

Students Demand Representation and Respect

Connerly Beats Dead Horse, Mohs Carries Water, Bradley Foundation Foots Bill

By Matt Nelson and Carlo Albano

“Let us not put ointment on the wound of race, let us cut it out of the body politic like the cancer that it is.” - Ward Connerly.

“[Racial] preferences need to be challenged nationally, and I believe you are the man to do it.” – Thomas Rhodes, Chair of the Bradley Foundation Board to Ward Connerly.

Wisconsin has reached a critical juncture that will determine the make up and focus of the State’s 26 public colleges and universities. And, once again, Ward Connerly has been called to Wisconsin to revive the Right-wing’s failing efforts to enhance discrimination and intensify racial injustice in Higher Education. Will the State forge inclusive, diverse, and democratic institutions, or will Wisconsin demonize, demean, and privatize our public institutions rolling back the gains made by the Civil Rights Movement?

A meeting on Affirmative Action at the Wisconsin State Legislature on Tuesday, December 19 features Connerly and Frederick Mohs as they seek to guide the State’s policy regarding Affirmative Action programs in Higher Education. Led by an alliance of students of color, Wisconsinites have united across the State in support of access and equal opportunity in Higher Education.

Students and faculty understand that the points raised by Ward Connerly mirror sentiments expressed by Ex-Regent Fredrich Mohs in his attempts to destroy Affirmative Action. In reality, faculty, students, and staff voted overwhelmingly to do more, not less, to increase the presence of women and people of color in all of the UW System colleges and universities. This is highlighted by the recent vote of the UW-Milwaukee Faculty Senate to continue its support of the consideration of race and ethnicity as factors in admission. Nevertheless, these Bradley Foundation Right Wing operatives refuse to respect our decision.

The image of Jim Crow returning to Wisconsin necessitates a response to Connerly and Mohs’s heavily-funded misinformation campaign. First, who are Ward Connerly (aka Uncle Ruckus) and Ex-Regent Mohs?

Connerly became a spokesperson for “colorblindness” when he, himself, was a college student. During this time he stated, “Reveling in Blackness- black is beautiful, black power, black consciousness- just creates an invisible wall of difference that sets us apart.”

In 1993, Connerly, now an appointed member of the Board of Regents for the state of California university system, moved directly into politics with the

establishment of his Civil Rights Institution. Ironically as the name itself, this institution was founded on the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. His outfit, armed with funding from the Bradley Foundation and supported by Washington Neo-cons, soon led a head-on attack on Affirmative Action.

In 1993, Proposition 209 and Proposition 54 were written into the California ballot. These propositions effectively dismantled the use of Affirmative Action in any student admission or faculty and staff hiring decision, and discarded both racial discrimination claims and any research geared towards improving the equality between the socioeconomic status of people of color and other members of American society.

Connerly's history, internal and public confusion, and political shift can be further researched at www.campusprogress.org.

While Ward Connerly paid over 70,000 dollars to Governor Pete Wilson to secure his seat on the CA Regents, Mohs was best known for bribing his way onto the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents with a 10,000 dollar campaign contribution to Governor Thompson who then appointed him in 1994. Mohs' wife also gave the maximum contribution to the Thompson campaign with a second 10,000 dollars. During his tenure as a Regent, his proposal and was voted down at least three times to end affirmative action programs at all of the University of Wisconsin system schools.

In 1998, while serving on Madison's Mayor's Racial Task Force, Mohs suggested to Hmong immigrants that they could solve their financial problems and dealing with police by taking a second job at a "car wash or a PDQ." In a White Paper he submitted to the Board of Regents in 2000, Mohs explained, "Everyone watching TV or the movies must be impressed by the increase in diversity." And, "No longer are minorities some distant class of people to be pitied for their ignorance and poverty. Minorities are everywhere . . ."

What else are they saying?

First, they argue that diversity in higher education already exists. The facts at UW-Milwaukee, where the largest population of people of color live and Madison, the System's flagship campus, suggest otherwise.

For the last 3 years, student of color enrollment at UW-Milwaukee as compared to the campus as a whole has decreased. This year alone the enrollment of students of color at UW-Milwaukee has decreased 12 per cent. UW-Madison ranks at the bottom for minority enrollment in the Big Ten and well below half the national average. At both institutions, to even approach reflecting the state's college-aged population, the number of Native American, South East Asian, and Latin@ students would have to at least

double; African American students more than triple. Talk of “enough diversity” rings hollow when the door to this institution remains shut on so many.

Second, Connerly and Mohs suggest that affirmative action diminishes academic credibility by lowering admissions standards. Yet according to UW-Madison Professor Aaron Browers, after the first year, students of color and white students hold virtually identical GPAs (2.68 and 2.76 respectively). Another study finds that whites make up the bulk of those admitted here with low ACT scores. While these statistics refute the image of hoards of unqualified people of color pillaging the campus, they cannot relate the invaluable contribution diversity makes to the quality of education. If a university is a market place of ideas, then a store full of people with the same experiences and perspectives offers a pretty bland intellectual diet. Exposure to a myriad of identities, belief systems, and histories counters any facade of truth based upon exclusion while opening up countless avenues for personal growth.

Third, critics contend that affirmative action accords discriminatory “preferences” to women and people of color. Few who believe in equal opportunity have a problem with providing more opportunities to those wrongly denied their fair share. Opponents of affirmative action, therefore, must assume that racism and sexism no longer constitute significant obstacles to mobility. But the playing field is not level, which explains the relative absence of women and people of color from elite institutions and positions of authority.

State of Crisis and Student Demands

Under-representation reflects a lack of opportunities for those under-represented. The playing field remains skewed against people of color who face pervasive discrimination in housing, financing, employment, and education. Women of color must also wage daily struggles against gender-based discrimination, harassment, and assault. Students and faculty of color have identified major obstacles to an ethnically diverse student body including: 1) racial bias in primary and secondary education, 2) low levels of financial assistance, 3) a recruitment focus on white dominated high schools, and 4) a hostile cultural climate both on and off campus. Recruitment and retention policies arising from the recommendations for the Milwaukee Commitment and Plan 2008 will address and hopefully remove these barriers to equal opportunity, fair representation, a level playing field, and respect. Eliminating Affirmative Action, in fact, would leave preferences, for white men and a legacy of discrimination, unchallenged.

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