tenure inevitably provides a shelter for political and religious agitators who insist on teaching what is manifestly untrue and unscholarly," Mary R. Lefkowitz, a professor in the humanities at Wellesley College and author of "*Black Athena*" *Revisited* (1996), comments in the symposium. "But the premium must be paid, because tenure also protects those of us who are prepared to challenge the latest trends of academic orthodoxy, within disciplines and in the university curriculum."

Tenure may protect established scholars, John Silber, chancellor of Boston University, observes in *Academic Questions*, but the nontenured faculty are left exposed. They are at the mercy of "doctrinal orthodoxy as defined by the senior professors of a department," who tend to decide who does and does not get tenure. The infringement by the tenured on the intellectual rights of the nontenured, in Silber's view, "represents by far the most serious and most frequent violation of academic freedom in our colleges and universities."

Jon Wiener, a historian at the University of California at Irvine and a contributing editor of the *Nation*, worries about a different danger. "The greatest threat to the teaching of unpopular ideas today," he maintains in *Dissent* (Winter 1998), comes from administrators who have embraced "the logic of the market" and "the inexorable trend toward staffing colleges and universities with part-timers, adjuncts, and instructors." These untenured teachers are now "almost half the faculty at four-year colleges." In Wiener's view, collective bargaining is "the best way to defend college teachers—at least at public colleges—against politically motivated firing" by administrators aiming to satisfy the market.

Paul A. Cantor, a professor of English at the University of Virginia, also worries about administrators, though for a different reason. Without tenure, administrators would inevitably have a bigger say in hiring and firing. "[As] wrongheaded as my [academic] colleagues may at times have seemed to me," Cantor writes in *Academic Questions* (Winter 1997–98), "they came across as positively Solomonic in comparison with the university administrators I have known over the years. . . . Some critics of tenure think that abolishing it will provide a means of bringing to bear the less radical views of society as a whole on the academy," he observes. "But the more likely outcome would be to give new power to a subset within the academy, namely the educational establishment—perhaps even the education school establishment—which is generally more radical than the academy as a whole."

## Are All Cultures Equal?

"Cultural Relativism as Ideology" by Dennis H. Wrong, in *Critical Review* (Spring 1997),
Yale Stn. Box 205416, New Haven, Conn. 06520.

Scratch a modern "multiculturalist," and you get (among other things) what has long been known as a "cultural relativist," that is, one who regards all cultures as morally equal. Yet the anthropological doctrine of cultural relativism originally had a quite different meaning, maintains Wrong, an emeritus professor of sociology at New York University.

"The term *culture,* in something approximating the modern sense," he writes, "was originally an expression of German nationalism and was deployed against the universalism of the French Enlightenment." Denying there was any single story of human progress, Germans insisted "that different peoples developed their own unique ways of life that could only arbitrarily be measured against a common standard. Therefore, despite the economic and political 'backwardness' of German society, German culture was not necessarily inferior to that of France."

It was only "a short step from acceptance of the irreducible variety of cultures" and the rejection of a common human nature, Wrong says, to the theory of races that later became the basis of Nazi ideology. But in the ivory tower, he observes, culture became the ruling idea among German historians. When the pioneering German-born anthropologist Franz Boas (1858–1942) emigrated to America in 1886, he brought this German tradition with him. The rise of the Nazis later discredited racial theories, and shifted intellectual opinion decisively in favor of the view of Boas and others that cul-

ture, not race, shapes human customs and institutions. This view was popularized by Boas's student Ruth Benedict (1887–1948), in her 1934 book *Patterns of Culture*—a paperback bestseller in 1946. She attempted to illustrate what came to be known as "cultural relativism" (though she called it "cultural relativity").

Against the backdrop of the crimes of Hitler and Stalin, Benedict's book (and especially a sentence in it about "equally valid patterns of life") stirred intense debate about cultural relativism's implications for moral judgment. Wrong believes that Benedict did not mean to imply that any and all patterns of life are equally valid morally. "The original cultural relativism of Boas and his students did not entail the eschewal of any and all moral judgment," he says. Their cultural relativism meant that the culture in which individuals had been reared since infancy invariably shaped or determined their actions. But just because the actions of cannibals, headhunters, and other *individuals* should be viewed in the context of their cultures, that did not preclude "a comparative evaluation of different *cultures* and the conclusion that some were more desirable than others." Making such evaluations was not the work of scientists qua scientists, however, since moral judgments were then regarded as outside the fact-oriented realm of science.

Today's multiculturalists, in contrast, go so far as to call into question even factual knowledge, Wrong points out. They "are usually epistemological as well as cultural or moral relativists." But he does not believe that the current multiculturalist vogue will last long. "The very stress on supposedly irreducible cultural differences may express an uneasy awareness that they are not very great and that . . . they are likely to diminish," thanks to intermarriage and integration into the larger American society.

# *Reinventing Cities*

America's aging big cities need to accept the fact that they are shrinking, and set about planning to make smaller better. So contend Rybczynski and Linneman, professors of real estate and urbanism, and of real estate, finance and public policy, respectively, at the University of Pennsylvania.

The usual response of urban areas faced with a declining (and increasingly poor) population, the authors say, has been to raise taxes, thus making the city even less attractive. Another oft-proposed solution—regional government—is politically impractical, even leaving aside probable constitutional difficulties.

Mayors and urban planners should emulate Venice, Vienna, and Glasgow, Rybczynski and Linneman maintain. Though their populations peaked long ago (in the 17th century, in the case of Venice), they are still good places to live. "A city that has irretrievably lost large amounts of its population," say the authors, "needs to examine ways to redesign itself to become more compact, and perhaps even smaller in area."

Many cities have strong outlying parts, and some have strong centers, they note.

"Between these areas lies a complex web of decrepit housing stock, abandoned industry, and strong neighborhoods." What can be done? In some cases, they suggest, empty tracts could be turned into parks and recreation areas. New York City, owner of 20,000 vacant lots, is considering asking private corporations to pay for converting empty land into parks and playgrounds, in return for the right to use the space for advertising. Some vacant land may have commercial possibilities. In downtown Chicago, a developer recently built a golf course on 30 vacant acres near the convention center. Or perhaps large tracts could be consolidated and sold to the U.S. Department of the Interior for the creation of urban greenbelts. Another, more drastic idea: selling large tracts (of, say, 100-plus acres) to private developers to create independent "suburban" municipalities, with their own schools and governments.

Rybczynski and Linneman concede that significant reforms will provoke massive resistance. But for New York and other "shrinking cities," they believe, there is no realistic alternative.