

Letters

To the Editor:

Geoffrey Clarfield's "Primitive Mentality, Modern Civilization and the Fate of Anthropology" (Winter 2021) offers *Academic Questions* readers a truly delightful discovery: anthropologist Christopher Hallpike.

After reading the article, I immediately ordered two of Professor Hallpike's books. Had his work been available to me during my college years, I would have actually enjoyed anthropology—a discipline that has now become dull, mechanistic, and straitjacketed into narrow Darwinian thinking and a political correctness that misunderstands human nature.

Professor Hallpike speaks a common-sense language about human motivations and isn't afraid to call Stone Age societies "primitive" in their thinking. He explains the differences between primitive and advanced societies and describes "how we got there" in his book by that name. Common sense at last!

Many thanks to the article's author, Mr. Clarfield, who brought Hallpike's work to readers' attention.

Linda Ames Nicolosi
Thousand Oaks, CA

To the Editor:

Daniel Pipes's sweeping survey of the concept of national character in your Spring 2022 issue ("The Great Inquiry into National Character") clearly demonstrates both the vagueness of the concept and the disappointing attempts to define or clarify it. As illuminating as Pipes's piece is, it does not explain how or why that state of affairs has been so persistent over time. Might I suggest not only that defining national character is a challenging enterprise but that the narrow disciplinary biases of those who struggle with it virtually guarantee failure?

By recommending history as the clue to unravelling the puzzle that anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists and even philosophers have, as Pipes shows, failed to do, he takes refuge in what he assumes is a broader focus. How

can that be? Historians must select from the mass of data those elements of society which define it most accurately, but that only begs the question concerning what those elements are. Several of the writers cited at the end of the article seem to be doing just that, but which still leaves the issue pretty much up in the air.

As the social historians who reshaped so much of the profession would be the first to tell us, their predecessors going back to ancient times concentrated their attention on the political aspects of society, implicitly or explicitly following Aristotle who understood politics with reference to who rules and for what ends. This is another way of saying that if you would learn a nation's character you must examine over time its constitution or regime, including both formal and informal institutions and practices, not to mention policies. History sheds light on a nation's character to the extent that these elements are taken into account. Otherwise, history is simply the story historians tell, or no more than "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

Richard H. Reeb Jr.

Retired political science instructor, Barstow Community College, 1970-2003
Helendale, California

Daniel Pipes responds:

I thank Richard Reeb for his careful reading of my article and am reassured by his agreeing with me about history as key to understanding national character. I in turn agree with him that political history must be studied fully to understand a nation's character.

To the Editor:

The review of John McWhorter's *Woke Racism* (2021) by Seth Forman makes at least two important points, but does not emphasize a very general problem about the interpretation of statistics.

It was indeed important to point out that the seeds of the present dysfunction were sown in the 1960s. A corollary is that today's circumstances were long in the making and will not—cannot—be rectified quickly.

It was necessary and appropriate to point out that the analogy of Wokeism with religion is superficial; a more appropriate analogy would be religious cults, say, like the Unification Church ("Moonies").

Misinterpretation of statistical data is the most fundamental reason why the criterion of “disparate impact” is faulty and damaging. In many aspects of contemporary society, conclusions are jumped to erroneously as any statistical difference between groups is taken to demonstrate the effect of a specific cause. That transgresses the most basic rule of statistical interpretation: correlation never proves causation. That rule is ignorantly broken, quite pervasively nowadays, for example in connection with diseases and drugs. On socio-political matters, the misinterpretation is perhaps most common when groups that differ in sex or race are compared.

At my University, political correctness—the precursor of woke racism—became prominent first over the perceived unequal treatment of women by comparison with men. The universal shibboleth that women nowadays earn less than men because of gender discrimination has been applied locally by raising some salaries of female faculty. But the actual reason why female faculty earned less on average than male faculty lay in the fact that, on average, they have fewer years on the job than comparably employed male faculty. Until fairly recently, few women sought jobs on higher education faculties. That is possibly because of past paternalism, but also possibly because of differences in the labor market, cultural attitudes, educational levels, and personal preferences in the past. The point is, the female presence on faculty is relatively new. That their average salaries are nowadays lower than those of male faculty at the same rank is owed primarily to the fact that, at each rank, male faculty have significantly more years of seniority. When our Associate Provost compared people not by averages for each of the ranks but individually by qualifications, credentials, publications, and including seniority, it turned out that, in the early 1980s, it was actually worth an extra \$500 or so annually to be female. That insight was of course only shared privately, with the Deans among a few others.

The \$500 premium was also an average. The premium was considerably greater at the level of Assistant Professor than at the higher ranks, because social circumstances caused every university in the country to recruit preferentially females as well as “people of color” (POC). Demand far outstripped supply in those days, so that Assistant Professors who were female or POC had to be enticed by higher starting salaries than men with similar technical qualifications.

It is simply wrong to use disparate impact as a criterion that proves deliberate contemporary discrimination rather than lingering consequences of

historical circumstances. That the judicial system has failed to recognize this illustrates that the Judiciary, as most of the rest of society, is dysfunctional on such technical issues as the interpretation of statistics. That underscores the need for something like a Science Court as a resource for the judicial system overall. That case has been made at length in my book, *Science Is Not What You Think: How It Has Changed, Why We Can't Trust It, How It Can Be Fixed* (McFarland 2017).

Henry H. Bauer

Dean of Arts & Sciences, 1978-86,

Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University

To the Editor:

One must deplore the treatment that Bruce Gilley has received for his original article "The Case for Colonialism," as described in his recent article "The Case for Colonialism: A Response to My Critics," (*AQ*, Spring 2022).

I think Professor Gilley would have had a less hostile reception had he employed a less provocative title such as "Some Positive Aspects of Colonialism," or even more apt, "Selected instances in which colonialism has had positive consequences." He clearly delineated the boundaries of his discussion in his paper, but the title implied he was defending a much larger thesis.

That does not justify of course, the inflamed unfair attacks upon him and the article itself from bigoted and ignorant critics, many of whom, as he describes it, have simply adopted a knee jerk unthinking hostile response. Yet I suspect that the attacks on the article (as well as upon Professor Gilley) have actually increased its impact, confounding its critics. Nevertheless, only Gilley's courage and perseverance in standing up to them has led to this outcome, and we must all congratulate him for his tenacity.

Ernest B. Hook

Prof. Emeritus

School of Public health

University of California, Berkeley