

Transforming African and African-American Sociopolitical and Educational Realities: Possibilities Or Pipe Dreams?

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Apartheid No More. Reitumetse Obakeng Mabokela and Kimberly Lenease King, eds. Westport, Connecticut: Bergin & Garvey, 2001. 173 pp.

When Race Becomes Real. Bernestine Singley, ed. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2002. 335 pp.

Education in a Globalized World: The Connectivity of Economic Power, Technology, and Knowledge. Nelly P. Stromquist. Lanham, Md: Roman & Littlefield, 2002. 240 pp.

During recent periods the African continent has been visible on the American radar screen via the media presentations of President George W. Bush's trip to the continent, the allocation of \$15 billion for the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the alleged and later proven false reports of Iraq's plans to purchase uranium from Niger, and unfortunately, the bloody civil conflicts in Congo, Liberia, Burundi, and Rwanda. Simultaneously, in the United States African immigrants and African-Americans are debating means to influence American corporate and foreign policy toward Africa. The media presentations and the discussions among groups highlight issues for debate within the scholarly and public policy communities regarding some fundamental phenomena affecting Africa and African-Americans *and* the positing of salient sociopolitical and educational policies to address the challenges.

In the three volumes by Mabokela and King, Singley, and Stromquist, we can comprehend the interconnectivity among individual, institutional, and global challenges as altered and/or new factors manifest themselves in contemporary milieus. The volumes provide foundations for exploring poignant questions: Although universities in the new South Africa have become open to all students, what are the subtle means that impede the progress of African students and faculty? How do national financial resource allocations alter the effectiveness of social and educational institutions when the machinations of political realities continually appear? Does the effect of racism in America lessen or increase the ability of African-Americans and European-Americans to fully comprehend ethnic and racial conflicts on the African continent? To what extent do the pervasive effects of globalization and its various manifestations necessitate that we posit new models to examine on-going and emerging problems of economic power, technology, and new knowledge? In essence, can meaningful sociopolitical and institutional transformations occur so that the individual and collective lives of people will be enhanced?

Too often there is a tendency among sophisticated lay audiences to view education as merely teacher education and pedagogy. Mabokela's and King's volume, *Apartheid No More*, quickly moves beyond that perspective and instead attempts to portray the nexus between the elimination of political apartheid in South Africa and Namibia *and* apartheid's extant remnants in universities. In *Apartheid No More*, scholars representing the fields of sociology, intercultural studies, history, philosophy, and educational policy studies and higher education explicate and analyze the post-1948 elections that were pivotal in

enacting several repressive laws of apartheid.¹ The contributors to the volume examine these laws in the light of the laws and measures of the 1990s and beyond which were designed to eliminate apartheid. All chapters in the volume maintain that sociopolitical and economic forces are integrally linked to educational policies and programs, the psychological reactions of university students in intergroup and interracial relations, and subtle lingering measures that prevent the recruitment and retention of black African faculty.

The authors examine the necessity for and means of structural and policy transformation by discussing the historically marginalized positions of black universities which was comparable to the peripheral positions of other societal institutions such as hospitals, social welfare agencies, and labor organizations. Although whites comprised well under 30% of the population, ten historically white universities were created between 1829 and the 1960s compared to only five for black, colored, and Indian students.

Sociocultural and linguistic features were visible in six of the Afrikaans-language universities and four of the English-medium sites. Similar divisions existed for Indians (University of Durban, Westville), University of Western Cape (for Colored students), University of North (for Sotho-Venda-Tsongan-speaking individuals), the University of Zululand (for Zulu-speakers), and the University of Fort Hare (the oldest Black university designed for Xhosa-speaking Africans). Historical sociolinguistic divisions or cleavages were used to separate groups which lessened the possibilities for creating inter-group solidarity. The languages of instruction, the social studies curriculum, and the composition of the faculty also limited cross-cultural interactions. The Extension of University Act (1959), in some regards, had a similar effect at the university level as the Bantu Education Act had had for primary and secondary education. Both established and/or further solidified postsecondary education along ethnic lines. The nexus between sociopolitical and public educational policies, thus again, becomes evident. Due to politically-charged enactments by the South African Parliament, the segregated universities provided only substandard instruction.

Prior to the 1990s, the national government established and then justified differential university funding formulas based upon the number of student matriculants, the percentage of students who were successful in their academic studies (certainly influenced by their level of preparation in segregated secondary institutions), enrollments in scientific fields in contrast to the humanities, and graduate student enrollment. Hence, as Mabokela and King portray, the University of Cape Town (an English-medium white site) garnered 71% of its budget from the government compared to 46% by the University of the Western Cape (an English-speaking Colored university situated in the same metropolitan area). The repercussions of these policies are discussed in case studies, which highlight inadequate infrastructures, different academic credentials for white, black, Colored, and Indian faculty, and limited instructional and curricular material.

The case studies in *Apartheid No More* also discuss contemporary issues that have emerged since the early 1990s with the advent of democratic government. Anne Austin, for example, in her chapter “Transformation through Negotiation,” discusses the University of Port Elizabeth Strategic Master Plan, which stated that “negotiated transformation is a process in which the systemic features of the institutions are modified...which include structural, cultural, and interactional dimensions,” (pp. 5-7). Equally important for universities are the cultural transformations, which refer to the ideals, ideologies, knowledge, and values for the university and their transmission to graduates who, in turn, can effect transformations in their careers *and* in provincial and national policymaking.

Doria Daniel’s chapter, “Crossing the Divide: Black Academics at the Rand Afrikaans University” discusses transformation in terms of reorientation of individuals and groups. Rodney K. Hopson’s chapter, “Higher Education Transformation in Namibia” offers insight on the impediments to

transforming the nature of higher education due to the lingering roles of “of cultural hegemony [as] the process where ruling classes are able to exert general predominance over subordinate classes,” (pp. 124-125). Collectively, the constructs offered by Austin, Daniel, and Hopson provide perspectives of transformation after apartheid. The challenging task then becomes one of combining the various elements of transformation into concrete policies and programs that reflect the new post-apartheid constitutional provisions. The new South African constitution stipulates non-racial and non-sexist conditions and requires affirmative action. The question remains: How will postsecondary institutions implement such comprehensive transformation?

Mabokela’s chapter, “Selective Inclusion” portrays how faculty at the University of Stellenbosch struggle with language since Afrikaans is not adequately understood by many blacks to enable them to participate fully in university life. In essence, a transformation in language policy is necessary to incorporate non-racial policies in universities. In “Oh Sorry, I’m a Racist: Black Student Experiences at the University of Witwatersrand,” Rochelle Woods describes how sometimes the questions of black students are dismissed or ridiculed by white faculty, how white students avoid blacks outside formal classroom interactions, and how perceptions exist that white students (and some faculty) are afraid or feel intimidated by blacks. In one instance, a white male student sent an e-mail to a student asking her if she would like to talk. The woman student replied that she is black whereupon the white male replied, “Oh, sorry, I’m a racist,” (p. 101). Such interpersonal attitudes portray blacks in transformational processes.

Professionals and faculty at the postsecondary level are aware of government and university plans to initiate affirmative action so that more blacks and women will be represented in the faculty and professional ranks. Identifying promising undergraduate and graduate students and young faculty is one method of “growing one’s own” to join the professional ranks. However, Daniels points out that when such promising blacks or women join the professional cadre, many report that white faculty still believe they were appointed simply because of affirmative action and not because of their academic qualifications and experiences. Several chapters conclude that limited progress is being made in the transformation process due to such individual attitudes. However, there is irony at play because many historically white institutions now have a majority black student body which itself is a major indicator of positive social and educational transformation.

While Mabokela’s and King’s volume contained a few chapters concentrating on individual experiences with and perceptions of racism, Bernestine Singley has assembled an impressive array of scholars and professionals ranging from a twelve-year old to an eighty-year old former executive editor of the *USA Today* newspaper. The twenty plus essays is comparable to reading a biography or novel. *When Race Becomes Real* articulates the many manifestations of racism in the United States in range of disciplines (including communication and journalism, economics, engineering, sociology, psychology, history, and literature). The essays are organized into three main sections: Genesis, Fear and Longing, and Exodus.

Within the Genesis section, world-renowned journalists, Leonard Pitts, Jr., John Seigenthaler, Sr., and Jim Schutze write from their personal and professional perspectives. In an appropriately titled essay, Pitts argues that it is the constant forms of racism that makes blacks and other American minorities “Crazy Sometimes.” Jim Schutze explains how, as a European-American six-year old, he burglarized the church collection boxes along with African-American first-graders. His misadventures, however, were viewed vastly different from his African-American peers who were sanctioned. John Seigenthaler, Sr. recounts his early life in the American south during the first third of the 20th century. He recalls how laws, customs, and white preference meant that his hometown was racially partitioned just like South Africa.

How journalists and other professionals move beyond the experiences of what Woods refers to as “everyday racism,” in the Mabokela and King volume, is the constant challenge.

Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient and child psychiatrist, Robert Coles, recalls his first conscious remembrances of racism as a six-year old in the Boston metropolitan area. Additional chapters in the Genesis section portray how African-American and white teenagers struggle with racism in their personal lives. In some instances, it is not vastly different from thoughts voiced by South African university students. “Talking White,” written by Kimberly Springer narrates how other African American youth and even her father sometimes ridicule her for “talking white,” as if she were relinquishing some of her cultural and psychological identity to succeed. From another perspective, Lucy Gibson, in “It all Started with My Parents” describes her extreme discomfort as her father continually voiced derogatory comments toward African-Americans and sometimes women. In essence, while individual psychological proclivity may have existed, structural sociopolitical conditions reinforced her father’s individual perceptions and actions. In all the essays within the Genesis section, we observe the constant interplay between individual perspectives and sociocultural structures, laws, and norms.

In the Fear and Longing section, some of the essays are written by academicians and scholars who encounter racism within the halls of Ivy League institutions, on the lecture circuit, and within various social institutions. For example, in “To Make Them Stand in Fear,” historian David Bradley examines lynchings in the 1800s and first half of the 1900s and raises the penetrating question of whether lynchings still occur today. A lynching, according to Bradley, is a murder committed by a conspiracy of private citizens, with malice and expectations of impunity. Bradley maintains that lynching is a form of terrorism to instill fear and intimidation in blacks so they would not compete with European Americans in economic, social, or political spheres. Notably, he asserts that while the violent lynchings of a century ago are not often observable (a notable exception was the brutal vehicular dragging and dismemberment of an African American man in Jasper, Texas in 1998), newer forms of intimidation are occurring. Contemporary racial profiling, not uncommon for African-American and other minorities, often leads to use of unnecessary physical force and arrests by police.

In Singley’s final section titled Exodus, essays by Beverly Daniel Tatum, Noel Ignatiev, and Michael Patrick MacDonald warrant attention as they address “white privilege” and civil rights in Boston, Ireland, and South Africa. Tatum and Ignatiev’s essays explicate the social construction of white privilege. Individuals of primarily European descent have particular rights, liberties, and entitlements based upon their physical appearance of being white. As psychologist Tatum observes in “Choosing to Be Black – The Ultimate White Privilege?” often ongoing sociocultural life means that European-Americans do not have to think about their being white and the benefits it accrues. While social class may be salient factors for European-Americans in the United States, there are privileges (regardless of social strata)– based upon being visibly white --such as not being the victims of racial profiling, or assumptions that a student selection is based on merit. Such conditions are not generic to African-Americans. Subsequently, Ignatiev’s “One Summer Evening” recounts why and how he began publishing *Race Traitor*, a journal premised upon the idea that “treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity,” (295). The overarching goal of the journal is to help society understand that the white race is a peculiar social formation and continues based upon ongoing conformity to social institutions and behavior patterns that perpetuate white privileges.

In an intriguing essay, “All Souls: Civil Rights from Southie to Soweto and Back,” MacDonald discusses his impoverished white background in South Boston where 85% of the residents were welfare recipients and 73% were headed by single women. Despite their disadvantaged backgrounds, these residents were the most resistant to school integration via busing in the 1970s and 1980s. As an adult,

MacDonald traveled to Northern Ireland, where he was exposed to an area known as Soweto because the residents maintained that they were treated like blacks in Soweto, South Africa.

The final book in this review, Nelly P. Stromquist's volume, *Education in a Globalized World: The Connectivity of Economic Power, Technology, and Knowledge*, delineates revised sociopolitical and economic paradigms for comprehending global phenomena especially as they affect minorities in the United States and people of Africa and other developing nations. A senior professor of international development, Stromquist seeks to move beyond existing paradigms associated with dependency, neocolonialism, and post-modern theories. The volume begins with the premise that globalization compels a multidisciplinary examination.

To elaborate on the effects of globalization, Stromquist cites economic statistics from the United States and other settings affected by an international labor market where each year about 500,000 Americans are displaced by imports and about one-third of these will be re-employed with no substantial decrease in lifetime earning. About 33% will experience severe reductions. However, labor conditions and compensation in developing nations means meager existence, including malnourishment, in the very countries, which export goods to the United States and other North or developed nations. Further income distribution levels are widening, rather than narrowing, with increased globalization. So, ratio discrepancies between developed and developing nations rose from 30 to one in 1960, 60 to one in the early 1990s, and then 71 to one by the late 1990s.

Globalization is a multidimensional and multilevel phenomenon initiated by industrialized countries and pursued via formal and informal structures. Stromquist further posits that the G-8 countries have set in motion and sustain economic conditions (including international trade, labor, and intellectual property rights) that affect all sectors of individual societies and international relations. Furthermore, the influences or roles of transnational corporations (TNCs) and the media are critical to the process. The media, according to Stromquist, convey messages and symbols about business products and commodities that promote economic exchanges. She explains how the interactive effect of TNCs and the media are perpetuating "new knowledge" which is created by collaborations between TNCs and universities. The new knowledge is usually not developed in emerging nations of Africa and elsewhere. Indeed, the dissolution or eradication of indigenous knowledge common to African ethnic groups prevents the maintenance of their positive sociocultural practices and modes of learning. Simultaneously, in developed countries, knowledge creation (in a range of fields) is protected by western intellectual property law. To what extent should knowledge production and intellectual property be available to all, and under what conditions, with new forms of dissemination via the internet and other technological modes? After all, if indigenous knowledge is dissolved and African universities are not integrally involved in the intellectual property equation, then African citizens are not equal beneficiaries of globalization.

Herein lies the crux of Stromquist's arguments regarding globalization: there is a convergence, rather than a divergence, of economic, sociocultural, political, and educational accruals to northern nations. Even when there are some benefits for developing nations, it is usually to select societal sectors and in most cases, globalization has deleterious effects on minorities including African-Americans. For example, when technological positions are transferred overseas —instead of preparing black and Hispanic Americans for such positions—they are often transferred to select Asian nations and are acquired by individuals who have spent time or undertaken training in western nations (Auchard, 2003).

Identifying the means to transform these structural economic and sociocultural conditions within developed nations so that globalization reaps benefits for all, especially in African and developing nations is a daunting endeavor. For Stromquist, non-government organizations (NGOs) can lead the resistance to the status quo. Although they vary in their altruistic goals, Stromquist maintains that the majority of NGOs pursue the public's good by seeking the social inclusion of marginalized people and drawing

attention to harmful market patterns and government structural policies which are not beneficial. In her final analysis, she suggests that resistance to adverse effects of globalization (such as labor displacement, low salaries, mean work conditions, and environmental degradation) must take into account the interconnected components of economic power, technology, and new knowledge. In addition, individuals, labor unions, women's organizations, university students and faculty, and the United Nations should buttress resistance.

Together, the three volumes provide a comprehensive framework for reshaping the future. The three books advocate the alteration or creation of intellectual and disciplinary paradigms that can help professionals in the social sciences, humanities, technology, and sciences address pressing global and domestic issues, so that alternative sociopolitical, cultural and educational policies are posited and implemented. As this successfully occurs, various public educational and social entities will benefit.

In conclusion, we should note the salient piece by the late Nobel Laureate Dr. Ralph J. Bunche, who, over 60 sixty years ago, maintained that universities are part of the public good and must prepare students and faculty to address concrete problems and pose solutions.² In conjunction with other active groups and organizations, universities can create multidisciplinary intellectual knowledge that can assist in promoting positive sociopolitical and cultural transformation.

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NOTES

1. Notable among such laws are the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949); the Population Registration Act (1950) requiring a pass which limited physical mobility; the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act (1950) obligating specific residential locales for the races; and the Bantu Education Act (1953) which restricted the types and levels of educational access and attainment. Hence the rights of Black and Colored people were severely curtailed by solidifying public and educational policies of apartheid throughout South Africa and the former South West Africa, now Namibia.

2. Bunche, 1940.

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