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ABSTRACT
        This essay presents two strands of arguments against
radical or critical emancipatory multiculturalism. In strand 1,
"'Culture' is...whatever..." the looseness of the core concept of
"culture," which can refer to anything at all concerning a social
group that itself may exist only theoretically, is shown. In strand
2, "From ideology to leveling, propagandizing curriculum," the
thinking behind the education that an article by Cameron McCarthy,
"Multicultural Discourses and Curriculum Reform: A Critical
Perspective," and others advocate as emancipatory but that reads
anything but is examined. The paper suggests that adherents to
multiculturalism may not be interested in school reform but in
building separatist communities. The essay concedes that
multiculturalism can add to an educational program: (1) by giving
students fuller and better balanced views of history, art, and
society; (2) by developing a richer appreciation of literature of
other peoples; and (3) by addressing directly the problems inherent
in prejudice and discrimination based on ethnic heritage. Contains 28
notes with numerous references. (EH)

Against Radical Multiculturalism
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In the Winter, 1994 <u>Educational Theory</u>, Cameron McCarthy's article "Multicultural Discourses and Curriculum Reform: A Critical Perspective" distinguished among approaches to multiculturalism and then went on to present the author's own views, an argument for "critical emancipatory multiculturalism." These views are echoed in much recent writing that seeks to go beyond a human relations, "we all need to be sensitive to diversity" multiculturalism specializing in exotic foods and ethnic dances.

James A. Banks has usefully identified and discussed four levels of multiculturalism: Level 1, the contributions approach; Level 2, the additive approach; Level 3, the transformation approach; and Level 4, the social action approach.[1] McCarthy's "critical emancipatory multiculturalism" and the "radical" or "transformative" multiculturalism of others encompass elements of Banks's Levels 3 and 4: snatching the curriculum away from Eurocentrism "to enable students to view concepts, issues, events, and themes from the perspectives of diverse ethnic and cultural groups" and preparing them to take effective political action on the issues they have studied.

In this essay I present an argument of two strands against radical or critical emancipatory multiculturalism. The overall view I advance was captured nicely in a discussion of the opening game in the recent football (soccer) World Cup. The commentator noted

2

that the Bolivian team could do a lot of nifty maneuvering in the midfield area, but never posed a threat to the German goal. That's just what I see in this body of educational writing: the closer it gets to classrooms, and generally to life, the less sense it makes. Banks' Level 2 becomes the highest level at which multiculturalism can be supported with confidence.

In the first strand I show the looseness of the core concept "culture," which can refer to anything at all concerning a social group that itself may exist only theoretically. Often the explaining offered with recourse to the concept is just ideologically charged stereotyping. The second strand considers the thinking behind the education that McCarthy's piece and others advocate as "emancipatory" but that reads as anything but. School has the potential to "emancipate" young people from ignorance and futile mental activity; school has no business training them as conscripts to a quirky post-Marxist revolutionary praxis.

Strand #1: "Culture" is ...whatever...

Advocates of multicultural education of all stripes struggle with the pivotal concept "culture." Following Bullivant, many multiculturalists define "culture" as a social group's program for survival in and adaptation to their environment, transmitted as "knowledge, conceptions, and values" among group members. [2] Some are thinking more narrowly of the group's most valued aesthetic objects.[3] Others define "culture" very loosely, such that whatever people in any identifiable group distinctively think or do is part

2

of the "culture" of that group. Multiculturalists characteristically talk past each other, and past traditional educators, for want of a common understanding of the pivotal term.

Cultural anthropology began with fieldwork among remote tribal peoples, and this helps explain the employment of such a broad, vague construct as "culture" in that research. Nothing could be taken as given between the observer and the people being studied, and the observer might be seeing totally unfamiliar behavior at all levels of social organization, from burial rites to personal grooming to ways of speaking to a grandparent. At least initially the unanimity of the group would be far more impressive than the individual differences observed.

Nothing like this pertains to the description of children and adults in the United States today by educator and researchers quite familiar with them. Hastily assuming the anthropological perspective, multicultural educators often blind themselves to two important empirical questions: (1) How much does this group share with other residents or citizens in the United States? and (2) How much variety exists within this group? Typically, multiculturalists understate wildly the knowledge, value, and lifestyle shared among social and cultural groups in the United States, a nation with a powerful and pluralistic "macroculture."[4] In addition, they often leap to generalizations that apply only to some, or a few, members of the group in question, writing off the others as assimilated and falsely conscious.

Add to this a "relational" epistemology that places all truth

in the eye of the beholder, and multiculturalists can say almost
anything about any group. African-Americans and Hispanics value
this or that; boys and men believe this, while girls and women
believe that and the other. Inside the paradigm, the only standard
for criticism of any such claim is ideological. Liberal
multiculturalists, correctly identified by McCarthy and others as
advocating a reformist pluralism, value diversity per se and see
the good and the distinctive in almost every cultural variation.
Radicals say anything nasty they please about "dominant groups,"
but only praise the culture and the individual members of an
"oppressed group," excepting the sellouts therein.

Granting radical multiculturalists the ineffable pleasure of
being not just right but righteous in every pronouncement they
make, the approach has severe limitations that announce themselves
every time one stops to consider the actual words employed.

Consider the opening passage from an article in the anthology
Empowerment Through Multicultural Education:

> Appalachian people share a rich cultural
> heritage which includes a strong sense of kinship, a love
> of the land, a rich oral tradition, and a commitment to
> personal freedom and self-reliance.[5]

The author, Kathleen P. Bennett, here begins to identify
Appalachians as an oppressed cultural minority, to include them
among the excluded. Reading enough language like this prepares one
to predict the exact educational implication to follow: Given this
group's excellent culture, any competitive disadvantages of their

kids in school can only be explained by the incompetence and malevolence of the schools themselves. And indeed, the school's reading program "was in conflict with the culture of the students" (28) and "the ideology of stratification which permeated the reading program was the source of the cumulative deficits in the reading abilities of students" (46).

But Bennett's encomiastic descriptions of Appalachian culture admit of quite different educational significance. Where she sees "a rich oral tradition," a practicing educator might see families and whole neighborhoods in which no adult reads. "Self-reliance" might be less Emersonian than atavistic in character. The "strong sense of kinship" might mean that kids pay no attention to anyone outside the family. Bennett communicates nothing of practical educational value because the terms of the description are so airy, closer to ad-campaign slogans than scientific observations.

Even less persuasive is Bennett's assigning these descriptions evenly across the Appalachian population, defined as "as one who was born, or whose parents or grandparents were born, in one of the counties making up the Appalachian region" (28). Bennett assumes all the individuals in this very loosely defined group to have <u>nothing but</u> Appalachian cultural values, and so the study of <u>exactly one classroom</u> is sufficient to reveal a situation applicable to all. This implies that religion, ethnicity, gender, education level, occupation, and so on have exerted no influence on this group and that the national youth culture entirely bypassed Appalachia as late as 1985.[6] Moreover, the particular Appalachians

5

studied are urbanites, living in "a small Appalachian neighborhood within a large Midwestern metropolitan area" (30). Bennett asks us to believe that kids two generations removed from the countryside, living in a Midwestern city, have fully retained the culture of their grandparents, including the love of land they may never have seen.

Bennett's scholarship is more correctly called regional stereotyping, akin to statements like "New Englanders are taciturn" and "Southerners are hospitable and eat grits." But her thinking is typical: Having described a collectivity, multiculturalists begin talking about its culture without a pause, stripping the individuals in the collectivity of all identity except as members of that group. Thus we read of "white culture" and "Anglo culture," as if Andrea Dworkin, Jerry Falwell, and Santa Cruz surfer-rats shared a common culture based on race. The case is no more promising with constructs like "Asian culture," "Hispanic culture," and "working class culture."

Bennett's piece also shows that it is not so simple a matter to demarcate between "dominant" and "oppressed" people. Her "oppressed" Appalachians would be carved up unmercifully by other radical multiculuralists, the Appalachian Caucasians as racists, the males as sexists, the non-disabled as ablists, the non-gay as heterosexists, and so forth, all as a matter of ideological presupposition, irrespective of anything any particular Appalachian says or does. And wouldn't it seem odd to a U.M.W. of A. organizer that professors at schools of education, who teach perhaps six

6

hours a week and write the occasional article, are branding black-lunged, old-before-their-time coal miners as "hegemonists"?

In their article "Cooperative Learning as Empowering Pedagogy" (1991), Sapon-Shevin and Schniedewind indicate the boundlessness of cultural overgeneralization if an ideological point is to be scored.[7] Trying to expose competition within schools as not only evil in itself but also racist in its effects, the authors write:

> Cross-cultural studies have revealed incidences in which Hawaiian and Native American children have rejected group contingencies and reward structures which would place one student above another or would embarrass any of the participants (Gallimore and Howard, 1968; Kohn, 1986). Thus children of color may not be motivated by competition, further increasing their alienation from majority culture. (emphasis in original; 163)

Here the authors leap from observations about some "incidences" involving young Hawaiians and Native Americans to a "Thus"-claim about "children of color," millions of them, Black, Hispanic, Samoan, Vietnamese, Korean, Hindi, and so on. These children may or may not be competitive, the authors admit, making the passage not only empirically specious but also moot since white children also may or may not be competitive.

Within the paradigm, employing the properly trenchant rhetoric and in-group language masks all such nonsense.[8] Inevitably, though, the looseness of the claims on "culture" will set radical multiculturalists against each other in unresolvable conflicts.

7

Sapon-Shevin and Schniedewind depict U.S. schools as oppressive and racist for being authoritarian and encouraging competition. A second, very influential recent article depicts schools as oppressive and racist for just the opposite.

The lead character here is Clifton, in Emilie V. Siddle Walker's "Falling Asleep in English Class: A Critique of Process Teaching."[9] An African-American student in a rural high school, Clifton regularly dozes off during English class, a class he finds "tiring." The class is given over to the process of composition, with students choosing topics and working through drafts in collaboration with peers. Clifton and some other African-American students in the class, we are told, would prefer a very traditional English class without peer grouping and student collaboration. Siddle Walker associates this preference with African-American ʳulture, charging process-oriented teachers and curriculum planners with racist insensitivity to African-American students.

The most significant word in the piece is "some." In process pedagogy, "some African-American students are often distanced from class structures" (321); "that might explain some African-American student response" (322); "operative in explaining the failure of some African-American students to respond effectively to process methods" (322); "it is oppositional to and noninclusive of the cultural norms of teaching that have been documented as being valued by some African-American children" (323). Clifton is presented as one of the "some," so his sleeping can be interpreted as a defense against an attack on his culture.

8

But the "some" deeply troubles. Some, but which? Taking "African-American culture" as a holistic, static entity, Siddle Walker has no conceptual room to begin to explain the "some but not others" phenomenon. Nothing in the research begins to indicate why authority and structure are to be considered parts of African-American culture while creative collaboration, relaxed supervision, and independent initiative are not.[10] When this author favors the preference of "some" African-Americans for traditional directive pedagogy, her thinking seems no better grounded than the previous authors' sweeping judgment that the child of color is too sweetly cooperative to succeed in traditional classrooms.

Think now of the dilemma all this puts the practicing teacher in. If you prepare traditional structures, you get branded an oppressor and a racist; if you opt for progressive indirection, you get branded a racist and an oppressor. This echoes the double-bind in which radical critics generally place practitioners: If your pedagogical efforts fail, you are guilty of miseducating the students and forcing them into the secondary labor market; but if you succeed with your students, you are guilty of colonizing their minds and coopting them into the managerial elite.

Finally, teachers teach individuals, not groups, and so it would be most natural for them to suppose that Clifton is just being Clifton when he falls asleep during English class, his snoozing having little or nothing at all to do with any "culture" that links him with other African-Americans, males, sixteen-year-olds, heterosexuals, rural people, etc. At stake here

9

is no lack of cultural knowledge or sociological imagination but the hard-won sense of experienced practitioners that group-study leaves a large remainder of individual educational behavior unaccounted for. Even Bullivant, who analyzes "culture" as a matter of a social group's adaptation and survival, makes room for the individual to modify a cultural program or choose to behave independently of it, developing "a personal culture."[11]

Self-aware people know how much they <u>allow</u> their various environments and affiliations to affect decisions and choices they make; the individual in them <u>stands above</u> the currents of macrocultural and microcultural influence and <u>governs</u> behavior. Insofar as traditional liberal education moves students toward this mature self-awareness, it has a built-in advantage over all approaches built on the primacy of "culture." Intellectually, "culture" may be no more than the herd mentality, telling young people that as long as Grandpa did it or the people on the block or on T.V. are doing it, it must be right. Defending such "culture" against schooling in the name of progressivism of any sort can only be a semantic conceit.

Here we can appreciate the hastiness with which multiculturalists identify "school culture" and "the dominant culture," denying schools the measures of institutional and normative autonomy they obviously have. "Dominant culture" in the United States is a protean concept susceptible to easy sloganeering, but <u>as it directly affects the young</u>, it now features stylishness ("Image is everything"), the cult of celebrity, the

prizing of speed, power, and freedom from responsibility, and what
Cornel West has termed "a rapacious hedonism in quest of a
perennial 'high' in body and mind" (45-46). Far from supporting any
of this, the school's demands for sustained concentration,
disciplined inquiry, respectful behavior, and pride of
accomplishment isolate it increasingly from the macroculture and
the national youth culture.

Recent U.S. educational history has not been the tale of
outstanding achievement by upper-class white males and failure by
everybody else. It is a tale, rather, of general underachievement,
a slippage from national norms established in the late 1950's and
early 1960's, with overlapping achievements among the different
subgroups, and some great successes within groups hardly recognized
in t e curriculum.

The threat here, of course, is that the next thing to say is
that some individuals from every social group succeed _fairly_ in
school, and are to be congratulated for doing so.[12] When schools
reward problem-solving ability in math class, insightful analysis
in history class, and accurate observation in chemistry lab, they
do nothing fishy on the "cultural" level, no more than a track meet
discriminates unjustly in favor of the "culture" of those who train
hard, run fast, and jump high. Not to their credit, many
multiculturalists, especially radical multiculturalists, reject and
rebuke all such logic. Some are prepared to dispense with the
entire substance of education itself sooner than live with the fact
that schoolchildren master it unequally.

11

Strand 2: From ideology to leveling, propagandizing

curriculum

At an earlier stage of philosophy of education, scholars laboriously set out philosophical systems like idealism, realism, pragmatism, and social reconstructionism, and then traced the educational implications of those systems. The next generation of philosophers noted, quite correctly, that the drawing out of educational implication rested on theories about the practice of education that in no way derived from the the overarching system. In the end, the intervening theories proved meaningful and the overarching system did not, and the discipline took Occam's Razor to its own beard.

Cameron McCarthy seems typical of radical multiculturalists in returning to the earlier professional model: "deducing" school particulars from abstract ideational systems. But exactly like realism and pragmatism, "oppositional" post-Marxist ideology provides no educational directives. Its adherents may not be interested in school reform at all, only the building of separatist communities, or bombs. If schools do interest them, they may favor the purism that decentralization offers and support a voucher initiative. Or they may ally with cultural nationalists full of ideas and practices every bit as reactionary as the worst "Anglo" ways. Or maybe they champion traditional rigor because they see the need for informed leadership and technical expertise for the long struggle to come, or just because their daughter has her heart set on Dartmouth.

12

Nothing "follows" from the ideology directly; all the connections to educational practice are indirect and idiosyncratic, mediated by many other theories. McCarthy writes very insightfully on the nature of racism, for instance.[13] But an analysis of racism, however acute, implies nothing at the level of school practice. Is racism best attacked through integration or separate schools for each group? Are traditionally elite subjects like calculus, physical chemistry, and literary criticism to be avoided or seized upon as the rightful, valuable possessions of all? Analyses of racism or patriarchy or knowledge do not directly answer questions like these, much less the routine questions of procedure and institutional style.

Not careful enough on this point, much radical multicultural educational writing is misshapen. Far too much time is spent on the setting out of matters far from the classroom. Then, dribbling out at the end will be the educational program that "follows" from all the theorizing. Often the imbalance between the abstract analysis and the practical proposals is striking, the practical parts seeming like hastily conceived afterthoughts.

McCarthy's article is right about a number of important matters: skeptical, both philosophically and politically, about Afrocentrism and other racially essentialist programs; seeing the oversimplication of "culture" that does not involve the intersections of (at least) class, gender, and ethnicity; demanding that "all students should have access to an academic curriculum" (94); and insisting that "urban schools meet their end

13

of a social contract with African American and Hispanic students and their parents" (97). On all these points McCarthy is taking multiculturalism in the most promising directions it can go. Much else, though, cuts against the good sense of its best passages, in particular the haste with which the article dismisses scholarly traditions responsible for material and cultural advances literally unthinkable without them.

McCarthy would bring the "uninstitutionalized experiences of marginalized minorities and working-class women and men to the 'center' of the organization and arrangement of the school curriculum" (95). These experiences will be shaped (by somebody or other[14]) into a "common learnings" curriculum to be taught to all. "Counter-hegemonic knowledge based on the experiences and perspectives of the disadvantaged" will supplant present school-knowledge, contaminated by its shaping to hegemonic needs and interests.

Irving Howe has termed it "a comic misunderstanding" to consider such a repudiation of traditional academics as consistent with or following from Marxist or otherwise leftist or progressive ideals.[15] He cites Lukacs, Trotsky, and Gramsci as Marxists anything but disdainful of the studies that McCarthy dismisses in the name of social justice. Gramsci, a hallowed figure among radical theorists, favored the retention of Greek and Latin studies as aids to mental discipline:

> In education one is dealing with children in whom one has
> to inculcate certain habits of discipline, precision,

14

poise (even physical poise), ability to concentrate on

specific subjects, which cannot be acquired without the

mechanical repetition of disciplined and methodical acts.

The quote clearly shows the power of mediating theories to render
ideology inconsequential for educational practice.

Many protagonists in the "emancipation" of African-Americans
also favored and benefitted from traditional, canonical study.
Frederick Douglass greatly valued orators like Burke, Pitt, and
especially Sheridan, from whom Douglass received

a bold denunciation of slavery and a powerful vindication

of human rights. The reading of these documents enabled

me to utter my thoughts.[16]

W.E.B. Dubois proudly placed himself in the company of Aristotle,
Aurelius, and Shakespeare, while Ralph Ellison wrote:

In Macon County, Alabama, I read Marx, Freud, T.S. Eliot,

Pound, Gertrude Stein, and Hemingway. Books which seldom,

if ever, mentioned Negroes were to release me of whatever

"segregated" idea I might have had of my human

possibilities. [17]

H.L. Mencken had performed a similar service for Richard Wright,[18]
and Martin Luther King's studies led to his citing Socrates,
Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Buber, Martin Luther, John
Bunyan, and Thomas Jefferson in the "Letter From Birmingham Jail"
and his finding powerful inspiration in Thoreau, Gandhi, and
Reinhold Niebuhr.[19]

A crucial but very weak link in the rationale for McCarthy's

15

"counter-hegemonic" curriculum is its repudiation of what might be called descriptive Eurocentrism. The connections among the United States, Europe, and "Western Civilization" are well worth investigating, and the distortions are obvious in Allan Bloom's treating the U.S. as a mere appendage to Europe, subordinate and inferior in every respect. But "the role of Europe in the elaboration of American institutions and cultu: .;" is not the "myth" (89) that McCarthy asserts it to be. Eurocentrism in this sense is no more than historical realism.

Ample evidence of European influence can be found in American music, art, law, religion, architecture, moral philosophy, science, humor--everywhere--, but the clearest and most persuasive evidence is in McCarthy's own writing. Of the conservative intellectuals whom McCarthy names as defenders of Eurocentrism--Bloom, D'Sousa, Hirsch, Ravitch, and George Will--, only Bloom comes near McCarthy himself in being immersed in distinctively Continental modes of thinking.

The irony here is pungent: A Marxist with a Gramscian twist inveighs against European cultural influence; he quotes Althusser on "the mise-en-scene of interpellation" (91) and regularly drops phrases like "the rather philistine assertion" (89) and "the deep imbrication of traditional, canonical school knowledge in the legitimation of authority" (83), phrases saturated with meaning and cultural significance derived from Graeco-Roman history and Judaeo-Christian history. McCarthy cannot be read and understood except by individuals who have attained the very education he

16

damns.

A second irony is that the political role McCarthy plays is precisely that of the Continental idealist intellectual, devising a plan to redesign society that connects to almost nothing presently in society--schools, businesses, unions, political parties, churches, government agencies, or voluntary associations. Also in the Continental manner would be his labeling the enterprise a "democratic initiative" despite its building on input from very few of the affected parties and its being expressed in language that would be understood by even fewer of them.

In The Revisionists Revised, Ravitch cites a story that Michael Katz tells about radicals working to elect a poor mother to a school board.[20] She surprises them by favoring report cards and corporal punishment and opposing sex education, prompting Katz to admit, sheepishly:

> I suspect that what the poor want for their children is affluence, status, and a home in the suburbs rather than community, a guitar, and soul. They may prefer schools that teach their children to read and write and cipher....Educational radicalism is itself a species of class activity. It reflects an attempt at cultural imposition fully as much as the traditional emphasis on competition, restraint, and orderliness.

Ravitch notes this to present "a profound dilemma, and few of the other radicals even consider it."

Here we may note how little "culture" enters into radical

17

multiculturalism. A far more general reduction than a purging of sexism and racism from certain groups' established ways, the critical emancipatory curriculum selects out of the full range of the various groups' beliefs and practices just those to be shared as unifying "oppositional" lessons. The effect is that of a politically expedient stipulative definition. Breadth of cultural detail, what may be called the novelist's sense of life, is traded off for strategic emphasis at the juncture of Banks's Levels 3 and 4.

Injecting structural criticism of advanced capitalism into the already bubbling politics of identity among the young, critical emancipatory schoolwork bids to ally elements of the working class with a greatly expanded Rainbow Coalition. According to Christine E. Sleeter, radical multiculturalism "forges a coalition among various oppressed groups as well as dominant groups, teaching directly about political and economic oppression and discrimination, and preparing young people in social action skills." [21] Classroom teaching will try to develop "group consciousness and solidarity" in students, and "with training, oppositional behavior can become politically effective" (16). "Training" is a totally accurate term here in its impatience with nuance, reflection, and impartial weighing of evidence.

In this approach McCarthy, Sleeter, et al. resemble no contemporary educationist so much as an avowed ideological enemy, William Bennett, Secretary of Education under President Reagan and author of such works as "To Reclaim A Legacy" and The Book of

18

Virtues. Both the radical multiculturalists and Bennett treat as the primary value of schooling its capacity to shape character and inspire political allegiance. For his curriculum, accordingly, Bennett selects a handful of cultural artifacts to define Western Civilization, in effect purifying history; radical educators bid to do the same for the multiculture. Dangerously romanticizing, Bennett's curriculum does not care to mention Jefferson's slaves, imperialist plunder, the Holocaust, and Charles Keating, while the critical emancipatory curriculum does not dwell on the intra-Africa slave trade, the Gulag, the general failure of state-socialist economics, and the leadership style of Huey Newton.

McCarthy accurately observes that the oppressed "decode and deconstruct the meaning of style of the oppressor and respond with their own counterhegemonic forms" (96). The example that follows, however, seems so extraordinary as to be, again, dangerously romantic: the Caribbean epic Omeros, a brilliant adaptation of Homer by the Nobel Prize-winning poet Derek Walcott. Far less attractive "decodings" and "deconstructions" of dominant styles are described in detail by Cornel West, sociologists Elijah Anderson, Charles Murray, and William J. Wilson, and Afrocentrist educator Jawanza Kunjufu.

McCarthy then praises Zora Neale Hurston's literary deployment of everyday speech and writes: "It would be interesting to have a ninth grade literature class compare and contrast Mark Twain's use of dialect in Huckleberry Finn with Hurston's use of dialect in Their Eyes Were Watching God" (97). As the only such

19

educational specific in the entire piece, this note is especially
valuable for two assumptions: first, that ninth graders should be
able to read such materials with critical acumen, which the vast
majority of them cannot; and second, that they will try to do the
required reading eagerly and energetically, which very many of them
will not. His creative and useful assignment thwarted, McCarthy
would not so easily appreciate the "counter-hegemonic" stance of
underskilled and undermotivated 15-year-olds.

Nothing in the ideology from which McCarthy draws his
inspiration assuages the problems here; if anything, it exacerbates
them.   Although McCarthy writes that "all students should have
access to an academic curriculum," his theorizing suggests that no
one will have access to such a curriculum. "Films, television,
newspapers, and popular music" will be examined, but we read
nothing else of the disciplines that comprise the academic
curriculum or the procedures of gathering evidence and testing
hypotheses that inform those disciplines. An obvious explanation is
that the "experiences and perspectives of the least advantaged"
include little exposure to these disciplines and procedures.

Instead of working to overcome academic disadvantage, the
redesigned "emancipatory" schools appear to work in a different
direction entirely: to see to it that academic disadvantage no
longer stands out as such. Committed to "equality of educational
outcomes" (97) and to collective political activism, critical
emancipatory education can   tolerate no surpassing of the
disadvantaged by the more advantaged, even (or especially) in a

20

21

common curriculum based on the less advantaged's "experiences and perspectives." The result can only be lowest common denominator standards; the academic work will be set at as low a level as needed to assure that no one fails or falls behind.[22] Institutional distinction or excellence will derive not from academic accomplishment but from surmounting underrepresentation and leading students to adopt or at least mouth the proper attitudes.

Sleeter, a teacher educator, would exempt "people of color" from the National Teacher Examination and any other merit-based obstacle to getting a teaching credential.[23] She also has written, in a chilling passage:

> One of my colleagues struggles with her White male students more than with any other group. Her perspectives on the social order, particularly with respect to gender, are diametrically opposed to those of many of her students. They resist actively her attempts to reorient their view of society away from oppression to one of freedom and openness for all individuals regardless of gender or background.[24] (emphasis added)

Sleeter outdoes George Orwell here: A teacher "empowers" and "emancipates" her students by "reorienting" their views if they fail to conform to the current Correct Feminist Thought, all in the name of "freedom and openness for all individuals."

The California Tomorrow publication The Unfinished Journey: Restructuring Schools in a Diverse Society (1994) describes school systems struggling with low achievement by ethnic minority and

21

immigrant children and praises efforts to throw out all the
established curricula, pedagogies, and achievement measures.[25]
"Resistant and traditional teachers" are to be identified as
"barriers to reform" (259) and removed from the school sites, this
to support "the inclusion of diverse views and perspectives."

At the college level, William Kerrigan notes,

> There is certainly a lot of political teaching going
> down. This semester, walking a hallowed hall, I heard
> from behind a closed door a professor browbeating a
> student at the top of his lungs: "Where do you think the
> homeless go when the shelter is closed!" The hectored
> student probably thought it was going to be a course in
> composition. [26]

Kerrigan sees multiculturalists reducing higher learning to
"political sermonettes about race, class, and gender" (165) and
identifies in the verbs "browbeat" and "hector" the precise
pedagogical actions demanded when changed politics are seen as the
final cause of teaching.

Whatever Sleeter's and Kerrigan's colleagues were actually
hired to teach, they fulfilled no "social contract" with their
employers, their students, their students' parents, or the
taxpaying polity. They acted not as educators but as indoctrinators
or, in Bertrand Russell's analysis, as propagandists:

> To the propagandist his pupils are potential soldiers in
> an army. They are to serve purposes that lie outside
> their own lives.... The propagandist does not desire that

his pupils should survey the world and freely choose a

purpose which to them appears of value. He desires like

a topiarian artist, that their growth shall be trained

and twisted to suit the gardener's purpose. [27]

Such "topiarian" teaching, if not intrinsic to radical multiculturalism, is such a close corollary to it as to be virtually inseparable in practice from it.

Those with a higher vision of teaching must insist that ideological battles be waged by adults, leaving schoolchildren to gain the academic skills needed to sustain purposes they will choose for themselves. Multiculturalism can add to an educational program by giving students fuller and better balanced views of history, art, and society than traditional textbooks provide; by exposing them to "wisdom literature" they probably would never read otherwise; and, one urgently hopes, by addressing directly the problem of their hating, assaulting, and even killing each other based on ethnic heritage. Beyond this, past Banks' Level 2 as a "training" alternative to traditional liberal education, multiculturalism fails to convince. As Midge Decter so well put the matter, radical multiculturalism would "convert the school-house from a place of disappointed longing to a place of plain and open hostility to its own real purposes."[28]

23

<u>Notes</u>

[1] James A. Banks, "Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum Reform," in James A. Banks and Cherry A. McGee Banks, eds. <u>Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives</u> (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1989), 198-207.

[2] Brian Bullivant, "Culture: Its Nature and Meaning for Educators," in Banks and Banks, eds., 35-36.

[3] See, e.g., Catharine R. Stimpson, "On Differences: Modern Language Association Presidential Address 1990," in Paul Berman, ed., <u>Debating P.C.</u> (New York: Dell, 1992), 44.

[4] The term "macroculture" comes from James A. Banks, "Multicultural Education: Characteristics and Goals," in Banks and Banks, eds., 11.

[5] Kathleen P. Bennett, "Doing Time in an Urban Appalachian School," in Christine E. Sleeter, ed., <u>Empowerment through Multicultural Education</u> (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1991), 27.

[6] On the spread of the national macroculture, and particularly its effects on disadvantaged youth, see Cornel West, <u>Race Matters</u> (Vantage, 1993). West's cogent analysis lets us appreciate how distant the "dominant culture" is from "school culture." Anyone tempted to equate the two must be prepared to show where schools reduce individuals to "objects of pleasure" (West 26) and advance "a rapacious hedonism in quest of a perennial 'high' in body and mind" (45-46). Far from this, the school's demands for disciplined, quiet concentration and its general encouragement of a lifestyle of cultivated asceticism isolate it increasingly from both the macroculture and the various microcultures (excepting, stereotypically, those of the "model minorities" and dour preppy nerds).

[7] Mara Sapon-Shevin and Nancy Schniedewind, "Cooperative Learning as Empowering Pedagogy," in Sleeter, ed., 159-178. The authors state flatly, "Black and Mexican American students favor cooperative situations, whereas Anglo students favor competitive ones" (169). They are quite sure as well that "the predominance of competitively structured learning...impedes the learning of female students" (170).

[8] The rhetorical key is the "goes-without-saying" expression of extreme claims. Breezing right by the claim that "children of color" are already alienated from the "majority culture," for example, Sapon-Shavin and Schniedewind suggest that the U.S. is so <u>obviously</u> white supremicist that nothing more needs to be said. In any conflict between an ethnic culture and the norms of the American school, they continue, it is the school that must change, <u>obviously</u> having no proper business of its own. Other

24

credentialing techniques in the paradigm include the repeated citations of writers like Giroux, Apple, Gramsci, and Freire, and the use of labels like "white lesbian feminist" that are construed both to connote authority and to reveal the ultimate source of thinking.

[9]Emilie V. Siddle Walker, "Falling Asleep and Failure Among African-American Students: Rethinking Assumptions About Process Teaching," Theory Into Practice 31:4 (Autumn, 1992), 321-327.

[10]But an important reference here is to the research of Signithia Fordham. See especially "Racelessness as a factor in Black students' school success: Pragmatic strategy or pyrrhic victory?" Harvard Educational Review 58 (2), 422-425 and (with J. Ogbu) "Black students' school success: Coping with the burden of 'acting white,'" Urban Review 18 (3), 176-206. Fordham raises issues of great significance, the central one being that many Black students do not try in school because to do so is to "act white" and thereby betray one's own people. In cooperative peer groups, individuals will not participate actively just because they fear identification as "white." Conservatives like Charles Murray and Shelby Steele discuss this as thinking that needs to be repudiated and changed, not accepted and worked around, as Fordham suggests.

[11]Bullivant, 36.

[12]This is not to deny the existence of inequality of educational opportunity, as detailed so graphically in Jonathan Kozol's Savage Inequalities (New York: Crown, 1992). Kozol's arguments lead to a radicalism of educational provision that I find far more persuasive and politically compelling than any multiculturalist radicalism. To use a favorite image of Kozol's, we should work assiduously to level the playing field, but that is a far cry from attacking and undermining the game itself; if anything, it advances the quality of the game by widening the pool of players performing up to their potentials.

[13]This analysis is developed more fully in Cameron McCarthy and Warren Critchlow, "Introduction: Theories of Identity, Theories of Representation, Theories of Race," in McCarthy and Critchlow, eds., Race, Identity, and Representation in Education (New York: Routledge, 1993), xiii-xxix.

[14]The first "take" on this is to imagine a meeting at which representatives from McCarthy's various "included as excluded" groups convene to decide how much weighting to give each group in the common curriculum and which materials from each group to include. Hints as to the nature of the proceedings come from essays in which individuals have discussed whether they have been more oppressed in their lives as, say, a woman or a person of color; there is, of course, no agreement essay to essay on these matters. Debates among Marxists, feminists, and the various ethnic

essentialists should be fierce and extremely long-winded, and the contributions from the Derrida/Lacan/Foucault disciples should drive most of the underclass and working class representatives straight to the Hospitality Suite.

The second "take" is more realistic: McCarthy and some other vanguard intellectuals will decide.

[15]Irving Howe, "The Value of the Canon," in Berman, ed., 155. Howe cites Lukacs: "Those who do not know Marxism may be surprised at the respect for the classical heritage of mankind which one finds in the really great representatives of that doctrine" (155). The quote from Gramsci is on p.156.

[16]Quoted in Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., The Disuniting of America (New York: Norton, 1992), 90-91. I take Schlesinger to be generally correct in this book on the failings of the politics of cultural particularism and on the kind of nation the United States is and has been. For an interpretation of recent U.S. history more sympathetic to demands for radical multiculturalist education, see Michael W. Apple, "Constructing the 'Other': Rightist Reconstruction of Common Sense," in McCarthy and Critchlow, eds., 24-39.

[17]Schlesinger, 91.

[18]See Black Boy (New York: Harper & Row, 1937), 271-272. Wright would be a very difficult figure for contemporary radicals to come to grips with: a straight-ahead truth-teller who had sharp criticism for his own people as well as racist whites in the Jim Crow South and whose membership and rise to leadership in the Communist party eventually gave way to great disillusionment about radical leftist politics.

[19]For "Letter to Birmingham Jail," see Why We Can't Wait (New York: New American Library, 1964), 76-95. It is easy both to understate and to overstate the influence of King's academic studies in philosophy on the formation of his politics. I discuss the overstatement thereof in "William Bennett on Martin Luther King: Mock-Diversifying the Core Curriculum," Journal of Education, 174:3 (1992), 89-96.

[20]New York: Basic Books, 1978. The citation is from Katz's Class, Bureaucracy, and Schools (New York: Praeger, 1971), 139.

[21]Christine E. Sleeter, "Introduction: Multicultural Education and Empowerment," in Sleeter, ed., Empowerment through Multulultural Education, 12.

[22]A striking discussion of lowest common denominator standards comes in an unlikely source, Stanley Milgram's Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View (New York: Harper & Row, 1974),

130-131. Analyzing the behavior of his subjects (who kept administering ever more powerful shocks to a fellow participant in a psychological experiment), Milgram discusses in passing the general efficiency of hierarchical systems, in which local control is ceded to a coordinating component. "If not," Milgram writes, "the larger system will be less efficient than an average individual unit."

To show this, he considers a set of five electric trams with governing mechanisms to brake each one at 50 miles an hour. Linked together in a five-car train, they will move along at 50 miles an hour. But when variability is introduced, and the speed governors brake the cars at 10, 20, 30, 40, and 50 miles an hour, the train can go no faster than the slowest unit. This least common denominator linkage is "the least efficient system possible."

I use this reference to Milgram not as an endorsement of a Hyman Rickover-style tracking program but rather as an illustration of the dangers of gearing an entire system of instruction to the "experiences and perspectives" of the least accomplished and worst behaved students. However nobly inclusive this sounds in the abstract, in practice it can only mean...10 miles an hour.

[23]Christine E. Sleeter, "How White Teachers Construct Race," in Mccarthy and Critchlow, eds., 168.

[24]Sleeter, "Introduction: Multiculturalism and Empowerment," in Sleeter, ed., Empowerment through Multiculural Education, 21-22.

[25]San Francisco, 1994. Readers who like the ideological sound of radical multiculturalism are encouraged to read this document cover to cover to see what happens when incompetents and ideologues are given the go-ahead to redesign schools entirely as they please for greater "cultural democracy." Echoing Giroux, McCarthy looks very critically at "the constraints and barriers to teacher creativity and innovation in the institutional culture of schools" (97). But some such constraints and barriers are clearly needed, and not just to protect students against the religious right.

[26]William Kerrigan, "The Falls of Academe," in Mark Edmundson, ed., Wild Orchids and Trotsky (New York: Penguin, 1993), 169-170.

[27]Bertrand Russell, "The Functions of a Teacher," in Unpopular Essays (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1950), 118-119. Russell's ironically titled essay "The Superior Virtue of the Oppressed," also included in this collection, is a near-perfect rejoinder to the romanticizing of McCarthy et al. I say "near-perfect" only because Russell could not have imagined the degree to which reluctance to "blame the victim" has occluded good judgment.

[28]Midge Decter, "E Pluribus Nihil," Commentary (September 1991), 26.