

Influences of Three Presidents of the United States on Multicultural Education

A Series of Research Studies in Educational Policy

Third Installment:
Examining Presidents John Quincy Adams,
Theodore Roosevelt, and Harry S. Truman



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Introduction

The recognition, development and implementation of multicultural education in this country is a relatively new and emerging idea (Apple, 1979; Banks, 1977; Burnett, 1994; Delpit, 1992; Frazier, 1977; Garcia, E., 1994; Grant, 1977; Hunter, 1974; Kallen, 1970; La Belle, 1976; Pai, 1984). Prior to the middle of the previous century, the concept of addressing and providing a meaningful educational experience for all students, including students of color, was non-existent.

In recent years, through the work of numerous educators (Banks, 1993; Banks, J. & Banks, C., 2004; Baptiste, 1979/1986/1994; Bennett, 1995; Boyer & Baptiste, 1996; Garcia, R.L., 1982; Gay, 1988/1994, 2004; Gollnick & Chinn, 1990; Nieto, 1992), not only has the concept of multicultural education begun to become a reality, it has become a driving force in curricular development.

Colleges of education of several major universities, such as the University of Mas-

sachusetts, the University of Washington in Seattle, the University of Wisconsin at Madison, the University of Houston, and New Mexico State University are actively engaged in educating students to become multicultural educators (Gay, 1994).

National professional organizations such as the National Council for the Social Studies, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education and the National Education Association have declared their commitments to multicultural education. In 1990, the National Association for Multicultural Education was formed to further the development of multicultural education (Gay, 1994).

While these efforts by educators are important, the commitment of this country to multicultural education in American schools and on the international scene has not been significant (Spring, 2000). Part of this absence must be attributed to the lack of support and leadership from the President of the United States and his administration. Through the policies and actions of each President's individual administration, the role of multicultural education in this country is affected, both positively and negatively. In this paper, three presidents, John Quincy Adams, Theodore Roosevelt, and Harry S. Truman, will be examined as to their roles in multicultural education.

While considering these three men, it may appear that there is no common theme connecting them other than that all of them

occupied the office of President of the United States. There are, however, connections that can be made among them. One thread was the political backgrounds of these men. Each would reflect the beginnings, evolution, and change of political parties in this country.

Adams and Roosevelt were both men who did not maintain only one political party affiliation but moved between parties as their consciences and circumstances dictated. Indeed, Adams is listed as belonging to three different parties: Whig, National Republican, and Federalist (Remini, 2002).

Roosevelt, while elected president as a Republican, went on to initiate an entirely new national political party, the Progressive or Bull Moose Party (Auchincloss, 2001). Only Truman maintained a lifelong affiliation with one party, the Democratic Party (McCullough, 1992), as party affiliation had become a dominant theme on the political landscape by the middle of the 20th century.

Another thread to bind these men is their social standing. Both Adams and Roosevelt were products of what would be considered upper-class social status in this country and enjoyed the privileges, perquisites, and advantages of that status (Kunhardt, P., Jr, Kunhardt, P., III, & Kunhardt, P., 1999). Adams came from the rigorous, austere and religious background of New England (Remini, 2002) and

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Roosevelt from the well-to-do of New York City (Auchincloss, 2001). Again, as a counter point, Truman was from literally middle America, coming from a farm in Kansas (McCullough, 1992). While not on the level of the previous two, Truman's background was by no means one of deprivation. The dominant link among these three, indeed among all presidents of this country, is that they are white Protestant males.

Though similar in some attributes and different in others, each man would exert tremendous influence on events and developments in this country and the world. Areas affected would encompass every aspect of people's lives. By considering their backgrounds, their public lives and political actions, their acts while president relating to multicultural education or some antecedent, and the legacies of these acts, we can hope to gain an insight into effects that each of these Presidents of the United States has had in the area of multicultural education.

John Quincy Adams

The son of the second President of this country, John Quincy Adams came from a Puritanical, New England family of several generations in American and was expected to, "add to the family's illustrious record of accomplishment" (Remini, p. 2). Traveling with his father throughout Europe as a youth and educated in the classics in various private schools, by the time he reached the age of sixteen, "he had become something of a celebrity among the social elite [of Europe]. He was a skilled linguist, a classicist of sorts, a superb conversationalist whose knowledge of literature, the arts and science set him apart. Moreover, he was American, a rather unique distinction in social circle at that time" (Remini, p. 14-5).

This sounds very much like the British gentleman that landed families of Virginia and other early states wished for their sons (Wilkins, 2002). This would later contribute to Adams being labeled an "aristocrat," not in touch with the "democracy" of this country (Nagel, 1997).

The entry of Adams into politics took place after he returned home from Europe, completed his education at Harvard, settled in Boston, and began practicing law (Remini, 2002). In his spare time, he responded to *The Rights of Man* by Thomas Paine with a series of essays called "Letters of Publicola" (Remini, 2002). In these essays, "Adams warned against demagoguery and insisted on protection of individual rights. In America, he said, those rights are protected under a constitutional



system that had established a republican frame of government" (Remini, p. 22).

This viewpoint identified Adams as a Federalist, an ally of Alexander Hamilton, and placed him in opposition to the Jeffersonian Republicans of that time. Adams's political career had its ups and downs in state and national levels as he won some elections and lost others. He soon demonstrated a lack of party loyalty as he would oppose measures and resolutions from both political parties while in office (Remini, 2002). Adams became so estranged from the Federalists that he attended a Republican congressional caucus in 1808 (Remini, 2002), an act that truly horrified his family and was a harbinger of later political party oscillations.

Demonstrating exceptional diplomatic skills by negotiating the Treaty of Ghent to end the War of 1812 (Bemis, 1956) and in recognition of his intellect and social status, Adams was selected by the newly elected President James Monroe to be Secretary of State. This was an important position, as the Secretary of State was viewed at that time as being a stepping stone to the office of President. Adams accepted and is credited with being "the greatest secretary of state to serve that office" (Remini, p. 50).

While Secretary of State, Adams would be involved in two important documents: The Florida Treaty and the Monroe Doctrine. The first was the culmination of over twenty years of efforts by American administrations to dislodge Spain from Florida. The final part of the process involved actions of Andrew Jackson's incursion into Florida to pursue and punish

Seminoles for raiding into the United States. Adams defended Jackson's actions, arguing, "that the general was justified by his action in that Spain was unable to police its territory and prevent rampaging 'savages' from killing American citizens" (Remini, p. 55). Indeed, Adams argued that Jackson's actions "be justified as 'defensive acts of hostility'" (Drinnon, 1997, p. 104).

This attitude of conquest continued in his authorship of the Monroe Doctrine. It was Adams's belief that America possessed a unique and God-given call to take possession of the entire continent and the doctrine was his way of expressing this belief. The effects on the people already on the land did not concern Adams. It was America's Manifest Destiny to expand westward and the people now on the land were of no consequence (Remini, 2002). This attitude towards what would now be termed a minority people is an important part of Adams's legacy.

The presidential election of 1824 was a very contentious affair that involved electoral vote trading and deals of convenience (Remini, 2002). Adams felt he should be chosen the next President in the same manner as the previous Secretaries of States, Madison and Monroe, were chosen President. His background for the office is described by Bemis:

He led no party, controlled no political machine, nor did he have personal magnetism or other qualities necessary to build one. All he had to stand on politically was his distinguished lineage, his character, his large experience with affairs at home and abroad, and his undoubted competence for public office. No man has ever been better fitted, as professional public servant, for the Presidency. No man has had less aptitude or inclination for the organization and command of political cohorts. (p. 11)

Though a recognized and able statesman, Adams was still a neophyte politician at a time when Presidential candidates did not actively campaign for office. He did clumsily attempt to ensure his election. He suggested that his opponents, Andrew Jackson, Henry Clay, and John Calhoun, be sent on missions to Europe or Latin America, had his wife give a lavish ball to entice Jackson to be his Vice Presidential candidate, was an "anonymous" source for information praising his efforts to various editors, and began socializing at every opportunity to advance his candidacy among the influential circles in Washington at that time (Remini, 2002).

Opposing Adams were four Democratic-Republicans: John Calhoun, Henry

Clay, William Crawford, and Andrew Jackson. Calhoun would withdraw to be named Vice President. The Electoral College vote did not give any of the candidates a majority and was split 99 for Jackson, 84 for Adams, 41 for Crawford, who had suffered a debilitating stroke prior to the vote (Remini, 2002), and 37 for Clay. Without a decision, the election would be decided in the House of Representatives, where Clay, not allowed to be considered for the presidency because of his fourth place finish, was essentially going to decide the election as Speaker of the House.

Clay provided the support for Adams to be elected president and Adams awarded the support by naming Clay Secretary of State (Bemis, 1956). The apolitical Adams had participated in one of the biggest political trade offs in American history that would split the Democratic-Republican Party into the Democrats of Jackson and the National Republicans that supported Adams. Andrew Jackson complained loudly and campaigned unceasingly to reverse the results of the election that he viewed as being stolen from him (Bemis, 1956). The constant and unremitting attacks by Jackson and his supporters would be Adams' legacy for his political maneuvering.

Once elected, Adams's dream for the betterment of the nation was a grand vision to promote knowledge with, "[a] national bankruptcy law, [a] national university, [a] national astronomical observatory, [a] national naval academy, national research and exploration, and a new department of the Interior to administer increasing national business" (Bemis, p. 76). The recipients of this enhanced knowledge were undoubtedly to be Americans like himself, male, white and of the upper social strata of the country. There would be no consideration for any one else other than this well defined and well off group.

His status derived from a "minority election" (Hargreaves, 1985) doomed these lofty efforts, "of the National Government operating under a benign Providence to promote and assist the "general diffusion of knowledge" and its application for the continuing improvement of American citizens and of mankind (Bemis, p. 63). As expressed by Nagel:

His four years in the White House were misery for him and for his wife. All that he hoped to accomplish was thwarted by a hostile Congress. His opponents continually assailed him with what he claimed was the foulest slander. Consequently, while Adams sought reelection in 1828, he did so mostly from stubborn pride, and he actually looked impatiently toward his certain defeat by Andrew Jack-

son. For the remaining twenty years of his life, he reflected on his presidency with distaste, convinced that he had been the victim of evildoers. His administration was a hapless failure and best forgotten, save for the personal anguish it cost him. (p. 296)

Even with this rather gloomy estimation of Adams's administration, there can be some analysis of his attitudes and actions regarding people of color and, by implication, multicultural education. Granted, for Adams, the term "multicultural" might more likely invoke references to Latin and Greek, rather than Native Americans, Mexican American, and African Americans, but there are some identifiable thoughts on his part about people of color that would best be termed benign neglect as Adams would do nothing to change the prevalent treatment of people of color in this country during his administration.

For Adams, the development and expansion of the nation to the west was the paramount issue and the most desirable approach was a, "humane policy of Indian removal [that] would transfer the tribes to the west of the Mississippi, educating and civilizing them, perhaps eventually assimilating them into the body of citizenry" (Bemis, p. 62). Writing in his diary, Adams expresses his sentiment about the intended role of Native Americans:

...while I was there Mr. Calhoun came, with a deputation of five Cherokee Indians. This is the most civilized of the tribes of North American Indians. They have abandoned altogether the life of hunters, and betaken themselves to tillage. These men were dressed entirely according to our manner. Two of them spoke English with good pronunciation, and one with grammatical accuracy. (p. 313)

Assimilation would be the attitude of for Native Americans, after they relinquished their homelands to the advancing stream of settlers. His administration did nothing to recognize and interact with Native Americans in any positive manner (Hargreaves, 1985).

For African Americans, the "peculiar institution" of slavery was something that Adams would not actively address in any proactive manner. For him, "slavery in a moral sense is an evil, but as connected with commerce it has its uses.' Business rated higher than morality so he left slavery alone" (O'Reilly, p. 31). So, while occupying the office of president, Adams did not oppose slavery nor propose its abolition. This act of denial was similar to those of previous Presidents. Washington,

Jefferson, and others had also done nothing to break the cycle of allowing slavery to continue in America (Wilkins, 2002).

After his defeat for reelection, Adams would, as a Congressman, become an eloquent and forceful opponent of slavery and a hero to abolitionists of that time (Remini, 2002). His opposition to the Gag Rules designed to prevent anti-slavery petitions from being introduced to Congress became more and more strident with time (Remini, 2002). While his arguments were in defense of the constitution and the rights of free speech, the applications were in opposition to slavery. This apparent contradiction to his lack of action concerning slavery while President can be resolved by recognizing his pragmatic nature.

His first allegiance was of preserving the country and the Constitution at all costs, but his Puritanical upbringing provided the moral compass to recognize the abhorrent nature of slavery to the point that an enlightened citizenry, perhaps prodded by martial law, would bring liberty to Black persons (John Quincy Adams, Memoirs). In an amazing bit of foreshadowing, Adams would express his convictions about slavery in light of the Missouri Compromise, by writing in his Diary that:

If slavery be the destined sword in the hand of the destroying angel which is to sever the ties of this union, the same sword will cut in sunder the bonds of slavery itself. A dissolution of the Union for the cause of slavery would be followed by a servile war in the slave-holding States, combined with a war between the two severed portions of the Union. It seems to me that its result must be the extirpation of slavery from the whole continent; and, calamitous and desolating as this course of events in its progress must be, so glorious would be its final issue, that, as God shall judge me, I dare not say that it is not to be desired. (p. 246-7)

This statement and the passion that it evokes would not be evident while he was President, but would certainly explain his religious fervor and later actions as a member of the House of Representatives.

The second instance of notoriety that involved Adams was the *La Amistad* incident. Thirty-nine captive Africans aboard a Spanish ship destined to work on Cuban plantations rebelled against their captors and commandeered the ship, the *La Amistad*. Later captured by American forces, Spanish authorities sought the return of the ship and the captives. Before the United States Supreme Court, Adams argued for the defendants' freedom by evoking the Declaration of Independence and

making a passionate plea for human rights (Remini, 2002). The Court ruled against the government's case and "declared the Africans freemen and dismissed as immaterial the treaties involving slave trade" (Remini, p. 148).

While in office as President, Adams did not exert any appreciable influence to address the idea of multicultural education, or even the antecedents of this concept. He followed his personal dictates in terms of what he considered important to the country and moral to his set of values, but there would be no attention paid to the elimination of slavery or the recognition of the worth of other groups of people.

His contributions to multicultural education would come after he left the office or President and were prompted by a personal vendetta against Jackson (Bemis, 1956; Hargreaves, 1985; Remini, 2002) and were in terms of protecting the constitution rather than recognizing the value of diversity. But his legacy of foreshadowing a civil war should be recognized for the prediction of the momentous conflict that would come in a few short years to this nation. The ruling of the Supreme Court concerning civil rights for individuals provides another powerful antecedent of this country's history of multicultural events.

Theodore Roosevelt

Coming from a prosperous Dutch family that immigrated to New York City in 1644 and became part of the New York aristocracy, Roosevelt was part of the elite circle of this country. Stories about his childhood and his desire to develop a "manly" physique and character are well documented and recorded (Brands, 1997; Charnwood, 1923; Dalton, 2002). These ideas would later contribute to his wanting to live the life of the "outdoors man" in the West (Brands, 1997).

The factors of praising, even perhaps worshiping, strength of character, mind, and body as a primary driving attitude of Roosevelt will be important in this discussion. His thoughts that, "a man, any man, [was] in total charge of his own destiny and therefore capable of choosing the terms of his employment and incurring total responsibility of his crimes" (Auchincloss, p. 16) would define his views on interactions between nations as well as individuals or groups of people.

This sense of self-determination, to make your own way in life, of an individual's control of events would consistently be a central part of his views of life. Recognizing that he came from "comfortable" circumstances, this is a view that makes some sense.



Theodore Roosevelt

Roosevelt possessed the ways and means to accomplish his own personal goals, but he had difficulty recognizing that others starting with less might not have the freedoms of choice and action that he enjoyed (Brands, 1997; Charnwood, 1923; Dalton, 2002).

Due to his "frail" condition, Roosevelt was tutored at home throughout his entire school age life (Brands, 1997). Traveling with his family, he became convinced that industrious and civilized nations were desirable in international development (Brands, 1997; Dalton, 2002). This conviction of power as a source of "good" behavior would dictate Roosevelt's view of the world throughout his lifetime (Brands, 1997). After his "home schooling" ended, he attended Harvard as was expected by his family given his background (Brands, 1997). He would graduate and start a life of politics and government service in various capacities.

As a New York Assemblyman, Civil Service Commissioner, New York City Board of Police Commissioner, and Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Roosevelt showed a willingness to engage in political fights over issues that he deemed appropriate (Auchincloss, 2001; Brands, 1997; Lorant, 1959; Morris, 1979). His choices consistently involved some abuse of power by an individual, business, or "trust" (Lorant, 1959), a view that he would adhere to throughout his life. Any limitation or encroachment of one's ability to determine one's destiny would qualify as offending the spirit of fair play and self-determination.

Roosevelt would resign from the Navy Department to go into combat in the Spanish-American War, a move predicated by

his "manly" outlook on life for himself (Charnwood, 1923; Brands, 1997).

He soon made a name for himself on the national scene with the spectacular public relations coup of the Rough Riders (Dalton, 2002; Morris, 1979) and the "Charge" up San Juan Hill during the Spanish-American War. Following the war, he was selected to run for governor of New York. His nomination was made possible, however, only after extensive political maneuvering and deal making (Auchincloss, 2001; Brands, 1997).

During the campaign, he did his best to turn the general election for the state house into a national referendum on the war and the concept of expansion of the United States throughout the world. Roosevelt felt that this country must accept its destiny to carry civilization and the American flag around the world (Brands, 1997). This might be thought of as a call for a policy of *pax Americana* and he was ready to take the lead in this crusade. The lesson that Roosevelt learned from this experience, and one that he would consistently use later, was that there were times when arrangements were necessary and had to be done to accomplish certain goals. He, "perfectly understood that a failure to deal with the [political] machine would mean failure to make any social progress at all, and he adopted the course of compromise quite openly" (Auchincloss, p. 36).

His nomination as Vice-President was, in some measure, a political deal to remove him from the office of governor of New York where he was too much of a "loose cannon" to the political bosses (Lorant, 1959). The assassination of President William McKinley then unexpectedly moved Roosevelt and his sense of moral righteousness into the office of President.

Not afraid to decide what was good and what was evil, Roosevelt began to interpret issues of the day as he saw them. His "Square Deal" of socially progressive principles (Auchincloss, 2001) was a pronouncement of these views of right and wrong. "The creation of a pure food and drug law, supervision of insurance companies investigation of child labor, an employers' liability law for the District of Columbia, and suits against railroad rebates," (Auchincloss, p. 62) were all indicative of this consistency of viewpoint, that the individual needs some protection from bad circumstances and institutions to accomplish self-determination. This agenda would be translated into notable legislative acts, including:

the Elkins Law, against the railroads' practice of given rebates to favored customers; the creation of the De-

partment of Commerce and Labor withits Bureau of Corporations, which grew to regulate every business that crossed state lines; the Hepburn Bill, which amended and vitalized the Interstate Commerce Act and gave government the power to set railroad rates; the Pure Food and Meat Inspection Laws, which remedied some of the scandals of the meat packing industry as exposed by Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle*; and the Employers' Liability and Safety Appliance Laws, which limited the hours of employees. (Auchincloss, p. 45)

In addition, Theodore Roosevelt also used the Sherman Antitrust Act to crusade against actions of what he considered "bad" trusts. Being a big trust was not evil, in the eyes of Roosevelt. However, if any trust, "sought to profit by restricting production by trick or device, by plotting against competitors, by oppressing wage earners, or by extorting high prices for a commodity made artificially scarce," (Auchincloss, p. 50) then Roosevelt would go after the offender to restore a sense of moral correctness to the actions involved. The duty of government in his view was, "to force the bad ones [trusts] to become good by making them follow what he deemed to be the path of *Ô*rightheousness" (Lorant, p. 471).

Roosevelt lived at a time when international events began to mold a sense of a new beginning for the world. He wanted to carry America along with this sense of adventure at the start of the century. He pushed to build the Panama Canal and complete the Pacific Cable. At this time, the first Model-T automobile, Marconi's trans-Atlantic radio transmission, sailing of the United States fleet around the world, and the first flight of the Wright brothers (Dalton, 2002; Lorant, 1959) fueled this sense of adventure.

The concept of universal education in this country may have been espoused for a number of years but, in reality, it was only available to the well-to-do that could afford the expense, which was Roosevelt's background and support (Dalton, 2002). In his own way, Roosevelt did contribute to the idea of multicultural education with his consistent view of an individual's inherent ability to define and reach self-determination. However, he did not play a significant role in the efforts of African Americans, Native Americans, or women to be part of this reform movement (Hanson, 1999).

This lack of inclusion for diversity first shows in Roosevelt's actions involving dining with Booker T. Washington in the White House soon after he became Presi-

dent. Roosevelt was unable to travel to Tuskegee Institute to view Washington's approach, "where self-help was preached as gospel and where students and faculty combined strenuous outdoor labor with their intellectual endeavours" (Brands, p. 422), an approach that Roosevelt would have been sure to support. So Roosevelt invited Washington to the White House whenever he was in town. Washington accepted and the fateful dinner occurred on October 16, 1901.

The reaction by the Southern media and politicians to the meal was swift, vocal, vociferous, and venomous. Roosevelt was surprised by the reaction and said he would ask Washington to dine as often as he pleased at the White House (Brands, 1997). As a political reality, Roosevelt would come to view this as a political misstep and never offered another invitation to Washington or any other individual of color to eat at the White House. As expressed in O'Reilly:

Dumbfounded by this "condition of violent chronic hysteria," which he explained by reference to the same "combination of Bourbon intellect and intolerant truculence of spirit... which brought on the Civil War, Roosevelt and his partisans recast the Washington dinner. To minimize fallout from the breach of racial etiquette they downgraded the dinner to a luncheon, told the press that the Roosevelt women did not sit and eat with the black man, and reminded everyone that black women were not welcome at the first lady's weekly teas and biweekly musicals. (p. 69)

Spin doctors, as they are referred to today, were clouding the details of the event. Roosevelt was determined to avoid any more "mistakes" of this nature (Brands, 1997).

Two other incidents might seem to indicate a positive approach to race on the part of Roosevelt. He appointed an African-American, Dr. William D. Crum, as Collector of the Port of Charleston, South Carolina, and Minnie M. Cox as postmistress of Indianola, Mississippi. Both appointments were met with opposition from locals, but Roosevelt held firm in his choices and did not remove them from their positions (Gould, 1991). While these events may give a sense of positive actions about civil rights, other events gave a much darker picture.

The most famous of these is the "Brownsville Incident" in which an all-Black Army regiment, the 26th Infantry Regiment, was accused of engaging in a shooting riot in the south Texas town. Roosevelt's resolution of the incident was to summarily discharge every soldier in the

regiment without honor (Dalton, 2002). Subsequent testimony would clear the soldiers and evidence showed that the citizens had fabricated the incident, but Roosevelt would not rescind his decision (Gould, 1991; Morris, 2001). This was a serious lapse in his interpretation of "good" and "evil."

According to one author, Roosevelt was given to numerous statements and observations that would not be considered positive concerning race. In *Nixon's Piano* by O'Reilly, Roosevelt is describe as:

... obsessed with race. He carried a gene hierarchy in his head and spent endless hours compiling and cataloging "stronger races" and "weaker races." Negroes found themselves placed near rock bottom among the "most utterly underdeveloped." "Suffered from laziness and shiftlessness" and prone to "vice and criminality of every kind," blacks threatened white citizens and "race purity." Roosevelt studied the problem scientifically, in the progressive manner, and concluded that Negro "evils" were "more potent for harm to the black race than all acts of oppression of white men put together." "[This] perfectly stupid race can never rise," he added on another occasion. "The Negro...has been kept down as much by lack of intellectual development as by anything else." (p. 65)

This dichotomy of views can possibly be explained to some degree by Roosevelt's progressive view of every person being judged on their won personal merits, so that an African-American could attain a level of success as typified by Washington but the "scientific" side of him sided with the "scientific" results of different abilities of various races. This success was an exception rather than a rule in Roosevelt's mind and superiority of the white race was something that would be basically unchallenged (Dyer, 1980).

The political animal in him, recognizing the necessity of compromise and deal making, would always entertain some individuals of color for various federal positions to secure support of Black voting blocks come election time (Brands, 1997). As a person, he felt pride, "in being man enough to open his home to Black guests, to sit at a table and break bread with a Black man in the executive mansion when governor of New York" (O'Reilly, p. 66), and dine with another while in the White House. He even bragged that his children, "sat in the same school with colored children" (O'Reilly, p. 66). Yet this same man would support segregation as a method of dealing with the race issue and discount

lynchings of Blacks in the South as somehow justified because, “the man lynched has been guilty of a crime beyond descriptions” (O’Reilly, p. 72).

For Native Americans, Roosevelt’s views also have a sense of bipolar implications. As a product of his formative years living in the West, he “was no great enthusiast for the American Indian — at least while they were still in belligerent opposition to westward-moving white men” (Auchincloss, p. 96). Yet he had “a great respect for their reservations and origins once they had been quelled” (Auchincloss, p. 96).

Indeed, Roosevelt set aside millions of public lands in the western states to serve as reminders and opportunities for Americans to participate and enjoy the rustic life of the West that he so revered (Lorant, 1959). He sought to preserve Native American tribal relics with the passage of the Antiquities Act in 1906 and he opposed attempts to steal tribal lands (Dalton, 2002). But Roosevelt vetoed bills that granted land claims to Native Americans and stopped monetary grants to them (Dalton, 2002). He remained committed to “civilizing” native people of the West (Dalton, 2002; Sinkler, 1971) through a Carlisle school approach of assimilation (Hagen, 1997).

Roosevelt’s view of women was even more conservative, with an attitude that women were best suited to stay in the home. An extensive education was not a requirement for women and the serious business of running a country and advancing in the world was best left to men and the strength of the male of the species. In his own words in a letter to Hugo Munsterberg:

The first requisite in a healthy race is that a woman should be willing and able to bear children just as the men must be willing and able to work and fight. (June 3, 1901; Letters, III, 86)

After his presidency, as a third party candidate Roosevelt did champion the women’s labor reform movement and suffrage for women, but the primary motivation was his recognition of the twenty-five million potential votes for his presidential aspirations (Dalton, 2002).

The sum total, then, of Roosevelt’s efforts for multicultural education would be less than the sum of the parts. While a resounding progressive in many important areas, his record here is one of mixed signals and the bottom line is a dismal one. Any positive attributes are clouded by political expediency and not meant to produce meaningful change. “President Roosevelt was very hesitant about exert-

ing strong executive leadership in matters of race” (Sinkler, p. 373).

Harry S. Truman

Coming from Missouri, Truman was viewed as a Southerner by some but not by others. The mind-set of a border state that stretched back to antebellum Civil War still dictated views of the nation. Raised on a farm, attending the local schools and marrying his Sunday School sweetheart (McCullough, 1992), his was a background rooted in the nation’s “heartland.” Truman did not attend college and, after an unsuccessful venture in a clothing business (Daniels, 1950), decided to try politics. His mentor was “Big Tom” Pendergast, a well-connected political boss in Kansas City (McCullough, 1992). Pendergast decided that Truman had qualities that made him electable, namely: farm background, war record and friendly personality (McCullough, 1992). With the political machine’s help, Truman was successfully elected to various positions in Kansas, ultimately winning a seat in the United States Senate in 1934 (McCullough, 1992).

Considering his background, Truman was not inclined to be very positive in terms of racial equality. He used “nigger” while referring to African-Americans (McCullough, 1992) and “enjoyed the kind of racial jokes commonly exchanged over drinks in Senate hideaways” (McCullough, p. 246). As he served in the Senate, however, this view apparently began to be modified as he became aware of racial discrimination, persecution, and abuse. He still accepted the doctrine of separate-but-equal (O’Reilly, 1995) but some ideas of equality did start to become evident.

This change was due more to Truman’s belief in the ideal that America was a land of opportunity, even for those perceived to be inferior, rather than a belief in racial equality and integration. His was a paternalistic attitude toward African Americans (Miller, 1986).

In the opening speech for his reelection to the United States Senate to an all-white audience in Sedalia, Missouri, in 1940, he said:

I believe in the brotherhood of man, not merely the brotherhood of white men, but the brotherhood of all men before the law... If any class or race can be permanently set apart from, or pushed down below the rest in political and civil rights, so may any other class or race when it shall incur the displeasure of its more powerful associates, and we may say farewell to the principles on which we count our safety... Negroes have



Harry S. Truman

been preyed upon by all types of exploiters, from the installment salesmen of clothing, pianos, and furniture to the vendors of vice. The majority of our Negro people find cold comfort in the shanties and tenements. Surely, as freemen, they are entitled to something better than this. (McCullough, p. 247)

In a speech to the National Colored Democratic Association later that summer, Truman told a Black audience that everyone benefited by providing educational opportunities to African Americans. “When we are honest enough to recognize each other’s rights and are good enough to respect them, we will come to a more Christian settlement of our difficulties” (McCullough, p. 247-8). As “natural born American[s],” African Americans should have equality under the law (McCullough, 1992).

In the same speech, though, his idea of separate-but-equal attitude was still evident as he remarked, “The highest types of Negro leaders say quite frankly that they prefer the society of their own people” (O’Reilly, p. 146). These expressions should be viewed relative to the political necessity of courting the Black vote that led Truman to make the public pronouncements that he did (McCullough, 1992; Miller, 1986).

Selected as a compromise candidate for Vice President for the election of 1944, Truman became President with the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt on April 12, 1945. His administration was marked by momentous international events. The defeat of Germany, the start of the United Nations, the dropping of two atomic bombs, the defeat of Japan, the start of the Cold

War with Russia and China, the creation of the nation of Israel, and the Korean War were events that must be considered monumental in scope for the world. The beginnings of change in civil rights in this country would also be of considerable importance during his administration.

Given his background, Truman's views on race issues were something of an unknown as he took office. "No one had any idea of what to expect, as Roy Wilkins noted, from, 'an untested haberdasher from Klan country'" (O'Reilly, p. 145). Several liberal, "New Deal" advocates, including Eleanor Roosevelt and Henry Wallace, hoped that Truman would come out as a strong advocate for civil rights. His actions, however, would be more politically expedient than meaningful in promoting racial equality. Truman would always be concerned about garnering the Black vote (McCullough, 1992), not necessarily always in a manner that would consistently advance civil rights.

The approach that Truman consistently followed in terms of racial issues was to present a proactive picture initially and publicly, but then to not push for implementation or action to carry out the goals stated for public consumption. "Thereafter, Truman was invariably more forthright in rhetoric if rarely in action. 'The strategy,' White House aide Philleo Nash explained, 'was to start with a bold measure and then temporize to pick up the right-wing forces. Simply stated, backtrack after the bang'" (O'Reilly, p. 147).

Thus, Truman's administration was initially style, not substance, in terms of racial policy. Speeches would be made, committees would be formed, promises would be given, but limited actions would be taken (McCullough, 1992). In newspaper and media reports, Truman was proactive in appearance, but the lack of follow through to fulfill the promises made for a different picture than was presented. Over time, this method of implementation would be modified to actually gain some noteworthy goals, such as desegregation of the military services. But the overall agenda would be a limited one (Miller, 1986).

The first area where this talk-but-not-act scenario would occur involved the Fair Employment Practice Committee which was created during World War II to monitor minority rights violations. Targeted by Southern congressmen for elimination (O'Reilly, 1995), Truman publicly expressed support for its continuance as a permanent committee to investigate civil rights violations but did nothing as President to make its continuation a reality.

An example of this non-action ap-

proach involved the 1945 strike of the Washington Capital Transit Company. FEPC Chairman Malcolm Ross prepared a directive requiring that Capital Transit stop denying jobs to African Americans. "With no other explanation than an unspoken bow to the white South, Truman ordered Ross not to issue this directive" (O'Reilly, p. 149).

While some individuals viewed the strike as an opportunity to confront segregation in the south, at that time Truman's logic was that the federal government's seizure of the transportation system was not to enforce the aims of the FEPC but to provide transportation for the citizens of Washington (O'Reilly, 1995). In issuing Executive Order 9664, Truman reduced the FEPC to a fact finding committee with no powers of compliance. The committee ceased to exist in 1946.

However, due to many Americans believing in the wartime promises of freedom from oppression and minority leaders efforts to gain equality, opportunity and protection, Truman was forced into some actions to meet these demands. The creation of the Indian Claims Commission to address financial grievances of Native Americans and the appointments of an African American as governor of the Virgin Islands and a Puerto Rican as governor of that island show that he was sympathetic to some form of attention to racial issues (McCoy, 1984) but these initial efforts were limited in scope.

Indeed, Truman did nothing to further any sense of improving conditions or achieving equality for Native Americans and women. In his own words in *Where the Buck Stops*, Truman wrote:

Our conscience was finally awakened thirty or forty years ago, and we've had two or three Indian agents in this century who are really looking after the welfare of the Indians. Now we have a large number of Eskimos in Alaska who are properly taken of, I think, and the Indians in New Mexico and Arizona have the best reservations in the country and are being protected. (p. 288)

He would also veto bills that he felt were harmful to Indians. This paternalistic attitude leaves no doubt that Truman did not have a proactive or constructive attitude toward Native Americans.

Towards women, Truman saw them as important as a block of votes but was insensitive to women's issues of opportunity and equality. He did not support the Equal Rights Amendment and did nothing to work for its passage (Miller, 1986). Indeed, comments from his appointment book best

express his views on the Equal Rights Amendment:

September 21, 1945: 12:15 p.m. — [Group of Women Sponsoring Equal Rights Amendment] — A lot of hooley about equal rights. (p. 68)

It was the area of violence, though, to African Americans, Native Americans, Japanese Americans, Jews, and Mexican Americans (McCoy, 1984) that would prompt a change in Truman's view of racial problems. In 1946, he would meet with a National Emergency Committee Against Mob Violence headed by Walter White (O'Reilly, 1995). Sponsored by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the purpose of this committee was to address the widespread hate crimes of violence against people of color, even men and women in the military, that was rampant at that time (O'Reilly, 1995).

A second group, headed by Paul Robeson, also met with Truman to address the rampant and indiscriminate lynching of African Americans, especially in the South, that was taking place at that time. Limited by what he could do legally, other than have the Justice Department investigate allegations of violence with the small hope of prosecution (McCoy, 1984), Truman settled on another solution. Truman established the President's Committee on Civil Rights by Executive Order 9808 (Ferrell, 1983; McCoy, 1984; O'Reilly, 1995).

As bold a step as this was, there were political considerations in it for Truman. To go against the overt wishes of Southern congressmen and senators was to go against the precepts of the Democratic Party that included the Solid South. But Truman would tie the issue of civil rights to the Cold War fight against Communism. To further couple this connection, the members that were appointed to the Committee on Civil Rights were required to take a loyalty oath that was used at the time to monitor any subversive activities (O'Reilly, 1995).

One of the major points of communist propaganda was to document racist atrocities that African Americans and other people of color endured in this country (Cochran, 1973; O'Reilly, 1995). "How could the president fight for world freedom while the nation denied basic freedoms to its own non-white citizens?" (O'Reilly, p. 154). Another view of this global conflict involved diplomats from Africa to the United Nations who were routinely denied access to food, housing and rest room facilities as they traveled from New York to Washington.

The newly emerging nations of Western Europe and the Pacific Rim saw this country espousing human liberties yet its

own African American citizens lived in fear of being lynched. The “democratic” government of this country with Truman at its head still tolerated a discriminatory set of laws that kept a group of citizens in a permanent state of second-class status in legal, economic, education, and job opportunities (Gardner, 2002). The world did not view these events in a positive light.

To maintain a perceived headway for civil rights, albeit because of the perceived threat of Communism and need of the African American vote (McCullough, 1992; O’Reilly, 1995), Truman agreed to address a NAACP rally in front of the Lincoln Memorial on June 29, 1947. He was the first president to speak at an NAACP gathering (Gardner, 2002; O’Reilly, 1995). His speech was a turning point in the efforts for civil rights as the “bully pulpit” of the office of the President was used to identify the issue of civil rights in this country. His statements included:

Our national government must show the way. This is a difficult and complex undertaking. Federal laws and administrative machinery must be improved and expanded. We must provide the government with better tools to do the job... Every man should have the right to a decent home, the right to an education, the right to adequate medical care, the right to a worthwhile job, the right to an equal share in making public decisions through the ballot, and the right to a fair trial in a fair court. We must insure that these rights — on equal terms — are enjoyed by every citizen... The support of desperate populations of battle ravaged countries must be won for the free way of life. We must have them as allies in our continuing struggle for the peaceful solution of the world’s problems. They may surrender to the false security offered so temptingly by totalitarian regimes unless we can prove the superiority of democracy. Our case for democracy should be as strong as we can make it. It should rest on practical evidence that we have been able to put our own house in order. (Gardner, p. 35-6; O’Reilly, p. 154)

For the first time, the federal government and, significantly, the President were to be leaders in the fight for civil rights (Gardner, 2002; O’Reilly, 1995). Even though there was the linkage between civil rights at home and the threat of Communism abroad, the placing of the civil rights at the forefront was an important statement. While lacking in specifics (O’Reilly, 1995), the speech certainly set a public tone.

This engagement was done at a time when this country “was not energized over civil rights” (Gardner, p. 73).

But was there another agenda to Truman’s proposals? Was this a stance to cultivate the African American vote away from the possible candidacy of New Dealer Henry Wallace? Was it an attempt to keep the African American vote from going for the “traditional” home of the Republican Party and Thomas Dewey? Was the loss of the Solid South considered an acceptable risk for gaining the minority vote?

Answers to these questions vary from source to source (Cochran, 1973; Ferrell, 1983; Gardner, 2002; Miller, 1986; McCoy, 1984; McCullough, 1992) but the fact that Truman had raised the civil rights issue on a national level and, as it turned out, in a meaningful manner, cannot be denied.

A few months later, on October 29, 1947, the results of Truman’s Commission on Civil Rights were released. *Entitled To Secure These Rights*, the 178-page report detailed four constitutionally guaranteed basic rights that committee members felt were taken for granted by Americans but totally lacking for people of color in this country (Gardner, 2002). Four fundamental rights enumerated by the committee were:

1. The Right to Safety and Security of the Person
2. The Right to Citizenship and its Privileges
3. The Right to Freedom of Conscience and Expression
4. The Right to Equality of Opportunity

The first right was to address lynching of African Americans throughout the country as well as the commonplace inability of Black men to be judged by a jury of their peers throughout the South (Gardner, 2002; Miller, 1986).

The disenfranchisement of African Americans to the basic right of voting was covered in the second right. The poll tax, requiring Black voters to explain portions of state constitutions before being allowed to vote, and the continued discrimination of service in the military were all well documented by the committee (Gardner, 2002).

The third right addressed freedom and expression and was a reaction to the growing concern of violation of civil rights resulting from reactions to a perceived growing communist menace in America (Gardner, 2002; O’Reilly, 1995).

The fourth freedom contains the idea of providing to people of color opportunities for employment in emerging businesses and industries and fair housing. Neither were in place at that time. As part of the idea of

equality in opportunity is the caveat of equal opportunities in education. The Truman Civil Rights Committee found that, as a nation, there was widespread lack of equal opportunities for education for minority students that had developed under the separate but equal doctrine that had been in place for years (Gardner, 2002).

With the placing of civil rights on a national agenda, Truman was in a position as President to significantly improve educational opportunities for people of color in this country. Already in place was the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly referred to as the GI Bill of Rights, which provided support for servicemen and servicewomen to return and attend school (McCoy, 1984). Created during the Franklin Roosevelt administration, it could have been a powerful instrument to initiate significant changes in education by issuing the precepts of multicultural education that were just beginning to be expressed.

The GI Bill of Rights would be a success story as 2.2 million veterans would attend college using the funds from this program. Of that number only 70,000 African Americans and 60,000 women would benefit from the program, not a diverse or representative population for the nation. Furthermore, many African Americans, especially in the South, had to attend segregated postsecondary schools of poor quality. Truman did nothing to alter the picture of the recipients of the GI Bill benefits.

Truman did introduce legislation to provide federal aid to education (McCoy, 1984) that would provide more opportunities for students and initiated a meaningful role of the federal government in the arena of public schools (McCoy, 1984). Like so many of his initiatives, it was defeated in Congress by conservative forces so that while he publicly took a position of improving the educational situation for all Americans, Truman did not utilize the political muscle necessary to deliver any tangible results (McCoy, 1984).

The Commission on Civil Rights was directed by Truman to not only identify rights for all Americans but also to recommend a comprehensive federal solution (Gardner, p. 49). *To Secure These Rights* also contained thirty-five recommendations that provided a bold, and to the South “explosive” (Gardner, p. 61), national solution to civil rights abuse. Truman wanted the committee to provide a framework for what was needed to remedy and eliminate pervasive racism and discrimination throughout the United States (Gardner, 2002). What the committee stated was, “the Na-

tional Government of the United States must take the lead in safeguarding the civil rights of all Americans” (Gardner, p. 58).

The committee recommendations would mean structural and permanent changes in the country’s segregated landscape. Imbedded in the recommendations were the use of powers of the executive branch of the federal government to advance civil reforms and to attack the status quo policies, i.e., separate but equal, of states’ rights politicians (Gardner, 2002). “The committee’s report ‘shocked the nation with its documentation of lynchings, of the denial of voting rights, of inequality of educational opportunities, of discrimination in our armed services’” (Gardner, p. 64). The truly significant aspect of the committee’s work was:

that the committee’s report was revolutionary primarily because it explicitly called on this *American president, who was the product of a slave-owning heritage*, to take comprehensive federal actions on behalf of African Americans — actions that, if taken, would impact every phase of American life. [Committee Chairman Charles] Wilson also knew that, equipped with the committee’s thirty-five recommendations, it was now up to Truman to demonstrate that he had the moral courage to lead the country on a journey into the uncharted civil rights frontier, a journey that had been stalled since Lincoln liberated America’s slaves eight decades earlier. (Gardner, p. 64)

Whether Truman’s raising of the civil rights issue and linking it to national security was a political strategy as suggested by some or the beginning of a revolutionary use of the presidency by Truman to change the country’s civil rights for people of color as believed by others, the culmination of this line of action was Truman’s special message to Congress on civil rights on February 2, 1948 (Gardner, 2002; McCullough, 1992; O’Reilly, 1995).

Truman’s civil rights proposal contained ten points that called for the establishment of a permanent Commission on Civil Rights, a Joint Congressional Committee on Civil Rights, a Civil Rights Division in the Department of Justice and a Fair Employment Practices Commission. It provided federal protection against lynching, protected the right to vote, including the elimination of the poll tax, called for the end of discrimination in interstate travel, provided home rule and suffrage in Presidential elections for residents of the District of Columbia, provided statehood for Alaska and Hawaii, provided greater self-governance for American island pos-

sessions, equalized opportunities for residents in the United States to become naturalized citizens, ending discrimination in the military, and settle the evacuation claims of Japanese citizens (Gardner, 2002; McCullough, 1992; O’Reilly, 1995).

While definitely focusing on providing federal support for ending racial abuse for African Americans, Truman included improving civil rights of all Americans. When asked a few days after his speech to Congress on civil rights as to what he had drawn on as background, Truman replied the Constitution and the Bill of Rights (McCullough, 2002).

As sweeping as Truman’s proposals were, opposition was just as pervasive, both in Congress and in the nation. There would not be passage of any significant points as outlined by Truman (only the matter of Japanese evacuation would eventually be passed during Truman’s administration) and a Gallup poll of fifteen hundred Americans conducted in March, 1948 showed that 82 percent of those polled, while not clear what ethnic groups were represented, opposed Truman’s civil rights program (Gardner, 2002).

Whether by political design, as believed by some (O’Reilly, 1995), or as a consequence of his growing into the role of President, as felt by others (Gardner, 2002), it is clear that Truman’s election in 1948 over Republican Thomas Dewey is one of the greatest upsets in political history in this nation’s history. While his policies were anathema to the body politic of Congress, he was liked by the American people. “They know that he is a sincere and humble man and, in the cliché often heard, that he is a man “trying to do his best” (McCullough, 2002).

Truman proved that he was the electable candidate seen by Boss Pendergast so many years before. In terms of real accomplishments in civil rights, there were two areas Truman did have successes. One was in the form of Executive Order 9981 to abolish the practice of segregation in the military and create the President’s Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Forces (McCoy, 1984; O’Reilly, 1995). The end of segregated military units would be realized by the start of the Korean War.

The second area of progress would be in terms of friend-of-the-court or amicus curiae briefs filed by the Justice Department on behalf of African American plaintiffs challenging segregation in schools. In *Sweatt v. Painter*, the United States Supreme Court ruled that a separate law school for African Americans was not equal to the University of Texas Law School and in *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents*, the

Court ruled that African American students cannot be separated from other students at the University of Oklahoma.

Both rulings struck against the dogma of separate but equal conditions in schools and provided important antecedents for the historic *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* in 1954 (McCoy, 1984; O’Reilly, 1995).

Indeed, while significant amounts of legislation or acts would not be passed during his administration, Truman provided the start of the civil rights movement by engaging the problem of racial discrimination and segregation on a national level. He provided the concept of the federal government as being responsible for the protection and attainment of civil liberties for all Americans and his use of the federal courts would be a benchmark act for civil rights.

Summary

These three men, John Quincy Adams, Theodore Roosevelt, and Harry S. Truman, all occupied the office of President of the United States. The contributions of each to that office and to the country are varied in scope and substance. In terms of their effect on multicultural education, their individual legacies are also varied.

Adams provided very little in this area as the concept of universal education for everyone in the country was not even on the radar screen. His was still a time when slavery existed as a tolerated and abetted institution in the country. There was no thought of providing opportunities and education to anyone except the privileged few of the ruling, white elite. This framework would not change for several more administrations. His later opposition to slavery would come from a sense of preserving what he conceived as guaranteed constitutional rights, not as a goal of providing universal equal rights to everyone living in America.

Roosevelt would be a larger-than-life figure in many ways, but his record on race relations would also be a faint shadow of accomplishment. Roosevelt’s idea of a person making his way in the world and capitalizing on opportunities would still be limited to those who started with the advantages of money or a white skin. His pronouncements of support for African Americans and Native Americans would always be within a personal context that some races are superior and have an obligation to succeed and rule. Any accomplishments by people of color would be due to their playing by the white book of rules and regulations for success.

Roosevelt did, however, possibly provide a model for later federal entry into securing civil rights for people of color in

this country by using federal mandates to take over vast tracts of land from states in the West. Without knowing it, Roosevelt opened the window for recognition of the importance and validity of multicultural education for people of color by establishing the dominance of the federal government in different realms.

It would be the reconstructed person, Truman, who would make the greatest contribution to a legacy of multicultural education by using the office of the President to actively engage the federal government in the securing of civil rights for all Americans, especially African Americans, as described in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. While he was not an extremely proactive president in this regard and did not provide consistent or strong support for civil rights and multicultural education, Truman's legacy would be to provide the beginnings for effective multicultural education efforts that we see today.

Truman used the power of the Office of the President to utilize Executive Orders and to direct the Justice Department to pursue federal court decisions for civil rights were extremely important acts. The use of the federal courts would be a part of a legacy that stretches back to Adams and the *La Amistad* decision to the *Brown v. Topeka* case that would produce profound meaning to the attainment of civil rights and liberties for people of color in America.

Although not imagined by the framers of the Constitution and other historical documents, Truman was a product of years of history for this country and the Office of the President who produced actions of attaining meaningful education and civil rights for all.

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Previous installments in this series of research articles on President of the United States and multicultural education appeared in the Winter 2003 and Spring 2004 issues of *Multicultural Education*.

The first installment in the Winter 2003 issue examined Presidents James Madison, Rutherford B. Hayes, and John F. Kennedy.

The second installment in the Spring 2004 issue examined Presidents Andrew Jackson, Woodrow Wilson, and Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Look for additional installments in the next issue and future issues of *Multicultural Education*.