

# MULTICULTURALISM 101

---

## Great Books of the Non-Western World

DINESH D'SOUZA

Hey, hey, ho, ho, Western culture's got to go, the angry students chanted on the lawn at Stanford University. They wore blue jeans, Los Angeles Lakers T-shirts, Reeboks, Oxford button-downs, Vuarnet sunglasses, baseball caps, Swatches. No tribal garb, Middle Eastern veils, or Japanese samurai swords were in sight. Observers could not recall a sari, kimono, or serape. None of the women's feet were bound. Clearly the rejection of the ways of the West was a partial one. Nevertheless, it was expressed with passion and vehemence, and commanded respect for its very intensity.

As at Stanford, American universities today routinely face protests and demands to downplay the teaching of Western or "Eurocentric" culture and to give greater emphasis to non-Western or global culture. Partly in sympathy with these demands, partly in response to pressure, university leaders are moving quickly to replace required courses in Western classics with what they call a multicultural curriculum.

After a much-publicized debate, Stanford eliminated its Western civilization core curriculum and established a new requirement called Cultures, Ideas, and Values (CIV). The new curriculum includes a hodgepodge of Western and non-Western texts assigned at the professor's discretion. Shakespeare, Locke, and Marx are assigned often as texts, but they are supplemented by the likes of *Popol Vuh*, *The Son of Old Man Hat*, and *I, Rigoberta Menchu*.

At Mount Holyoke and Dartmouth students must now take a course in Third World culture although there is no Western culture requirement. The University of Wisconsin recently instituted a mandatory non-Western and ethnic studies course, although students need not study the classics, American politics, or American history. Berkeley's newly adopted ethnic course requirement is the only undergraduate course that all students must take. The University of Cincinnati established an "American Diversity and World Cultures" requirement. Cleveland State University now requires a course dealing with a non-European culture. Meanwhile, the bastions of core curricula in Western classics, such as Columbia and the University of Chicago, are under pressure to climb on the multicultural bandwagon.

The study of non-Western cultures certainly merits an important place in American education. If pursued as a complement to rather than as a substitute for study of the West, learning about the achievements and failings of other societies can help us better understand our own. The great works of other civilizations, like those of our own, can broaden our minds and sharpen our thinking. There are practical reasons, too, for Americans, who will have to compete in a global economy, to learn about the languages and cultures of non-European lands.

### Closing of the Multicultural Mind

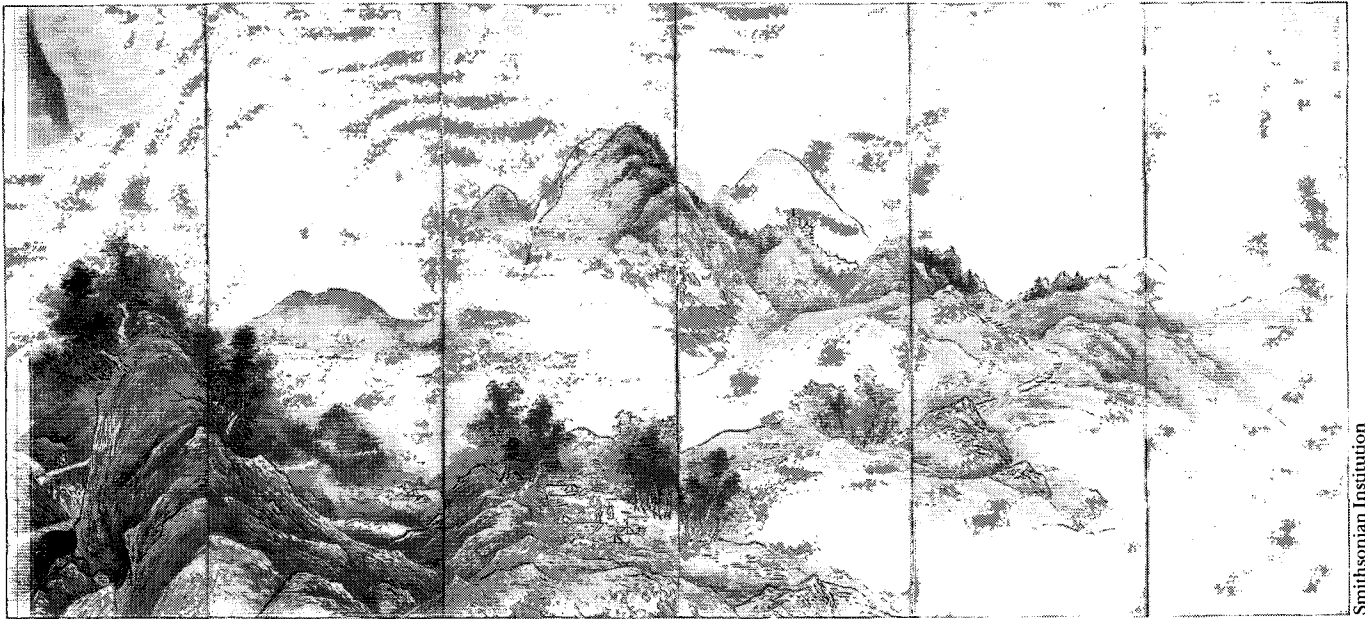
The question is not whether to teach students about other cultures, but how to do so. As currently offered, multicultural curricula in American universities produce puzzlement, if not disbelief, among many educated citizens of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. The materials presented to students bear virtually no resemblance to the ideas most deeply cherished in their cultures. Instead, American students receive a selective polemical interpretation of non-Western societies, revealing less about those societies than about the ideological prejudices of those who manage multicultural education.

For example, a course outline for the "Europe and the Americas" track of Stanford's CIV curriculum suggests that texts be uniformly subjected to a "race and gender" analysis, that is, viewed from the perspective of oppressed women and persons of color:

Works of imaginative literature that establish paradigms of the relationship between European and "other" will be analyzed, e.g., Euripides' *Medea*, whose main character is both "barbarian" and female; the medieval *Song of Roland*, which polarizes Christian and pagan (Moslem) stereotypes; Shakespeare's *Tempest*, whose figure of Caliban

---

DINESH D'SOUZA, formerly managing editor of *Policy Review*, is a research fellow in social policy at the American Enterprise Institute. His book *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* will be published this spring by the Free Press/Macmillan.



draws on contemporary reports of natives in the recently discovered “new world”; Césaire’s *Une Tempête*, an adaptation of the Shakespeare play that uses the Caliban–Prospero encounter as a model, in part, for the colonizer–colonized relations.

If it seems unfair to reduce Euripides and Shakespeare to a mere function of colonialism and racial and gender stereotypes, non-Western texts suffer the same trivialization. Thus the outline continues, “Race, gender, and class are all thematized in Barrio’s autobiography and Anzaldúa’s poetic essays. Gender is a central issue in Jamaica Kincaid’s novel *Annie John*, a mother–daughter story. Roumain’s *Masters of the Dew* plays out a class drama around the conflict between traditionalist peasant culture and modern proletarian consciousness.”

### Travelling with Rigoberta

A representative text in this track of the new Stanford core curriculum is *I, Rigoberta Menchu*, the life story of an Indian woman from Guatemala as told to the feminist writer Elisabeth Burgos-Debray. In the introduction, we learn from Burgos-Debray that Rigoberta “speaks for all the Indians of the American continent.” Further, she represents oppressed people everywhere: “The voice of Rigoberta Menchu allows the defeated to speak.”

So how did this authentic voice of oppression in Latin America link up with her translator? It turns out that they met in Paris, where Rigoberta Menchu and Burgos-Debray were both attending a socialist conference. Rigoberta’s use of phrases such as “bourgeois youths” and “Molotov cocktail” do not sound like the usual vocabulary of a traditional Indian peasant. Suspicions that Rigoberta does not represent the Third World peasant population are reinforced by her chapter titled “Rigoberta Renounces Marriage and Motherhood,” which describes her feminist consciousness.

If Rigoberta does not represent traditional Mayan villagers, whom does she represent? The answer is that she represents a projection of Western radical and

feminist views onto Latin Indian culture. As Burgos-Debray suggests in her introduction, Rigoberta provides independent Third World confirmation of the validity of socialist and feminist ideologies. She is a mouthpiece for a sophisticated Western critique of society, all the more useful because it issues from a seemingly authentic peasant source. Rigoberta’s importance to Stanford is that she provides a model with whom American minority and female students can identify; they too are oppressed like her.

In a crucial passage in the book, Rigoberta is identified with quadruple oppression. She is a person of color, and thus a victim of racism. She is a woman, and

---

**“Forget Confucius. I don’t want to study China. I want to study myself.”**

---

thus a victim of sexism. She lives in Central America, which is a victim of European and American colonialism. If this were not bad enough, she is an Indian, victimized by Latino culture within Central America.

Rigoberta’s claim to fame, therefore, is not anything she did or wrote but her status as a consummate victim—the modern Saint Sebastian, pierced by the arrows of North American white male cruelty. Rigoberta has experienced genuine tragedies, with her father, mother, and brother all having been killed by Guatemalan armed forces. But her life story is portrayed as an explicit indictment of the West and Western institutions. She fits into the historicist framework of contemporary scholarship, which employs Hegelian and Marxist terms to describe history as inevitable progress toward the end of proletarian emancipation. Thus Rigoberta becomes wor-



thy of canonization—quite literally, worthy of admission into the Stanford canon.

### Multiculturalism as Parochialism

Multicultural curricula at Stanford and elsewhere generally reflect little interest in the most enduring, influential, or aesthetically powerful products of non-Western cultures. "The protesters here weren't interested in building up the anthropology department or immersing themselves in foreign languages," comments Stanford philosophy instructor Walter Lammi. Alejandro Sweet-Cordero, spokesman for a Chicano group on campus, told the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, "We're not saying we need to study Tibetan philosophy. We're arguing that we need to understand what made our society what it is." Black activist William King says, "Forget Confucius. We are trying to prepare ourselves for the multicultural challenge we will face in the future. I don't want to study China. I want to study myself." Thus does the non-Western project begin to reveal its own paradoxical provincialism.

It is impossible to understand the American university's project to reform the core curriculum without recognizing that the impetus for change virtually always comes from a triangular alliance of student protesters, faculty advocates, and ideologically sympathetic administrators, all committed to the civil rights, feminist, and homosexual rights struggles originating in the 1960s. For these activists, the purpose of studying other cultures is to cherish them; to investigate alternatives to racist, sexist, and homophobic Western mores; to celebrate the new pluralism and diversity. Stanford classics professor Marshall McCall put it bluntly, "The pressure is on here to affirm those who have been 'out,' and to spare those cultures and traditions any criticism."

### The Lash of the East

But any search for superior alternatives to the West produces an alarming discovery. By and large, non-Western cultures have no developed tradition of racial equality—not only do they violate equality in practice, but the very principle is alien, regarded by many with suspicion and hostility. Moreover, many of these cultures have deeply ingrained ideas of male superiority. The Koran, for instance, stipulates that "men have authority over women, because Allah has made the one superior to the other." The renowned Islamic scholar Ibn Taymiyya advises, "When a husband beats his wife for misbehavior, he should not exceed 10 lashes." Many Chinese continue to abide by an old saying from the

*Ts'ai-fei-lu*, "If you care for your son, you don't go easy on his studies. If you care for your daughter, you don't go easy on her foot-binding." Such practices as dowry, purdah, wife-burning, and clitoral mutilation are widespread in non-Western cultures.

It is perhaps pointless to bring up the issue of attitudes toward homosexuality and other "alternative life-styles," which are forms of behavior likely to warrant segregation, imprisonment, even capital punishment in various Third World countries. In Cuba homosexuals are often thrown in jail and in China they are sometimes subjected to shock treatment, which is credited with a high "cure rate." Basil Davidson, in his book *The African Genius*,

observes that African tribes such as the Nyakusa, although tolerant in matters of sex, regard homosexuality as a sin and a sickness "occasioned by witchcraft."

Since the race and gender viewpoints of the new advocates of multiculturalism and diversity find little support in other cultures, it seems reasonable to expect that these cultures would be roundly denounced as even more backward and retrograde than the West. But, for political reasons, this is totally unacceptable, since the developing world is viewed as suffering the same kind of oppression that blacks, Hispanics, women, and homosexuals suffer in America. It is crucial for the activists to maintain victim solidarity. As a result, instead of being subjected to charges of misogyny and prejudice, non-Western cultures are ransacked to find "representative" figures who are congenial to the Western propaganda agenda—then, like

Rigoberta Menchu, they are triumphantly presented as the "repressed voices" of diversity, fit for the solemn admiration and emulation of American undergraduates.

### Quetzalcoatl and Safe Sex

Advocates of multicultural curricula on all campuses, not just Stanford, are plagued by these challenges. One of the most successful texts, widely assigned in non-Western courses across the country, is a book produced in direct rebuttal to Allan Bloom and E. D. Hirsch titled *Multicultural Literacy*. Published by Graywolf Press in St. Paul, Minnesota, the book begins with the plausible contention that, in a global culture, it is insufficient for American students to study only the cultural ingredients of the West—this legitimate preparation for self-understanding and democratic self-government should be extended to the study of other civilizations as well.

Unfortunately, *Multicultural Literacy* devotes virtually no space to the philosophical, religious, and literary classics of China, Japan, Indonesia, India, Persia, the



The Bettmann Archive

Arab world, Africa, or Latin America. Nor does it examine dramatic political changes that have brought non-Western cultures into new cooperation, or confrontation, with Western ideals. Instead, the book includes 13 protest essays, including Michele Wallace's autobiographical "Invisibility Blues" and Paula Gunn Allen's "Who Is Your Mother: The Red Roots of White Feminism."

It also offers a Hirsch-style laundry list of alleged Third World vocabulary. This bewildering catalog includes: "AbdulJabbar, Allende, ancestor worship, Arafat, ashram, barrio, beatnik, Biko, Bogota, Cajun, Cardenal, child abuse, condom, covert operations, dadaism, de Beauvoir, domestic violence, Dr. J, economic violence, Farsi, Friedan, genitals, Gilgamesh, Greenpeace, Harlem, Hopi, Hurston, indigenous, internment camps, juju music, karma, kundalini yoga, Kurosawa, liberation theology, Little Red Book, Mandela, McCarthy, migrant worker, misogyny, mutual assured destruction, neo-Nazi, New Right, nuclear freeze, Ojibwa tribe, Plath, premenstrual syndrome, prophylactic, Quetzalcoatl, rap music, safe sex, samba, sexism, socialized medicine, Soweto, Tao Te Ching, Tutu, wars of liberation, Wollstonecraft, Zimbabwe."

What this eccentric selection of a few hundred words reflects is nothing more than the limited grazings in Third World pastures by American intellectuals of a left-wing and feminist bent. The new multiculturalism ignores the true diversity of other cultures; instead, its brand of diversity leads to intellectual conformity—where Asian, African, Latin American, and Middle Eastern cultures are forced onto the procrustean bed of Western progressive preconception. Moreover, this non-Western project is not above distorting and abusing other civilizations for its own ends; the distinctive ideas and ways of Third World peoples are only permitted expression through the refracted lens of American liberationist ideology.

### Principles of True Multiculturalism

University leaders who are committed to an honest and critical analysis of other cultures should replace ersatz multiculturalism with a better alternative. A serious and authentic multicultural curriculum would satisfy three basic criteria.

First, it would study non-Western ideas and institutions in relation to, and not as a substitute for, the great works of Western thought. Educated citizens should know the philosophical, historical, and literary basics of their own culture. Just as an educated Chinese would be

familiar with Confucius, so it is imperative that Americans know something about Thomas Jefferson and the Bible. Indeed students are better equipped to study other cultures when they have critically reflected on their own, because they then have a base of knowledge against which to compare new ideas and new experience; indeed, they are in a position to develop standards of aesthetic and moral judgment that transcend the conventions of any particular culture.

Second, a multicultural curriculum should teach the "best that has been thought and said" in other cultures. It should not be arrogantly assumed that Western thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle should be studied to determine whether their ideas are true or false, while the people of Asia, Africa, and Latin America should be studied just for their social and economic anthropology, and particularly for their victimization at the hands of the West. Non-Western teachers such as Confucius, Mohammed, and Zoroaster advanced controversial theses about human happiness, how society should be organized, and the role of women. And these deserve to be taken seriously, which is to say, subjected to the same critical scrutiny as Socrates and Rousseau.

It defeats the purpose of multicultural education to cater to the political prejudices of Westerners. In fact the greatest advantage of such education is that it performs a similar function as a serious reading of Western classics: it helps to liberate American students of the late 20th century from the provincialism of the moment. Just as the classic texts of Thucyd-

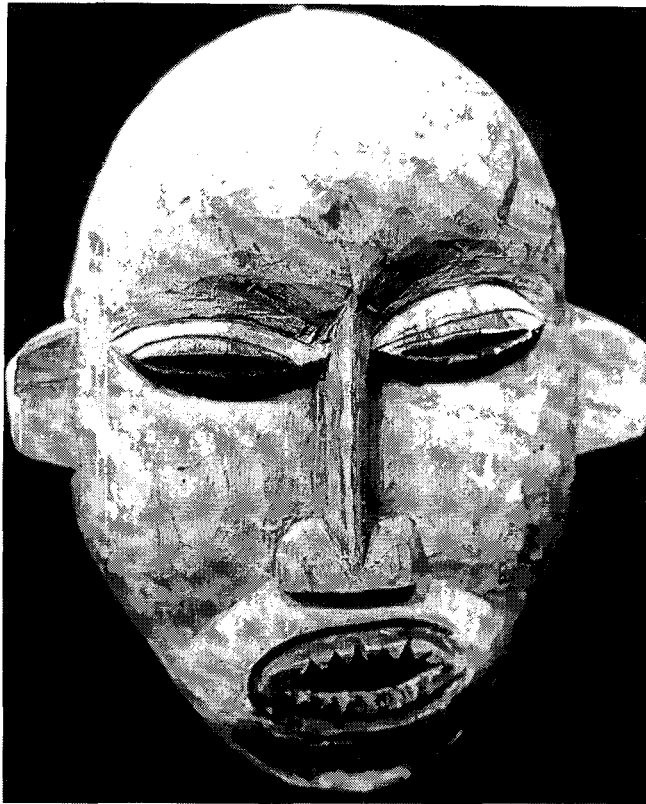
ides, Dante, and Shakespeare draw us backward into time, providing a rare glimpse into the minds and lives of the past, non-Western classics draw us across the boundaries of space, providing us with an experience of the way other peoples think and live. It is no argument against these texts that they do not always speak directly to the passions of the moment; their benefit is that they provide spiritual, intellectual, and emotional encounters otherwise unavailable to us. And at their finest, they illuminate the enduring questions of life and love and death with which all human beings, past and present, native and foreign, have ever grappled.

While non-Western classics may be taught for their powerful, if controversial and unfashionable, vision of an alternate way of life, a third principle for multicultural curricula should be political and cultural relevance. This does not contradict earlier points—it simply means that Americans should study other civilizations both for what is timeless about them, and for what is timely. By learning



Smithsonian Institution





The Bettmann Archive

about societies that vitally intersect with the West, students can better prepare themselves to deal with the most pressing challenges of a global society.

As the world becomes a smaller place, great political and social currents from different societies are likely to come into increasing contact and collision. Three of these are Asian (especially Japanese) capitalism, which has proved so successful in world markets; the rapid spread of Protestant evangelicalism and democracy throughout traditionally Catholic and autocratic Latin America; and Islamic radicalism and fundamentalism, perhaps the most formidable ideological opponent of Western liberal democracy in the aftermath of the Cold War. Students should consider such questions as why the “age of secularism” has produced such a powerful religious revival in the Arab world; what relationship, if any, Islamic fundamentalism bears to American fundamentalism; how free churches and free elections will change the landscape of Hispanic culture, and indeed of the Americas; and whether the Confucian ethic of East Asia is as advantageous for capitalism as the “Protestant ethic” of Max Weber.

### A Model Curriculum

What follows is a list of “Great Books” that could be offered in a non-Western curriculum. These texts could be taught alongside a similar sequence in Western classics, or Western and non-Western texts could be integrated into a single core curriculum. Obviously this outline does not exhaust the list of important works produced in other cultures; it is intended to suggest the kind of approach that should guide serious advocates of multiculturalism. The titles are accompanied by brief accounts of the texts and some themes they raise.

Written in Sanskrit between 800 and 400 B.C., the *Upanishads* represent sacred spiritual teaching for the Hindus. The word “upanishad” means a sitting, instruction at the foot of a sage. Although there are more than a hundred upanishads, about a dozen are well known, and of them the *Bhagavad Gita*—the lessons of life communicated by Lord Krishna to the archer Arjun, amidst the fury of combat—is undoubtedly the most influential. The philosopher Schopenhauer said, after studying these verses, that their reading “has been the consolation of my life, and will be after my death.” The best place to approach the *Upanishads* may be selections from the *Katha*, *Chandogya*, and *Svetasvatara* upanishads. In the latter we read, “With upright body, head and neck lead the mind and its power into the heart; and the Om of Brahman will be thy boat, with which to cross the rivers of fear.” The teaching of the *Upanishads* is that God must not be sought as a Being separate from us, but rather as a sublime force within us, enabling us to rise above our mortal limitations. The influence of the *Upanishads* has contributed to a widespread conviction, across the Indian subcontinent, that it is a waste of time to combat social injustice because true liberation comes from the inner soul’s receptivity to the divine calling.

Although it dates back to 320–400 B.C., Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War* remains a classic of military strategy that has influenced the conduct of battles from ancient China right up to the time of Mao Zedong. Among Western texts only Clausewitz’s *On War* compares to Sun Tzu in profound psychological reflection of the human spirit under conditions of hostility, and of the two Sun Tzu reads as less dated and more timely. Like Clausewitz, Sun Tzu believed that the moral, intellectual, and circumstantial aspects of war, and not just military force, are decisive. “Numbers by themselves confer no advantage,” he said. He emphasized attacking the *mind* of the enemy so the

---

## The new multiculturalism ignores the true diversity of other cultures.

---

battle could be over before it began: “To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.” Sun Tzu stressed decisiveness (“Hesitancy in a general is a great calamity”), swiftness (“While we have heard of blundering swiftness in war, we have not yet seen a clever offensive that was prolonged”), and surprise (“Offer the enemy a bait to lure him, feign disorder, and then strike”). For all his martial advice, Sun Tzu recognized the ultimate futility of conflict: “There has never been a protracted war from which a country has benefitted.” Even as we return to peace, Sun Tzu reminds us of our human proclivity toward aggression and conquest; as long as this proclivity endures, *The Art of War* will continue to illuminate the principles of human struggle.

Confucius' *Analects*, compiled by his pupils soon after the master's death in the 5th century B.C., reveal his teachings, which have become the foundation of Chinese thought. Like Socrates, his rough contemporary, Confucius believed that men should seek virtue for its own sake rather than because it promises a reward, either in this life or the next; he also shared Socrates' view that the contemplative life is the highest calling. "The gentleman understands what is moral," Confucius tells his interlocutor. "The small man understands what is profitable." The Confucian life is dedicated to the relentless pursuit of moral improvement, through refinement of such character traits as courage and benevolence.

Tsu-kung asked, "All in the village like him. What do you think of that?"

The Master said, "That is not enough."

"All in the village dislike him. What do you think of that?"

The Master said, "That is not enough either. Tell me that those people in his village who are good like him, and those who are bad dislike him. That would be better."

Western students who study Confucius confront a very unfamiliar worldview, one that takes a fatalistic approach to reforming social institutions, emphasizes unqualified obedience within the family, and embraces rigid class structures and emperor worship. A less pliant approach to political oppression may be found in Mencius, whose doctrine of rulers existing for the good of the people was unfortunately ignored for most of Chinese history.

The *Tao Te Ching* or "way of life" was primarily composed by the Chinese philosopher Lao-tzu a few centuries before Christ. This collection of didactic segments, hymns, arguments, and aphorisms outlines the vision of the Chinese mystics who advocated a life of simplicity,

---

## Sun Tzu emphasized attacking the *mind* of the enemy to end the battle before it began.

---

frugality, and closeness to the rhythm of nature. One of the central terms is "Wei wu wei," or literally "to do without doing." This paradoxical advice urges stillness and alertness, so that nature's course, the Way or ultimate reality, can act through us without human interruption or distraction. Although sometimes elusive, the Taoist philosophy of selflessness and mystical quest for unity in nature have made Lao-tzu perhaps the most influential Chinese thinker after Confucius. Native in its references, the *Tao Te Ching* is universal in its insights:

Once the Way is lost,  
Then comes virtue;



The Bettmann Archive

Virtue lost, then comes compassion;  
After that, morality;  
And when that's lost, there's etiquette,  
The husk of all faith,  
The rising point of anarchy.

Composed in Sanskrit by the poet Valmiki in the 4th century B.C., the *Ramayana* is India's *Iliad*. It is 24,000 stanzas long, but the novelist R. K. Narayan has a fine condensation. The *Ramayana* is the story of the amorous courtship of Prince Rama, the abduction of his wife Sita by the monster Ravana, and Rama's mystical pursuit of the demon across a continent of deities, spells, and strange beasts, culminating in a final battle between the avenging prince and his concupiscent adversary. The work abounds with sensuous images—a stream scours the mountain "verily like a woman of pleasure gently detaches the valuables from her patron during her caresses." Viewed by some Indians as carrying scriptural authority, the *Ramayana* is ultimately about the timeless struggle between authority and usurpation, between fidelity and profligacy, between good and evil.

The holy text of the Moslem religion, accepted as the word of Allah communicated to the prophet Mohammed in the 7th century A.D., the *Koran* is at once sublime and terrifying to the Western reader. This Moslem scripture has much in common with the Judeo-Christian tradition out of which it sprang—like the Old Testament, it is a rich combination of commonsense advice, history, moral instruction, and divine law. The *Koran* outlines a vision of human dignity, self-discipline, and charity that has





The Bettmann Archive

greatly improved the lives of many of its followers. While the cruel and the heartless will be punished, the Koran promises: "Those who have faith and do good works will be rewarded by gardens watered by running streams." At the same time, its teachings regarding male superiority and authority over women, polygamy, and criminal deterrence ("As for the man or woman who is guilty of theft, cut off their hands, for this is the punishment enjoined by Allah") will be difficult for many Westerners to embrace. The Koran does not distinguish between religious and political activity; it calls for Moslem domination and limited rights for others, and it urges a *jihad* or holy war against non-Islamic states to bring them under the rule of Allah.

The *Ruba'iyat* of Omar Khayyam is an 11th-century collection of short stanzas, compiled by the Persian philosopher-poet, which outlines an Epicurean vision celebrating the pleasures of the here-and-now with subtle irony. It is the consummation of the verse form, the ruba'i or two-line poem, that was developed by relatively free-thinking Persian poets who were often in rebellion against religious dogmatism. Even those who reject the *carpe diem* ("seize the day") attitude of the *Ruba'iyat* must confront its philosophy of fatalism and its enduring human temptation, especially in the tantalizing verses of Khayyam:

Drink wine since for our destruction  
The firmament has got its eye on our precious  
souls  
Sit where it is green and enjoy the sparkling  
liquor

Because this grass will grow nicely from your  
dust and mine.

Lady Shikibu Murasaki's *Tale of Genji*, composed during the 11th century A.D., is a vivid and opulent account of Japanese life at court. Murasaki served as an aide to the empress Akiko, who reportedly enforced a stern regimen of chastity amongst her normally flirtatious maids. Murasaki camouflaged her learning in Chinese and Japanese language, as well as history, because she knew that such knowledge was considered inappropriate for a woman. This breadth of erudition, as well as a fluent style, are evident in *Tale of Genji*, however, in which Murasaki herself is a character—the second wife of Prince Genji. The work was well known in court circles during her time, and the Japanese emperor upon reading it was amazed at Murasaki's understanding of Japanese imperial history and convention. *Tale of Genji* provides the patient student (it is a lengthy novel in six parts) with a rare vista of the complex norms of 11th-century Japan.

Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali*, written in Bengali in the early 20th century, consists of a series of poetic meditations on life and nature. In many high schools in Asia, one of its poems is offered as a daily prayer:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is  
held high;  
Where knowledge is free;  
Where the world has not been broken up into  
fragments by narrow domestic walls;  
Where words come out of the depth of truth;  
Where tireless striving stretches its arms toward  
perfection;  
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost  
its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;  
Where the mind is led by Thee into ever-widen-  
ing thought and action;  
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my  
country awake.

William Butler Yeats, who wrote the introduction to the English translation of the *Gitanjali*, said he dis-

---

**The Koran outlines a vision of  
human dignity, self-discipline,  
and charity that has greatly  
improved the lives of many of  
its followers.**

---

covered in Tagore a world that he had always dreamed about, but never encountered, either in reality or in imagination, in the West. "These verses," Yeats wrote,

"will not lie in little well-printed books upon ladies' tables, who turn the pages with indolent hands that they may sigh over a life without meaning...but, as the generations pass, travellers will hum them on the highway, and men rowing upon rivers. Lovers, while they await one another, shall find this love of God a magic gulf wherein their own more bitter passion may bathe and renew its youth." Somehow Tagore's spiritual eros managed to capture "a whole people, a whole civilization," and he did so grandly, nobly, without polemic.

The conflict between the old tribal ways of Africa and the new forces of colonialism and Christianity are portrayed in Chinua Achebe's 1958 novel *Things Fall Apart*. The novel dramatizes change through the life of a bellicose tribesman of the Ibo tribe in Nigeria, who places such emphasis on physical strength that he regards all men weaker than himself as "women." Achebe's novel tragically recounts the destruction of thousand-year-old indigenous traditions as a result of alien invasion, yet at the same time he describes the less attractive features of those traditions, including brutal internecine warfare among the tribes (the protagonist Okonkwo drinks wine from the skulls of rival tribesmen he has killed), wife-beating, the consultation of oracles leading to bloodshed, and superstitious refusals to bury those who die from disease.

When an African convert to Christianity defiles the old religious symbols of the tribe, Okonkwo proposes to "take a stick and break his head." But the other elders prevail with a strategy of resignation. "If a man kills the sacred python in the secrecy of his hut, the matter lies between him and the god. We did not see it. If we put ourselves between the god and his victim, we may receive the blows intended for the offender." *Things Fall Apart* was written with such economy, honesty, and moral seriousness that it has been compared to the classics of Greek tragedy.

Naguib Mahfouz's *The Thief and the Dogs*, published in 1961, captures the social texture of middle-class Egyptian life as well as any of Mahfouz's extensive corpus of

---

**India's Iliad, the Ramayana, is ultimately about the timeless struggle between authority and usurpation, fidelity and profligacy, good and evil.**

---

work. When Mahfouz won the Nobel prize he was praised for being realistic and yet metaphorical, detailed and yet evocative. In the tradition of Flaubert and Dickens, Mahfouz is a masterful observer of the subtle interaction of foreign and indigenous influences in Cairo, and his



The Bettmann Archive

**A scene from Omar Khayyam's *Ruba'iyat*:  
A jug of wine, a loaf of bread, and thou beside me,  
singing in the wilderness.**

novels reflect the rich social texture of urban life: its distracting exotica; its picaresque abandon; its social-climbing, kowtowing, and disguised corruption. *The Thief and the Dogs* is a narrative thriller, following the roguish exploits of the jewel robber Sai Mahrán, his desperate attempts at revenge and love, his moral disguise of revolutionary ideals for his self-aggrandizing crimes, ultimately his effort to escape the police dogs without degrading himself to the level of an animal. Like Mahfouz's other works, *Wedding Song* and *The Beginning and the End*, this novel raises the veil on an often-concealed and often-misrepresented civilization that Westerners would do well to understand better.

*The Labyrinth of Solitude*, published in 1985 by the Mexican writer Octavio Paz, consists of two long meditations—the famous title piece and "The Other Mexico"—and other shorter articles, all exploring the moral and psychological identity of Mexico, partly in relation with colonial Spain and the United States. Paz, who won the 1990 Nobel prize for literature, is a novelist, poet, and social critic, and this book employs the diverse forms of flights of fancy, rhythm, and meter, as well as trenchant analysis and commentary. Politically Paz terms himself a "disillusioned leftist," and his work resonates with long-



ing for peasant utopia, punctuated by a keen awareness of the follies that attend its implementation.

In the lead essay, "The Labyrinth of Solitude," first written in 1961, Paz defines the Mexican character as solitary, repressed, inscrutable, usually presenting itself behind social masks, occasionally breaking out with wanton indiscretion during a revolution or fiesta. "During these days the silent Mexican whistles, shouts, sings, shoots off fireworks, discharges his pistol into the air. He discharges his soul. The night is full of songs and loud cries. Nobody talks quietly. Hats fly in the air. Now and

---

## The great works of other civilizations, like those of our own, can broaden our minds and sharpen our thinking.

---


then, it is true, the happiness ends badly, in quarrels, insults, pistol shots, stabbings. But these too are part of the fiesta, for the Mexican does not seek amusement: he seeks escape from himself, to leap over the wall of solitude that confines him." In another extraordinary insight, Paz adds, "The North Americans are credulous, and we are believers. They love fairy tales and detective stories and we love myths and legends. We get drunk in order to confess. They get drunk in order to forget. North Americans consider the world to be something that can be perfected. We consider it to be something to be redeemed."

*Love in the Time of Cholera*, published in 1988, is one of Colombian novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez's baroque narratives, similar in style and genre to his better-known *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The novel is a love story, but of no ordinary sort. Florentino Ariza is so consumed by the image of the beautiful but haughty Fermina Daza that he develops strange illnesses, somewhat like cholera.

Daza, who is happily married to a distinguished physician, submits to no tawdry infidelities, with the result that Ariza's affections go unfulfilled and unrequited for more than half a century. Their reciprocal relationship begins when Ariza is 76 years old, an ancient troubadour. Garcia Marquez's story is enveloped in a rich Latin tapestry, revealing somber and dissolute priests, venal politicians, wenches for hire, long-suffering grandmothers, and a narrator simultaneously detached and yet involved, cosmopolitan and yet native.

Evidence of Garcia Marquez's political and aesthetic sensibilities comes from his sharp contrast between peasant mulattoes ("During the weekend they danced without mercy, drank themselves blind on home-brewed alcohol, made wild love among the icaco plants") and bourgeois Spanish ladies ("Indoors, in the cool bedrooms saturated with incense, women protected themselves from the sun as if it were a shameful infection.... Their love affairs were slow and difficult and were often disturbed by sinister omens, and life seemed interminable"). But whatever the merits of its author's ideological convictions, *Love in the Time of Cholera* creates scenes, characters, and attitudes that North Americans will find bizarre, captivating, and vastly informative.

### Careful Study

Other books could be added to this list, such as Ibn Khaldun's *Muqadimmah*, the autobiography of Al Ghazali, the Chinese drama *Three Kingdoms* by Lo Kuan-Chung, not to mention contemporary works such as Mario Vargas Llosa's *Against Wind and Tide*, V. S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*, the poetry of Jorge Luis Borges, the novels of Wole Soyinka. Any multicultural curriculum should explore the principles of Buddhism. There are also excellent editions of folklore, historical survey, and modern scholarly comment on the literature and philosophy of other cultures that merit study. Multicultural education is too important to leave to the current ideological biases of those who administer such programs. Through a careful study of the contrasting principles embodied in Western and non-Western cultures, American students may find stronger rational and moral grounds for adopting the norms of other civilizations, or for affirming their own. 

# LAND OF MILK AND MONEY

---

## Governor Tommy Thompson's Wisconsin Showcase

### AN INTERVIEW BY ADAM MEYERSON

One of the ironies of modern politics is that the state of Wisconsin, earlier this century the shrine of Progressivism, is today the showcase of conservative policy ideas. Under Republican Governor Tommy Thompson, Wisconsin has combined economic dynamism with a boldly experimental approach to education and welfare reform. Wisconsin is the only state in the nation whose welfare rolls declined last year. And while public school choice is sweeping many states, Wisconsin, with a pilot program in Milwaukee, is a pioneer in offering vouchers that students can use at private as well as public schools.

Thompson's policies seem to be popular. A conservative Republican in a state with a strong liberal tradition, Thompson last November was reelected to his second four-year term with 58 percent of the vote. He carried 67 of 72 counties, and picked up 25 percent of the black vote. Thompson has also attracted attention through his unusual coalition on school vouchers with State Representative Polly Williams, who was Jesse Jackson's state chairman and has close ties with militant black separatists in Milwaukee.

Thompson was interviewed in January 1991 in his Madison office by *Policy Review* editor Adam Meyerson.

***Policy Review:* With unemployment at slightly over 4 percent, a relatively untroubled real estate market and banking system, and a boom in industrial exports, Wisconsin has recently enjoyed one of the strongest state economies in the nation; and, like most of the Midwest, your state has so far been less affected by recession than other sections of the country. What changes in national economic policy have contributed most to the turnaround of the Wisconsin economy? What changes in state policy have been most important?**

**Thompson:** The most helpful change in national policy has been the declining value of the dollar. We're one of nine states now that have a trade surplus of at least a half billion dollars. A lower dollar helped our export industries be more competitive.

The most important changes for Wisconsin, though, have been in state policy. We've gone from a business-

bashing state to a very friendly place to do business. I ran for governor on a pro-business platform—against the advice of people who said you can't win in Wisconsin doing that. And I twice proved them wrong.

One of my main priorities has been to make our tax structure more competitive. We've reduced income taxes so we're no longer in the top 10. We've reduced corporation taxes. We're one of only seven states with a 60 percent exemption for capital gains taxes. We're phasing out the inheritance tax. We've cut the unemployment compensation tax three times, and now have a \$1.2 billion surplus in our unemployment compensation fund. We have one of the lowest workers' compensation rates in the country.

Another change has been a more aggressive effort to sell Wisconsin as a good place to do business. I spend a lot of my time pounding on business doors, often flying out of state, to try to convince companies with expansion plans that they should locate in Wisconsin.

***P.R.:* How have tax cuts benefitted your economy?**

**Thompson:** Lower taxes make it more profitable for businesses to locate and expand their operations here. They also have an important effect on perceptions of business climate. I find it significant that the new governors of Minnesota and Michigan, Arne Carlson and John Engler, both publicly said they couldn't raise taxes in their states or they would risk losing more businesses and more jobs to Wisconsin.

Our 60 percent exemption for capital gains has been a very good selling point in attracting business. In fact, based on our experience, I would strongly recommend cutting capital gains taxes at the national level. Keeping down taxes on capital gains encourages entrepreneurs to take risks. It gives them the incentive to invest, to expand their operations, and in the process put more people to work. A cut in these taxes is not a break for the rich. It's an inducement for growth and ingenuity.

Our phaseout of inheritance taxes has been especially important. For many years, we suffered a terrible drain as people who really energized the state, the movers and the shakers, were leaving Wisconsin to go to the Sunbelt