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PUBLIC RESEARCH AND RACISM

THE CASE OF THE RACIST RESEARCHERS

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INTRODUCTION

THIS ARTICLE IS INTENDED to inform readers of research activities that vitally affect their interests. It should especially interest attorneys who can employ the law to safeguard those interests when they are threatened by hostile or biased research.

The article suggests that the Public Information Act can be employed to the fullest extent to insure systematic review of publicly funded non-classified research. Something like Nader's Raiders ought to be established to pay attention to research and research organizations that bear on the interests, however indirect, of black people. The Fair Employment Practices laws and the provisions of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act should be brought to bear on the research ond consulting industry. Legislative hearings on individual firm practice and industry behavior may be in' order. Black congressmen as a group and committees concerned with research policy should be asked to undertake congressional investigations leading to administrative and perhaps legislative reform. The new Consumer Affairs Section of the Antitrust Division of the Justice Department may be useful in investigating complaints.

Black mayors, city councilmen, state legislators and other state and local officials, many of whom are lawyers, should consider appropriate legislation, perhaps along the lines of New York City's proposed "Freedom of Information Law." This proposal would require full disclosure by the city of all statements, opinions, and documents that affect the public.[1]

And last, class action suits, including antitrust action, may be useful in limiting hostile research undertaken with public funds.

The uses to be made of these tools will depend on the creativity and ingenuity of lawyers who bring suits and who press for hearings and regulation. It should become a priority matter for the National Bar Association and the National Conference of Black Lawyers.

THE BLACK community in the United States, with a population, by some estimates, approaching 30 million, is making progress toward collective social, political, and economic security. (So are many independent black nations in Africa). The pace of progress varies by region in the United States. Many obstacles remain, but enough tools have been developed and tested successfully to provide some basis for optimism.

The opposition of white society to black progress has also been varied, differing by age, class, region, religion and

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1. See *"Plan Given to End Consultant Issue,"* New York Times, December 21, 1970, p. 52.

so forth. There have been, let us agree, white allies in the effort, some more or less steadfast. As black people have moved on various fronts, however, resistance has taken both blunt and subtle forms.

Indeed, the matter of white opposition is fairly complex. Some organized opposition is simple in its determination to maintain white supremacy. But the behavior of white American corporations, consulting firms, and white dominated public agencies is generally less single-minded. Most white corporations, for example, have explicit policies and programs to assist black communities on the one hand, and covertly act to stifle black aspirations on the other.

Black progress has in the last decade depended to a significant extent on the organization and application of information and knowledge. This will undoubtedly be true to an even greater degree in the seventies and beyond.

. Research and consulting will be of great importance in private and public policy and program development. In the last five years or so, black people have become increasingly sophisticated about the operations of government as it affects their lives at every level. This article aims to discuss some of the dangers posed to the black community by at least some, and probably many, white research and consulting organizations. It points to dangers to their professional standing and to society generally from misbehavior. And it suggests that reform and perhaps regulation is appropriate if an increase in the already dangerously high level of mutual racial mistrust, at least deriving from this source, is to be avoided.

THE KNOWLEDGE industry[2] includes many types of organizations including, of course, colleges and universities. Attention here is limited to research and consulting firms, profit and non-profit, because they are most engaged in applied as distinct from basic research in urban affairs and the social sciences. University research, however, is also capable of simi-

lar mischief and is not to be ignored. The same watchfulness should be exercised by both the black and concerned white community over all processes of social analysis.

Non-profit organizations[3] increasingly active in urban research include fairly well known examples such as the Rand Corporation, Systems Development Corporation (SDC), Stanford Research Institute (SRI), and Batelle Memorial Institute (BMI).

There are also the profit oriented firms such as Arthur D. Little, based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Planning Research Associates in Los Angeles, and others.

The general consulting firms such as Booz, Allen, and Hamilton, McKinsey and Company, and Fry Consultants are also active in urban research nationally. A number of accounting firms like Arthur Andersen and Arthur Young are also engaged in applied social science research and urban consulting for private and public clients from time to time.

Planning consultants and economic consultants are well known for their efforts in the field. Lastly, heavy industrial companies, for example in metals, aerospace, and forest products, such as Alcoa, Lockheed, and Boise Cascade have been similarly engaged.

The principal concern here is with the first two groups, especially those that

2. For background on the industry see: Amitai Etzioni, *"Knowledge and Power,"* (Review of The Rand Corporation: Case Study of a Nonprofit Advisory Corporation, by Bruce L. R. Smith), The New York Times Book Review, July 31, 1966, p. 3; William Lazer and Arthur E. Warner, *"The Knowledge Industrys Research Consultants in Perspective,"* Bureau of Business and Economic Research, Graduate School of Business Administration, Michigan State University, Marketing and Transportation Paper no. 13; and MacGregor, James, *"Brains for Hires Tax-Empt Battelle Prospers as It Studies All Kinds of Problems,"* Wall Street Journal, January 12, 1970, p. 1.

3. See: James D. Grant, *"The Future of Nonprofit Research and Development Organizations,"* California Management Review, Summer 1965, p. 81; Bruce L. R. Smith, *"The Future of the Not-for-Profit Corporations,"* The Public Interest, No. 8, Summer 1967, p. 127; and Dean C. Coddington and J. Gordon Milliken, *"Future of Federal Contract Research Center,"* Harvard Business Review, March-April 1970, p. 103.

propose to apply to social problems analysis techniques first developed for military purposes.

ALTHOUGH EACH organization is unique, a closer look at one with which I am reasonably familiar at first hand, may provide insights that will assist the public toward self protection.

Stanford Research Institute is a 24-year-old not-for-profit research organization with headquarters outside San Francisco in Menlo Park, California. It was founded after World War II by a group of West Coast industrialists who foresaw the need for organized independent applied research in the sciences and in techno-economics in support of the economic development of the eleven western states. Its early years were spent on the campus of Stanford University. As it grew it acquired a separtate physical plant three miles from Stanford. Its relations with the University have been legally complex and politically subtle, but it has been often described as an operationally independent subsidiary of Stanford. Until very recently the Board of Directors of SRI contained some of the same men as sat on the Board of Trustees of Stanford, and for most of the last twenty years the president of Stanford had been ex-officio chairman of the SRI Board.

In mid-1970 after a series of student confrontations over military and other controversial research, the Board of Trustees of the University, with faculty support and over some significant student opposition, voted to dispose of SRI.[4] The disposition is in process of completion after legal and financial problems were negotiated. The point remains however that SRI's behavior has been vigorously called into question by concerned critics for moral and political reasons relating principally to Vietnam and other military research. Challenges of that sort to the activities of any organization that is also doing research in urban affairs should be noted with interest; and the organizational responses to such criticism

more and more carefully analyzed for any potential racial implications.

. Until recently SRI had a staff of about 3,200, 1,500 of them professionals. Lay-offs and unreplaced resignations have left about 2,700 employees, 1,300 of them professionals. SRI at present does work in almost every scientific and social scientific discipline. It has offices and teams around the world and across the United States. In recent years it has done as much as $65 million of contract research annually.

The quality of work in an organization like SRI varies according to the individuals working on a project, and it is sometimes influenced by factors outside the control of the professional researcher, such as forced contract renegotiations arising from federal budget cuts (rare), or the imposition of unanticipated time constraints. In general, quality is good and throughout SRI there are a number of excellent professionals with national and international reputations. The same, I would guess, is true of most other large research and consulting organizations.

THE MANAGEMENT SCIENCES DIVISION contains the Urban and Social Systems Department composed of groups specializing in Urban and Regional Economics, Manpower, Education, and so on. Management Sciences also includes a Transportation Department that has done considerable work in urban transportation. Each of these departments and groups has individual staff members who are professionally outstanding and socially aware and sensitive. Each group also however, includes men usually, as it happens, senior professionals and managers, who are preoccupied with internal politicking, whose professional skills as researchers have atrophied, and probably of greatest importance to the concerned public, whose behavior often has a racist effect, and who seem to be concerned with maintaining white supremacy rough-

4. John Noble Wilford, "Researchers Cut Link to Stanford," New York Times, Saturday, July 4, 1970.

ly as they have come to know it through their life experiences. Often they are heavily engaged in the cronyism of mutual protection ,and are frequently evasive or uninformed when queried on professional matters of social significance.

Since this is the knowledge industry and all of these men are highly educated, their racism often takes the relatively subtle form blacks have come to recognize in certain types of corporate liberalism. That is to say, their utterances and behavior are not uniformly, consistently and blatantly bigoted. They profess concern for social problems, deplore racism and discrimination, and fervently hope "the problems will be solved." But black people have dealt with enough quasi-liberal school superintendents, city councilmen, corporate personnel officers, and welfare administrators to generally recognize the type I have referred to. The problem in this case is that the consultant and researcher who is a racist is also represented as an expert and a scientist. An objective and dispassionate analyst who presents findings and conclusions backed by data and evidence.

The problem is increasingly compounded by another fact. There are often, even usually, black researchers on the staff who, though constrained, have participated in the work, and who to the public's mind seem to bring additional authenticity and legitimacy to the final report.

Now most black professional researchers, as many white researchers, are probably vitally concerned with community welfare. But in an organization like SRI, these men, usually juniors, working on a large, say six figure contract, led by a senior professional or manager, are not able to single-handedly review entire research efforts and point out bias. Large research efforts consequently are sometimes seriously contaminated, and when the results are accepted and applied, to the extent the application affects black or other minority people, the research organization has acted as a contaminating agent in the community. At SRI, younger white researchers, like educated young

whites generally, are less likely to transmit bias in their work, but since the bigger the project the more senior the leadership, as a rule, concerned communities and their professional advocates, should be especially alert to examine the method, the data, and the results of large publicly funded projects. Indeed, the award of large study contracts to research firms even suspected of significant racial bias will, I would expect, be subject to more and more public questioning by advocate organizations and concerned professional groups as they come to recognize the potential of harmful results of biased research.

Because of the increased sense of community vigilance developed over the last few years, and often because of the insistence of federal contracting officers, white firms have more and more found it wise to employ black consulting firms as subcontractors. (These black firms, as their expertise and muscle increases are increasingly in the running for prime contracts, using white subs when necessary.) The use of black subs, like black staff of the prime contractor, tends to provide internal watchdogs on projects as they proceed. Black lawyers monitoring contract award procedures or acting as community advocates should be increasingly mindful of the need for black subs on large public contracts of all kinds including those that appear to be strictly technical, eg. in transportation, water resources, and other engineering economic studies.

IT IS ACCEPTED practice that much work in applied social science research is done under some form of public contract, federal, state, or local. Most of the key contracting officers in the relevant agencies are white and middle-aged, and given what we think we know about social conditioning and social dynamics, it it reasonable to assume that many are biased to some degree. Research firms such as SRI generally maintain a relatively high degree of professional integrity. But integrity, i.e. basic honesty, is not incompatible with racial bias in the con-

duct of research. There is such a thing as a reasonably honest bigot. But if his research concludes, for example, that a transport system is optimized by a freeway or other transit structure through black neighborhoods, his technical honesty is of little consolation to those adversely affected. Indeed, the structure may be an optimizing solution in a narrow technical sense, but if the final report neglects to fully discuss political and social implications, the community may be the loser. ·

Comprehensive attention to "non-economic" factors, psychological, social, cultural, political, and aesthetic, has increased in the last couple of years and such blatant or stubborn oversights are becoming fewer. Nevertheless, the black community and its representatives seem increasingly to be coming to believe that they ought not leave the matter entirely in the hands of the professional researcher and the contracting officer. (Research affecting the black community will be felt to be too important to be left entirely to researchers.) Surveillance increasingly is considered necessary throughout the study process. Progress reports to communities and full access to final reports and back-up data are more and more requested by representatives or advocates. Lawyers should be especially involved in this process, and should use such tools as the Pubic Information Act to gain access to research in progress.

Many studies for local public agencies are subject to public hearings before acceptance, although they are often "sanitized" with controversial or, to the client, unwelcome views or findings, softened or deleted before final presentation through preliminary review and negotiation. Most federal studies for HUD, DOT, DOL, HEW, and OEO are not, in practice, subject to much public scrutiny. Actually, dedicated researchers are often frustrated when their reports end up on a shelf or in a file and are never acted upon.

Concerned communities have a vital interest in examining every unclassified report done for every public agency that bears on community interests. There may on occasion be good reason for treating a report as confidential for a period of time. But in general that period should be brief. Disclosure of the existence of all domestic research, including that of the Defense Department, should be insisted upon, and the Public Information Act should be used to gain access to all reports of interest to these communities. Research of AID relating to black nations in Africa and the Caribbean will probably be similarly perused.

Such review should perhaps be undertaken on a regular and systematic basis by several review centers established both at black and predominantly white universities, at some of the emerging black and white activist think tanks, by advocate planning and research groups, and by national organizations like NAACP, Urban League, SCLC, or NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund. Some pressure for disclosure could also be brought on research for private clients that bears on the welfare of concerned communities.

So far I have suggested that surveillance and examination of research is necessary because of the personal bias of significant numbers of senior professionals and managers in contract research organizations like SRI.

Many senior professional and managers are "good government" advocates whose principal criterion of good government is efficiency rather than equity, responsiveness, or openness. This concern leads to interest, for example, in metropolitan or regional government because of the expected realization of scale economies. Black people apparently are increasingly wary of regionalization when it means reduced political power and protection.

The concern of such researchers for efficiency is often related to a generally benevolent, paternalistic, or even "neo-colonialistic" stance toward the solution of social problems in which senior white professionals are presumed to know fairly well what is best for all social groups.

Many PROFESSIONAL researchers following academics such as John Kain and David Birch are also intrigued by the possibilities of dispersal of the black population as a solution to some urban problems. Often this seems to be a racist reflex reaction to black concentration and political leverage, rather than the result of careful and responsible analysis of a range of policy choices.

Both "good government" and "dispersal" preferences often reflect general ignorance of, opposition to, or contempt for the political aspirations of the black community.

These men are often also relatively johnny-come-latelys to the field, having spent most of their careers in such fields as real estate, logistics research, military systems analysis, or the military itself. As a result they often bring professional habit and ideological baggage that is incompatible with what to concerned people is satisfactory social research (e.g. housing, transportation, education). Systems analysis can make important contributions to solutions of complex problems. When the systems analysts are turned loose on social problems. However, the results are sometimes ludicrous. They should almost always be led and constrained by thoroughly trained social scientists. Black lawyers should be alert to the dangers in current notions of retraining out-of-work aerospace professionals for an attack on "social problems." Many, if not most, of the scientists and engineers in this field should probably not be allowed to bring their views to bear, in a professional context, on matters directly affecting black people.

Black organizations, lay and professional, can take steps to protect themselves by inviting senior researchers and managers, including top managers, to speak or sit on panels. These men and women ought not be allowed to remain hidden from public scrutiny. Some of them hold views on race and urban affairs that cannot stand the light of day. Under careful questioning the basic racism in many will emerge. They can then be quarantined.

Commercial REALITIES affecting research also are an influence that may concern minority communities. Many firms in the field are there out of a desire to diversify from military work, a respectable motive in some cases. But often, as pointed out, this leads to the use of military analysts whose social judgments may fairly be suspected, and whose concern for excessive scientific rigor and elegance is inappropriate to the problems at hand. Also firms are sometimes preoccupied with commercial survival and the "follow-on," or next and related contract, and are therefore willing to compromise the research by modifying the conclusions or recommendations in order to keep a client happy or at least unembarrassed.

Most of the men discussed here consider themselves objective and unbiased on questions of social research and policy. Most do not believe they should be "advocates." Apparently many black people, and increasing numbers of whites on the other hand, understand that all Americans, white and black, who work on these problems are advocates in one manner or another. Every middle class American certainly has an interest and a stake of some kind in the outcome of the race conflict, and each advocates, however subtly, the status quo, small change, or major change in some direction. Most seniors at SRI, and I would guess elsewhere, seem to favor either the first or the second. Many, if not most, black people favor the third. It is unlikely that SRI's senior staff will come to view their interests much differently during the remainder of their career, but black people will probably be increasingly alert to the problems of advocacy or its denial, and of questionable objectivity in the conduct of research on the part of research and consulting firms generally.[5]

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5. See Gunnar Myrdal, *The Challenge of World Poverty*, (Pantheon) 1970. In Chapter 1, "Cleansing the Approach from Biases," he addresses this problem in the context of research in developing countries. Professional researchers have been known to express disrespect for nationals of countries in which they were or had been working.

Now WE CAN look briefly at a few other characteristics of SRI's organization that may be fairly general in the industry. These characteristics also suggest a need for wariness.

At SRI, in my opinion, there is a serious shortage of first rate talent among the managers in the Urban Department and in the Institute's top management. Because of the economics of the industry, its competitive postition in the management markets, and for other reasons of personal and organizational eccentricity, the Institute, at present, seems burdened with many managers who are incapable of successful innovation and dynamic leadership. Since research institutions like SRI can be a valuable national asset, it is to be hoped that when current problems are solved and the Institute is stable and independent, new managers and a new top management team will be brought in that will be capable of recommending more enlightened polices to the Board, and that will be able to accomplish important internal organizational and program reform.

Let us now look at four examples of problems in need of solution that will probably also concern the black community although perhaps not as much as unsatisfactory research.

As mentioned earlier, many white firms behave toward the black community in a positive manner on one hand and with hostility on the other. Consider some SRI policies and practices that may be viewed with concern by black people. First, the Institute in the past has done work for at least one U.S. corporation interested in opportunities in South Africa, and for Portuguese corporations with interests in Mozambique and Angola. What should be SRI and industry poilcy toward research in these areas for such clients (to say nothing of possible potential work for the South African government or corporations there)?

Second, SRI and others may have done (I do not have the facts) work in "riot" control," including work for local and federal agencies interested in the problem popularly known as "law and order." Black people, and concerned whites of course, are generally interested in "law" and "order," but not in "law and order." More seriously, it is possible the Institute has or could undertake studies of a more general variety, examining the black community as it would a hostile entity and evaluating and preparing alternative suppressive strategic and tactical responses (a sort of "cold war" planning).

Some problems in South Africa or in internal security may be legitimate subjects of analysis under some circumstances by some researchers. But non-profit corporations have a public nature, and the studies in question are contracted with public funds. To the extent they have been undertaken and are hostile to black people, the black community should take such legal measures as are available to prevent continuation of such work.

Of concern here is the issue, will an organization that with one division conducts studies in the "suppression" or "exploitation" of black people in the U.S. or Africa (i.e. studies seen by many as hostile), and with another, health, housing, transportation, education, and welfare, be allowed to study the latter in these communities? SRI, to my knowledge, has made no explicit policy statements concerning either its work in Southern Africa or Portugal, or its work in what is often called domestic counter-insurgency. No final judgement is possible here. The key question remains, however, will an organization that remains silent respecting its policies, one way or the other, in areas many black people feel are sensitive be allowed to send its researchers into black communities even to do what most black people can agree is socially useful work? Does the one hand contaminate the whole and hence the other? It would be entirely appropriate to put these questions to all organizations, profit and non-profit, that have multifaceted and far flung research programs.

THE MATTER of "academic freedom" is relevant here. Most, if not all researchers and consultants, wherever they are, but especially in universities and non-profit orginizations, seem to believe that they are or should be free to study anything that is researchable limited only by the availability of financial support. Morality is a consideration for some men, political reality for others, in determining areas for investigation. Academic freedom is an important issue, complex and delicate. Some research executives who use the term however, are not really speaking of an important principle but are merely using the expression to defend immediately profitable work, however socially questionable.

It is reasonably clear that the historical merit of the concept of academic freedom has been principally the protection of iconoclastic or critical social analysis. It is further clear that research organizations can and do establish policies limiting research in a variety of ways, according to client, subject, size of contract, and so on. Indeed, few if any consulting research organization would do work for, say, the Ku Klux Klan, even if the work were on a legitimate and researchable problem. The behavior of "respectable" clients though subtle on occasion can be hostile to reasonable minority groups interests as that of the Klan.

Third, the Board of Directors at SRI, a non-profit corporation active in public policy research, is entirely white. This situation is likely to be questioned, and changes will probably be brought about, but a hard rule on board composition will most likely remain elusive.

At last, what of research staffs generally? SRI, for example, has a handful of black professionals, fewer than 20 out of a staff of about 1,300. Its record is a bit better with non-professionals, but racially backward personnel policies can be inferred from an examination of the work force, and from discussions with the President, other principal officers, department and group managers, and black staff. There are no black professionals in the entire Economics Division,

THE MARKET for contract research is difficult just now; there have been layoffs at SRI, federal research budgets are tight; competition is keen, and so forth. Probably not much can be done about professional recruiting through 1971. But the question that will be raised in the black community is what are the real, as distinct from stated, personnel policy preferences of the management of such organizations? What legal remedy is available here.[6]

The concerned community, black and white, will probably begin to question SRI and similar organizations on all these policy issues. Those found wanting will tend to be viewed with suspicion as to their capacity to perform consistently reliable research that relates to the well being of black people especially, and society in general. Those that do thorough, careful, and imaginative work will be rewarded. And those that refrain from engaging in offensive work probably will be relatively more favorably regarded.

SRI, The Hudson Institute, and a number of other research organizations are working on the problem of "the future." Teams of researchers are examining as carefully as they can, trends, projections, forecasts, and scenarios relating to U.S. and world development over the next three to five decades, the focus of work often pointed "toward the year 2000." The clients are often government agencies, such as the Office of Education in HEW, interested in "alternative futures." The idea, not a startling one, is that social change can be at least somewhat anticipated, and perhaps partially managed. In any case, it is hoped that surprises, especially unpleasant ones, can be avoided to some extent.

At present few people know about this research in the black community. Few, if any, blacks or browns monitor it, or participate in developing scenarios or

6. Dr. Melvin Humphrey, a black economist, has recently been appointed Director of Research for the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. His work can be very helpful in this regard. SRI, for example, has been given a clean bill of health, by the EEOC. Deeper investigation might alter that.

evaluating "alternative futures." What is desirable for minority groups in the year 2000? Black think tanks are looking ahead. But the work of white think tanks should not be allowed to go unquestioned or conducted quietly in private. These are public issues studied at public expense and it is the black future being anticipated as a part of that of the larger society. Inasmuch as this work will affect public policy, especially in education, the work should, to the extent feasible, be fully public every step of the way, and a variety of organizations concerned with black community welfare and security will likely begin to make direct inquiry and take steps to keep the work in the public eye through periodic reports of evaluations. Black lawyers concerned with these long range studies might derive some benefit from examining the literature on "futurism."[7]

Much OF THIS examination of the case of SRI as one example in the research and consulting industry of questionable practices and products may be likened in spirit to that of the growing consumerism movement generally. Ralph Nader and others have uncovered flagrant abuses by manufacturers of consumer items and providers of services. The professional research industry can perhaps stand some investigation, legal as well as technical. There is increasing concern about secrecy in government and science. George Bernard Shaw is said to have once claimed that "Every profession is a conspiracy against the public." That, of course, is arguable. But concerned people ought to be wary of the impact of the work of planners, researchers, and consultants. As a young American patriot pointed out about 200 years ago, in a different yet strangely similar context, eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.

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7. See: Daniel Bell: *"The Study of the Futures* v. *Can One Predict?* B. *The Oracle at Delphi,"* The Public Interest, No. 1, Fall 1965, p. 119; and Otis Dudley Duncan, *"Social Forecasting — The State of the Art,"* The Public Interest, No. 17, Fall 1969, p. 88.