

willing to test the bottom of the market for assistant professors as well. My coauthor Stephen Watt and I discuss this destructive trend in detail in our recent *Academic Keywords: A Devil's Dictionary for Higher Education* (Routledge, 1999). I doubt that all these schools are ready to pay extra money to hire minority candidates. As this news trickles down to undergraduates, it will eventually reduce applications to humanities PhD programs.

It is true, of course, that scarce commodities are more valuable. Hence composition specialists and minority faculty members can often (but not always) be paid a premium for their services. I certainly tell promising minority undergraduates that they will most likely be able to get a full-time academic job if they earn a PhD. I explain the problem in terms of market forces and scarcity and always emphasize that there are multiple categories of rewarded scarcity.

So why is it that people resent the African American colleague who receives \$10,000 more in salary and research funds and not the composition specialist who receives identical benefits? Or why do people seem more likely to resent the robust job market for African American candidates and not the seller's market for rhetoric teachers? I am afraid I must suggest that the answer is racism. That is not to say that faculty members who express this anger are racists. It is rather to say that racism in the culture fuels resentment focused on race and makes it more readily available; it directs anger there rather than elsewhere.

Such resentments are also enhanced by widespread political, institutional, and economic ignorance in academia. The really outrageous salary differentials among full-time faculty members are based not on race but on discipline. A new assistant professor of business or law may well earn twice as much as a new assistant professor of English. As you move up the ranks, the gap grows exponentially. When the *Chicago Tribune* called me in hopes I would complain about Stanley Fish's salary as a dean at the University of Illinois, Chicago, I told them they should be more concerned about the salaries of business professors across town at Northwestern University who earn \$150,000 a year more than Fish does. Plus many business professors double or triple their salaries with consultantships.

Instead of resenting the colleague down the hall with a marginally better salary, members of English departments might do well to learn where power and privilege are actually located in higher education. They are not located in the humanities. For scarcity is hardly the motivating factor behind high salaries in disciplines like law or business. Nor are we compelled to compete financially with nonuniversity business career options; talented peo-

ple will always be willing to choose the academic life despite its lower salaries.

I must also say that I have little sympathy for tenured professors in any field who complain endlessly about their salaries but neglect even to ask what their department pays its part-timers and graduate student teachers, let alone press for improvements in the wages, benefits, and working conditions of these other instructors. If we want to deal rationally and comprehensively with salary inequities, we need to address the whole system of academic labor.

In that context, as I have argued before, the much smaller race-based salary differentials on campus would best be phased out because they help generate racist anger. We can only do that by increasing the number of minority PhDs. I quite agree with David Mikics that open searches with a secret agenda to hire only minority candidates are unethical. A nonminority candidate who pays to travel to what amounts to a fake MLA interview is the victim of a fraud, one the profession should investigate and sanction. Yet I strongly support special campus funds to hire minority faculty members when the efforts are aboveboard and honest. As I first wrote more than a decade ago, white men must not be the only ones seen at the front of the classroom; otherwise we send the message that they alone can teach, can profess, can be people of authority and expertise. But that does not justify the intellectually empty claim that only those from minority groups are qualified to teach minority culture, a claim rejected by most distinguished African American scholars in literature departments but still heard at some of our major universities.

As is clear from my response, Mikics's letter raises a number of linked issues. They are professionally and emotionally charged matters, but they would still benefit from frank discussion. I have answered in detail to help keep that discussion going.

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Edward W. Said's Presidency

To the Editor:

Jon Whitman's letter regarding Edward Said requires response not for what it says about Said but for the general claims it makes about the presidency of the MLA (Forum, 114 [1999]: 106–07). Whitman begins his letter by establishing "dignity in the public treatment of others" as a criterion that, in his view, should be satisfied

by any president of the MLA. Perhaps Whitman is suggesting that an election should be overturned if the candidate does not satisfy this criterion. Perhaps he is merely criticizing Said's supporters for failing to observe this criterion when casting their votes. The former is so arrantly antidemocratic and so obviously in violation of freedom of speech that it probably does not require refutation. But I fear that at least some members of the MLA will feel that the dignity mentioned by Whitman should influence their votes in the future, or even their membership renewal. Some might feel that Said is objectionable as president because at times he apparently lacked this "dignity."

There are two points to make in connection with this. The first is that the criterion proposed by Whitman is a matter solely of decorum, not of ethics—despite Whitman's assertion to the contrary. He is not suggesting that someone is made unfit for office by having, in practice, effectively supported the systematic degradation of individual human lives through the economic systems in which we live and work. He is not suggesting that a candidate becomes unfit for office by having—in national or professional or departmental politics—been complicit in the deprivation of individual human dignity based on race or sex or class or sexual preference or ability. He is not referring to the many and terrible varieties of practical dehumanization that make most of humanity suffer painful indignity every day. He is suggesting, rather, that impolite speech and impolite speech alone disqualifies one from office. Had Whitman adopted a moral criterion regarding human dignity rather than a criterion of mere etiquette, he may have been forced to conclude that Edward Said is one of the few people elected president of the MLA who in fact deserves the position.

The second point to make in this context is that even the criterion of decorum is never applied consistently. It is invoked almost entirely against dissident voices, as in Whitman's letter. As John Stuart Mill put it:

With regard to what is commonly meant by intemperate discussion, namely invective, sarcasm, personality, and the like, the denunciation of these weapons would deserve more sympathy if it were ever proposed to interdict them equally to both sides; but it is only desired to restrain the employment of them against the prevailing opinion: against the unprevailing they may not only be used without general disapproval, but will be likely to obtain for him who uses them the praise of honest zeal and righteous indignation.

PATRICK COLM HOGAN
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To the Editor:

Pardon my cognitive dissonance if I am unable to understand the recent attack on the qualifications of Edward Said, one of the most distinguished and well-known members of the academy in America or indeed in the world, to be president of the Modern Language Association. As someone who has known Said both through his written work, interviews, and media appearances and personally as my dissertation director, colleague in the Columbia English department, and friend, I can say that there probably are few people more fit to head the MLA.

The implication made is that because Said has attacked some scholars in a strong, engaged, and heated manner, he has somehow forfeited his right to be placed in a position of honor and service within the profession. First, it must be pointed out that the specific quotations were taken out of context and made into a tessellation secured with the misleading glue of ellipses. Second, even if we grant that some of the quotations were accurate, must we conclude that strong and even offensive language is inappropriate? We should all remember that Said is not arguing some abstruse theoretical position or some nicety of style. His work has been involved in the life-and-death politics of the Middle East and the ideological struggles associated with that conflict. Strong situations demand strong words, and the Supreme Court upholds the right of Americans to use strong and even offensive language. We should also remember that many of the authors we teach in literature classes—people like Thomas More, Jonathan Swift, or James Joyce—wrote things that make Said's comments seem like remarks at a Junior League tea.

Living as we do in a time of renewed puritanism, let us not stoop to the kind of impugning of character best left to scoundrel politicians. Integrity and commitment are characteristics too complex to be judged by a handful of selectively chosen "bad" words. By any standards, Said's accomplishments in literature and politics set an ideal for the rest of us. I believe that the majority of MLA members are deeply honored to have Said head the organization.

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To the Editor:

As a recent student of Edward Said's at Columbia, I write in a state of particularly outraged response to Jon Whitman's letter, in which he resigns from the MLA because of Said's accession to its presidency. Whitman's