SHANTYTOWN at COLUMBIA: BUILDING STRUCTURES for a NON-RACIAL SOCIETY IN SOUTH AFRICA, IN OUR COMMUNITIES & AT COLUMBIA

Promoting or tolerating racism: COLUMBIA'S ROLE

RACISM AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

For all of its talking about Affirmative Action in the 1970's, today Columbia has little to show regarding programs of concern to black students. Despite its billion dollar endowment, Columbia deemed it necessary to arbitrarily and abruptly shut down the Graduate School of Architecture & Planning's Office of Minority Affairs. The Teachers College Office of Minority Affairs may face a similar fate. Despite its abundant resources, at Columbia there is no black studies program, let alone department. Inadequate amounts of money are allocated for the recruitment and retention of black students (this despite the fact that Columbia is located in a city full of academically talented black youth). In addition, Columbia is absolutely uncommitted to bolstering the dismal number of black faculty—who number five out of a few thousand faculty members.

That Columbia has few black students, almost no black faculty and no Third World Culture Center, speaks clearly to the black student of how his or her existence is consistently denied. Indeed, Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man has materialized at the university.

Linking the failure of Columbia to speedily cut its economic ties to South Africa to the failure of Columbia to meet its black student needs is essential. Neither of these issues are going to be given high priority among the Trustees who are predominantly white, upper-middle class men, most of whom are inexorably tied to those corporations buttressing apartheid today, and some of whom belong to all-white country clubs. According to the provost of the university, a black studies program is not as intellectual as Columbia's already established eurocentric curriculum. Throughout Columbia's consistent refusals to implement a black studies program and their subsequent attempts to justify their decisions, black students are reminded of the South African bantu education which teaches blacks that they are inferior and not as intellectually capable as their white student counterparts. Constantly drawing upon these inferences reminds black students that an atmosphere is created and perpetuated at Columbia where discrimination is selectively practiced and/or tolerated.

What do these facts teach us about Columbia? They tell us that there was a time in this country where it was costly to a university's image and its financial and social stability to tolerate discrimination. Today, with the incentives and public pressure gone, Columbia is no longer committed to recruitment and retention of black students. Unfortunately, there seems to be no ethical principles which are wrought in stone concerning discrimination. If the zeitgeist is such that anti-racist vigilance is no longer required, Columbia seems content to be caught up in that spirit.

Institutional racism at Columbia is not just confined to an immoral investment policy supporting apartheid in South Africa, an employment policy that oppresses minority and women workers, and a housing policy that calls for expansion into Black and Hispanic communities. Racism also permeates the very way Columbia carries out its "educational" function.