



REASON * March 2000

Thought Reform 101

The Orwellian implications of today's college orientation

By Alan Charles Kors

At Wake Forest University last fall, one of the few events designated as "mandatory" for freshman orientation was attendance at *Blue Eyed*, a filmed racism awareness workshop in which whites are abused, ridiculed, made to fail, and taught helpless passivity so that they can identify with "a person of color for a day." In Swarthmore College's dormitories, in the fall of 1998, first-year students were asked to line up by skin color, from lightest to darkest, and to step forward and talk about how they felt concerning their place in that line. Indeed, at almost all of our campuses, some form of moral and political re-education has been built into freshman orientation and residential programming. These exercises have become so commonplace that most students do not even think of the issues of privacy, rights, and dignity involved.

A central goal of these programs is to uproot "internalized oppression," a crucial concept in the diversity education planning documents of most universities. Like the Leninists' notion of "false consciousness," from which it ultimately is derived, it identifies as a major barrier to progressive change the fact that the victims of oppression have internalized the very values and ways of thinking by which society oppresses them. What could workers possibly know, compared to intellectuals, about what workers truly should want? What could students possibly know, compared to those creating programs for offices of student life and residence, about what students truly should feel? Any

desire for assimilation or for individualism reflects the imprint of white America's strategy for racial hegemony.

In 1991 and 1992 both *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* published surveys of freshman orientations. The *Times* observed that "orientation has evolved into an intense ...initiation" that involves "delicate subjects like...date rape [and] race relations, and how freshmen, some from small towns and tiny high schools, are supposed to deal with them." In recent years, public ridicule of "political correctness" has made academic administrators more circumspect about speaking their true minds, so one should listen carefully to the claims made for these programs before colleges began to spin their politically correct agendas.

Tony Tillman, in charge of a mandatory "Social Issues" orientation at Dartmouth, explained in the *Journal* that students needed to address "the various forms of `isms': sexism, racism, classism," all of which were interrelated. Oberlin "educated" its freshmen about "differences in race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and culture," with separate orientations for blacks, Hispanics, gays and lesbians, and Americans of Asian descent. Columbia University sought to give its incoming students the chance "to reevaluate [and] learn things," so that they could rid themselves of "their own social and personal beliefs that foster inequality." Katherine Balmer, assistant dean for freshmen at Columbia, explained to the *Times* that "you can't bring all these people together...without some sort of training."

Greg Ricks, multicultural educator at Stanford (after similar stints at Dartmouth and Harvard), was frank about his agenda: "White students need help to understand what it means to be white in a multicultural community....For the white heterosexual male who feels disconnected and marginalized by multiculturalism, we've got to do a lot of work here." Planning for New Student Week at Northwestern University, a member of the Cultural Diversity Project Committee explained to the *Weekly Northwestern Review* in 1989 that the committee's goal was "changing the world, or at least the way [undergraduates] perceive it." In 1993, Ana Maria Garcia, assistant dean of Haverford College, proudly told the *Philadelphia Inquirer* of official freshman dormitory programs there, which divided students into two groups: happy, unselfish Alphas and grim, acquisitive Betas. For Garcia, the exercise was wonderfully successful: "Students in both groups said the game made them feel excluded, confused, awkward, and foolish," which, for Garcia, accomplished the purpose of Haverford's program: "to raise

student awareness of racial and ethnic diversity."

In the early 1990s, Bryn Mawr College shared its mandatory "Building Pluralism" program with any school that requested it. Bryn Mawr probed the most private experiences of every first-year student: difference and discomfort; racial, ethnic, and class experiences; sexual orientation; religious beliefs. By the end of this "orientation," students were devising "individual and collective action plans" for "breaking free" of "the cycle of oppression" and for achieving "new meaning" as "change agents." Although the public relations savvy of universities has changed since the early 1990s, these programs proliferate apace.

The darkest nightmare of the literature on power is George Orwell's *1984*, where there is not even an interior space of privacy and self. Winston Smith faces the ultimate and consistent logic of the argument that everything is political, and he can only dream of "a time when there were still privacy, love, and friendship, and when members of a family stood by one another without needing to know the reason."

Orwell did not know that as he wrote, Mao's China was subjecting university students to "thought reform," known also as "re-education," that was not complete until children had denounced the lives and political morals of their parents and emerged as "progressive" in a manner satisfactory to their trainers. In the diversity education film *Skin Deep*, a favorite in academic "sensitivity training," a white student in his third day of a "facilitated" retreat on race, with his name on the screen and his college and hometown identified, confesses his family's inertial Southern racism and, catching his breath, says to the group (and to the thousands of students who will see this film on their own campuses), "It's a tough choice, choosing what's right and choosing your family."

Political correctness is not the end of human liberty, because political correctness does not have power commensurate with its aspirations. It is essential, however, to understand those totalizing ambitions for what they are. O'Brien's re-education of Winston in *1984* went to the heart of such invasiveness. "We are not content with negative obedience.... When finally you surrender to us, it must be of your own free will." The Party wanted not to destroy the heretic but to "capture his inner mind." Where others were content to command "Thou shalt not" or "Thou shalt," O'Brien explains, "Our command is *`Thou art.*" To reach that end requires "learning... understanding [and] acceptance," and the realization that one has no control even over one's inner soul. In *Blue Eyed*, the facilitator, Jane Elliott, says of those under her authority for

the day, "A new reality is going to be created for these people." She informs everyone of the rules of the event: "You have no power, absolutely no power." By the end, broken and in tears, they see their own racist evil, and they love Big Sister.

The people devoted to remolding the inner lives of undergraduates are mostly kind and often charming individuals. At the Fourth Annual National Conference on People of Color in Predominantly White Institutions, held at and sponsored by the University of Nebraska last October, faculty and middle-level administrators of student life from around the country complained and joked about their low budgets, inadequate influence, and herculean tasks.

Their papers and interviews reveal an ideologically and humanly diverse crowd, but they share certain assumptions and beliefs, most of which are reasonable subjects for debate, but none of which should provide campuses with freshman agendas: America is an unjust society. Drop-out rates for students of color reflect a hostile environment and a lack of institutional understanding of identity and culture. What happens in the classroom is inadequate preparation for thinking correctly about justice and oppression.

They also share views that place us directly on the path of thought reform: White students desperately need formal "training" in racial and cultural awareness. The moral goal of such training should override white notions of privacy and individualism. The university must become a therapeutic and political agent of progressive change.

Handouts at the Nebraska conclave illustrated this agenda. Irma Amirall-Padamsee, the associate dean of student relations and the director of multicultural affairs at Syracuse University, distributed the Office of Multicultural Affairs' brochure. Its "philosophy" presupposes that students live "in a world impacted by various oppression issues," including "racism." "OMA's role," it announced, "is to provide the...leadership needed to encourage our students...to grow into individuals willing to take a proactive stance against oppression in all its shapes."

Molly Tovar, who has done this sort of work both at the University of Oklahoma and at Oklahoma State University, passed out a 22-page guide she co-authored, "How to Build and Implement a Comprehensive Diversity Plan." The guide explains the three "kinds of attitudes" that

agents of cultural change will face: "The Believers," who are "cooperative; excited; participative; contributive"; "The Fence Straddlers," who are "suspicious; observers; cautious; potentially open-minded"; and "The Skeptics," who are "critical; passive aggressive; isolated; traditional."

Ronnie Wooten, of Northern Illinois University, distributed a handout, "Inclusive Classroom Matters." It adapts a variety of common academic sources on multiculturalism, including a set of "guidelines" on how to "facilitate learning about those who are different from you." The students in this "inclusive classroom" would have to abandon what might be their sincere inner beliefs, replacing them with such professions of faith as "We will assume that people (both the groups we study and the members of the class) always do the best that they can." The guidelines make it clear that one may not restrict one's changes to the intellectual: "We will address the emotional as well as the cognitive content of the course material. We will work to break down the fears that prohibit communication."

Sharon Ulmar, assistant to the chancellor for diversity and equal opportunity at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, handed out a flyer titled "Can [A] Diversity Program Create Behavior Changes?" Her program's mode of self-evaluation was to measure "the number of participants that took action based upon the awareness they learned from [the] program." Among the units of "awareness" successfully acquired were the following (some of which surely might strike one as more problematic than others): "gays and lesbians no different than [sic] others"; "handicap accessibility is for those who are handicaped [sic]"; "difficult to make a decision about own beliefs when others are watching"; "module allowed participant to witness subtle behaviors instead of hearing about it"; and the ineffably tautological "understanding commonalities of each individual may be similar to yours."

Denise Bynes, program coordinator for Adelphi University's Center for African-American Studies Programs, distributed a "Conflict Resolution Styles Questionnaire" for students, all of whom are to be categorized at the end as one of the following: "competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating." The handout also presents the "basic values" of each American ethnic group. For white Americans, these are "Freedom/liberty/privacy; equality/fairness; achievement/success; individualism/self-interest; economical use of time; comfort." For African-Americans, "Ethnic pride, heritage, history; kinship

bonds/family/motherhood; equality/fairness; achievement; respect; religion/spirituality." For Asian-Americans, "Reciprocal social duties; self-control/courtesy/dignity; devotion to parents; tradition (family, culture, the past); duty/hard work/diligence." Each group also has its own particular "overview" of nature, logic, time, society, and interpersonal relationships. Whites wish to "control" nature, for example; Hispanics, to live in "harmony" with it; blacks, to "overcome" it; and Asians, to "be adjusted to" and "accept" it. Whites are "rational, logical, analytical"; Hispanics, "rational, ethical"; blacks, "allegorical and synthetical"; and Asians, "intuitive, holistic, tolerate inconsistencies."

According to a formal presentation by Bynes and her colleague at Adelphi, Hinda Adele Barlaz, all of these materials were acquired during "training" by the U.S. Department of Justice Community Relations Service, a program so effective that "it was very hard to get any of the other white members of the committee [Barlaz was white] to go for the training that the Department of Justice provided free of charge. The white members of the [Adelphi Prejudice Reduction] Committee had been so alienated by the training that they didn't want to go back."

What do these presenters in Nebraska, typical of those now governing offices of student life and residence, believe about the re-education of our college students? The keynote speaker at the conference was Carlos Muñ oz, professor of ethnic studies at the University of California at Berkeley. He explains in an interview that to create an appropriate environment on campus, one has "to do as much outreach as possible away from the classroom, into the dorms, into the places where students live." Such work should begin during freshman orientation, continue throughout a college experience, and be mandatory.

Amirall-Padamsee from Syracuse argues that "students of color need to be nurtured as insightful leaders of our community" and that "they must be formally trained in anti-oppression theory and related skill building." "White students," in turn, "have to be trained as allies in change." (*Ally* is a code word in sensitivity training circles. As the "diversity facilitator" Hugh Vasquez of the Todos Institute explains in a widely used manual, an "ally" is someone from "the dominant group" who is aware of and articulates his unmerited privilege and who intervenes on behalf of mistreated groups.)

The goal of such training, according to Amirall-Padamsee, is "to

produce graduates who are individuals committed to educational and social justice, and not just a tolerance of, but a validating of difference." To accomplish that she says, "we need to define and implement ways to translate education to behavioral change." In addition, she boasts, she has access to federal work-study funds, and she uses that position--and her capacity to dismiss people-- "to try to make a positive change in the way that the student is thinking."

Tovar, formerly of Oklahoma State University and now at the University of Oklahoma, declares in an interview at the conference that "at OSU we have all kinds of sensitivity training." She describes an incident involving fraternity brothers who had been disrespectful of Native American culture: They ended up "incredibly emotional....These fraternity kids broke down." OSU also has mandatory multicultural freshman orientation sessions.

Bynes, also the co-chairman of the Prejudice Reduction Committee at Adelphi University, says the committee's emphasis is on training individuals how to interact "with a diverse student body," with "separate training for students...[and] special sessions on student leadership training." This "cultural and racial awareness training would benefit all members of the Adelphi community, both in their university and personal lives." The committee would get people to talk about "what I like about being so-and-so," "what I dislike about being so-and-so," and "the first time I encountered prejudice," all exercises that the facilitators had been shown and had experienced in their own "training" by the Justice Department.

Bynes is a kind, accomplished, candid, and well-meaning woman. As she explains, "White people must have...sensitivity training...so that they can become aware of white privilege." Mandatory sensitivity training ideally should include both students and faculty, but "there are things that we can't dictate to the faculty because of the fact that they have a union."

There are painful ironies in these attempts at thought reform. Individual identity lies at the heart of both dignity and the flourishing of an ethnically heterogeneous society. Black students on American campuses rightly decry any tendency of university police to stop students based on race. Their objections are not statistical but moral: One is an individual, not an instance of blood or appearance. The assault on individual identity was essential to the horror and inhumanity of Jim Crow laws, of apartheid, and of the Nuremberg Race Laws. It is no less inhuman when

undertaken by "diversity educators."

From the Inquisition to the political use of Soviet psychiatry, history has taught us to recoil morally from the violation of the ultimate refuges of self-consciousness, conscience, and private beliefs. The song of the "peat bog soldiers," sent by the Nazis to work until they died, was "*Die Gedanken sind frei*," "Thoughts Are Free," for that truly is the final atom of human liberty. No decent society or person should pursue another human being there. Our colleges and universities do so routinely.

The desire to "train" individuals on issues of race and diversity has spawned a new industry of moral re-education. Colleges and universities have been hiring diversity "trainers" or "facilitators" for 15 years, and the most famous of them can command \$35,000 for "cultural audits," \$5,000 for sensitivity workshop training, and a sliding scale of honoraria, some for not less than \$3,000 per hour, for lectures.

This growing industry has its mountebanks, its careerists, its well-meaning zealots, and its sadists. The categories often blur. Three of the most celebrated facilitators at the moment are Edwin J. Nichols, of Nichols and Associates in Washington, D.C.; Hugh Vasquez, of the Todos Institute in Oakland, California; and Jane Elliott, the Torquemada of thought reform. To examine their work is to see into the heart of American re-education.

Nichols first came to the attention of critics of intrusive political correctness in 1990, when he led an infamous "racial sensitivity" session at the University College of the University of Cincinnati. According to witnesses, his exercise culminated in the humiliation of a blond, blue-eyed, young female professor, whom he ridiculed as a "perfect" member of "the privileged white elite" who not only would win "a beauty contest" but even "wore her string of pearls." The woman, according to these accounts, sat and sobbed. These contemporaneous revelations did not harm Nichols' career.

According to the curriculum vitae sent by his firm, Nichols studied at Eberhardt-Karls Universität in Tübingen, Germany, and at Leopold-Franzens Universität in Innsbruck, Austria, "where he received his Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology and Psychiatry, cum laude" (a rare degree). In some publicity material, he states that he founded a school of child psychology in Africa; at other times, he modestly withholds that

accomplishment.

Nichols' schedule of fees is almost as impressive as his schedule of thought reform. He charges \$3,500 for a three-hour "Basic Cultural Awareness Seminar," plus travel and per diem. For a plain old "Workshop," he gets \$4,000-\$5,000 plus expenses. This makes his staple offering--a "Full Day Session (Awareness Seminar and Workshop)"--a bargain at \$5,000 plus expenses. For a "Cultural Audit," he gets \$20,000-\$35,000 (he recently did one of these for the University of Michigan School of Medicine). The Bureau of Labor Statistics at the Department of Labor paid him \$15,000 for diversity training; the Environmental Protection Agency got him cheaply at \$12,000.

Business is booming. Nichols has brought awareness to the employees of six cabinet departments, three branches of the armed services, the Federal Reserve Bank, the Federal Aviation Administration, the Internal Revenue Service, and the FBI; the Goddard Space Center, the Naval Air Warfare Center, Los Alamos National Laboratory, and NASA; the Office of Personnel Management, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and the Social Security Administration. He has enlightened city and county governments, whole school systems, various state government departments, labor unions, several prestigious law firms, and the Archdiocese of Baltimore. His clients include "Fortune 500 Corporations, foreign governments, parastatals, associations, health and mental health systems," and he has been a consultant to offices of "The British Commonwealth of Nations" and "organizations in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Japan, Latin America...Singapore, Malaysia, and China." He has a very long list of academic clients, and he was a centerpiece of Johns Hopkins' 1999 freshman orientation.

What does Nichols believe? He believes that culture is genetically determined, and that blacks, Hispanics, and descendants of non-Jewish Middle-Eastern tribes place their "highest value" on "interpersonal relationships." In Africa, women are the equal of men. Whites were altered permanently by the Ice Age. They value objects highly, not people. That is why white men commit suicide so frequently when they are downsized.

Nichols calls his science of value systems "axiology," and he believes that if managers and administrators understand these cultural differences, they can manage more effectively, understanding why, according to him, blacks attach no importance to being on time, while whites are compulsive about it. Whites are logical; blacks are intuitive

and empathetic. Whites are frigid; blacks are warm and spontaneous. Whites are relentlessly acquisitive; nonwhites are in harmony with nature. White engineers, for example, care about their part of something; Asian engineers, managers should know, care about the whole. Whites are linear; nonwhites have a spiral conception of time. Nichols has a handout that he frequently uses. Whites, it explains, "know through counting and measuring"; Native Americans learn through "oneness"; Hispanics and Arabs "know through symbolic and imagery [sic]"; Asians "know through striving toward the transcendence [sic]." Asking nonwhites to act white in the workplace is fatal to organizational harmony. Understanding cultural axiology is essential to management for the 21st century. Now, reread his list of clients.

Two diversity training films widely used at major universities reveal the techniques and the characters of two other leading thought reformers. *Skin Deep*, the 1996 film funded by the Ford Foundation, records an encounter at a retreat between college students from around the country. The facilitators are not active in the film, but the published guide tells you what they do and identifies their leader as Hugh Vasquez.

Skin Deep begins with ominous news clips from the major networks about "racial violence," "racism," "slurs," and "racist jokes" on campus. It announces that "at these training grounds for our future leaders, intolerance has once again become a way of life." We meet white, Hispanic, black, and Asian-American students from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, the University of California at Berkeley, and Texas A&M. The whites have terrible stories to tell: They have grown up in white neighborhoods; their families have prejudices; and they feel rejected by people of color. The people of color have terrible stories to tell: They suffer frequent abuse in white America, and they are sick of it.

Neither group is typical of a college population. The whites, we gradually learn, have been members of organizations working for racial understanding. The students of color all use terms like "allies," suggesting that they've been through sessions like this before. There is a Jewish woman who objects to being thrown into the nightly "white caucus," where she doesn't really belong. She also anguishes over whether all of the things she has been told at the encounter about the Jewish role in the suffering of people of color are true. (Vasquez responds candidly to an inquiry on this, revealing that some of those allegations were outright anti-Semitic, and that the Jewish girl was looking for "allies" who would not "scapegoat" Jews.) In short, the

white students talk about the stereotypes they have learned, and the students of color reflect deeply on the cruelty of race in America.

When white students initially suggest that they personally did not do terrible things, the students of color fire back with both barrels. A first reply goes immediately to the heart of the matter: "One thing that you must definitely understand is that we're discussing how this country was founded, and because you are a white male, people are going to hate you." A black student explains, more patiently: "Things are going on *presently*: the IMF, presently; the World Bank, presently; NAFTA, presently; Time Warner, presently; the diamond factories, presently; reservations, presently; ghettos, presently; barrios, presently. Slavery still exists." (Diamond factories?) The Chicana, Judy, lets them know that "I will not stop being angry, and I will not be less angry or frustrated to accommodate anybody. You whites have to understand because we have been oppressed for 2,000 years. And if you take offense, so?" (Two thousand years?) And from Khanh, a bitter Vietnamese student: "White people need to hear that white people are very affected by internalized racism....As a person of color growing up in this society, I was taught to hate myself and I did hate myself. If you're a white person, you were taught to love yourself....If you don't know that you have shit in your head, you'll never deal with racism."

By the end, the students of color have had the grace to state that if the white students become real "allies," their victims can let go of their anger a bit. White students have come to realize that the pieties their parents taught them, such as an honest day's pay for an honest day's work, apply only to whites in America.

In short, what moves the film (and American thought reform) is a denial of individual identity and responsibility, an insistence on group victimization and rights, and the belief that America is an almost uniquely iniquitous place in the world, without opportunity, legal equality, or justice. "I want you to know," an Hispanic male explains, "that because of the system, my cousin was shot...and then another cousin was shot." The tribalism of the exploited Third World expresses a core truth: You are your blood and history. Let the children of the guilty denounce their parents. Let the victims stake their claims. Let the cultural revolution begin.

Vasquez is a frank and warm man by e-mail. He explains that the filmmaker never showed the facilitators because she wanted to focus solely on the students, but that "it took a great deal of planning and

structure and facilitation to make what happened happen." In his own mind, he was devoted to eliminating "blame, ridicule, judgements, guilt, and shame" among all of the students in the group, and he sounds sincere when he writes that his goal is to eliminate "individual and institutional mistreatment of any group or culture." But his effect, whatever his intention, is frightening, atavistic, and irrational, and his means are deeply intrusive.

Americans surely need to study, discuss, and debate, frankly, matters of race and ethnicity. Reasonable people disagree on profound questions. Some of the issues are empirical: Is aversion to difference acquired above all from culture or evolution? Should we be more startled by America's success in creating a nation of diverse backgrounds or by the difficulties it has in doing so?

Some of the issues are moral and political: Should we favor legal equality with differential outcomes or equality of outcomes even at the price of legal inequality? Are today's whites responsible for the crimes of 19th-century Southern slave owners? What are the benefits and costs of a society based on individual responsibility? These are not issues for indoctrination. Indeed, they do not even reflect everyone's chosen intellectual or moral agenda, and free individuals choose such agendas for themselves.

Vasquez's "Study Guide" for *Skin Deep* explains that the final goal of using the film in "colleges, high schools, corporations, and the workplace" is to produce "action strategies and... networks for working against racism," for which there is a page of strategy. The guide further explains the necessity of affirmative action, the "myths" of reverse discrimination and balkanization, and the reality of white privilege. It teaches the need for the privileged to become "allies" of the oppressed, and it focuses on the nightmare of "internalized oppression." The internalization of oppression manifests itself in "self-doubt...fear of one's own power; an urgent pull to assimilate; isolation from one's own group; self-blame for lack of success; [and] fighting over the smallest slice of the economic pie."

The guide also has a rare explicit endorsement of "political correctness," reminding facilitators that "language was a prime factor" in the murder of 6 million Jews, that language perpetuates racism, and that it is wrong to believe that "anything people say should be left alone simply because we all have the right to free speech....The challenges to political correctness tend to come from those who want to be able to say

anything without repercussions." (He did not have Khanh in mind.)

Skin Deep is a kid's cartoon, however, compared to Jane Elliott's *Blue Eyed*. Elliott has been lionized by the American media, including Oprah Winfrey, and she is widely employed by a growing number of universities. Disney plans to make a movie of her life.

Blue Eyed arose from Elliott's elementary school class in Riceville, Iowa, where, starting in 1968, she inflicted upon her dyslexic students an experience in which they were loathed or praised based upon their eye color. According to Elliott, she was ostracized for this experiment, her own children were beaten and abused, and her parents (who were racists, she informed a Dutch interviewer) were driven into isolation, bankruptcy, and despair because they had raised "a nigger lover" (one of her favorite terms).

In her modest explanation, once news of her exercise with the children made it onto national television, the people of Riceville feared that blacks across America would assume that everyone there was like Elliott and would move to their town. To punish her for that, they stopped buying from her father. Elliott also revealed to her Dutch interviewer that she abandoned teaching school in 1984 to devote herself full time to diversity education, for which she receives \$6,000 per day from "companies and governmental institutions."

In *Blue Eyed*, masochistic adults accept Elliott's two-and-a-half-hour exercise in sadism (reduced to 90 minutes of film), designed to make white people understand what it is to be "a person of color" in America. To achieve this, she divides her group into stupid, lazy, shiftless, incompetent, and psychologically brutalized "blue eyes," on the one hand, and clever and empowered "brown eyes," on the other. Some of the sadism is central to the "game," but much is gratuitous, and it continues after the exercise has ended.

Elliott is unbearably tendentious and ignorant. To teach what an IQ test truly is, she gives the brown eyes half of the answers to an impossible test before the blue eyes enter the room, explaining that, for people of color, the IQ exam is "a test about which you know absolutely nothing." IQ tests only measure "white culture." They are a means of "reinforcing our position of power," and "we do this all the time in public, private, and parochial schools," using "culturally biased tests, textbooks, and pictures on the wall...for white people." (Fortunately for Elliott, it

appears there were no Asian-Americans or psychometricians in her group.)

Elliott often describes the 1990s as if they were the 1920s; indeed, in her view, nothing has changed in America since the collapse of Reconstruction. Every day in the United States, she explains, white power keeps black males in their place by calling them "boy" (two syllables, hissed), "and we do it to accomplished black males over 70, and we get away with it." We tell blacks to assimilate, which means merely to "act white," but when they try that, we put them in their place and change the rules. For example (this in 1995), whites now are building up Colin Powell, but as soon as they build "this boy" up, they will kick him down. For Elliott, the Powell boom was a conscious conspiracy to humiliate and disorient blacks.

She teaches her "blueys" with relish that protest accomplishes nothing, because if blacks protest, "we kill them." It is not smart to speak up or act clever, which is why blacks appear passive and stupid. The lesson: "You have no power, absolutely no power. ...Quit trying." Blacks might try to "win" on the inside, but it is almost impossible to validate oneself when white society puts you down "all day, every day."

Even if a "bluey" understands the implications of the workshop, or even if a white woman understands male prejudice, it bears no real relationship to the daily suffering of every black: "You do not live in the same country as that [black] woman. You live in the USA, but you do not live in the same country as she does." Blacks such as Shelby Steele (singled out by name), who speak of transcending race, delude themselves, because one might transcend one's skin color but never society's behavior: "All you can do is sit there and take it." People call the exercise cruel, Elliott explains, but "I'm only doing this for one day to little white children. Society does this to children of color every day." She stands over briefly assertive "blueys" and humiliates them, explaining that if this makes you sick to your stomach for a few hours, now you understand why blacks die younger.

In short, this is America, and there truly is no hope. Nothing ever changes. No one can succeed by effort. Culture, society, and politics all are static. "White privilege" controls all agencies of power, influence, and image, and uses all the means that arise from these to render "people of color" psychologically impotent, confused, passive, and helpless. So either vent your hatred or assume your guilt.

There is no redemption except guilt, but there is a political moral. After "teaching" a "bluey" to submit totally to her authority, she asks if that was a good lesson. The workshop thinks it was. No, she says with venom, submission to tyranny is a terrible lesson, but "what I just did to him today Newt Gingrich is doing to you every day...and you are submitting to that, submitting to oppression."

The facilitators' guide and publicity for *Blue Eyed* states things honestly: Elliott "does not intellectualize highly emotionally charged or challenging topics...she uses participants' own emotions to make them feel discomfort, guilt, shame, embarrassment, and humiliation." Facilitators are urged to use the raw emotions of *Blue Eyed* (blueys do cry a lot) to tap the reactions of the viewers. They should not expect black participants to "bleed on the floor for whites," but they should get whites to "stretch" and "take risks." The facilitators should be prepared for very strong and painful emotions and memories from the participants. The ultimate goal of the film: "It is not enough for white people to stop abusing people of color. All U.S. people need a personal vision for ending racism and other oppressive ideologies within themselves."

Elliott does mean everyone. In 1996, she told her audience at Kansas State University that all whites are racists, whatever they believe about themselves: "If you want to see another racist, turn to the person on your right. Now look at the person on your left." She also believes that blacks were in America 600 years before whites. She told the students at Kansas State that if they were angry at her, they should write letters, but that they must do so without paper, alphabet, or numbers, all of which were invented by people of color. Whites, in Elliott's view, did have a certain creativity. Betraying a breathtaking ignorance of world history, she told the Australian Internet magazine *Webfronds* in 1998 that "white people invented racism." Other than that, however, whites were quite parasitic.

"You're all sitting here writing in a language [English] that white people didn't come up with," she told the magazine. "You're all sitting here writing on paper that white people didn't invent. Most of you are wearing clothes made out of cloth that white people didn't come up with. We stole those ideas from other people. If you're a Christian, you're believing in a philosophy that came to us from people of color."

Jane Elliott has lived through revolutionary cultural changes without

taking note of any. She teaches only helplessness and despair to blacks and only blood-guilt and self-contempt to whites. She addresses no issue with intellectual seriousness or purpose. She also is the reigning star in thought reform these days. On May 7, 1999, CBS News ran a feature on her that declared: "For over 30 years, Jane Elliott has waged a one-woman campaign against racism in America." CBS might want to rethink the notion of "racism."

Even traditionalist campuses now permit the ideologues in their offices of student life to pursue individuals into the last inner refuge of free men and women and to turn students over to trainers who want them to change "within themselves." This is a return of *in loco parentis*, with a power unimagined in prior ages by the poor souls who only tried to keep men and women from sleeping with each other overnight. It is the university standing not simply in the place of parents but in the place of private conscience, identity, and belief.

From the evidence, most students tune it out, just as most students at most times generally have tuned out abuses of power and diminutions of liberty. One should not take heart from that. Where students react, it is generally with an anger that, ironically and sadly, exacerbates the balkanization of our universities. The more social work we bring to our colleges and universities, the more segregated they become, and in the classifieds of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* during the last few years, colleges and universities by the hundreds have advertised for individuals to oversee "diversity education," "diversity training," and "sensitivity training."

Orwell may have been profoundly wrong about the totalitarian effects of high technology, but he understood full well how the authoritarians of this century had moved from the desire for outer control to the desire for inner control. He understood that the new age sought to overcome what, in Julia's terms, was the ultimate source of freedom for human beings: "They can't get inside you." Our colleges and universities hire trainers to "get inside" American students.

Thought reform is making its way inexorably to an office near you. If we let it occur at our universities and accept it passively in our own domains, then a people who defeated totalitarians abroad will surrender their dignity, privacy, and conscience to the totalitarians within.

Alan Charles Kors (akors@sas.upenn.edu) is a professor of history at

the University of Pennsylvania, co-author of [The Shadow University: The Betrayal of Liberty on America's Campuses](#) (HarperCollins), and president of FIRE, the [Foundation for Individual Rights in Education](#). He is indebted to Thor Halvorssen, executive director of FIRE, for the materials and interviews from the Nebraska conference.

([HIGHER EDUCATION](#))

