

POINT OF VIEW

America: Multiethnic, Not Multicultural

Lawrence Auster

“America is culturally diverse”; “Our diversity is our greatest strength”; “Diversity is enriching”; “We must respect all cultures”; “All cultures are equally precious”—the catchwords of pluralism, like the patriotic slogans of old, have gradually, almost unconsciously, become imbedded in the fabric of contemporary speech. Yet even as “diversity” has become a shibboleth of American democracy, it has become clear that the ultimate tendency of the “diversity” movement in American schools is to delegitimize the Western tradition, dividing American society along racial and cultural lines. It has also become clear that current notions of cultural pluralism are antithetical to genuine political and intellectual pluralism.

Yet, as effective as much recent analysis has been in exposing the extremely radical aims of many multiculturalists, the irony is that mainstream critics of the diversity movement have adopted its rhetoric, unintentionally insinuating its basic premises. They use the words “diversity” and “cultural pluralism” without defining them, as catchwords for the American way of life. At the same time, in championing an abstract ideal of universalism as a cure for the excesses of diversity, they disregard the historic particularities of the civilization they are trying to defend.

The eminent education historian Diane Ravitch, a leading opponent of the new trends, typifies these contradictions. In a major article in the Summer 1990 issue of *The American Scholar*, Ravitch distinguishes between two types of multiculturalism: a benign, “pluralistic” multiculturalism, which she supports, and the bad, “particularistic” multiculturalism of the radicals. The problem with Ravitch’s approach is that the “mainstream” multiculturalism she likes inevitably paves the way to, and legitimizes, the radical multiculturalism she condemns:

As a result of the political and social changes of recent decades, cultural pluralism is now generally recognized as an organizing principle of this society. In contrast to the idea of the melting pot, which promised to erase ethnic and group differences, children now learn that variety is the spice of life.... They learn that cultural pluralism is one of the norms of a free society; that differences

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among groups are a national resource rather than a problem to be solved. Indeed, the unique feature of the United States is that its common culture has been formed by the interaction of its subsidiary cultures....Paradoxical though it may seem, the United States has a common culture that is multicultural.¹

Ravitch applauds the efforts made in recent decades to bring “cultural democracy” into our schools:

This understanding of the pluralistic nature of American culture has taken a long time to forge. It is based on sound scholarship and has led to major revisions in what children are taught and what they read in school. The new history is—indeed, must be—a warts-and-all history; it demands an unflinching examination of racism and discrimination in our history. (Pp. 339–40)

But now, she says, this “good” multiculturalism is threatened:

Alas, these painstaking efforts to expand the understanding of American culture into a richer and more varied tapestry have taken a new turn, and not for the better. Almost any idea, carried to its extreme, can be made pernicious, and this is what is happening now to multiculturalism....The pluralists seek a richer common culture; the particularists insist that no common culture is possible or desirable. (P. 340)

Ravitch criticizes particularist multiculturalism on the following grounds: (1) it seeks to overturn or deny the common culture; (2) it posits the false idea that children can only gain self-esteem if they see that major historical figures (as well as their teachers) are of their own ethnic or racial group; (3) it claims that race determines culture; (4) it dismisses the idea of universality as a form of “Eurocentric” arrogance; and (5) it seeks to install a criterion of ethnicity in place of traditional standards of excellence and achievement.

What I take exception to here is not Ravitch’s insightful critique of particularist multiculturalism, but her support of pluralistic multiculturalism as an organizing norm for this society—a position shared by a large number of other ordinarily perceptive observers. The internal contradictions (not to mention the historical and sociological inaccuracies) of that position make it very weak ground on which to mount a defense against particularist multiculturalism, mainly because the pluralistic position turns out to be virtually identical in key respects with particularist multiculturalism. From Ravitch’s pluralistic perspective, as from the particularist perspective, our society has no common, formative principles, no center of gravity: “the unique feature of the United States is that its common culture has been formed by the interaction of its subsidiary cultures” (339). But a common culture whose only formative principle is “diversity” is not just an intriguing paradox; it is a complete contradiction in terms. It is absurd to state, in effect, that all we have in common is our diversity—and then to complain about the particularist assertion that we have no common culture at all. If “differences among groups are a national resource rather than a problem to be solved” (one of the radicals’ cutting-edge slogans Ravitch has adopted), then diversity becomes an end in

itself, and we should positively encourage groups to emphasize their mutual differences rather than to participate in a shared civilization—and *that*, of course, is the main goal of the particularists. Furthermore, the very idea of “cultural democracy” that Ravitch endorses implies that all the cultures making up the American fabric are equal. But if that is true, then the dominant position of America’s mainstream, Western culture must be illegitimate. Once again, the pluralists’ purportedly “moderate” position turns out to be indistinguishable from that of the radicals.

Near the end of her *American Scholar* article, Ravitch attempts to climb out of the hole she has been digging:

Pluralism is a positive value, but it is also important that we preserve a sense of an American community—a society and a culture to which we all belong....If there is no overall community with an agreed-upon vision of liberty and justice, if all we have is a collection of racial and ethnic cultures, lacking any common bonds, then we have no means to mobilize public opinion on behalf of people who are not members of our particular group. (P. 353)

It is interesting that in this passage, Ravitch justifies America’s common culture only as it promotes intergroup tolerance and assistance. The concept of an abiding American civilization transcending group differences—which is good in itself and worth preserving for that reason—is not readily accommodated in the pluralist paradigm. If the American people are not merely a *collection* but a national *community*, as Ravitch asserts, then what have been the formative principles of that community?

The words “liberty and justice” hardly provide a sufficient account of those formative principles. For one thing, liberty and justice have little meaning without reference to the particular historical context in which those principles have been understood and practiced; and such a context is notably lacking in the pluralist vision. For another, it is precisely in the name of liberty and justice that the particularist demands have been made and met. As the cultural reformers keep saying: “What makes us Americans is not a common culture, but a love of *freedom*.”² Yet a love of freedom—if that is *all* we have in common—is hardly enough to assure national unity. Do we need to be reminded that the French Canadians who are now attempting to secede from Canada love freedom?

Moreover, Ravitch implicitly denies the role of any enduring norm in defining our national character; she portrays that character solely in terms of the continual process of transformation wrought by our various ethnic groups. Describing her own position, she writes: “The pluralists say, in effect, ‘American culture belongs to us, all of us; the U.S. is us and we remake it in every generation’” (341). Whether defined as a collection of equal cultures or as a constant process of ethnic transformation, the pluralistic paradigm leaves Americans with no historical loyalties or defining principles other than whatever ethnic trends or demands prevail at any given moment.

Diane Ravitch's account of American culture—with its exclusive emphasis on democratic universalism and pluralism and its concomitant failure to articulate traditional and normative American ideals—is incapable of providing an effective counterweight to radical multiculturalism. In the end, the “pluralistic” critique of radical multiculturalism boils down to the nervous cry: “No, no! We're not pluralistic in that way! We're pluralistic in this way!” Such fine distinctions are likely to go over the heads of most Americans, not to mention the ethnic minorities and new immigrants who are now being told, even as they enter our schools and universities, that America is a “multicultural” country.

In pursuing the chimera of a “good” multiculturalism, Ravitch has many allies among current mainstream critics. Thus, the *New Republic* has proposed, as an alternative to the repressive multiculturalism on today's campuses, its own version of multiculturalism—a pluralism so radically “open” that it is hard to imagine how any culture could survive it: “*True* multiculturalism, which we applaud and hope to see flourish, would, in contrast, set no borders to texts and ideas, histories and cultures, lives and images, from worlds alien to our own”³ (emphasis added). Now perhaps the *New Republic* only means that different cultures should communicate with and influence one another, as they have done throughout history. But if so, the “no borders” image is surely an unfortunate way to suggest that idea. It is one thing to visit another culture and bring back fruitful ideas; it is quite another to erase the border altogether. If there are no “borders” to alien cultures, then there are no alien cultures, period. All cultures—Christian and Islamic, African and Japanese, Mexican and American—become “one.”

It is true, for example, that medieval Arab civilization influenced the West in some important ways; but that influence was limited to those mathematical and philosophical ideas that European thinkers could use in their own work. Far from importing Islamic culture as a whole, the West in the Middle Ages articulated itself in conscious opposition to Islam. Had it not done so—had it adopted instead the *New Republic's* “borderless culture” idea—the Moslem armies would have overwhelmed Europe and there would be no Western culture today for us to argue about. A culture based on an *unqualified* pluralism, like a nation without borders, is a contradiction in terms.

“Diversity-Speak”

Pluralist multiculturalism, however it is formulated, turns out to be little more than a intellectualized version of the careless “diversity-speak” to which American elites have become so deeply addicted in recent years. This unfortunate verbal habit is a prime source of confusion in the culture debate. When most moderates say, “We are a diverse, pluralistic country, etc., etc.,” it is, in effect, an expression of tolerance and sympathy for different people and ways, an old-fashioned, liberal affirmation of American unity and patriotism. But

in current usage the idea of *ethnic* diversity within an implicit national unity has been conflated with the radically different notion of *cultural* diversity; and before people realize it, they have inadvertently endorsed the central tenet of the multiculturalists—the “equal” value of “all” cultures in this “culturally diverse” country—and the concomitant need to downgrade our “oppressive, Eurocentric” culture.

Thus in 1989 the New York State Regents’ fulsome praise of “diversity” set the stage for the “Curriculum of Inclusion”—a virulently anti-Western (and anti-white) vision of diversity that the regents began pulling back from when, after several months of nationwide criticism, they realized what it meant. We can only be grateful that, in this case, the extremists tipped their hand by the blatancy of their rhetoric. The resulting check on the multiculturalists’ plans proved, however, to be only apparent and temporary, and multiculturalism, in New York as elsewhere, continues to spread like a plague through American institutions—partly because mainstream elites have failed to define diversity and radicals exploit that confusion. In a speech delivered on 20 October 1989 at Columbia University Teachers College, New York State education commissioner Thomas Sobol declared:

We are becoming a different people. Our country is becoming more ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse. By the year 2000 one out of every three New Yorkers will be an ethnic minority....Unfortunately, we are not dealing well with this diversity....The old idea was that it didn’t matter where you came from, that what mattered was being an American....The purpose of the schools was the promotion of assimilation, implanting in children the Anglo-Saxon conceptions of righteousness, law, order, and popular government, and awakening in them a reverence for our institutions. This prevented the US from becoming an ethnically Balkanized nation. *The assimilationist idea worked for ethnic peoples who were white but is not working nearly as well for ethnic peoples of color....* Replacing the old, assimilationist view is a competing ethnic-cultural pluralism. *Today we must accommodate not only a diversity of origin but a diversity of views.*⁴ (Emphases added.)

In making this remarkable assertion—that the different race and ethnicity of the new immigrants is forcing us to abandon the assimilationist ideal—Mr. Sobol seems unaware that he is calling for the very Balkanization that, he acknowledges, the old assimilationism prevented. Furthermore, Sobol’s shift of emphasis from a diversity of “origins” to a diversity of “views,” though benign-sounding, signifies something other than a recognition of the historical experiences of ethnic groups in America (an interesting area of study Sobol’s own “Curriculum of Inclusion” contemptuously rejected, on the grounds that it does not challenge the centrality of America’s national culture). Sobol’s shift represents, instead, the official sponsorship of totally different, even incommensurable concepts of cultural identity, ethical and intellectual norms, and history.

This “multicentered” approach to culture may explain Sobol’s appearance at a recent national conference on “Afrocentric” education. According to the

New Republic, Sobol endorsed the Afrocentrists' aims, while pathetically appealing to them not to reject Western democratic institutions.⁶ Yet the ideas put forward at this meeting (and in Afrocentric texts generally, with which Sobol was surely familiar) could not be more hostile to those very institutions. The Afrocentric creed promoted at the conference included the following assertions: that the ancient Egyptians were black; that this black Egypt was the source of all European culture, including Greek philosophy; and that Europe perverted the African civilization it stole, turning it to "vomit," which it is now forcing down the throats of African-Americans. Conference participants also called for the rejection of the concept of determinate entities and linear polarities (such as truth and falsehood); the rejection of Christianity; and the teaching of ancient Egyptian "cleansing rituals" and "physics" to ninth-graders. Meanwhile, other conferees, including black studies professor Leonard Jeffries, denounced multiculturalism as a myth put forward by the white power structure. This is incredibly ironic, considering the fact that Jeffries himself was a principle author of "A Curriculum of Inclusion." Nothing could offer better proof that multiculturalism—whether in its radical or its moderate form—is but the briefest transitional stage on the way to total cultural warfare in this country.

Consider these other items from the ongoing *Kulturkampf*:

- As reported by Samuel Lipman, the chief arts funding sources in the United States intend to "downgrade and even eliminate support for art based on traditional European sources" and instead support art produced by "oppressed" and Third World cultures.⁷
- Houston A. Baker, Jr., the University of Pennsylvania English professor who speaks gleefully of destroying "whitemale," "anglomale" Western civilization, who dismisses reading and writing as "mere technologies that favor an order of privileged ascendancy and selective power," and who lauds rap music as the seed of a new humanity, has been elected president of the Modern Language Association.⁸
- Demands for proportional racial representation in student bodies and faculties, and for "diversity" in many other areas of life as well, are being widely made. The most advanced such plan is underway in California, where the state college and university systems are requiring that the ethnic makeup of their student bodies match the ethnic proportions of recent high school graduates, both in first-year classes and subsequent graduating classes.⁹ It should be obvious that the proportionality concept, if it continues to be institutionalized, means a regime based on group rights and thus the end of liberal society.

Defections from Liberalism

Such are the perilous waters into which the idea of diversity as the primary American *datum* has delivered us. While misguided centrist rhetoric may have

helped legitimize that idea in recent years, the diversity concept originated in the mass defections from mainstream liberal values that began in the 1960s. As Gregory D. Curtis has argued, traditional American liberalism can be defined as consisting of two sets of beliefs: (1) a commitment to personal liberty, social justice, and the welfare of historically excluded groups and (2) a commitment "to the fundamental value of American social, cultural, and political institutions and to the essential virtues of personal and civic responsibility."¹⁰ These commitments may be referred to, respectively, as the "social justice" and the "institutional values" branches of liberalism.¹¹ In the heady atmosphere of the 1960s, hubristic expectations of social justice, and their inevitable disappointment, resulted in a series of defections from the liberal belief in institutional values. The first defection was a response to the failure of the Great Society programs to end black inequality: many who had been liberals concluded from this, not that the Great Society had been overly ambitious, but that our basic institutional values were the main obstacle to social progress and had to be overturned. The second defection resulted from the Vietnam War, which planted in many minds the corrosive image of America as an inherently oppressive nation.

Once the faith in our institutional values was shattered, a series of subcultural splinter movements emerged—the psychedelic culture, black nationalism, radical feminism, gay liberation, followed in the 1980s by animal rights, radical environmentalism, liberation theology, Afrocentricity, deconstructionism, and so on. These movements were not aimed at equality or progress in the old liberal sense, but at an inchoate vision of radical egalitarianism and ethnic and personal liberation. To attain the extreme notions of "diversity" implied in those antinomian dreams, it was no longer enough just to overthrow contemporary America's normative institutional values, as the 1960s radicals wanted; the enemy had become Western civilization itself.

It is unlikely, however, that these various movements could have merged into today's multiculturalist ideology—the very centerpiece of "political correctness"—without another, unexpected factor being added to the equation: the historic changes in American society brought about by the opening up of American immigration in the mid-1960s. A country that twenty-five years ago was basically biracial, with an almost 90 percent white majority and a small black minority, is in the process of becoming a conspicuously multiracial society. The effect of this demographic shift on our concept of American civilization, particularly as it is taught in the schools and represented in popular culture, can hardly be overestimated; it has led many Americans to feel that America's predominantly European heritage is anachronistic and no longer a legitimate source of national identity, idealism, and political wisdom. "Diversity"—a term now charged with the radical ideas of group rights and derogation of the West—is thus made to seem the only way we can describe our society, and the only way we can sanction our institutional arrangements.

Rediscovering America's Distinct Culture

If American education is not to be overcome by the centrifugal social forces that now beset it, it needs a more clearly defined idea of our national experience than that provided by today's pluralistic creed. If our growing racial and ethnic differences are not to tear us apart, we need to subsume those differences within the framework of a common culture that is more than a mere collection, and that may appeal both to our idealism and our affections. For Americans, that common culture is found, first of all, in Western civilization and its primary historical constituents: Judeo-Christianity and classical Greek philosophy. As Donald Kagan declared in his courageous address to the entering Yale Class of 1994:

It is both right and necessary to place Western civilization and the culture to which it has given rise at the center of our studies, and we fail to do so at the peril of our students, our country, and of the hopes for a democratic, liberal society emerging throughout the world today.¹²

We need to recognize, however, that a rediscovery of the Western tradition—vitaly necessary though it is—may still not be a sufficient cure for today's cultural confusions. The universalist ideals the West has given birth to have not been transmitted to us in a void, but through the mediating influence of a distinct national culture. To use a simple example, the ideal of political justice is symbolized to the English by Magna Carta; to the French by the Declaration of the Rights of Man; to Americans by our own founding documents and traditions. These embodiments of general ideals are not simply interchangeable; each belongs to a particular historical tradition or "cultural story." Without the mediating forms provided by such a tradition and the loyalties and emotions connected with them, the ideal would be too abstract to form the basis of a viable society. It follows then that today's mainstream ideology—the belief in a global democracy and a "borderless" culture—is not a sufficient substitute for the sense of membership in the imagined community of a national culture that schools and universities once inculcated.¹³ As the disturbing accounts of racial and ethnic fragmentation on today's campuses suggest, a centerless, "pluralistic" universalism can leave a spiritual void in young peoples' lives, thus making ethnic tribalism seem an attractive alternative.¹⁴

I do not intend here to propose an American civic religion as a solution to our educational problems. But we cannot afford to ignore historian Henry Bamford Parkes's profound observation that "[a] civilization cannot preserve its vitality unless its institutions are seen as embodiments of ultimate values and ideals."¹⁵ Ideals such as justice have *universal* significance, but their embodiments, as we have seen, are *specific* to each society. Between the potentially anomic abstractions of pure universalism on one side and the disintegrative forces of ethnic tribalism on the other, American education

needs a revitalized view of our *national* particularism. The missing key to such an understanding is not hard to find, though it lies in a dimension of our national story that has been deliberately repressed in recent decades. I am speaking, of course, of the English and Anglo-American roots of American institutions.

This is not a matter of ethnicity, but of culture. As historian David Hackett Fischer has written in *Albion's Seed* (his fascinating study of the English Protestant origins of American folkways): "Today less than 20 percent of the American population have any British ancestors at all. But in a cultural sense most Americans are Albion's seed, no matter who their own forebears may have been."¹⁶ For our present purposes, rather than referring to early American history, it will be more useful to consider the role of Anglo-American values and institutions in the context of our twentieth-century multiethnic society. Such a perspective found a classic formulation in Milton M. Gordon's *Assimilation in American Life*, published in 1964. As I will try to show, Gordon's centrist, liberal view of assimilation provides a much-needed corrective to the myth of cultural diversity that has arisen in the ensuing quarter-century.

The Anglo-American Mold

Gordon examines the three classic theories of assimilation—Anglo-conformity, the melting pot, and cultural pluralism—and concludes that cultural assimilation along Anglo-conformity lines has been the most important thread in the historic pattern of assimilation. Here cultural assimilation means the adoption by ethnic group members of the habits, mores, behavior models, and values of the "core" white Protestant culture and the partial or complete abandonment of the ethnic group's ancestral ways. It is important to note that this cultural assimilation is balanced by "structural" pluralism, in which members of ethnic groups maintain primary social contacts within their communities even as they assimilate into the common civic culture. In addition, as the individual ethnic group members are assimilating, the internal patterns of the ethnic group itself are also being transformed into an Anglo-American mold. More subtle than today's simplistic diversity myth, Gordon's distinction between cultural and structural assimilation helps explain why that myth has been so easily accepted: the obvious fact of ethnic, structural pluralism in this society has obscured the more subtle, but far more important, fact of cultural assimilation.

Of course, today's multiculturalists, both radical and mainstream, dismiss the very idea of a "core" culture into which immigrants have assimilated or should assimilate; the reputed core, they say, is nothing but the product of successive waves of immigration. What Gordon has to say on this matter is worth quoting at length:

In suggesting the answer to this question, I must once again point to the distinction between the impact of the members of minority groups as individuals making their various contributions to agriculture, industry, the arts, and science in the context of the Anglo-Saxon version (as modified by peculiarly American factors) of the combination of Hebraic, Christian, and Classical influences which constitutes Western civilization, and the specific impact on the American culture of the minority cultures themselves. The impact of individuals has been so considerable that it is impossible to conceive of what American society or American life would have been like without it. The impact of minority group culture has been of modest dimensions, I would argue, in most areas, and significantly extensive in only one—the area of institutional religion. From a nation overwhelmingly and characteristically Protestant in the late eighteenth century America has become a national entity of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews....For the rest, there have been minor modifications in cuisine, recreational patterns, place names, speech, residential architecture, sources of artistic inspiration, and perhaps a few other areas—all of which add flavor and piquancy to the totality of the American culture configuration but have scarcely obscured its essential English outlines and content.¹⁷ (Emphasis added.)

I realize, of course, that to discuss American society in terms of its “essential English outlines and content” is, to say the very least, unfashionable. Even before the rise of multiculturalism, a major thrust of twentieth-century social science and literature, as well as of the adversary and popular cultures in recent decades, has been the debunking of the old-fashioned WASP character and virtues, especially when conceived as constituents of an American norm. Nowadays, in order to accommodate our increasing ethnic diversity, we are accustomed to think of America in terms of a generic “democratic capitalism” or pluralist, liberal democracy rather than as an Anglo-American form of society. The problem with such descriptions is that while they are accurate as far as they go, they fail to account for America’s most distinctive particularities. For example, the remarkable degree of individual freedoms we enjoy in this country is not a result of “democratic capitalism” *per se*, but of a historically specific Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture with its ideal of moral autonomy and self-restraint.

Even Michael Novak, a Catholic critic of the WASP “monoculture,” acknowledges the supreme importance of this value in American life. “America is a Protestant country,” he writes in *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics*. “Its lack of external restraints is one of the blessings for which Catholics are genuinely grateful.”¹⁸ To these blessings we might add the habits of local government, self-reliance, and entrepreneurship, as well as the common law tradition and freedom of speech. Democratic capitalist countries like France and West Germany, with their highly centralized governments and corporatist economies, have far less local self-government and small-scale entrepreneurial activity than the United States. Similarly, the emerging nations of the Pacific rim, all staunchly capitalist, have little understanding of freedom of speech in the American sense. Our very notions of liberty and individualism are deeply

rooted in the English language itself, in its literature and its legal and political traditions.

There are many other such culturally defining characteristics that I can only hint at here: the Anglo-American traditions of honesty, industry, and civic-mindedness; the sense of fair play, mutual trust, generosity, and “easy-goingness” made possible by the above, all finding their outlet in the American habit—celebrated by Tocqueville—of forming the voluntary associations that are the substance of a free society. These and other defining traits, derived directly or indirectly from the original Anglo-American roots of this country, are part of the cultural birthright of *all* Americans.

Being Something Instead of Everything

Two conclusions emerge from the preceding discussion that will seem starkly heretical in today’s intellectual climate. The first is that the United States has always been, in its fundamental structure and character, an Anglo-Saxon civilization—the successive waves of immigrants became Americans in the very act of adopting that civilization (even after people of English descent had started to become a minority). The second conclusion, a corollary of the first, is that the cultural diversity myth is historically unwarranted and conceptually vacuous. As currently used, stock phrases like “This country was built by diversity” and “All cultures are of equal value to our society” imply that America has been primarily built, not by individuals of various backgrounds and talents contributing, as individuals, to an existing (or gradually modified) American culture, but by minority cultures as such, all joining together in some kind of “equal” mix. As the preceding discussion has indicated, this opinion is mistaken. Yet the entire rhetoric of both mainstream and radical pluralism is based on it. The same goes for the current notion that America has always been an “ever-changing conglomeration of cultures.” As writer John Ney has remarked: “The Ministry of Truth says that American culture was always in flux, which is true, but the Ministry does not add that the flux was contained within a general form.”¹⁹

As the diversity myth does not reflect the true historical character of this nation, so, too, multiculturalism is not our determined destiny. It is a question we must decide for ourselves. Do we as a society want to preserve our historical identity as a Western, Anglo-form culture modified and enriched by great ethnic diversity, or do we want to continue down the road to multicultural disaggregation? That, truly, is the choice America faces—but the pluralist ideology has prevented us from making that choice by convincing us that “history” has already made it for us.

The urgent task of American education in the 1990s is to rediscover—and restore to its rightful place in the curriculum—the neglected, despised, and almost forgotten roots of American and Western culture. It was the civilization

of the West, particularized in a unique Anglo-American political and ethical pattern, that gave birth to this nation, that made possible the successful assimilation of many waves of immigrants, and that still has the creative power to keep us one nation today. But such a recognition can only come at a price the cultural pluralists will be loath to pay. If America is to continue to be *something*, it cannot also be *everything*. The insight that our way of life is founded on Judeo-Christian and Anglo-American values means that we cannot adopt the perspectives and values of quite different civilizations and expect to preserve that way of life. A society based on individual rights cannot also be based on group rights.

If such a renewed emphasis on America's WASP origins seems ethnocentric, we should take note of Richard Brookhiser's observation that it was WASP civic-mindedness—the loyalty to society as a whole ahead of group or family honor—that demanded, and made possible, the assimilation of immigrants into a common culture.²⁰ In other words, American universalism has a *particularist* root, and probably cannot survive without it.

Finally, we need to stop indulging in those testimonials to cultural pluralism that have become second nature to us. We should understand that when we utter obligatory phrases like "America is culturally diverse" or "We must respect different cultures," without making it clear what kind of diversity is meant, and without laying primary emphasis on the principles of our national commonality, we have already granted the cultural disintegrationists their major premise. Perhaps more than any other factor, it is this imprecision of thought and speech, by liberals and conservatives alike, that has made the radical multiculturalist movement possible.

Notes

1. Diane Ravitch, "Multiculturalism: *E Pluribus Plures*," *The American Scholar* (Summer 1990): 339. Future references to this article will be cited within the text.
2. This is a slogan that has been used *inter alia* by the Committee for a Multicultural New York, by advocates of official bilingualism, and by New York governor Mario Cuomo.
3. "The Derisory Tower," *The New Republic* (18 February 1991), 6.
4. Thomas Sobol, videorecording of a speech delivered at Caswell Memorial Conference, Columbia University Teachers College, 20 October 1989.
5. See Lawrence Auster, "The Regents' Round Table," *National Review* (8 December 1989).
6. Andrew Sullivan, "Racism 101," *The New Republic* (26 November 1990), 18.
7. Samuel Lipman, "Backward and Downward with the Arts," *Commentary* (May 1990): 24.
8. Houston A. Baker, Jr., "Whose 'Crisis' Is It Anyway?" *Pennsylvania Gazette* (December 1989): 24.
9. John H. Bunzel, "Affirmative Action Admissions: How It 'Works' at UC Berkeley," *The Public Interest* (Fall 1988).
10. Gregory D. Curtis, "The Essential Liberal," unpublished manuscript.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Donal Kagan, "An Address to the Class of 1994," *Commentary* (January 1991): 48.

13. "Imagined community," a phrase coined by anthropologist Benedict Anderson, is used by Michael Walzer to describe national cultures in "Only Correct," *New Republic* (13 August 1990).
14. See "Race and the Campus," a special issue of the *New Republic* (18 February 1991).
15. Henry Bamford Parkes, *Gods and Men: The Origins of Western Culture* (New York: Random House, 1959), 457.
16. David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 6. Fischer's 20 percent figure includes only those who identified themselves as having English ancestry. Since most people who eschew any ethnic label, simply identifying themselves as "American," are of English-Protestant background, the true size of America's WASP population is probably closer to 30 percent of the total.
17. Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 109-10.
18. Michael Novak, *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in the Seventies* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 170.
19. John Ney, *Miami Today—The U.S. Tomorrow* (Monterey, Va.: The American Immigration Control Foundation, 1989), 12.
20. See Richard Brookhiser, *The Way of the WASP* (New York: The Free Press, 1991).