinas. *This* is the nature of the crisis currently confronting race, equity, and affirmative action in U.S. higher education. It is *déjà vu* all over again. We see a return to the apartheid in higher educational systems that either completely excluded or allowed only a few token Blacks or Latinos/Latinas and Native Americans.

It is of interest that much of this move to resegregate U.S. higher education occurs under the guise of efforts to improve academic standards and academic quality. Students of color are implicitly and explicitly identified as "threats" to academic quality; growth in their enrollment or graduation numbers is taken as *prima facie* evidence of declining academic standards. Thus it is presumed that the best way to improve academic reputation is to exclude Blacks or, at the very least, to greatly limit their presence. We are seeing the proliferation of "high-stakes" standardized tests that privilege White and Asian Pacific Islander students who have access to educational resources and experiences denied to Black and Latino/Latina students. This thicket of Advanced Placement courses, standardized tests, and high-priced personal academic coaches often torpedoed the educational goals and achievement of Black and Latino/Latina students and ensures that after a "fair" competition, they will end up at the bottom of the heap.

The state of California leads the anti-affirmative action and pro-punitive academic standards movements, largely as a result of poor educational policy and planning—and declining investment in education. Over the past three decades, the state's population nearly doubled, growing from 19 million in 1970 to 35 million in 2000. During the same 30-year period, California's Black population grew by roughly 71% (from 1.4 million to 2.5 million), an impressive rate of population growth under most circumstances. However, this rapid growth was dwarfed alongside the astounding rates of increase in the Latino/Latina and Asian American populations. From 1970 to 1998, the state's Latino/Latina population grew by more than 450% (from 2.4 to

10 million), while the Asian American population grew by more than 500% (from 671,210 to 3.7 million) (California Department of Finance, 1999). Multiple governors and state administrations failed to anticipate or address the consequences of the population explosion for the California public higher education system, thus contributing to severe demand–supply discrepancies in higher education. Instead of adding beds in college dorms, these administrations chose to invest in exponential increases in the number of prison beds, an investment decision that made neither sound fiscal nor sound moral sense.

Twenty-one prisons have been built in California since 1984, as compared with three state university campuses and one University of California campus (currently under construction). This defies logic, given that each prisoner costs the state more than ten times the standard in-state tuition for a college student (\$38,000 v. \$3,800) (Families to Amend California's Three-Strikes, 2000). Moreover, with implementation of the highly controversial "three-strikes law," the California prison population increased sevenfold, growing from 23,511 inmates in 1980 to 162,000 by 2000 (California Department of Corrections, 2000). California's radically disproportionate investment in the criminal justice program multiplied the annual budget for the California Department of Corrections from \$728 million in 1985 to \$4.5 billion by 1998 (California Department of Corrections, 2000). Alongside these prodigious expenditures on the prison system, the state of California is facing extreme shortages in K–12 and college educational resources, facilities, and personnel. In short, in California—and across the nation—misplaced values and mis-investment have caused a needless crisis where demand for college seats outraces supply. The unhappy, short-sighted solution has too often been to erect still more barriers to college opportunities and access in the form of high-stakes standardized tests, higher thresholds of "college eligibility," the dismantling of affirmative action, and the proposed implementation of high school exit exams.

What Future for Race, Economics, and Educational Opportunity?

In the dawning moments of the 21st century, race and ethnicity continue to challenge this society. America still wrestles with whether race and ethnicity will be bases for unity or division. Nowhere is this sobering assessment more vividly portrayed than in California, the Golden State in the land of opportunity. In the nation's mythology, California is the antithesis of the race relations that characterize Mississippi and the Deep South. In the view of many, California was at one time living proof of the possibility of a multiracial, multicultural society, a testament to the declining impact of racial discrimination. So, on the face of it, comparison of the status of Blacks in contemporary California with that of Blacks in historical Mississippi would seem to be rather outlandish. However, when one carefully examines the current landscape of race, ethnicity, and national origin in California, such a comparison becomes considerably less far-fetched.

Few are unfamiliar with the heated rhetoric associated with successful efforts in California to pass anti-immigrant and anti-affirmative action legislation statewide. In each instance, the language was coded but nonetheless racially charged, stereotyping Blacks and Latinos/Latinas as threats or problems. This language,

these patterns of behavior, and the underlying racist attitudes demonstrate a striking affinity with the mores of the bygone segregationist South. The ultimate result was to turn back the clock of racial progress and to maintain structures of racial oppression (beliefs, customs, and institutional practices).

In California (as in the United States more broadly), news coverage and government statistics show that Blacks, Native Americans, and Latinos/Latinas are massively overrepresented in prisons, among the unemployed, on welfare rolls, and among those with high morbidity and mortality. African Americans are 17 times more likely than Whites to be charged under the three-strikes law in Los Angeles County (Torbet, Griffin, Hurst, & MacKenzie, 2000). The three-strikes law can result in life sentences for third criminal convictions, no matter how minor the offense. In California, more than one third (39%) of African American men in their twenties are in prison, on probation, or paroled (Torbet et al.). At the same time, Blacks are woefully underrepresented on college and university campuses (as students *and* as faculty) and among those in high-status, powerful, well-paid occupations.

From 1989 to 1998, California's African American population remained consistent, yet the University of California system experienced an 18.1% decrease in Black student enrollment. Between 1997 and 1998, African American freshman enrollment in the University of California system dropped 24%, from 917 to 739. A significant drop in enrollment was seen at the Berkeley campus, where African American freshman enrollment fell by 51% (from 257 to 122), although total freshman enrollment increased, from 3,215 to 3,333 students (Bunche Research Report, 2004). With 2.3 million African Americans, California has the third-largest total Black population in the country (after New York and Texas). Yet in 1999, only 3% of Black high school graduates qualified for admission to the University of California system, as compared with 13% of Whites, 30% of Asians, and 4% of Latinos/Latinas. Although African Americans were 7% of the state population, they were only 3% of University of California undergraduate enrollment.

Despite these facts, the state of California, through Proposition 209 (1996), continues to ban affirmative action in college admissions. A clearly ambivalent U.S. Supreme Court approved "narrowly tailored," time-limited affirmative action admissions programs; nevertheless, "liberal" California continues to oppose affirmative action programs. Last year, the chair of the University of California Board of Regents maligned the Berkeley campus admissions process, fearing that 381 students admitted in fall 2002 with SAT scores of less than 1000 might somehow "contaminate" and degrade academic quality for the other 25,000-plus students on campus (Moore, 2003). Will the last ever be first?

Ethnicity and national origin represent additional factors, beyond race and socioeconomic status, with the power to either unite or divide California as a state and the United States as a nation (Chua, 2003). Contests are consistently waged in relation to these issues across the country as various groups seek a competitive edge. In many respects, these contests—characteristic of the multicultural, 21st-century reality—are cast in sharpest relief in California, the 35 million-strong, racially and cultural diverse subcontinent within a nation. Not surprisingly, the economic situation is often the trigger for such contests or conflicts—

certainly, this has been the case in California. After California experienced economic downturns in the aerospace industry and other declines in the high-tech sector, the state's social fabric was severely strained. Since World War II, California had seen an expanding economy and Californians overall had experienced great prosperity. When finally the state confronted a "bust cycle," following the prolonged "boom cycle," people panicked, resorting to race-baiting, stereotyping, hostility, economic exclusion, xenophobia, and discriminatory identity politics.

Predictably, the psychological and real burden from this backlash fell disproportionately on African Americans, as the equivalent of an "untouchable" caste in this society. To be sure, Latinos and Latinas were also targets of the racial backlash, in fact more so with regard to nativist citizenship arguments. Blacks, however, were the disproportionate focus because our unique history defines Blacks as the anchor group in this society's racial hierarchy, with Whites at the very top and Blacks at the very bottom (other groups jockey for positions between these extreme poles). Blacks, some people of color, and some immigrants became convenient targets for White and mainstream fears, anger, and personal insecurity resulting from widespread economic insecurity. Thus, initial efforts to dismantle affirmative action were justified by myths of "reverse discrimination" and competitive disadvantage for Whites. The foundation was laid for undermining government commitment to and support for Black and Latino/Latina access and success in higher education.

California is a metaphor for the status of race in America in these dawning moments of the 21st century. California represents as appropriate a metaphor now, as Mississippi did 40 years ago when the Civil Rights Movement brought the walls of racial segregation tumbling down. The focus on California reveals that the problems of the color line are still very much alive in the United States, not only Down-South, but also Up-South, East-South and West-South. As a case study, California places in stark relief the complex intricacy of the nation's "race problem" in the new century: racial conflict linked to racial or ethnic conflict *and* to conflict based on citizenship or national origin. This complexity propels us to search for alternative models, models that would eventually clarify the roots of other struggles for power, personhood, and inclusion, for example those related to gender, social class, and sexual orientation (Collins, 1998; Marable, 2002). Ultimately, conflicts in California, Mississippi, Michigan, across the country, and around the world (e.g., in Iraq, Peru, Kashmir, and the Congo) are traceable to sociopolitical, economic systems that require and thrive on exploitative relationships (Chua, 2003).

America struggles with warring ideologies: On the one hand is the shining dream of vast opportunity, limited only by a person's vision, energy, and talents; on the other hand is a profound and abiding belief in and commitment to the ideas of racial supremacy. Between these extremes, at the center of the struggle, lie the heart and soul of this country. Adding to the complexity, both the national ideals of unbounded opportunity and the daily reality of racial hierarchy operate under the powerful spell of an inherently exploitative economic system.

A striking paradox confronts the nation: How to be human in the context of an inhumane system? Will America ever fully embrace the U.S. Constitution's sweeping pronouncements of

liberty, equality, and fraternity for all? Or will our nation continue to indulge its demons of degradation, domination, exclusion, and exploitation, penalizing Blacks, non-Whites, the poor, and other excluded groups? This struggle is presently being waged in the nation's institutions of higher learning. Universities are on the front lines in a battle for the soul of our nation and the security of the world. Perhaps this is as it should be? For more than any other institution, the nation's colleges and universities are charged with visioning and modeling this society's ideals. Colleges and universities across America and in the great state of California can win the struggle for equity, excellence, and diversity in higher learning, winning in the process the larger struggle for human dignity. Our society and the world depend on us to light the way; to do otherwise would be to fail a most sacred trust.

NOTE

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