

Perspective on Dr. Porteus

ON THE MANOA campus of the University of Hawaii the scales are better balanced now on at least one topic — the naming of Porteus Hall to honor the late Stanley D. Porteus (1883-1972).

The former chairman of the Department of Psychology, Dr. Ronald C. Johnson, has sprung to the defense of the inventor of the Porteus Maze Test against charges that he is undeserving of a building named in his honor.

Dr. Danny D. Steinberg, a psychologist serving as an associate professor in the Department of English, has compiled a paper on Porteus's writings that is pretty yeasty.

EXAMPLES:

On blacks — "The Negro actually belongs, as far as all-around ability is concerned, to an inferior race."

On Chinese — "They are more interested in acquiring money than in improving the social or political standing of the group as a whole."

On Filipinos — "The Filipinos

Dr. Ronald Johnson has sprung to the defense of the late Dr. Stanley D. Porteus, supporting him on his total record, and opposing a move to change the name of Porteus Hall. Those who want the name changed cite comments on race made by Porteus in 1926.

represent a fine example of a race in an adolescent stage of development."

On Hawaiians — "The shallowness of his emotional life is shown by the fact that although he is very affectionate in his attitude toward children, he is often quite willing to exchange offspring with a neighbor or friend."

On Japanese — "The Japanese on the Mainland is the same alert, aggressive, far-seeing, selfish and unscrupulous individual as we find in Hawaii."

There is more, and this might seem to give Dr. Steinberg's case a pretty good launching pad.

BUT DR. JOHNSON has weighed in to offer some important perspectives. Dr. Porteus's career was long. From 1914 to 1969, he authored some 105 publications.

The excerpts above are primarily from a single one, published in 1926, just as he was settling permanently in Hawaii.

For them, Porteus drew on ratings by plantation managers. This would be recognized now as a biased source, but 50 years ago, says John-

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son, it was naive reflecting the general level of scientific acumen then existent.

While Steinberg claims Porteus damaged Hawaii's "non-Nordic" types with such views, Johnson points out that he did nothing worse than reflect stereotypes widely held at the time and still held until quite recently, according to competent studies, even by the groups that were stereotyped.

WHERE PORTEUS deserves praise, says Johnson, is that he was always willing to put his ideas in testable form and to revise his beliefs when they were disproved.

Porteus held to the last to his belief that there are identifiable genetic differences among races, but he was no white supremacist.

After living in Hawaii, Johnson notes, Porteus came to the conclusion that Japanese and Chinese were superior to whites in ability and/or temperamental qualities that lead to achievement. He was a pro-Hawaiian witness in the Massie case, later an active supporter of Statehood whereas racists tended to be against it.

He maintained a lifelong high regard for the Australian aborigines, with whom his earliest research was done. He saw their abilities as different in structure from those of Australians of European ancestry, but saw each as superior in different ways.

IN HIS LAST work, published in 1969, Porteus speaks of intelligence as "a many splendored thing."

"It is like national currency," he wrote, "of full value in one set of financial circumstances, but useless in another. In other words, intelligence has no gold standard by which its value can be equated."

Natural selection, Porteus believed, gave each people talents best suited for their particular environments.

Dr. Johnson and most psychologists today accept Porteus's view on the importance of inheritance in



Stanley Porteus

determining individual intelligence and temperament. They are more inclined to ascribe overall racial variances to environment rather than heredity. On the Mainland the issue has become so hot that speakers with a contrary view have been shouted off college campuses.

STEINBERG WOULD fault Porteus totally on the basis of a very few writings out of very many, and for early ones at that.

Johnson would support him on his total record and on the citation given him by the American Psychological Association in 1962. This citation praised his development (early in his career) of the Maze Test in which a subject's mental capacity is measured by his ability to trace a path out of a printed maze.

This test has remained in popular use and was being refined by Dr. Porteus as long as he lived. The Psychological Association also said that Porteus had made a fundamental contribution to clinical psychology and may, in fact, have originated the term.

Steinberg believes the University regents should see fit to change the name of Porteus Hall.

Johnson holds that Dr. Porteus "was a scientist of the first water and his name deserves recognition."

THE STAR-BULLETIN previously suggested that if Porteus Hall is to be re-named, Jefferson Hall should be re-named as well. Jefferson also was a man subject to the foibles of his times.

Even as he gave the world a dream of democracy and freedom, at home he kept slaves. Jefferson wouldn't do that today, and Porteus in 1975 would make a different approach to "Temperament and Race" than he did in 1926 in the fledgling years of psychology as a science.