
Should Minorities Rule?

By Philip Carl Salzman

In today's colleges and universities, "progressive stacking" is recommended as a constructive way to deal with diversity among students. The professor sorts out students according to categories, using intersectional criteria of suffering and victimhood. In this "social justice" vision, black and Indigenous women are the most oppressed, then white women, then black and Indigenous men, then finally the privileged white males.

A professor then favours the most oppressed, calling first on black and Indigenous women to answer questions, then white women, then black and Indigenous men, while ignoring white men. In this way, each professor does her part in correcting the world's injustice.¹

Today social justice warriors argue that only minorities have rights, because minorities are victims. The majority no longer has any rights, because it is the oppressor of minorities, and therefore evil. This view is dominant in major American universities and colleges. Throughout universities, the mainstream media, and in the Democratic Party, minorities are increasingly privileged. Reports and policies in these institutions urge that recognition and benefits be directed toward minorities, and that the majority should be neutralized, marginalized, and punished.

Social justice discourse is, in fact, a neo-marxist ideology. It evolved from orthodox marxism-leninism that posited a class conflict between the working class and the bourgeois capitalist class. But the idea of class conflict was never appealing to the majority of North Americans, who tended to think of themselves as middle class, as enjoying economic prosperity, and as having the prospect of economic mobility. But, contrary to orthodox marxism, social justice ideology posits conflict, not between economic classes, but between gender classes, sexual identity classes, and racial classes: males oppress females; heterosexuals oppress gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals, two spirited, etc.; and whites oppress people of colour. The concept of intersectionality is used both to identify multiple oppressions, e.g. for women of colour both race and gender, and to urge alliances among all oppressed categories.

The classical liberal emphasis on individuals and their individual agency is set aside by social justice discourse, which reduces all people to their census categories, the groups they can be said to which they belong whether or not they want to belong. In social justice discourse, what counts are one's gender, sexual preference, and race, not one's characteristics as an individual. This illiberal reduction of people to a few identifiable categories is not only morally suspect, it is sociologically suspect. In North America, there is not a high level of status crystallization, in which all aspects of status clump together, with upper classes rich,

¹ https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/10/20/penn-grad-student-says-shes-under-attack-teaching-technique-encourage-all-talk-class?utm_source=Inside+Higher+Ed&utm_campaign=a31e0ab6b1-DNU20171020&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1fcbc04421-a31e0ab6b1-227250161&mc_cid=a31e0ab6b1&mc_eid=3abfdb6dbc
http://www.chronicle.com/article/Yes-You-Have-Implicit-Biases/241797?cid=wb&utm_source=wb&utm_medium=en&elqTrackId=23063459b25f4e0c933ae1a75c777da2&elq=9ad86e3b10bb4c09b2f5ed158b2d1914&elqaid=16791&elqat=1&elqCampaignId=7262

educated, powerful, and prestigious, middle classes less so, and working classes poor in all aspects.² Rather, the low level of status crystallization in North America means that different people occupy the educated elite, the religious elite, the business elite, the professional elite, and the political elite. Moreover, there is considerable mobility between these classes. People are poor when they are young and going to school, become richer, then poorer as they move into old-age.

Among the so-called oppressed classes there are wealthy segments, highly educated segments, professional segments, and powerful segments: wealthy women, wealthy people of colour, and wealthy gays and lesbians; highly educated women and people of colour; professional women and people of colour, and women and people of colour who hold elected office and high appointed offices. The idea that all women, all gays and lesbians, all people of colour occupy the same position in society, as victims, is far from supported by the evidence; it is even more ludicrous to imply that all people in each of the categories--women, gays, and people of colour--are all the same.

Social justice discourse projects moral superiority onto claimed victimhood, as if victim status were a virtue. Conversely, it identifies "oppressors," who are seen to be morally inferior. In practice, this means that alleged victims must be given special advantages while so-called oppressors must be rejected and marginalized, a social justice type of reverse discrimination. One operational goal is to bring about equality of results, so that women and men, blacks and whites, and homos and heteros are equally represented in all institutions sharing the same social benefits. This goal fits well with orthodox marxism and its cathecting of absolute equality. What this means in social justice practice is that whites, men, and heteros are the ignored, silenced, and marginalized, so that blacks, women, and homos can flourish. It also means that majorities, such as whites and heteros, must bow to the preference for black and homo minorities. This is true even when the minority person has, by objective criteria, more money or more power than the majority person.

The social justice idea that majorities should bow to minorities is, shall we say, original. The rule of minorities over majorities violates the well established democratic principle of majority rule.

In practice, democracy is governed by its most popularly understood principle: majority rule. Namely, when something is voted on, the side with the most votes wins, whether it is an election, a legislative bill, a union-management agreement, or a shareholder motion in a corporation. The majority vote (or sometimes a plurality when there are more than two choices) decides the election or the issue. Thus, when it is said that "the people have spoken" or the "people's will should be respected," the people are generally expressed through its majority.

On the other hand, the alternative is "the antithesis of democracy: minority rule"³

Complementary to majority rule is minority rights. In order to avoid tyranny by the majority in a democratic society, rights of all citizens are protected by constitutionally encoded laws, civil rights and civil liberties, which cannot be impinged upon by the majority.⁴ This is seen, for example, in the American Bill of Rights and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. But, the protection of minorities does not include minority rule, or the raising of minority interests above those of the majority, whether electoral minorities, racial minorities,

² <http://oxfordindex.oup.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100529529>

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2087459>

³ <http://democracyweb.org/majority-rule-principles>

<https://www.lawteacher.net/free-law-essays/administrative-law/majority-rule-and-minority-rights-administrative-law-essay.php>

⁴ <http://democracyweb.org/majority-rule-principles>

<https://www.lawteacher.net/free-law-essays/administrative-law/majority-rule-and-minority-rights-administrative-law-essay.php>

cultural minorities, sexual minorities, or ideological minorities.

The illiberal social justice policy of treating people according to their census category, the putative groups they are members of, rather than as individuals, which is, in fact, a violation of each individual's human rights. Treating people according to their gender is sexism; treating them according to their race is racism; treating people according to their sexual identity is bigotry.

That university students subject to progressive stacking are treated in a sexist, racist, and bigoted manner by their professors, and particularly by university administrators, is testimony to both how dominant social justice ideology is in universities and how low universities have sunk in their commitment of individual education and individual freedom. I would be deeply ashamed if I thought that I had ever treated students as members of categories rather than as the individuals they are. And I take considerable pride in the many seminars I conducted during which every student, irrespective of their group identity, participated by speaking and answering questions. I also graded essays "blind," not knowing the name of the author, the essays identified only by student number. I always treated my students as individuals, as they deserved. Should we stand by and enable the sexist, racist, and bigoted treatment of people?

About the Author



Philip Carl Salzman B.A. (Antioch), M.A., Ph.D. (Chicago) is Professor of Anthropology at McGill University, appointed in 1968. He founded the Commission on Nomadic Peoples of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, and its international journal, *Nomadic Peoples*, for which he received the IUAES Gold Award. In recent years he has also served as Senior Fellow at the University of St. Andrews, Open Society International Scholar at the American University of Central Asia, Erasmus Mundus International Fellow at the University of Catania, and Visiting Professor at the University of Sydney. Extensive ethnographic field research in Baluchistan (Iran), Gujarat and Rajasthan (India), and Sardinia (Italy) provided the foundation many articles in academic journals, and for book publications such as *The Anthropology of Real Life: Events in Human Experience* (1999), *Black Tents of Baluchistan* (2000), winner of the Premio Pitr–Salomone Marino, *Understanding Culture: An Introduction of Anthropological Theory* (2001), *Pastoralists: Equality, Hierarchy, and the State* (2004), *Culture and Conflict in the Middle East* (2008), *Postcolonial Theory and the Arab-Israel Conflict* (2008), and *Thinking Anthropologically 3rd Ed.* (2010). His latest book publication is *Classic Comparative Anthropology: Studies from the Tradition* (2012). In public affairs, he was a member of Middle East Strategy at Harvard (2008-2010), a member of the Board of Directors of Scholars for Peace in the Middle East (2004-2012), and is currently a Senior Fellow at the Frontier Centre for Public Policy, a member of the Academic Council of the Canadian Institute for Jewish Studies, a Fellow of the Middle East Forum (2015-), and a member of the Board of Directors of Scholars for Peace in the Middle East (2016-). His articles have been published by the Frontier Centre, the Middle East Forum, the Gatestone Institute, the Canadian Institute for Jewish Research, the Macdonald Laurier Institute, and Areo Magazine.