DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 142 614 UD 017 097

AUTHOR Corbett, P. Scott; Worley, Bill
TITLE Ethnic and Minority History, Separate or Equal?
PUB DATE [77]
NOTE 16p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *American History; American Indians; Asian Americans; Blacks; Curriculum Enrichment; *Ethnic Groups; *High School Curriculum; *Minority Groups; *Senior High Schools; Social Studies Units; Spanish Americans; *Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *Kansas

ABSTRACT

This project attempted to discover whether Kansas public high school history teachers included information about ethnic/minority groups as a separate or as an equal component of their ccurse presentations. A questionnaire was sent to all instructors of American History in Kansas. 563 questionnaires were mailed and 176 (31.2%) were returned either partially or totally completed. The two part questionnaire solicited personal information such as age, sex, field of specialization, group identity, and an attitude survey of teaching ethnic and/or minority studies. Many of the respondents indicated agreement with the idea that ethnic content was appropriate while other respondents practiced "benign neutrality", and ethnic and/or minority exclusion from the history curriculum. It was emphasized that one of the problems of ethnic and minority studies as they relate to the teaching of history is that ethnic and/or minority groups have been artificially separated from the major areas of history teaching. An annotated bibliography is included. (JP)

ETHNIC AND MINORITY HISTORY---SEPARATE OR EQUAL?

by P. Scott Corbett and Bill Worley

In many areas of our state and country the issue of how to deal with the place of the divergent peoples in America's past and present has been raised, sometimes to a boiling point. In the last ten years the questions of Black Studies, Chicano Studies, Native American (Indian) Studies as well as bilingual and bicultural education have been talked about, occasionally adopted, sometimes shunted aside.

So what is happening today in Kansas with ethnic/minority studies, with comparative cultural/religious observance, with the studying and/or experiencing of events and people which help so many of us know who we are? Too often, it seems, rather than study or learn about different people and their histories and customs as they affect all of us, we tend to ignore their presence. This paper seeks to discover whether Kansas public high school history teachers include information about ethnic/minority groups as a separate or an equal component of their course presentations. Are there separate minority studies courses? Very few (12 in 1974-75) which is all right with us. But the question remains, are these groups being dealt with in an integrated fashion in the standard American history survey? To determine this, the authors conceived a project consisting of a survey of Kansas history teachers and a search of the appropriate literature.

This project was constructed to try to get a handle on how extensively information concerning certain ethnic and minority groups and their role in American history are incorporated into the teaching

of American history in Kansas public high schools. The crux of this project was a questionnaire sent to all the instructors of American history in Kansas as identified by the State Department of Education Directory of Social Studies Instructors, 1974-75. A total of 563 questionnaires were mailed, of which 176 (31.2%) were returned either partially or totally completed. Admittedly, this is a small sample but hopefully the figures generated are at least indicators of general trends of opinion concerning our questions. Furthermore, perhaps this initial step will stimulate enough interest that more successful results can be obtained in later projects.

The questionnaire had two parts to it. The first part was a brief five-question survey of personal information such as age, sex, field of specialization and group identity. From this we obtained a crude categorization of the typical respondent to the project. The results of this survey indicate that the average respondent was a white male, 35 years old, with a speciality in American history from one of the six Regents' institutions of Kansas. Nothing here is very surprising.

The second part of the questionnaire was designed to sample the participants' attitudes towards the teaching of ethnic and/or minority studies, whether much along those lines was currently being done at their schools, and whether they cared to receive some specially tailored extra education in the area of ethnic/minority studies or other more general fields of history. This part also included a section where the participants were asked to estimate how much time they spent, while teaching their general American survey courses, on the following groups: Blacks, Oriental Americans, Spanish-surnamed Americans, European

immigrants, and American Indians. The key questions, for the purposes of this paper, were numbers 3, 4, 7, 9, and 20. We will deal with the responses to questions 4, 7, 9, and 10 separately before going back to study the responses to question 3.

Question 4 asked if the group devoted more than two class periods to any particular immigrant group. If they did, they were asked to designate which group or groups they did devoted more than two class periods to. Of those answering this question, 54 (35%) said yes and 100 (65%) said no. Those responding yes mentioned Blacks, European immigrants, American Indians, and Oriental Americans most frequently when designating the groups they spent more than two class periods with.

Question 7 read as follows: "Would you like to see more coverage of the area of ethnic or minority group studies in your school?" The response to this was almost evenly split with 75 (48%) saying yes and 79 (52%) saying no. Question 9 was a follow-up to 7 asking if the participants felt well prepared in the fields of ethnic or minority group history. Here again the response was almost evenly divided with 72 (46%) answering yes and 84 (54%) answering no. And finally, the question was put to the group that if they did not feel well prepared in the fields of ethnic or minority group studies would they come to do something in conjunction with the University of Kansas to upgrade their preparation. The replies ran 70 (53%) yes and 62 (47%) no. Lest one get the impression that the study group was ambivalent about upgrading their skills as historians or teachers, question 12 asked if they "would like to attend other courses on other historical topics or in areas of teaching techniques or methodology?" This received a strong affirmative response as

116 (73%) replied yes and 41 (27%) replied no.

So far, what do we have? Well, we have a group of participants, half of whom feel competent in the fields of ethnic or minority studies, who do not spend more than two class periods in their survey courses on any particular immigrant group, are ambivalent on both wanting to see more done in these areas and receiving training in them but who would like to sharpen their professional skills.

Now let us turn to question three where the participants were asked to estimate how much classroom time they spent on the various minority groups while teaching their general thirty-six week American survey classes. One hundred twenty four people (70%) filled out this section in part or in whole. The responses appear in the following table:

TABLE 1

GROUP	# OF HOURS	% OF TIME
Black Americans	10.26	5.70
Oriental Americans	2.52	1.40
Spanish-surnamed Americans	2.79	1.55
European Immigrants	9.61	5.33
American Indians	6.89	3.82
	32.07	17.80

Depending on one's perspective and philosophical approaches to the discipline of history and its instruction, the above table may reflect an adequate, more than adequate, or a quite inadequate amount of time spent discussing the lives and the significance of those groups in helping to mold the fabric of our polyglot nation's past. We will return to this more ideological discussion later.

Two rough correlations were worked regarding the figures appearing in table 2. First, the responses of those answering no to

question 7 (Would you like to see more coverage of those areas?) against all those who completed question 3. Of those who answered, 79 answered no to question 7; 59 (74%) of these are currently teaching at least one section of a general American survey course. Of these, seven did not answer question 3 and another seven said they interspersed their emphasis on all the groups and accordingly provided no estimates as to the amount of time spent on the various groups. That left 45 that did provide estimates or 55% of all no answers. The amount of time devoted to the groups by these people is as follows:

TABLE 2
HOURS DEVOTED TO VARIOUS GROUPS

GROUP	ANSWER TO 7		ALL RESPONDENTS
	NO	YES	
Blacks	7.62	11.50	10.26
Orientals	1.95	3.01	2.52
Spanish-surnamed	2.22	3.03	2.79
European Immigrants	8.11	10.52	9.61
American Indians	6.08	8.73	6.89

Now, as one can see those people who did not wish to see more time devoted to the different groups of people fell below the average of the entire study group and did so significantly in the case of Blacks.

The second comparison made regarding those completing question 3 has to deal with where the participants received their professional training. Here, while a great variety of colleges were listed at least once, 112 or 63% of the entire group were trained by the six Regents institutions of Kansas and 32 or 18% obtained their degrees outside the State of Kansas. The breakdown appears in Table 3.

TABLE 3
HOURS DEVOTED TO VARIOUS GROUPS

GROUP	ENTIRE STUDY GROUP	REGENTS SCHOOLS	OUT-OF-STATE
Blacks	(10.26)	10.86	18.56
Orientals	(2.52)	2.60	1.80
Spanish-surnamed	(2.79)	2.55	2.90
European Immigrants	(9.61)	7.33	10.18
American Indians	(6.29)	6.82	7.56

As regards to those who answered yes to question 7 in question 8 they were asked tc indicate what they felt would be the most appropriate approach to implementing an increased coverage of minority groups in the high school classrooms. The single most frequent suggestion was the "inclusion of more material on ethnic or minority group history in the general U.S. history courses."

Now let's turn to a discussion of the amount of time spent on the various groups in the classrooms of Kansas high schools. According to our figures roughly 32 hours of instruction are devoted to discussing the various listed minority groups. Is this enough? Well, let's look at the other side of the coin--namely roughly 148 hours are spent discussing things other than the heritage and historical experience of minority groups. We would be the first to admit that in structuring a general survey of American history one never seems to have enough time to fit in all the material which seems significant in the development of our nation. There are wars and elections to be fought and won or lost. Industrialization and modernization tinctured with recurrent reform movements demand attention and discussion. The list of what could be discussed is endless. But still we ask, is it enough to spend portions of only 32 hours discussing participants in most if not all the major events of this country's past?

In the fall of 1976 the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) published in its journal, Social Education, an NCSS approved set of "Curriculum Guidelines for Multiethnic Education." On page 36 of this report the following observation, pertinent to our point just made, is given:

> To gain a more complete understanding of our past and present, students should look at events and situations from the perspectives of Anglo-Americans and from the perspectives of people who are Jewish American, Polish-American, Filipino American, and Puerto Rican American.

Thus, it may be useful at times in a lecture about the War of 1812 to ask how the Spaniards, who still governed Florida, would have reacted to the Battle of New Orleans or how the Indians reacted to the Proclamation Line of 1863.

The same report points out that American history is usually taught from "the view that the United States has developed mainly in an east-to-west direction." By using this approach we history teachers usually stress that "ethnic groups appear almost always in two forms: as obstacles to the advance of westward-moving Anglo civilization or as problems which must be corrected or at least kept under control." (p. 36) What we often do not stress (or maybe even realize) are the "northwesterly flow of culture from Africa to America, the northerly flow of Hispanic and Mexican society, the easterly flow of cultures from Asia, and the westerly flow of latter-day immigrants from Eastern, Central, and Southern Europe." (p. 37) One could add to this the southerly flow of French Canadians as well as the northwesterly movement of Blacks leaving the South following Reconstruction (do we ever mention the Exodusters?).

Several of the respondents to this survey included unsolicited comments about the issue of the proper balance between minority history and American history. Some of these comments are worth discussing. One teacher informed us that "I teach history and various groups are mentioned whereever [sic] appropriate." On the surface these sentiments seem laudable in one's approach to teaching American history classes. But the phrase "wherever appropriate" troubles us because with regards to at least two of the groups dealt with in this study (Blacks and American Indians) since they were part and parcel of this country's history from the very beginnings of European colonization "wherever appropriate" could mean any time. We suspect that what is actually meant by "wherever appropriate" is the point (perpetuated by most textbooks) where the various groups momentarily stand out in the historical process so obviously that indeed it would be hard to ignore the groups. We all know these points such as slavery for Blacks, the Plains Wars for the Indians, the flood of immigration of the late nineteenth century for the Europeans, and either the Exclusion movement or the internment camps for the Orientals, and maybe Santa Anna as the representative figure of Mexico at the Alamo and San Jacinto (which is a gross distortion itself). These are significant trends and themes which do need to be taught and discussed but as with the general trend of our history there is so much to chose from the heritage of these groups that also could, perhaps should, be discussed. Blacks and peonage in the South could be brought up during a discussion of Progressivism. The development of the Plains culture before the confrontation with the whites or the unsuccessful attempts of the late nineteenth century

and early twentieth century to recreate the Indian in the white man's image could provide interesting discussions. Or finally, a lecture or discussion of the early Jewish community of New Amsterdam could provide insights to the processes of our colonization.

Again the authors of the NCSS Guidelines offer some salient observations:

> Traditionally, students in the American common schools have been taught a great deal about the ideals of our society. Conflicts between ideals and realities are often glossed over. . . . Courses in American history and citizenship especially have been characterized by this kind of unquestioning approach to the socialization of youth. (p. 25)

On the other side of the coin:

> When ethnic studies emerged from the civil rights movement of the 1960's, there was a strong reaction to the traditional approach to citizenship education. A widely expressed goal of many curriculum reformers was 'to tell it like it is and was' in the classroom. In many of the reformed courses, however, American history and society were taught and viewed primarily from the view points of specific ethnic groups. (p. 25)

But the NCSS Committee found that:

> The unquestioning approach and the 'tell it like it is' approach both result in distortion. In a sound multi-ethnic curriculum, emphasis should be neither on the ways in which the United State has 'fulfilled its noble ideals' [which it has not, in many cases] nor on the 'sins committed by the Anglo-Americans [who were not the only 'sinners' in all cases] or any other groups of Americans. Rather, students should be encouraged to examine the democratic values that emerged in America, why they emerged, how they were defined in various periods, and to whom they referred in different eras. (p. 26)

We submit that, though many respondents seemed to think we were advocating specific courses or discussions on the various minority groups, we are in accord with all who feel that the unfolding of minority group history should be strongly integrated with general trends in our history. As one reply put it with regards to distilling out minority group history

that "I try not to make things seem like they were not." We certainly agree. But, conversely, by dealing with these groups at only certain traditional points and as limitedly as this study seems to indicate, is not that making "things seem like they were not."

One of the most prolific writers in this area of advocacy for multiethnic education is James A. Banks, professor of education, University of Washington, Seattle. In the May-June 1976 number of The Social Studies he describes the position enunciated by the above respondent as "assimilationist" which Banks defines as tending "to see ethnicity and ethnic attachments as fleeting and temporary within an increasingly modernized world." (p. 100) Further, "the assimilationists view ethnicity as somewhat non-characteristic of modernized societies [and] they believe that strong ethnic attachments are dysfunctional within a modernized state." Thus, for the assimilationist, "the school should take a position of 'benign neutrality' in matters related to the ethnic attachments of its students." (p. 101) We would hasten to add that 'benign neutrality' may be a legitimate position. We wonder, however, if it might not be improved upon in the future.

As noted earlier in this paper many of our respondents indicated agreement with the idea that ethnic content is appropriate while these just noted seemed to question that inclusion. We would like to suggest that the question of the inclusion of ethnically related material does not necessarily mean that other material is forced out of consideration. It is not an "either-or" proposition. By the same token we would argue that to continue our practices of "benign neutrality" would be to continue another sort of exclusionary curriculum and course development. Rather,

the authors of this paper agree with a substantial number of the respondents who indicated a desire for both a common understanding of American history and a treatment of the ethnic participation and/or response to that common understanding.

Another objection to devoting more time to minority group history was related to the nature of the student body. One person put it simply "I see no further need for minority studies here because of the nature of our school population." Another included some obviously more complete comments:

> History, as I see it should be applicaple [sic] to those who are receiving it. . . . It should only deal outside that area in those parts that are significant to the general development of the American Republic, not simply to satisfy some esoteric purpose to which they cannot related. In the common Kansas classroom instruction is carried on 180 days per year, one hour per day. This short time does not allow for the thorough development of American History in either political, social, economic, military or any other one field. To attempt to develope [sic] ethnic studies (which it might be added only prevents or hinders the socialization of American minorities) unrelated either to the students or to the general development of America, is at best superficial and most likely a waste of valuable, limited time.

Frankly, we do not quite know what to make of such comments. The implications seem to be that both writers teach in all white or mostly white high schools and white students do not want to learn about Blacks, Orientals, Hispanic-Americans, or American Indians, and therefore should not be forced to learn about these groups.

We realize that we are now beginning to delve into the realm of ideological perceptions of the nature of history and what we are about to say has in one form or another been said before. The above comments seem to take it that good history is useful history. We do not deny that a thorough knowledge of American history is useful.* But again we would

*We wonder if students should not be taught algebra, geometry, or literature because of the nature of the student body would seem to make such knowledge incomprehensible to them and therefore not useful.

argue that one of the most useful things a history teacher can do is to expose the student to the different cultures and historical processes that Americans, all Americans, have progressed through or are still developing. We doubt seriously any community in Kansas is America in microcosm and therefore learning of the different groups that make up this country seems to have a great deal of practical application. Not all students stay in their home community. Probably over half move elsewhere soon after graduation--either to a job or further education, in either case probably encountering a more highly diverse population than was present in their home communities.

This then is one of the major points we would like to make in this paper. America is a polyglot nation and though different people may retain and preserve their own legacies, they are all Americans and therefore inextricably a part of its history. We believe that one of the problems of ethnic and minority studies as they relate to the historical profession is that groups have been artificially separated from the vital context of the broader trends of history. Consequently, a course in Black history, if not well grounded in what society as a whole was doing during the appropriate period, runs the risk of assuming a verisimilitude which rather than enlightening the student serves only to confuse him or to promote compartmentalizing of his knowledge of history so he cannot see the forest for the trees. But the same or greater problem exists when all one is taught is the white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant saga of American history. One respondent wrote the following comments:

> When I began teaching I was enthused about ethnic or minority studies, but I have turned from that view to one of a total integration of subject matter. We as educators should be trying

> to educate Americans not some separate groups. . . .
> To [sic] many pressure groups have indicated we should teach these people their heritage when in the future they are going to be a seperate [sic] entity instead of Americans.

In seeking a better understanding of and possible improvements on the position just noted, the authors discovered the following comments by James A. Banks in the same May-June 1976 The Social Studies article previously cited. He holds that "the primary goal of the curriculum should be to help children learn how to function more effectively within their own ethnic cultures, within the wider common culture, and within other ethnic communities." Thus, "the curriculum should reflect the cultures of various ethnic groups and the common culture." (p. 105) Again, this is an advocacy of a "both-and" approach to course and curriculum development.

We feel that the general American history survey course is the very best place to teach "Americans" about other Americans and how they fit into the patchwork of our development. Indeed such an approach has many advantages especially for the small schools that cannot afford special courses in minority or ethnic studies. It seems to us that the best way to break down barriers of misunderstanding and ignorance which serve to keep specific groups as "separate entities" is by relating them as frequently as possible to their role and place in our history. We hope that this discussion has at least stimulated some thought on the issue now in a period when dissatisfied and neglected groups are not making demands on our attention. We also hope that the teaching of American history would not assume the semblance of separate and unequal as it deals with the life and times of all Americans.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. A well known book that can serve as a starting point for more thinking in this area of ethnic/minority content in American history is Milton M. Gordon's Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origin.

2. Two recent helpful booklets from the American Jewish Committee located in New York City are Andrew Greeley's Why Can't They Be Like Us? and Judith Herman's The Schools and Group Identity.

3. Greeley also has a 1974 book, Ethnicity in the United States, published by John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

4. In Boulder, Colorado, is the Social Science Education Consortium (855 Broadway, Boulder, Colorado 80302) which publishes a Teacher Resource Kit for Ethnic Studies, K-12, as well as Tips for Teaching Ethnic Studies.

5. Also specifically to the point of this paper is James A. Banks' book Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies, which emphasizes total curricular reform around the concepts of ethnic/minority cultural studies.

6. A quite helpful booklet, Eliminating Ethnic Bias in Instructional Materials, edited by Maxine Dunfee and published by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (1702 K Street, N.W., Suite 1100, Washington, D.C. 20006) includes an extensive bibliography of sources on the subject through 1974.

7. Three journals often have helpful informational articles and book reviews in this area: History Teacher, The Social Studies, and Social Education.

8. Two magazines have had extensive coverage of this topic in specific issues: Educational Leadership concentrated on "Multicultural Curriculum:

Issues, Designs, Strategies," in its December 1975 number; Momentum, a magazine devoted to Catholic primary and secondary education, featured the theme of "Ethnic Studies and Programs" in its October 1975 issue. Both of these have many helpful and provocative articles.