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DON'T CHEER THE BLEEDING HEARTS

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By **MICHAEL MEYERS**

HUNTER College graduates last week predictably cheered "liberal" voices like Sen. Chuck Schumer and Hillary Rodham Clinton, who offered them bromides like "Go Forth!" Meanwhile, the students jeered the hard-nosed counsel of the immigrant from Puerto Rico, successful lawyer, CPA and magna cum laude City College graduate Herman Badillo, the new chairman of CUNY's board.

Not all of the assembled graduates booed Badillo's call for higher admission and matriculation standards. But enough did - while they swooned over the windy rhetoric of the bleeding hearts who've been telling them for years that college is the place for functional illiterates to "catch up."

In their dreamy, wet eyes, the doors to higher education must remain open even to high-school graduates who can't read and write, to all those "students" who have not tested ready to be taught by college professors. It's no wonder that CUNY has so many adjunct teachers!

The new report on CUNY just confirms yet again news that is bad and stale: What goes on at many of our senior colleges is nothing less than an educational hoax.

Yes, CUNY has some exemplary students and graduates, who overcome tremendous odds to personal success. But they're vastly outnumbered by the 50 percent of CUNY frosh who are deficient in reading, and the 92 percent in the community colleges who fail one or more placement exams and so end up in remediation. The bleeding-heart commencement speakers see all minority kids (and adults) the same way; they sent achievers and the underachievers alike into the 21st century.

Badillo was nevertheless hopeful - even as students booed, showing that they never learned the joy of exploring ideas. The truly educated graduate doesn't boo the man who tells them the hard truth about how to make a living and a life - that it doesn't do them or their families any good for them to receive counterfeit diplomas.

Those who booed the "butcher of CUNY" hold sheepskins from what was once a distinctive public university, which was proud of educating the poor and the studious - but is now a university in disgrace and in decline. They actually booed the man who challenges the monstrous system of mediocrity to its reclamation of excellence. And they instead applauded the bleeding hearts who've

paternalistically pitched the same old stuff - excuses about how the language needs of today's students' are so much greater than the immigrants of an earlier generation who didn't even speak English.

The system owes them something, the bleeding heart pols and students agree. "Pataki says cut back, we say fight back." That's how the system has taught our students to think - through chants, mantra, and partisan calls to arms. Through boos and banners that decry racism.

That's a familiar refrain, coming on the heels of Manhattan Borough President Virginia Fields' headline-grabbing, dubious federal complaint - that the state discriminates in funding the city's lower schools. That was Fields' response to the disastrous results of the fourth-grade reading tests - tests which again revealed that Rudy Crew and the Board of Education have failed, and are presiding over a dysfunctional system of schools.

Did Fields instruct her Board of Ed appointee to declare a state of educational emergency or to re-evaluate Crew? Of course not. It was simpler to pass the buck to Washington and to cry racism, in a system where the schools chancellor and the Board of Ed president are both black.

Give us a break, Virginia. You say the suburban schools are outperforming ours "because" of better state funding and better paid teachers. So how do some private schools that don't pay as well still do so much better than our public ones?

Fields' reasoning is more black-eyed than it is fact-based. But blackness is not enough. If knowledge and genuine pride of achievement is to be instilled in minority kids, we can't have Virginia Fields thinking that the federal government is Santa Claus. It is not. The feds' remedy to "discrimination" is take money away, not to redistribute the wealth in accordance with the epistles of Virginia, Rudy Crew and other squanderers of taxpayers' monies and the public's trust.

No, Virginia, race-bias is not why our students are doing so poorly compared to their counterparts in the suburbs and upstate. The blame lies in our own system's lack of discipline, due diligence and devotion to accountability. You and your bleeding-heart political friends don't know zilch about racism if you think that the reason our kids don't do so well in the lower schools and the colleges is due to some discriminatory kind of sliding scale of per-pupil funding. Herman Badillo told you why they're not learning, and why we must end social promotion and bring rigorous standards back to CUNY. But all he got for his labors were boos.

This educational emergency requires drastic actions. Maybe we ought to shut some senior colleges so that scarcity will forge competition. Maybe you, Virginia, ought to have your Board of Ed appointee, who's so palsy-walsy with Crew, start asking him some tough questions - and to get action.

Take another look, Virginia, at Crew's incredible statement that he's not at all embarrassed by the

dismal reading tests scores. "I believe these data demonstrate that we're closing the gap. New York state, as a whole, didn't do a dramatically better job," says your chancellor. Did you put that into your federal complaint? It contradicts you.

At least CUNY has a head start at reform - it has a new board chairman and is looking for a new chancellor. New York's public schools should do likewise.