

CULTURAL PLURALISM AND EDUCATION

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Cultural Pluralism has become the "in" concept for educators who are interested in the relations between racial and ethnic groups in America. It is remarkably popular among diverse groups in our society, and among groups who are hostile or at least suspicious of one another. A number of minority groups see cultural pluralism as an umbrella under which they can preserve their identity and protect their life styles. Some leaders of the white and Anglo majority see cultural pluralism as a means of insulation of certain minority groups, for which they are willing to offer certain material payments.

Also our society's tendency to maximize freedom for individuals to live their own lives leads many Americans to favor a society which supports a plurality of life styles.

To state the case favourably for cultural pluralism, one can say that this social philosophy respects and admires a variety of ethnic and socioeconomic life styles. This makes everybody a winner.

But an opposed formulation says that cultural pluralism is a device which enables the dominant group to maintain its privileges and to admit only a few new comers to the inner circle on terms set by the dominant group. The dominant group bribes minority groups by giving them some material rewards for keeping themselves separate.

I shall try to analyze the movement for cultural pluralism objectively, and then to state its educational implications.

WHAT IS CULTURAL PLURALISM?

In a society made up of a number of different sub-cultural groups, cultural pluralism means:

- Mutual appreciation and understanding of every sub-culture by the other ones.
- Freedom for each sub-culture to practice its culture and socialize its children.
- Sharing by each group in the economic and civic life of the society.

Some of the functions of a viable cultural pluralism are:

1. To provide substantial opportunity to the members of each sub-culture to achieve happiness and life satisfaction in their own life style.
2. To provide education and training for every member of every sub-culture of a kind and quality that will enable the individuals to earn a fair living to avoid poverty.
3. To provide employment or access to the labor force on equal terms to all members of the society.
4. To provide opportunity and encouragement for the youth of every sub-culture to associate with youth of other groups in activities of mutual interest.
5. To maintain freedom of individuals and groups to practice separatism, though perhaps at some sacrifice in terms of material standard of living.
6. To permit sub-groups to maintain a separate economic system as long as this does no damage to the general welfare of the society.
7. To permit sub-groups to carry on their own separate educational systems, though they must bear the extra expense.
8. To make all sub-groups responsible for contributions to the general welfare of the society.

This is a positive definition, made by people and agencies who favor a policy of cultural pluralism. But there are some sceptics who say that this is a utopian vision, and that we waste our time working for it. Before examining this view, let us summarize the situation of the American society with respect to sub-cultural groups.

The American society has always contained a number of different national, racial, and religious groups, although the Anglo-Protestant group has always been in the majority. The relations between these groups have at some times been tense. Yet the general attitude of the majority of Americans has been to anticipate a reduction of group differences through various forms of common activity in a democratic society. Thus it was common to speak of America as a "melting pot" which took in diverse groups of people and turned them out as Americans first, and members of diverse groups second.

PLURALISM IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The United States has been a pluralistic society from its very beginning with the 13 colonies representing a variety of European nationalities as well as a variety of religious groups that were jealous of each other, while Indians were being pushed out of their lands, and Africans were held and sold as slaves. This pluralism could hardly be called democratic. Among the European immigrants who came to America in the 19th century, there was discrimination in favor of some and against others. For example, the large Irish migration to the United States between 1840 and 1860, resulting partly from famine in Ireland, produced a lower class of Irish who were welcome only in the dirtiest and hardest jobs of the new country. Advertisements in the newspapers for an office boy or for a parlor maid often carried the letters NINA (No Irish Need Apply). Subsequent to this period, immigrant Hungarians, Poles, Italians, Croatsians, and Russian Jews arrived and lived in poverty under brutal employment conditions.

What saved the situation for the newcomers and led to upward mobility was the constant demand for unskilled and semiskilled labor in the expanding economy, the free schools that enabled many immigrant children to move into white collar jobs, the almost free land on the frontier, and the expansion of local government and business which created roles into which many of the immigrants could move with little formal schooling. There was a mixture of social integration and cultural pluralism at work. Each wave of European immigrants who arrived without money or position improved its status rapidly, leaving behind in its rise, after one or two generations, some members who were not so fortunate. There were two groups, however, who did not share equitably in the benefits of the 19th century combination of democratic pluralism and social integration. They were the American Indians, who were pushed around into inferior lands, and decimated by the army if they chose to fight; and the freed African slaves.

The period of American social history up to about 1900 was dominated by a policy which has been called *Anglo-conformity* by the sociologist Milton Gordon. This policy assumed the desirability of maintaining the social institutions of England, the English language, and English-oriented cultural patterns as dominant and standard in American life. (1) Furthermore, the society was heavily Protestant, and there was much prejudice against Catholic immigrants. The German, Scandinavian, and Irish immigrants who predominated during the 1840 to 1890 period were accepted with some misgivings. Most of the Irish and some of the Germans were Catholic. The Scandinavians were clannish and kept to their home languages. Still, the country was large, a growing industry needed labor, and the frontier was open. The society became more pluralistic in fact.

THE MELTING POT

Around the beginning of the 20th century, there developed the concept of a new, composite American nationality through the agency of frontier life as it spread across the middle of the country and on to the west. This was asserted by the historian Frederick Jackson Turner in his influential book, *The Frontier in American History*. The western frontier, he said, "acted as a solvent for the national heritages and separatist tendencies" of the European immigrants. (2)

After 1880 there came a vast flow of immigration from southern Europe which made it clear that Anglo-conformity could not be a feasible social or political goal. The eastern cities and industry were filling up with a polyglot population. This had to be included in any conception of the structure of American society.

An English Jewish writer, Israel Zangwill, stated the new theory through his popular drama, *The Melting Pot*, first produced in America in 1908. The hero of the play is a Russian Jewish immigrant, who falls in love with a Gentile girl. The hero, in the rhetoric of his day, proclaims that America is God's Crucible, the great Melting Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and re-forming!

"Here you stand, good folk, think I, when I see them at Ellis Island, here you stand in your fifty groups, with your fifty languages and histories, and your fifty blood hatreds and rivalries. But you won't be long like that, brothers, for these are the fires of God you've come to - these are the fires of God.

A fig for your feuds and vendettas! Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians - into the Crucible with you all! God is making the American". (3)

The melting pot theory accepted the eastern and southern European immigrants as good "material" for making Americans, just as good as the English and north European stock.

EDUCATION AND THE MELTING POT THEORY

Free public education came into action about the middle of the 19th century. This, in theory, would aid the "Americanization" process by teaching everybody English and the American social ideals. The public school system was an agent in this process, though probably not as effective as was claimed by some of the public school leaders of the 1880-1920 period. Many children of immigrant families achieved poorly in school and dropped out as early as possible, to go to work at unskilled labor. Furthermore, the Roman Catholic bishops established parish schools which taught the Catholic religion, and also taught the European ethnic cultures to a considerable degree, since the Catholic parishes were generally organized so that each served a particular European nationality.

INTEGRATION AND PLURALISM AFTER 1920

After the close of World War 1, the socioeconomic condition of the country changed markedly. Restrictions were placed on immigration, thus opening the heavy industrial job market to migrants from the South and the Appalachian states and to the Mexican-Americans from the Southwest. Puerto Ricans came to the Eastern cities. These groups did not integrate into the "mainstream" readily. At the same time, technological development reduced the proportion of unskilled jobs in the labor market and increased the proportion which required high school and college education. Economic productivity increased so much that after 1950 the economic-industrial complex could not employ all the available labor, thus producing a substantial group of unemployed who had to live on welfare payments.

In effect, the socioeconomic changes of the society between 1920 and 1965 worked to restrict the opportunities of the groups with the lowest incomes to integrate themselves into the mainstream of economic, civic, and social activity.

THE RISE OF CULTURAL PLURALISM

The idea of the melting together of many diverse cultures into a single American culture was not widely approved by leaders of American thought, nor was it proved that this was actually happening. Horace M. Kallen, a Harvard-educated philosopher and a Jew wrote an article entitled "Democracy *versus* the Melting Pot", published in *The Nation* in 1915. His ideas were expanded in his book *Culture and Democracy in the United States* (1924). (4) He used the term "cultural pluralism" to describe his program for America as a democracy of nationalities cooperating voluntarily. Other social philosophers and social scientists as well as popular writers of various nationality groups favored this concept. Among educators, the field of *intergroup relations* assumed considerable importance and attention. Teaching units on intergroup relations found their way into the high school social studies and history courses. Recommendations were made for a more favourable treatment of minority groups in American history courses. The late 1940s and early 1950s saw much activity along these lines, supported by such organizations as the National Conference of Christians and Jews and the American Jewish Committee.

Then came the 1954 Supreme Court decision against racially segregated public schools, followed in the 1960s by the Civil Rights Act and by the Civil Rights movement which broke down many political and economic barriers against Negro-white relationships. But, the blacks were not brought into the melting pot. They were segregated residentially in the large cities, with the exception of a few middle-class black families. Their children continued to be segregated in schools in the big cities. However, the decade of the 1960s saw substantial improvements in the economic and educational and political situation of the black population, which was gained, it seemed, largely by black organizations when they asserted their rights and used political and legal measures to influence the government and the business community.

The relative success of the blacks appears to have stimulated other minority groups to organize for group action - especially the Chicano and Puerto Rican and American Indian groups. The middle 1960s saw the creation of several Chicano groups: Cesar Chavez developed the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee in California; Reies Lopez Tijerina started the Alianza Federal de Mercedes in New Mexico; Rodolfo Gonzales organized the Crusade for Justice in Denver. These worked for better housing, better wages, better health and educational services.

Among the Puerto Ricans, ASPIRA worked for better educational and social conditions. Several small Indian groups were organized, including the American Indian Movement which came to public attention with its occupation of the building of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington in 1972, and with the occupation of the village of Wounded Knee in South Dakota in 1973. The Black Muslims grew into strong organizations in several cities, with separate schools and business activities alongside their religious institutions.

EUROPEAN ETHNIC MOVEMENTS

The east and south European immigrants had not shown much sign of discontent with their lot in the United States. They had been industrious workers, and generally had established themselves securely in upper-working class and lower-middle class positions by 1940. Most of them lived in the large cities and in the industrial north central and northeastern regions. After World War II the migration of blacks, Chicanos and Puerto Ricans to the big cities began to crowd the European ethnics - both in terms of housing and in jobs. Middle-class people moved to the suburbs or to middle-class enclaves in the central city, leaving the working-class whites to come to terms with the new in-migrants. Tensions arose, with the white ethnic working-class people appearing as opponents to the expansion of residential areas for blacks and Spanish-Americans. Professor Mark M. Krug has pointed to this rivalry as a partial cause of the emergence of white ethnic group activism. He quotes Barbara Mikulski, a young Democratic politician and leader of the Polish-American community in Baltimore. "We anguish at all the class prejudice that is forced upon us," she said, as quoted in the *New York Times*. "Ethnic Americans do not feel that black people are inferior, but regard them as territorial aggressors in their residential and employment turfs." Krug goes on to say, "Encouraged by the example of the black community and strengthened by their unity of interests, white ethnic minorities have become more united and more militant in protesting their grievances." (5)

The United States Catholic Conference, through its Division for Urban Life, and Monsignor Geno Baroni, Director of Program Development for the Task Force on Urban Problems, issued a Labor Day Statement in 1970 which said that the white ethnic working class was being called upon to solve the urban problem of relations with blacks and Spanish-Americans, without help from the middle-class white population. The statement said :

"We reject the widespread accusation that these people are the primary exponents of racism in our society, although we do not deny that racism exists in their ranks. We find that race relations in America's big cities have come to mean increasingly the relations between the blacks and/or the browns on the one hand and white ethnic working class people on the other. This happens because, increasingly, business and institutional leadership no longer lives in the city and the upper middle class has either fled or is fleeing to the suburbs. It is obvious, therefore, that if there is to be a resolution of the racial crisis which currently grips our society, a critical role will be played by white ethnic working class communities." (6)

An eloquent voice on behalf of the European ethnics of southern and eastern Europe has been raised by Michael Novak in his book, *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics*. (7) He speaks of the 1970s as the "Decade of the Ethnics" and regards the rise in ethnic consciousness as part of a more general cultural revolution in America. His basic proposition is that ethnicity has similar elements, from one ethnic group to another, and these are a desirable antidote to the poisons of the modern industrial society. He says:

"The rise in ethnic consciousness is, then, part of a more general cultural revolution. As soon as one realizes that man is not mind alone, and that his most intelligent theories, political decisions, and works of genius flow from 'intelligent subjectivity', attention to the roots of imagination, value, and instinct is inevitable. When a person thinks, more than one generation's passions and images think in him." (8)

Thus the ethnic group, for Novak, lives in the individual in a mystical, non-rational way. He defines an ethnic group as

"a group with historical memory, real or imaginary.... Ethnic memory is not a set of events remembered, but rather a set of instincts, feelings, intimacies, expectations, patterns of emotion and behaviour; a sense of reality; a set of stories for individuals - and for the people as a whole - to live out." (9)

Thus we come to the mid-1970's with a wide and diverse support for the policy of cultural pluralism in our society. But this policy has only been put into practice in limited ways - not nearly to the extent implied by the definition we have given. And there is reason to doubt that it will be carried far enough into practice to satisfy those who are at present in disadvantaged minority groups.

WHO FAVORS CULTURAL PLURALISM?

To foresee some of the problems and issues that lie ahead for cultural pluralism, it is useful to analyze the supporters and the opponents of the concept. There are several categories of supporters:

1. Minority groups who are now favorably situated. One thinks immediately of Jews, Japanese and Chinese Americans. All three groups have higher average educational levels and higher average occupational status than the population as a whole.
2. Politically conservative white Protestants and Catholics, who are reasonably satisfied with their own socioeconomic position, and do not want integrated residential areas or integrated schools. They favor pluralism rather than integration, and are willing to make limited sacrifices to assist disadvantaged minority groups as long as they stay apart.
3. European white ethnics, mainly from eastern and southern Europe, and mainly Catholic. They have worked hard, saved money, and are getting a firm base in the American economic system. They see the black and Spanish descent groups pushing them out of their neighborhoods in the big cities. They want to be left alone.
4. Black groups who favor a permanent or a temporary separate status. Black Muslims favor a separate system of churches, schools, and businesses for their own group. Another black separatist group is working for black political and economic power and sees this as possible in black city wards, congressional districts and school districts, and possibly black cities.
5. Other racial and religious minorities. Certain Chicano and Puerto Rican groups. Some American Indians. Small rural religious groups such as the Amish and Hutterites.

These groups are so diverse that they could only coexist in a wealthy society with plenty of living space. Some groups are relatively wealthy and others are relatively poor. Their economic differences might create difficulties for the maintenance of a stable pluralistic society.

WHO OPPOSES CULTURAL PLURALISM?

There are two broadly defined opposition groups to cultural pluralism, and these two are diametrically opposed to each other. One is the integrationist group; the other is the separatist group.

1. The integrationists are white and black and minority group liberals who favor a democratic integrated society which tends to reduce the present degree of pluralism, though not to the extent of wiping out all racial, ethnic, and religious differences. They are not in favor of the "melting pot" in its simple form, but they would like to see the present economic and cultural differences between groups reduced, and much greater common participation in business, local government, and education. This position has been taken by the United States Commission on Civil Rights.

2. The separatists go as far as to ask for separate autonomous political and cultural groups living in separate areas. For instance, one Black Nationalist group has proposed that five of the fifty American states be deliberately assigned to blacks, and the whites who now live there be re-located.

Quite a different group are the "white supremacists" who would have the whites take and exert power to place every racial group "in its place", socially, economically, educationally and geographically.

INTEGRATION VERSUS CULTURAL PLURALISM

In my judgment, there is little chance for the separatists to push the American society into greater separateness. The major issue with respect to race and ethnic and socioeconomic relations in the United States for the next decade is the nature of the combination of integration and cultural pluralism which will be worked out. These are different enough to create some tension and conflict between their respective adherents; but viable compromises can be made. It is the nature of these compromises that will concern the educators and the political leaders for the next decade.

The place of the school system in this complex of issues is defined with clarity and moderation by Edgar Epps in his concluding essay of the book entitled *Cultural Pluralism*. He says:

"One of the most important issues facing minority group political leaders as well as educators and scholars is that of the relative effectiveness of assimilationist and cohesiveness strategies for improving the relative social positions of specific minority groups in contemporary America. The goal of assimilation was almost universally accepted by scholars and by large segments of most ethnic communities until the late 1960s. However, one of the most important recent developments in American race relations is the emerging sense of group pride that is increasingly expressed by racial minority and national origin groups. Black power, Chicano power, and Native American power movements have stirred the ethnic consciousness of other groups." (10)

He compared the position of a leader of the integrationist group (Thomas Pettigrew) with the cultural pluralists. Pettigrew concluded that "the attainment of a viable, democratic America, free from personal and institutional racism, requires extensive racial integration in all realms of life." Other authors contend that democratic education should have cultural pluralism as a goal. Cultural pluralism involves the mutual exchange of cultural content and respect for different views of reality and conceptions of man. Pluralism assumes that ethnic groups have the right to preserve their cultural heritages and also to contribute to American civic life. (11)

Successful integrationist strategy should result in minority children receiving education of the type and quality available to middle-class whites. This would prepare them for competition in mainstream occupations and lifestyles. However, if the integrated school does not accept the basic premises of the pluralist position and provide opportunities for cultural exchange and the development of respect for cultural and racial diversity, the educational benefits may be achieved at considerable psychic cost to individual students. The typical school with a melting pot orientation requires minority children to regard their own culture as inferior and to abandon it. (12)

Appropriate education in a pluralistic society would begin with the development of programs that use the cultural contexts of the populations served by the schools to determine the values, goals, and content of education. The focus in some schools may be nationalistic, even separatist; in others the emphasis may be bicultural or multi-cultural. The objective is to utilize the diversity that exists in this society to help children learn and to encourage a healthy respect for cultural differences. Some educators propose a type of education that would help oppressed minorities develop a political consciousness and a knowledge of the social structure that will enable them to attain greater political and economic power. Advocates of this type of approach argue that education should take place within a framework that will encourage members of minority ethnic groups to work for political self-determination and economic progress in their own communities. To those who fear that such separatist strategies will lead to the development of vested interests, increased competition among ethnic groups, and continued social isolation, they reply that the vested interests, competition and social isolation are already in existence. The educational programs being proposed are designed to improve their relative competitive position. (13)

A BALANCE OF PLURALISM AND INTEGRATION

There are advantages to pluralism, and there are advantages to integration. The American society seeks the most satisfactory and the most viable balance of the two policies.

At this point in time, it appears that cultural pluralism is more satisfactory, both to the majority group and to the minority groups, though for quite different reasons. The majority group has enough wealth to be able to share some with poor minority groups, and still to remain wealthy and powerful. The minority groups can gain self-respect, self-confidence, and somewhat higher income while preserving their life styles.

Inequality of income and power creates the major issue. As long as any group exists on a much lower economic level than the majority, some of its members are likely to try to join the majority through acquiring skills, knowledge, and new life styles that makes for success in the "mainstream". A policy of social integration would probably reduce the inequality between groups at the cost of reducing loyalty to the disadvantaged groups.

Schools and the educational system will be used on behalf of cultural pluralism or integration, as is desired by those who make policy. My guess is that the next ten years will see the American educational system balancing itself between programs that build self-confidence and group loyalty for minority groups and programs that help individuals to acquire knowledge and skills and attitudes that will aid them to find places in the society which suit them best, and may mean some decrease of loyalty to specific ethnic or other minority groups.

THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

In a few sentences, the educational program which does these things will have the following characteristics:

1. Teaching of history and social studies so as to build mutual respect and understanding of the various cultures represented in this country.
2. More integrated schooling, bringing together students of different ethnic and social class backgrounds.
3. Encouragement of minority group students to finish high school and attend college.
4. A balance of strong central administration in school systems with decentralized local community power.

If this prognosis is valid, we might look for more peace on the education scene for the next ten years than we have had during the past ten years. While other sources of controversy will be active, the rivalry may die down between racial and ethnic groups, and between various sectors of the big cities.

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