

## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

### Reflections on Racism

**R**ACISM is today's fashionable label for an old symptom-complex—a euphemism of man's basic insecurity related to impermanence. The essential ingredient is rooted in each of us. Its evolution parallels and is an analog of psychosocial development. From the beginning—before object relationships were conceptualized, before theoretical stratification of the psyche and during the long dependency of infancy, the prejudiced teaching processes that occur in childhood, the developmental differentiation of the ego and its mechanisms of defense—there has been this built-in fear. It exists in individuals and in groups. In the latter, as a group phenomenon, institutional racism first became evident in the so-called herding instinct: there is safety in numbers.

Man's early realization of and studied preoccupation with his impermanence have changed and refined his defenses with the seasons and through the years. The youth of today (disillusioned, agitated depressives) question the absurdities of history, the phenomenon of repetition, and the reasons for living. Successive generations during their period of idealism seem to get hung up on this issue. Impersonalized, institutionalized racism is a rationalization and manifests itself as nationalism in the races of mankind. It is often consciously built-in to the governmental apparatus. South Africa's theories and practices of apartheid are classic; in other organized groups they are more or less unconscious.

One oft-repeated technique for coping with impermanence was scapegoating—a primitive ego defense of externalization and/or displacement to the minute. This phenomenon has a mischievous and turbulent history. Aspirants for political office (scapegoat artists) too often are exploiters of group fear (insecurity) of impermanence and thus are perpetrators or vectors of racism. Scapegoating came into existence via magic and archaic thinking, the beginning of man's ever-continuing search for security and the nihilistic denial of his impermanence. Scapegoating became the art and practice for cathartic release of the associated tensions of insecurity and anxiety in individuals and groups. It is one of the many by-products—a pollutant of psychosocialization.

The youth of today, in their attempt to cope with impermanence,

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*In this section the Editor samples varied opinions on topical problems. The opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Editor, nor can they in any way be construed as marking the official policy of the Journal.*

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drop out. Literally, they would like to stop the world and get off. They are in conflict with the old order of things; members of the older generation are distorted images—a Thanatos—of what they will inevitably become in the *élan vital*, the eternal life-death struggle. This revolt-surrender morass, this up against the wall double bind, prompts them, in fantasy, to want to push the button before someone else does. Never before has catastrophic and instant total impermanence (via nuclear weaponry) been more immediately evident than today, giving rise to credibility of world destruction fantasies. Their inner conflicts are now manifesting themselves in a variant form—a new rendition of the same old tune, comparable to racism and labeled “ageism.” Its dynamism comes from the same place, deep within man’s psyche, as does racism. Some weaker group—somehow different as to skin color or some other external characteristic—seems always to be a convenient target in this nefarious victimizer-victim charade.

The history of racism suggests mutational virulent strains. Similar to Freudian slips, racist slips are everyday occurrences betraying its dynamic presence. Its universality appears incontestable. In many respects it is analogous to the schizophrenic symptom-complex, or maybe it is part and parcel of this ubiquitous syndrome.

Specifically, let us look at the American strain of racism as it pertains to black-white relations. This strain has been mutationally unique and virulent from the days of slavery. Its psychological contagion is hardly debatable. It is responsible for a broad spectrum of affective reactions and counter-reactions. Litigious positions and hot rhetoric have led to critical confrontations; annihilation has sometimes followed in its wake. Blacks, the victims, have developed an exquisite sensitivity and perceptivity to this protean and virulent strain of racism after many years of exposure to its often lethal dosages. It is remarkable that blacks have survived and increased in numbers. They have had to learn, in the service of survival, to be able to listen to, *tune in*, and *turn off* unconscious racism (not to mention its conscious variety). It is remarkable that their own deep-rooted human insecurities of impermanence have not been potentiated by the added crippling affects associated with living from day to day in a dehumanizingly cruel racist environment. In a less stouthearted group, extinction would likely have been their fate. Their past adaptational defenses, patience and hope, have coalesced and resulted in an increasingly tougher and rugged character structure, as we are now witness to.

The past business-as-usual equation—the old world plus the new world with all its racist resistances to change—must yield. A majority of the earth’s population (people of color), having conceptualized an escape, are presently proclaiming and trying to perfect an unalienated Third World—still another delusional order against the insecurities of impermanence. If this is accomplished, mankind will have come full circle—dynamically structuring the world after the old classic oedipal trilogy and its inevitable tragedies, which

also stem from the roots and insecurities of impermanence.

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## Research and Careers for Blacks

**P**ROBABLY FEWER than one in 25 doctors gives major and sustained effort to research inquiries. This group of men represents a priceless national resource. Few professionals would quarrel with the obvious need for quality research even as priorities concerning service and education are being modified. In order to assure such quality research, it is necessary to make provision for funds both for the conduct of investigations and support for the investigators. In the past, such support has included funds to nurture and develop researchers.

The public and private patrons of research now must be persuaded that it is crucial, even in times of a threatened cutback of research funds, to make special plans to encourage and develop Black researchers. Without such deliberate effort it seems doubtful that even one in 25 Black doctors will be engaged in research. The long-range consequences of such a situation are alien to the best interests of the country.

An ever-growing social and economic awareness of the need to supply better health services to minority populations will make certain that a good proportion of medical manpower concern itself in such delivery. During the next decade there will be an absolute increase in the number of Black doctors, who will aid in this cause as they labor in and out of the ghettos. However, compelling circumstances reflecting the temper of the times and the life experiences of the young Black doctors may make research careers seem irrelevant and/or out of reach. Thus the already small cadre of researchers would not be augmented by the infusion of more significant numbers of minority doctors. All of society is diminished in this regard.

Since psychiatry will appeal to large numbers of Black doctors, and the ghettos even now are requesting more mental health services, the need for Black mental health researchers is critical. Yet it must be emphasized that although it is a hopeful and justifiable expectation that Black researchers will contribute to the eradication of the psychosocial ills gripping our country, the Black doctor must not be forced into limited and narrow areas of investigation. Research interest cannot be legislated, but there is no doubt that many young Blacks between now and 2000 A.D. will pursue problems related to the ghetto. However, the very need of these ghettos to become vibrant, dynamic, proud, independent, contributing places will demand that other young doctors work on an unrestricted number of topics.

Accordingly, it is suggested that psychiatrists today make plans to encourage, select, and train Blacks in research careers. The fabric of