

Concerning balancing rights and responsibilities, the academic community has been increasingly troubled about pressures to amend curricula to reflect the needs of various groups for information about their cultures, and how to balance this with respect for the sources of Western culture. The curriculum report to the New York State Board of Regents has proved to be a particularly strong catalyst for discussions in this area. Arthur Schlesinger is the Albert Schweitzer Professor of Humanities at the City University of New York. An eminent historian and government servant, Professor Schlesinger is the winner of Pulitzer Prizes in both history and biography. This article is reprinted from THE WALL STREET JOURNAL with his permission.

AGAINST ACADEMIC APARTHEID

by Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.

"What then is the American, this new man?" a French immigrant asked two centuries ago. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur gave the classic answer to his own question. "He is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds...Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of man."

The conception of America as a transforming nation, banishing old identities and creating a new one, prevailed through most of American history. It was famously reformulated by Israel Zangwill, an English writer of Russian-Jewish origin, when he called America "God's crucible, the great melting pot where all the races of Europe are melting and reforming." Most people who came to America expected to become Americans. They wanted to escape a horrid past and to embrace a hopeful future. Their goals were deliverance and assimilation.

Thus Crevecoeur wrote his "Letters from an American Farmer" in his acquired English, not in his native French. Thus immigrants reared in other tongues urged their children to learn English as speedily as possible. German immigrants tried for a moment to gain status for their language, but the effort got nowhere. The dominant culture was Anglo-Saxon and, with modification and enrichment, remained Anglo-Saxon.

REPUDIATION OF THE MELTING POT

The melting pot was one of those metaphors that turned out only to be partly true, and recent years have seen an astonishing repudiation of the whole conception. Many Americans today righteously reject the

historic goal of "a new race of man." The contemporary ideal is not assimilation but ethnicity. The escape from origins has given way to a search for "roots." "Ancient prejudices and manners" - the old-time religion, the old-time diet - have made a surprising comeback.

These developments portend a new turn in American life. Instead of a transformative nation with a new and distinct identity, America increasingly sees itself as preservative of old identities. We used to say *e pluribus unum*. Now we glorify *pluribus* and belittle *unum*. The melting pot yields to the Tower of Babel.

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The new turn has had marked impact on the universities. Very little agitates academia more these days than the demands of passionate minorities for revision of the curriculum: in history, the denunciation of Western civilization courses as cultural imperialism; in literature the denunciation of the "canon," the list of essential books, as an instrumentality of the existing power structure.

A recent report by the New York State Commissioner of Education's task force on "Minorities: Equity and Excellence" luridly describes "African Americans, Asian Americans, Puerto Ricans/Latinos and Native Americans" as "victims of an intellectual and educational oppression." The "systematic bias toward European culture and its derivatives," the report claims, has "a terribly damaging effect on the psyche of young

people of African, Asian, Latino and Native American descent" - a doubtful assertion for which no proof is vouchsafed.

Of course teachers of history and literature should give due recognition to women, black Americans, Indians, Hispanics and other groups who were subordinated and ignored in the high noon of male Anglo-Saxon dominance. In recent years they have begun belatedly to do so. But the cult of ethnicity, pressed too far, exacts costs -- as, for example, the current pressure to teach history and literature not as intellectual challenges but as psychological therapy.

There is nothing new, of course, about the yearnings of excluded groups for affirmations of their own historical and cultural dignity. When Irish-Americans were thought beyond the pale, their spokesmen responded much as spokesmen for blacks, Hispanics and others respond today. Professor John V. Kelleher, for many years Harvard's distinguished Irish scholar, once recalled his first exposure to Irish-American history - "turgid little essays on the fact that the Continental Army was 75% Irish, or that many of George Washington's closest friends were nuns and priests, or that Lincoln got the major ideas for the Second Inaugural Address from the Hon. Francis P. Magegehegan of Alpaca, New York, a pioneer manufacturer of cast-iron rosary beads." John Kelleher called this "the there's-always-an-Irishman-at-the-bottom-of-it-doing-the-real-work approach to American history."

Fortunately most Irish-Americans disregarded their spokesmen and absorbed the American tradition. About 1930, Kelleher said, those "turgid little essays began to vanish from Irish-American papers." He added: "I wonder whose is the major component in the Continental Army these days?" The answer, one fears, is getting to be blacks, Jews and Hispanics.

There is often artificiality about the attempts to use history to minister to psychological needs. When I encounter black insistence on inserting Africa into mainstream curricula, I recall the 1956 presidential campaign. Adlai Stevenson, for whom I was working, had a weak record on civil rights in America but was a champion of African nationalism. I suggested to a group of sympathetic black leaders that maybe if Stevenson talked to black audiences about Africa, he could make up for his deficiencies on civil rights. My friends laughed and said that American blacks couldn't care less about Africa. That is no longer the case; but one can't escape the feeling that present emotions are more

manufactured than organic.

Let us by all means teach women's history, black history, Hispanic history. But let us teach them as history, not as a means of promoting group self-esteem. I don't often agree with Gore Vidal, but I liked his remark the other day: "What I hate is good citizenship history. That has wrecked every history book. Now we're getting 'The Hispanics are warm and joyous and have brought such wonder into our lives,' you know, and before them the Jews, and before them the blacks. And the women, I mean, cut it out!"

Novelists, moralists, politicians, fabulators can go beyond the historical evidence to tell inspiring stories. But historians are custodians of professional standards. Their objective is critical analysis, accuracy and objectivity, not making people feel better about themselves.

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Heaven knows how dismally historians fall short of their ideals; how sadly our interpretations are dominated and distorted by unconscious preconceptions; how obsessions of race and nation blind us to our own bias. All historians may in one way or another mythologize history. But the answer to bad history is not "good citizenship history" - more bad history written from a different viewpoint. The answer to bad history is better history.

The ideological assault in English departments on the "canon" as an instrument of political oppression implies the existence of a monolithic body of work designed to enforce the "hegemony" of a class or race or sex. In fact, most great literature and much good history are deeply subversive in their impact on orthodoxies. Consider the American canon: Emerson, Whitman, Melville, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Mark Twain, Henry Adams, William and Henry James, Holmes, Dreiser, Faulkner. Lackeys of the ruling class? Agents of American imperialism?

Let us by all means learn about other continents and other cultures. But, lamentable as some may think it, we inherit an American experience, as America inherits a European experience. To deny the essentially European origins of American culture is to falsify history.

We should take pride in our distinctive inheritance

as other nations take pride in their distinctive inheritances. Certainly there is no need for Western civilization, the source of the ideas of individual freedom and political democracy to which most of the world now aspires, to apologize to cultures based on despotism, superstition, tribalism and fanaticism. Let us abjure what Bertrand Russell called the fallacy of "the superior virtue of the oppressed."

Of course we must teach the Western democratic tradition in its true proportions - not as a fixed, final and complacent orthodoxy, intolerant of deviation and dissent, but as an ever-evolving creed fulfilling its ideals through debate, self-criticism, protest, disrespect and irreverence, a tradition in which all groups have rights of heterodoxy and opportunities for self-assertion. It is a tradition that has empowered people of all nations and races. Little can have a more "terribly damaging effect on the psyche" than for educators to tell young blacks and Hispanics and Asians that it is not for them.

ONE STEP AT A TIME

Belief in one's own culture does not mean disdain for

other cultures. But one step at a time: No culture can hope to ingest other cultures all at once, certainly not before it ingests its own. After we have mastered our own culture, we can explore the world.

If we repudiate the quite marvelous inheritance that history has bestowed on us, we invite the fragmentation of our own culture into a quarrelsome spatter of enclaves, ghettos and tribes. The bonds of cohesion in our society are sufficiently fragile, or so it seems to me, that it makes no sense to strain them by encouraging and exalting cultural and linguistic apartheid. The rejection of the melting pot points the republic in the direction of incoherence and chaos.

In the 21st century, if present trends hold, non-whites in the U.S. will begin to outnumber whites. This will bring inevitable changes in the national ethos but not, one must hope, at the expense of national cohesion. Let the new Americans forswear the cult of ghettoization and agree with Crèvecoeur, as with most immigrants in the two centuries since, that in America "individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of man."

SLICING IT THIN



Our earth and its resources are limited, yet our world populations continue to increase, and to use the earth's space and its resources.

Consider that an apple represents the earth. Slice the apple into quarters. Set three quarters aside, which represent the oceans of the world. The remaining fourth quarter represents the earth's land area.

Slice this "land" in half and set aside one of the pieces representing the land area that is inhospitable to people, such as polar areas, swamps, deserts, high or rocky mountains.

The remaining one-eighth piece is land where people live. Cut this piece into four sections, and set 3/32 aside. This is the land that contains cities, suburban sprawl, highways, shopping centers, schools, parks, factories, parking lots, and other places where people live and work but where food cannot grow.

Carefully peel the remaining 1/32 slice of earth. This tiny, fragile peel represents the very thin surface of the earth's crust upon which humans depend for growing crops.

Good topsoil, a most valuable resource, is often only a few inches thick, and one windstorm or rainstorm can easily remove what nature took 100 years to build.

Wise use of the land and soil conservation are essential to everyone.

Written by Barbara Nichols and reprinted with permission from Michigan Natural Resources, a publication of the Department of Natural Resources of the State of Michigan.

The rapid influx of immigrants by means of both legal and illegal immigration has brought with it the dilemmas of assimilation: parents who want their children to become culturally American facing off against school officials intent on maintaining the culture of origin; the inclusion of recent immigrants in affirmative action programs designed to redress wrongs that did not involve them; disputes over the role of language in maintaining culture vs the need for a common tongue; and so on.

The following article is a valuable reminder for Americans of the political and cultural contexts in which assimilation takes place. Ira Mehlman, who has lived and worked in Israel, is currently Director of Research and Publication for FAIR, the Federation for American Immigration Reform. This monograph was originally published by the 21st Century Fund.

ISRAEL AND THE UNITED STATES: A COMMON PROBLEM OF ASSIMILATING IMMIGRANTS

by Ira H. Mehlman

Parts of the United States are currently undergoing a radical demographic and cultural transformation rarely experienced in the annals of human history. Demographers have documented that, as a result of large-scale immigration, California - the country's most populous state - will be composed of a majority of minorities by the first decade of the next century. Moreover, unlike the waves of immigration that transformed the major urban areas of the East Coast and Midwest in the early part of this century, the immigrants flooding into California do not share a common European heritage with the more established population.

Such dramatic demographic and cultural changes will undoubtedly produce, even under the best of circumstances, profound social changes. If current patterns persist, in which large numbers of Latin American and Southeast Asian immigrants continue to lag well behind the Anglo population educationally and economically, the changes are likely to cause severe stress on the social fabric of California and other parts of the country undergoing similar transformations.

As is the nature of social science, demographers and sociologists and immigration reform advocates are searching for some historical precedent to which they can compare the social changes now occurring in California. Because the Anglo population will shortly cease to be the majority in California and is unlikely to relinquish control of the state's economic infrastruc-

ture, some have warned that a form of American apartheid will develop. The white minority in South Africa controls most of the wealth and the economic infrastructure of the country. Whites enjoy better housing, education and a significantly higher standard of living than does the nonwhite majority. The same is likely to be true of California's Anglo minority whose standard of living will remain well above that of the black, Hispanic and (some of the) Asian population, who, combined, will constitute the majority.

That, however, is about as far as the comparison legitimately goes. South Africa is a police state in which the majority population is afforded very few civil rights and virtually no political power. Apartheid, as political philosophy, advocates the continued separation of races and cultures. It is not the objective of the apartheid regime to assimilate the various cultures in South Africa into a single cohesive unit.

California (and the United States) is a democracy. The civil rights of all segments of the population are guaranteed (if not always perfectly enforced) and every citizen has the right to vote. Minorities can, and do, wield political power in California and throughout the country. Furthermore, the societal objective of the United States (and by extension California) is the incorporation of all elements of society into a cohesive, unified entity. We may not have succeeded in achieving this goal, but clearly, the motives of the two societies are