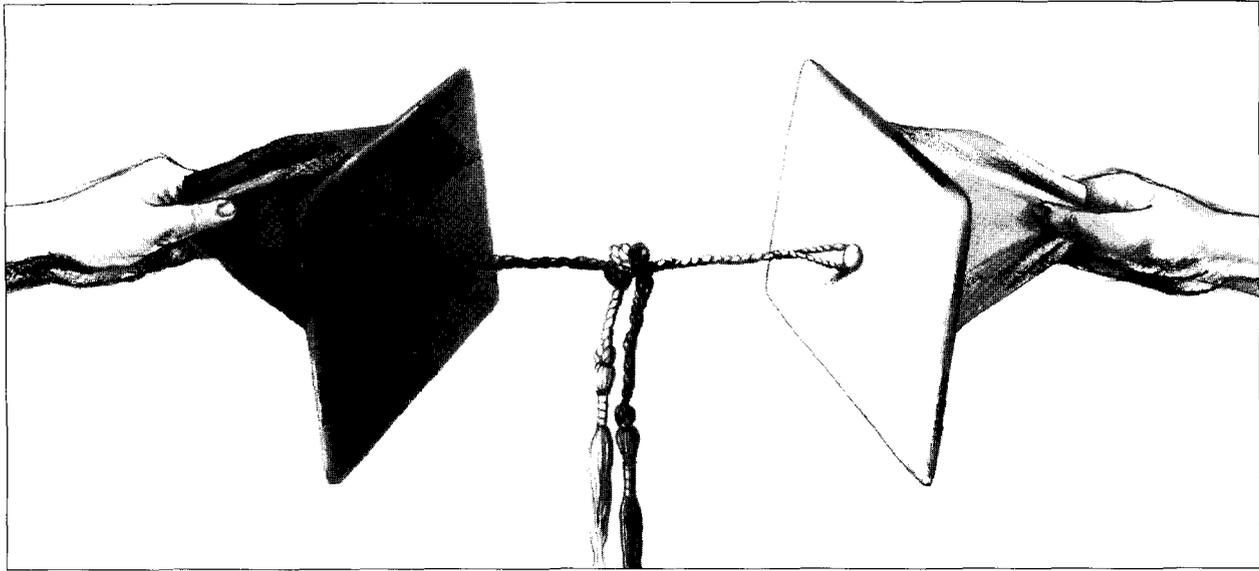


Multiculturalism in Theory and Practice

by Charles L. King



Kristina Jachmewicz

I came by my lifelong interest in foreign languages and cultures honestly. My grandfather, Andrew Jackson King, Jr., migrated to a Hispanic-populated area of the Territory of New Mexico in 1906. Acquiring a small ranch, he hired some (Spanish-speaking) Basque shepherds and raised sheep—for a while, that is, until one morning he discovered that both sheep and Basques had disappeared, never to be seen again. From these shepherds my teenage father “picked up” what he modestly called “shepherd Spanish.”

Later my father homesteaded land in the same area (Santa Fe County), got married, and settled down to raise pinto beans (and a few cows). That’s where I come in. Growing up in this bicultural environment—with a third culture, that of Pueblo Indians, nearby—I found that my Dad’s “shepherd Spanish” served him well in maintaining friendships with our Spanish-American neighbors. In my third-year high school Spanish class, I was the only non-Hispanic student, and by the end of the year, by making an effort to speak the language both in and outside the classroom, I had made a good start toward a mastery of Spanish.

Because language is the most intimate expression of a culture, I consequently acquired a real appreciation of Hispanic culture and of other languages and cultures in general. When World War II came along the Army sent me to the Philippines. There I tried my hand at Tagalog, that country’s primary language. As one of the earliest of those sent to Japan at the conclusion of the war, I associated openly with the Japanese, impressing them favorably with the few phrases of Nipongo I had learned during my ten weeks in their country.

Returning from the war, I completed a B.A. in Spanish at the

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University of New Mexico and both a M.A. in Spanish and a Ph.D. from the University of Southern California. I spent several years working in Bolivia, Uruguay, and Colombia before going to Tehran as assistant executive director of the Iran-America Society, where I learned to speak the Persian language. From Tehran I went directly to the United States Office of Education in Washington, D.C., as a specialist for language institutes, and from there to the University of Colorado, where I taught Spanish and served three terms as editor of *The Modern Language Journal* (1971-79), the world’s leading journal in foreign-language teaching methods and research.

All of which brings me to the subject of multiculturalism, and some reasons why I, after extensive time in six foreign countries and travel in many others, find so-called “multicultural studies” in our public schools and universities so disturbing. It is not what multiculturalism professes as its goal that disturbs me. That goal, usually expressed as making American students more sensitive to the diverse cultural backgrounds of their fellow Americans, sounds great. Who can argue with that? The problem is the yawning gap between multiculturalism’s profession and practice. That gap reveals itself in the fact that by “fellow Americans” multicultural ideologues do not mean *all fellow Americans*, but only those who are members of the four officially anointed minority groups: blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and American Indians. The goal is not *inclusive* but *exclusive*; it denies or effectively ignores the vast cultural diversity of white Americans (who, after all, constitute 75 percent of the American population) by lumping all Euro-Americans together in a monolithic mass, as if all Europeans were alike—Churchill, Hitler, and Mussolini notwithstanding. Inevitably, it pits minorities against the enemy, the majority—as if *all* Americans of whatever background, minority and nonminority, were not Americans first, and members of ethnic groups second.

When I asked my parents in New Mexico from which racial or ethnic or cultural group I had descended, they replied:

“What difference does it make where you came from? You are an American. We are all equal.” True multiculturalism, or “diversity” as it is referred to in Academe, would at least recognize all ethnic groups, not just the four politically correct groups. University multiculturalists teach that these four groups are oppressed by the all-powerful, the politically dominant majority—as if minorities were denied participation in the American political process.

A Native American student at the center was recently asked on a Denver television program what she thought of the term ‘Native American.’ Her response was that she saw herself as ‘a Native,’ not as an ‘American.’

When asked by Clifford May, associate editor of *The Rocky Mountain News*, whether “whites constitute a single culture or an ethnic group,” Professor Evelyn Hu-DeHart, director of the Center for Studies in Ethnicity and Race in America (CSERA) at the University of Colorado at Boulder, answered: “No, whites constitute one dominant power group, if you will. It is not just about race. It’s about power.” It would, of course, have been absurd for her to have claimed that “whites constitute a single culture or ethnic group,” but the rest of her statement reveals that her center effectively does view whites as one group (ignoring all the while that most Hispanics are white Europeans also). The center’s primary goal is clearly political power, to provide a kind of “academic respectability” or gloss for the university’s irrational affirmative action programs, not to mention the bilingual education offerings in its school of education.

I do not deny that all or almost all educational activity can in the broadest sense of the term be “politicized,” but the kind of blatant politicizing of “education” such as we see at the University of Colorado’s multicultural center and on campuses across the country is seriously undermining the academic integrity of higher education in this country. And by denigrating our dominant Euro-American culture, institutionalized multiculturalism weakens our national unity.

An example of politicization at the University of Colorado at Boulder occurred in April 1994, when for several days a small group of student protesters went on what they called a “hunger strike.” They demanded, among other things, that the university create an Ethnic Studies Department with Ph.D.-granting power (or give departmental status to CSERA, which is a program, not a department). Predictably, the university’s president, Judith Albino, played the minority political game by

calling a press conference, capitulating to their demand, and promising to push for the creation of such a department.

The inevitably biased comparisons and contrasts of cultures that students get in ethnic studies departments or multicultural centers are fraudulent at worst, superficial at best. If a student really wants to gain a deep understanding of another national culture, he or she needs to learn its language, as well as much of its history and literature. This is the province of foreign language departments.

Multiculturalism is right in recognizing that we can all learn from other cultures. We should: that’s what a truly liberal education teaches us. But multiculturalism ignores reality in the pursuit of that goal. It generally ignores the fact that the students’ time is extremely limited; that they, whether minority or not, need to understand their own national culture *before* they can intelligently compare it or contrast it with other cultures; and that learning another culture is a major endeavor. It took me, for instance, almost a lifetime of earnest effort to penetrate Hispanic culture, just one of many major cultural groups in the world. And I was lucky: I was able to make a living doing it.

Multiculturalists generally fail to recognize that the United States is among the most diverse nations the world has ever known, and that Americans are united not only by a common language but by a shared common culture (largely derived from that language), in addition to a political and legal system primarily Anglo in origin. Our unilingual system has enabled diverse elements to assimilate into a common American culture, thus welding us together as “one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

Public schools and universities in this country have a solemn obligation to educate a constantly changing new generation of children in the history and heritage of their country. When I look at my own school, and especially at CSERA, I am appalled at its abject failure to fulfill its responsibility to American society. A Native American student at the center was recently asked on a Denver television program what she thought of the term “Native American.” Her response was that she saw herself as “a Native,” not as an “American.”

If this “Native American” is not an American, of what nationality is she? One cannot expect multicultural centers to assume the responsibility of Americanizing students, but they should at least stop *de*-Americanizing them. Better still, they should be abolished altogether. Let the ethnologists in our anthropology departments teach ethnic cultures as ethnic cultures, not as a means of achieving a political agenda. And let history professors teach American history in as truthful, unbiased, apolitical, and comprehensive a manner as possible, history not revised to accommodate current political fads.

The danger multiculturalism poses to our national unity is also exacerbated by other powerful forces in our national life, such as massive immigration, legal and illegal, the highest in our history; bilingual education; bilingual ballots; the welfare state; and affirmative action (80 percent of our immigrants are from Asia and Latin America and, therefore, immediately eligible for preferential treatment in employment). These combined forces tend to separate society into competing groups, and at a time when our public schools have abandoned their historical mission of Americanizing students. This is nothing short of a formula for national suicide.

Black English

by Nicholas Stix



Krystyna Jachmowicz

“Those is the niggers that was f--kin’ with my sh-t.” “I knew that nigger was one of the niggers I could rely on.” The first speaker was a twentysomething “homegirl” from the projects, the second a drunk in his late 30’s. Both were riding on New York’s A train on different days and at different times. There was nothing extraordinary about their usage.

“That’s ‘transcendent’ [black] English,” said the young New Yorker, correcting her white professor, a 40-year teaching veteran. Faced with an error-riddled paper, the professor had sought to correct her English. But she denied his expertise. It’s a black thing, you wouldn’t understand.

From the end of the Civil War through the 1950’s, accommodationists such as Booker T. Washington, nationalists such as Carter G. Woodson (in *The Miseducation of the Negro*, 1933) and W.E.B. Du Bois, and revolutionaries such as George S. Schuyler (whose pseudonymously printed, serialized 1930’s newspaper novels have recently been collected as *Black Empire*) all were of one mind on the need for black Americans to become not just literate, but *superliterate*. Black illiteracy was either the result of racial oppression or of the passivity of the “inferior” black masses. In any event, educational movements led by the “talented tenth” would teach the Negro to outwit the white man.

Approximately 40 years ago, black nationalism underwent a profound change, embracing gangsterism. The “Black English” (“BE,” a/k/a “Ebonics”) campaign, which began about ten years later, is a curious amalgam of black supremacists and the white “progressives” who patronize and fear them and whom the Afrocentrists hold in contempt. One of the motiva-

tions of the new, gangster-style nationalist leaders was the desire to erect a world mirroring that of the then-recently departed Jim Crow. In this world, no white adult would be allowed to “disrespect” a black child by correcting him; white teachers who did so were “miseducating” black students. After all, according to Afrocentrism, blacks and whites are citizens of different nations. Blacks are neither “Americans” nor “African-Americans,” but *Africans*. The tag “African-American” was merely an intermediate step along the path toward total separation from everything American.

The argot described today as “Black English” is characterized by the constant use of street slang, obscenity, double negatives, the dropping of prefixes, word endings, and many verbs, and a lack of grammatical structure. The campaign to legitimate BE has been conducted largely through public agencies at public expense. With the help of wealthy, “progressive” white patrons, an upper-middle-class black insurgency imposed this idea on working-class and poor black children. Once it was decided that to be truly “black” was to be illiterate, promiscuous, and violent, it was child’s play to theorize that a “black learning style” was characterized by “relational” and “nonlinear” thinking (illiteracy and innumeracy). Intellectual excellence was derided from the gutter to the principal’s office as “acting white.” Millions of black parents who insisted on their children speaking proper English and doing their homework suddenly found themselves up against a formidable opponent—the state.

Some whites are willing to rationalize away all black educational failure. As a socialist political operative in New York confided to me during the 1988 Tawana Brawley hoax, “You can’t expect blacks to participate as equals in public discourse.” This is typical of such humanitarian racism. In fact, many progressives are so afraid of being called racists by blacks that they take

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