

Race relations report 1987

To: The Columbia Community

From: Robert E. Pollack, Dean, Columbia College

Subject: Report of the Columbia College Committee on Race Relations

A year ago I asked Professor of Political Science Charles Hamilton to chair a multiracial committee of faculty, deans, students and alumni to consider the matter of racism at Columbia College. Professor Hamilton and I knew the risks to us and to the institution such a request entailed. We knew the Committee would become a focus for the recording of discontents, and that information might be uncovered that might embarrass us. We both decided that if we were to hold back because of the risk of being embarrassed we would be running the worse risk of colluding in the persistence of injustice. We did not want to hear ourselves using the discredited rhetoric of "We're all happy here; it's just the outside agitators who are causing trouble." We agreed that we would take the risk to get the benefit of a complete airing of these problems. Professor Hamilton and his Committee met many times over the past year, always in confidential session. I was not present, nor did I learn of the conclusions of the contents of the Report until this week.

The Hamilton Committee's membership, and its Report to me, are attached to this letter. The Report makes fourteen specific recommendations to me. They are all clear, to the point, unambiguous and practical. I cannot recall any other report by a committee that speaks with such a clear, single voice. In its frankness, the Report demands a response from me, and I have decided to respond to it in the spirit it was written, directly and plainly:

Columbia College is supposed to be a place in which very bright, very ambitious young women and men learn how to think, how to argue, and how to be successful in their later years. We know that despite all laws, many of these young people come to us from racially exclusionary backgrounds. Ignorance of all but one of the many different cultures that make up this country and the world feeds and abets racism. In our country such ignorance is not racially symmetric. Americans of European origin can still reach college age without having learned much, if anything, about the cultures of their fellow Americans of Native American, African, Asian or Latin-American backgrounds, while Americans of these minority groups must learn about "white" America at the earliest age simply in order to survive. As a result of this asymmetric ignorance, most incidents of racial harassment on campus are directed against members of racial minorities.

Racism is the worst social disease in the United States. All American institutions are at constant risk of succumbing to it, of tolerating its injustice, of permitting its pain. Columbia College can and should be a place for 3200 young men and women to learn how to live and succeed in a multiracial America. Racism here slows us and confounds us in this task. If we fail, the nation loses its best future. In order to escape failure, we must be smart enough to admit the problem, and then to act as a College community proud of its multiracial character.

Each of the Hamilton Committee's recommendations to me, once implemented either by the College or by the University, would enhance the lives of people of all races, both in the College and in the University. Here is what I will do about each of them.

Recommendation 1:

I will ask the Committee on Instruction of the Columbia College Faculty to consider and approve the Statement of Behavior for publication in the Columbia College Bulletin, beginning with the Bulletin for

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1989-90 and thereafter. The statement should be part of the College's policies, that it should be distributed to all incoming students as soon as the Committee on Instruction and the Faculty of the College agree and that it should appear in our Admissions literature. I will ask the Council on Undergraduate Life to consider recommending this statement to the Deans of all the Schools at Columbia University, graduate as well as undergraduate.

Recommendation 2:

Pleased though I am with the Committee's endorsement of the College's new programs in African-American Studies and Womens Studies, and its new Major Cultures Requirement, I acknowledge that all of these initiatives will need careful nurturing if they are to thrive and become essential parts of the College. Curricular changes are adopted by vote of the Columbia College faculty. This semester the faculty will receive a Report on the Core Curriculum from a Committee chaired by Professor deBary. The deBary Committee already is considering how to include additional material from minority cultures in the Core courses. Any necessary budgetary decisions in the Arts and Sciences will be made by Vice President Cole in collaboration with the deans of the four Arts and Sciences schools. Vice President Cole has already begun a serious and concerted effort to engage the faculty of the 28 Arts and Sciences Departments in undergraduate teaching. I will bring to Vice President Cole and then Planning and Budget Committee of the Arts and Sciences the recommendation that the two new majors and the new requirement all be funded so that they may continue to grow in strength.

Recommendation 3:

Columbia University needs more minority and women faculty and administrators. The President, the Provost and the Vice President for Arts and Sciences all have said so in recent months, and the University has taken concrete steps to improve our recruiting. Programs linking Columbia faculty and students to neighboring universities and cultural institutions are important to the College. This year students taking Professor Foner's course in African American History will be able to do a directed research project at the world-famous Schomburg Library in Harlem. I will bring to the Planning and Budget Committee of the Arts and Sciences the recommendation that such programs be developed in larger numbers. Meanwhile the College will provide the funds to establish a program to bring minority individuals to campus in classroom and non-classroom activities. I will ask a small group of students, faculty and alumni to form a Board to oversee this program in the College, and to consider the utility and practicality of linking this program to an Intercultural Center (Recommendation 9).

Recommendation 4:

Orientation of freshman has become a collaborative event involving hundreds of volunteers from Barnard and SEAS as well as Columbia College. It would be difficult and I think unnecessary for the College to set up programs of racial awareness just for Columbia College students. Last semester the Council on Undergraduate Life concluded that Orientation would benefit from even more interconnection among the three undergraduate residential schools, and that parts might well be extended to incoming General Studies students as well. I will form a subcommittee of the Council to meet with Charles Price and the Orientation Organizing Committee to consider how best to implement a component of the Orientation devoted to the understanding and appreciation of differences in cultures.

Recommendation 5:

As the Report notes, the University Athletic Office does not report to the Dean of the College. It is awkward to comment on the recommendation that the Athletic Office be made in any way accountable to the Dean of the College. The primacy of academics over athletics is accepted by the Athletic Office, although it is periodically necessary to remind coaches that their players are students first and last, and that student-athletes, like all our students, are welcome to the services of their academic advisors and of the Office of the Dean of Students. I endorse the recommendation that minority coaches and staff be actively

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recruited by the Athletic Department. I expect that the University Advisory Committee on Athletics will consider all aspects of Recommendation 5 at one of its meetings this semester.

Recommendation 6:

Staff training sessions in racial awareness have been shown to be effective in changing behavior and in bringing to the surface unacknowledged prejudices. I believe that we all can benefit from such sessions. In order to be effective, though, they should encompass the entire staff of the University. I will recommend to the Administrative Services Committee and its chairman, Senior Vice President Joseph Mullinix, that Staff Training be made available as soon as possible to both campuses of the University.

Recommendation 7:

The Recommendation for more resources for the Office of Financial Aid in the College is an easy one to accept. Director Deborah Doane and I know all too well how crowded we are, and how little staff time we can make available for the necessary counseling of students and their parents. Nevertheless we already see our mission as counseling as well as "packaging". We have just hired another Assistant Director of Financial Aid in order to be able to serve our students better. The Columbia University Center for Computing Activities (CUCCA) has accepted responsibility for upgrading the software that serves the Offices of Admissions and Financial Aid for both the College and the undergraduate division of SEAS. These improvements should begin to be apparent this semester. In Columbia College, financial aid policy, like admissions policy, is determined by the Faculty of Columbia College. The great magnanimity of John Kluge C'32 has just enabled us to offer a package to some underrepresented minority students that contains a reduced loan/work component and a higher cash grant than average. In this, we are competitive with all the other Ivies. Our policies are also competitive with the other most selective colleges in the country except in one regard. Some of the best non-Ivy colleges will offer a minority applicant a race-based extra increment of money above the calculation of need, and we do not. I do not believe we should, but I will bring this issue to the Admissions and Financial Aid committee of the college faculty. The Kluge Program's progress and success should be specifically monitored as part of a general monitoring of race relations in the College (Recommendation 14).

Recommendation 8:

Either community service benefits both the donor and the recipient, or it benefits neither. DDC, Earl Hall, Ferris Booth, fraternities, sororities and the athletic teams have all been fertile ground for the flowering of community activity and community service at Columbia. Here, as in the recommendation on Orientation, it does not seem to me sensible to segregate College students from the rest of the University's student body. I will ask the Council on Undergraduate life to consider and discuss each of the specific recommendations under the rubric of Community Relations, and I will hope that my fellow Deans and I will find a way to bring these recommendations to pass for all our students. Meanwhile I can and will respond positively to the two specifics that apply solely to the College. I will ask the Dean of Students and the President of the College Student Council to recommend persons to serve on a new Columbia College Student Volunteers Board; ideally the other undergraduate colleges on campus will soon have such boards as well. At Commencement in May 1989 both the award and the cash prize suggested in this recommendation will be awarded to appropriate Columbia College students.

Recommendation 9:

The need for an Intercultural Center has been apparent for too many years. This semester the need will be met. Assistant Dean of Students William Wiggins will be responsible for identifying suitable and viable space, and for assuring that the Center serves the purposes described in this Recommendation. The Vice President of Arts and Sciences has already allocated some of the funds for operations of the Center. The Center is a priority item, and we will somehow find the money to keep it going once we open it.

Recommendation 10:

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With the added resources of the Kluge Program, Columbia College should be able to continue to be the most racially diverse of the Ivies. I will ask the Committee on Admissions and Financial Aid to study the current relationships among Double Discovery Center, the Opportunity Programs (HEOP for New York students and NOP for students from the rest of the country) and the Office of Admissions of the College.

Recommendation 11:

The Coalition Acting for Racial Awareness is an important, new, University-wide student organization. The College will support its share of CARA's costs as long as CARA continues to serve the Columbia community in its unique hands-on way. Plans for its expansion should be shared with the Deans of all the schools whose students are expected to participate in new programs.

Recommendation 12:

All students should have the opportunity to join all fraternities and sororities regardless of race. The Interfraternity Council can speak for the fraternities and sororities whose members are largely -- but not entirely -- drawn from the College's student body. I will ask the IFC to work with Charles Price, Diane Caruso and other Administrators to report to me on whether this policy of simple equity holds sway for all our fraternities and sororities. Where it does not now apply, it should and it will.

Recommendation 13:

The Committee is quite right to be concerned that the College and the University provide the incremental funds to support any new programs developed in response to these recommendations. Otherwise, we will appear to be moving forward as we move backward, a situation even less satisfactory than simply standing pat. No matter how they are packaged, incremental funds can only come only from gifts or tuition. Fortunately the sums required to implement these recommendations are not vast. I expect that the Report will make it somewhat easier for the necessary funds to be found, but the process will never be an easy one given the enormous cost of College and the many competing priorities for tuition and gift dollars. The College will do its best here.

Recommendation 14:

The Hamilton Committee Report is a valuable document. It has focused attention on some much-needed reforms in the College, and has clearly elaborated on the necessity of the College to join with the University as a whole to collaborate in some of these reforms. In replying to the report as a whole, I bring the Hamilton Committee's work to an end. In order not to lose the momentum of the group, I will ask members to help me to choose a small group to report to me next September on our progress in meeting these recommendations, the Kluge Program's progress, the relationship of DDC to the College and the University, and such other matters of racial equity in the College as may be deemed important at the time.