

As Nigger...

their egos are strong enough, they cheat a lot. And, of course, even the Toms are angry down deep somewhere. But it comes out in passive rather than active aggression. They're unexplainable thick-witted and subject to frequent spells of laziness. They misread simple questions. They spend their nights mechanically outlining history chapters while meticulously failing to comprehend a word of what's in them.

The saddest case among both black slaves and student slaves are the ones who have so thoroughly introjected their masters' values that their anger is all turned inward. At Cal State, these are kids for whom every low grade is torture, who stammer and shake when they speak to a professor, who go through an emotional crisis every time they're called on in class. You can recognize them easily at finals time. Their faces are pasted with fresh pimples; their bowels boil audibly across the room. If there really was a Last Judgement, the parents and teachers who created these wrecks would burn in hell.

So students are niggers. It's time to find out why, and to do this, we have to take a long look at Mr. Charlie.

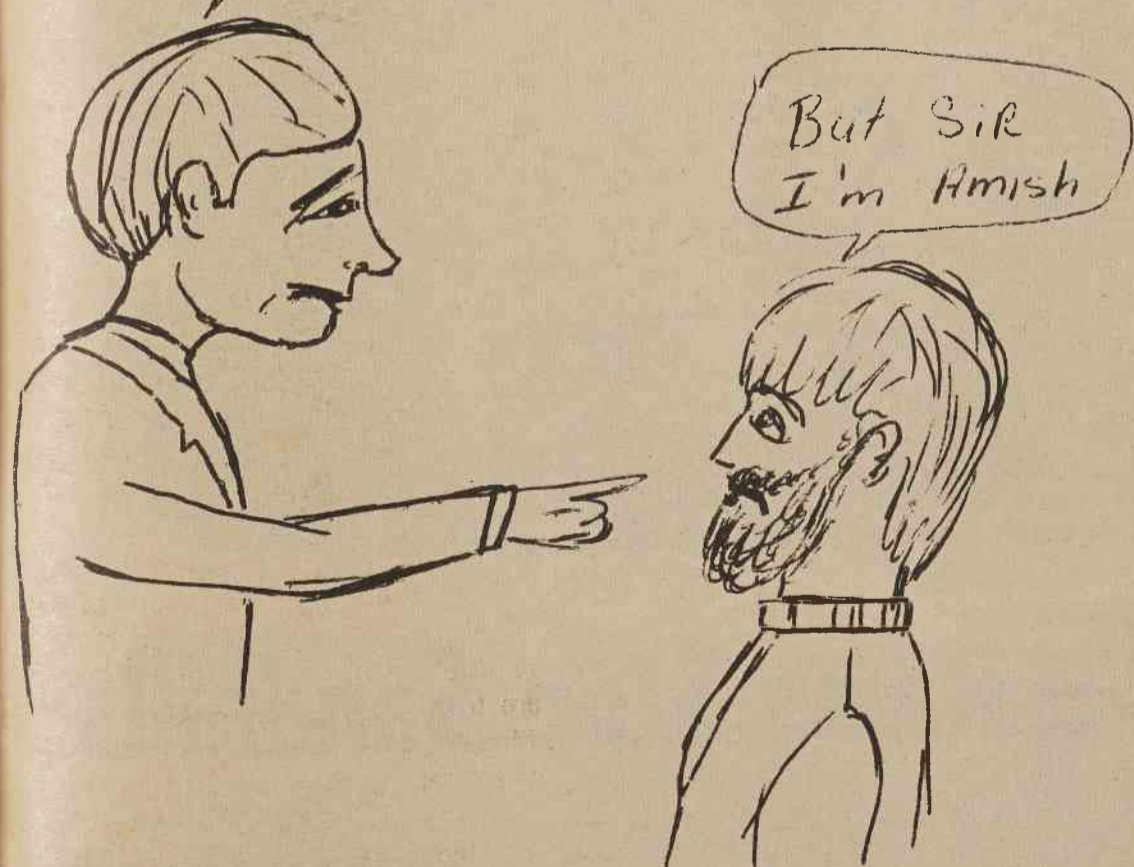
Professors afraid to better status?

The teachers I know best are college professors. Outside the classroom and taken as a group, their most striking characteristic is timidity. They're short on (Bleep! Bleep!). Just look at their working conditions. At a time when even migrant workers have begun to fight and win, college professors are afraid to make more than a token effort to improve on their pitiful economic status. In California state colleges, the faculties are (Bleep) regularly and vigorously by the Governor and Legislature and yet they still don't offer any solid resistance. They lie flat on their stomachs with their pants down, mumbling catch-phrases like "professional dignity" and "meaningful dialogue."

Professors were no different when I was an undergraduate at UCLA during the McCarthy era; it was like a cattle stampede as they rushed to cop out. And in more recent years, I found that my being arrested in sit-ins brought from my colleagues not so much approval or condemnation as open-mouthed astonishment. "You could lose your job!"

Now of course there's the Vietnamese war. It gets some opposition from a few

O. K. Kid you're in my class now. Before you enter this classroom again that beard had better be gone and your hair had better be short. I don't care how smart you are you're in my kingdom now.



rigid like a cop's gun, but in the long run it's more powerful. At your personal whim—any time you choose—you can keep 35 students up for nights and have the pleasure of seeing them walk into the classroom pasty faced and red-eyed carrying a sheaf of typewritten pages, with title page, MLA footnotes, and margins set at 15 and 91.

Fear of students

The general timidity which causes teachers to make niggers of their students usually includes a more specific fear—fear of the students themselves. After all, students are different just like black people. You stand exposed in front of them, knowing that their interests, their values, and their language are different from yours. To make matters worse, you may suspect that you yourself are not the most engaging of



persons. What can protect you from their ridicule and scorn? Respect and Authority. That's what. It's the policeman's gun again. The white bwana's pith helmet. So you flaunt your authority. You wither whispers with a murderous glance. You crush objectors with erudition and heavy irony. And worst of all, you make your own attainments seem not accessible but awesomely remote. You conceal your massive ignorance—and parade a slender learning.

You might also want to keep in mind that he was a nigger once himself and has never really gotten over it. And there are more causes, some of which are better described in sociological than psychological terms. Work them out, it's not hard. But in the meantime, what we've got on our hands is a whole lot of niggers. And what makes this particularly grim is that the student has less chance than the black man of getting out of his bag. Because the student doesn't even know he's in it. That, more or less, is what's happening in higher education. And the results are staggering.

For one thing, damn little education takes place in the schools. How could it? You can't educate slaves; you can only train them. Or, to use an even uglier word, you can only program them.

Educational oppression is trickier to fight than racial oppression. If you're a black rebel, they can't exile you; they either have to intimidate you or kill you. But in high school or college, they can just bounce you out of the field. And they do. Rebel students and renegade faculty members get smothered or shot down with devastating accuracy. In high school, it's usually the student who gets in; in college, it's more often the teacher. Others get tired of fighting college, for a rebel, is a little like going North, for a Negro. You can't really get away from it so you might as well stay and raise hell.

How do you raise hell? That's a whole other article. But just for a start, why not stay with the analogy? What have black people done? They have, first of all, faced the fact of their slavery. They've stopped kidding themselves about an eventual reward in the Great Watermelon Patch in the Sky. They've organized; they've decided to get freedom now, and they've started taking it.

Students, like black people, have immense power. They could, theoretically, insist on participating in their own education. They could make academic freedom bilateral. They could teach their teachers to thrive on love and admiration, rather than fear and respect, and to lay down their weapons. Students could discover community. And they could learn to dance on the IBM cards. They could make museum. They could raze one set of walls after another and let life come blowing into the classroom. They could raze another set of walls and let education come blowing out and flood the streets. They could turn the classroom into where it's at—a "field of action" as Peter Marin describes it. And believe it or not, they could study eagerly and learn prodigiously for the best of all possible reasons—their own reasons.

They could. Theoretically. They have the power. But only in a very few places, like Berkeley, have they even begun to think about using it.

teachers. Some support it. But a vast number of professors who know perfectly well what's happening are copping out again. And in the high schools, you can forget it. Stillness reigns.

I'm not sure why teachers are so chickenshit. It could be that academic training itself forces a split between thought and action. It might also be that the tenured security of a teaching job attracts timid persons and, furthermore, that teaching, like police work, pulls in persons who are unsure of themselves and need weapons and other external trappings of authority.

At any rate, teachers ARE short on (Bleep! Bleep!). And, as Judy Eisenstein has eloquently pointed out, the classroom offers an artificial and protected environment in which they can exercise their will to power. Your neighbors may drive a better car; gas station attendants may intimidate you; your wife may dominate you; the State Legislature may shit on you; but in the classroom, by God, students do what you say—or else. The grade is a hell of a weapon. It may not rest on your hip, potent and

*The bleeps were inserted so as not to overly offend the readers.