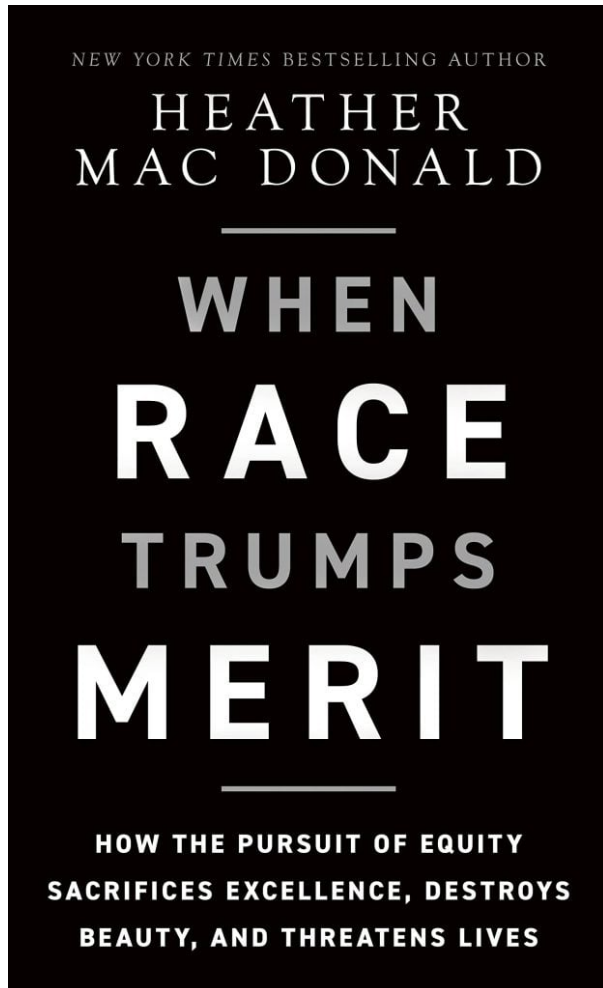


Triumph of Race Over Merit

Bringing all of us down – and fast.

by Bruce Bawer



In *The Diversity Delusion: How Race and Gender Pandering Corrupt the University and Undermine Our Culture*, Heather MacDonald, a fellow at the Manhattan Institute and contributing editor of *City Journal*, painted a grim picture of the damage done by university administrators desperate to diversify their student bodies at all costs. Identity studies programs, MacDonald made clear, exist not only because of the desire of progressive professors to promote postmodern ideology, but also because such courses, which involve little more than complaining about purported oppression and parroting inane jargon, are far easier for underqualified students to wrap their minds around than something serious and useful. In

the same way, the introduction of “critical race studies” provides a handy route through law school for black kids who’d never be able to negotiate a traditional legal curriculum.

Of course, low-achieving black and Latino applicants also get admissions preferences – which in the long term aren’t really good for them, since those for whom the bar has been lowered invariably fall behind. One of the more frustrating aspects of this rank injustice is that Asians, who effectively get punished for being smart, working hard, and earning high test scores, have a right to kick up holy hell but rarely do, while many blacks and Latinos who get special treatment – not just affirmative action, but scholarships and other benefits – can’t stop raging about racism.

The Diversity Delusion came out in 2019. On May 25 of the following year, a thug named George Floyd died during an unpleasant encounter with the Minneapolis police, and pretty soon everything MacDonald wrote about in *The Diversity Delusion* got even worse. Suddenly it was *all* about race: America had stepped into the looking glass and entered the harebrained world of Ibram X. Kendi and Robin DiAngelo, whose strange new road rules – and their dire consequences – are the subject of MacDonald’s new book, [*When Race Trumps Merit: How the Pursuit of Equity Sacrifices Excellence, Destroys Beauty, and Threatens Lives.*](#)

After Floyd’s death, needless to say, came a summer of race riots, all premised on the claim that white cops are killing innocent blacks in massive numbers (a lie that MacDonald, by the way, debunked in her 2016 book *The War on Cops*) and that America was born out of a deep-seated racism that has never abated. Instead of rebutting this falsehood, a veritable army of high-ranking establishment figures – from university presidents and corporate CEOs to the editors of medical and scientific journals – affirmed it, issuing ardent *mea culpas* in which they accepted the ridiculous charge that the underrepresentation of blacks in their respective institutions

was the result of white racism – *and nothing else* – and promised that they would act immediately and decisively to alter this inexcusable state of affairs.

MacDonald isn't having it. With a blizzard of statistics, she pulls back the curtain on the reality behind subpar black performance. For example, some figures on high-school seniors: in 2019, 28% of whites and 37% of Asians – but only 7% of blacks – were “proficient” in twelfth-grade math. The numbers for reading are similar. In 2015, 60% of those students attaining very high scores (between 750 and 800) on the math SAT were Asian, 33% were white, and 2% were black. In 2004, the average LSAT score of students admitted to the top ten law schools was 165; only 1% of blacks (a total of 108 individuals) scored that high. Fully 22% of black law-school grads never pass the bar after five tries, compared with 3% of whites. In 2020, the average score on the GMAT (for prospective graduate students) was 463 for blacks, 573 for whites, and 601 for Asians.

Why are these results so poor? Is it racism? Is it because blacks still suffer from the historical legacy of slavery, 158 years after the 13th Amendment, and of Jim Crow, 59 years after the Civil Rights Act? If that's the case, then why do recent Asian immigrants who've just escaped some of the worst living conditions in the world manage to soar so quickly? Could it be because Asian parents tend to value education and encourage studying, while too many black kids grow up hearing that being studious is “acting white”? Could it be because too many black kids live on welfare payments in single-parent homes, in neighborhoods plagued by gangs, in a subculture defined by booty calls and baby mamas and the idolization of rappers and drug dealers and thugs? “One third of all black males,” MacDonald notes, “have a felony conviction.” Over 70% of black babies are born out of wedlock.

Nor is it just black kids who teach each other irresponsible behavior. In 2020, the National Museum of African American

History & Culture declared that rationality, hard work, delayed gratification, politeness, self-control, and other admirable attributes (all of which predict academic and professional success) are “white” traits. In the same year, a leading charter school network eliminated its motto “Work Hard. Be Nice.” Thus do supposedly respectable black-community establishments actively *discourage* young black people from being civilized. Given all this, it’s a wonder that black kids’ test scores aren’t even worse than they are.

The reason for broad-based black failure is obvious and difficult to overcome: the black subculture – which in the 1950s, despite white bigotry and socioeconomic inequality, had a strong foundation in religion and family – has been going to the dogs ever since LBJ’s Great Society, and is in drastic need of radical change. Destructive cultural pathologies have long been crying out to be addressed. But to address them would mean acknowledging them. And in the post-George Floyd era, that’s harder than ever. To suggest in the year 2023 that any problem in the black community is the fault of anything other than crushing, systematic white racism is to reap the whirlwind.

And so the culture of lies endures – and the fervid attempts to correct for an utterly illusory racism intensify. In 2021, the University of California system barred the use of ACT and SAT scores in admissions on the grounds that the tests are racist. As of 2022, about 36% of grad schools no longer use the GRE. Around the country, primary and secondary schools, rather than trying to improve education for blacks, have sought to stick it to whites and Asians by killing off programs for gifted and talented students.

So it goes. The state of California now mandates that corporate boards contain a certain percentage of minorities – ignoring the fact that in many instances there simply aren’t enough minorities who qualify. Since 2021, the National Institutes of Health has demanded that researchers explain how

their work will “empower” blacks; the National Science Foundation has instituted similar requirements. Yet in 2021, for all the “anti-racist” initiatives in STEM fields, not a single black person in the entire U.S. was awarded a Ph.D. in certain disciplines, among them number theory, robotics, and structural engineering. Meanwhile scientists who might be looking for the causes of cancer are instead studying, say, the role of racism in black obesity.

This issue doesn't just arise in STEM. In the post-Floyd era, in the name of “anti-racism,” museum curators have been quick to declare that traditional European art forms are racist. Arts administrators pronounce that the underrepresentation of blacks in arts organizations is racist. Leading figures at orchestras, opera companies, and conservatories attribute the whiteness of their milieux to racism. Musicologists seek to take Beethoven down a few pegs and try to revive lousy, long-forgotten classical composers who happened to be black. And here, perhaps, is the topper: *New York Times* music critic Anthony Tommasini actually condemns blind auditions – which ensure a focus on merit and not on race, sex, or other irrelevant factors – as racist.

The folly – and danger – of this new dispensation becomes particularly clear when you examine the medical profession. In 2021, the American Medical Association issued a plan for “racial justice” that, in MacDonald's words, reads like “a black studies department mission statement.” Yale Medical School has instituted pass-fail courses. At the George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences, one dean decided that a certain student's poor academic performance was outweighed by her “passion for social justice.” As if this would make any difference in an operating room.

Sane dissent from this irresponsible madness is punished severely. In 2020, when Dr. Norman Wang of the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC) proposed in the *Journal of*

the American Heart Association that doctors be evaluated using colorblind criteria, he was savaged by the president-elect of the AHA, the *JAMA* withdrew the paper, and he lost his job at UPMC. On a 2021 podcast sponsored by the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, a *JAMA* editor who's a surgeon at UCLA spoke up for equality in medicine but criticized the profession's obsessive interest in racism – in response to which *JAMA* took down the podcast and yanked his editorship, while back at UCLA he faced a “show trial.”

I've been treated by doctors with a wide spectrum of skin colors without giving it a thought. But reading about the systematic relaxing of standards in medical education, I have to say that I'd now hesitate to see a young black doctor in the U.S. about anything more urgent than a hangnail. I can't help thinking that my late father, who was a doctor, would've been appalled to see his profession take such a stupid turn. It's no surprise to learn from MacDonald that these harrowing developments are leading a great many gifted white physicians to quit medicine altogether. A terrifying thought.

While American institutions are currently in the grip of this calamitous claptrap, what's up in China? There, the best students are identified at an early age and are channeled into special classes. Kids learn self-discipline and responsibility. Classroom time is never wasted on jawing about racism – or, for that matter, gender. The result: while Chinese students score highest in the world on PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) tests, the U.S. comes in at #25. And while the rankings of American universities, which have long been considered by far the world's best, are declining, China's are on their way up.

How tragic that while the tyrannical regime that focused, half a century ago, on indoctrinating everybody into the ideology of Mao's *Little Red Book* has turned that Communist dictatorship into a scientific and technological powerhouse, the United States of America – once the laboratory of the

modern world – has exchanged Einstein and Madame Curie for the mediocre maunderings of Kendi and DiAngelo. And what's worst of all is that none of this nonsense – not one bit of it – is helping black people climb a single step up the ladder. It's only bringing all of us down. And fast.

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