

Two years ago New York Education Commissioner Thomas Sobol received the report of his task force on minorities under the title "A Curriculum of Inclusion." The report lashes out at Western culture, which it accuses of lowering the self-esteem of minority children and impeding their academic progress. In the storm of criticism that followed, Commissioner Sobol has backed away from his initial endorsement of the report and the Board of Regents has appointed another panel to make recommendations later this year. In this essay Gerda Bikales, former Executive Director of US English, revisits the document that spells out the dogma of 'political correctness' for the public schools. Following this essay we publish the Executive Summary of the 1989 report to the NY Regents, a response written by Diane Ravitch and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., the speech on "The Role of the West" by Dean Donald Kagan, and a column by Michael Novak.

'YOU'VE GOT TO BE CAREFULLY TAUGHT'

By Gerda Bikales

In the post-World War era of nascent discomfort with the evils of racism, the immensely popular musical *South Pacific* took the subject straight on. "You've got to be carefully taught to hate and fear," sang the unhappy young GI in love with a Polynesian beauty, "before it's too late, before you are six, or seven, or eight." The implication was that people are born free of hatred and fear of others not like themselves, and then are deliberately taught to become prejudiced by the adults who mold their innocent minds.

Actually, lyricist Oscar Hammerstein had it reversed. Anyone who has closely observed young children knows that they are not receptive to strangers, generally, and even less so to people whose appearance differs from their own and that of family members. Without the influence of careful teaching of the principles of civilized behavior, children tend to be painfully insensitive and judgmental with anyone who is 'different.' Yet, with firm guidance from the significant adults in their lives, the impulse to distrust people who are not like themselves can be controlled and even overcome. It takes considerable effort, but, in time, familiarity arising from positive experiences with others, reinforced by careful early teaching about the worth of each human being and the dignity inherent in the human personality, will yield individuals fit for membership in a decent and pluralistic society.

Yes, you've got to be carefully taught. Not prejudice—as Hammerstein would have it, for that comes all too naturally—but rather how to reject prejudice. In the United States, we must be taught that we are all members of the American family, sharing the bond of common citizenship, whatever our ancestry. In steps calibrated to our maturing emotions and intellect we must be helped to learn tolerance, respect, and—for those able to take the further step—the appreciation of differences.

In the past the public schools in many parts of the

country had done a reasonably good job of teaching these essential lessons. Not a perfect job by any means, but a creditable one nevertheless. The massive waves of immigrants who reached these shores after the Civil War and early in this century came from societies harboring ancient hatreds toward one another, which the schools successfully diffused in the new generation by teaching the ideals of a shared American heritage. This assertion has become controversial in recent years, but its validity is demonstrated by the triumph of the momentous civil rights reforms of the 1960s. For it was the children educated in the 'melting pot' schools of urban America in the 1930s, '40s and '50s who would no longer stand for Jim Crow, who demanded radical changes and committed themselves—at no small long-term cost to themselves and posterity—to a more just and equitable society for all Americans.

The road toward greater justice and equality has proven to be arduous and frustratingly slow. Out of that frustration comes a new pedagogy, seemingly based on a literal interpretation of the Hammerstein lyrics, but with a new twist. This time, it is the public schools that are being urged to do the careful teaching of race hatred and fear!

Two years ago, New York State's Commissioner of Education, Thomas Sobol, issued a report by his Task Force on Minorities entitled "A Curriculum of Inclusion." The task force had been formed to review the Department of Education's affirmative action policies, its curriculum and instruction guides "to see if they accurately reflect the pluralistic nature of the society," and to review instructional practices "which may operate to the detriment of minority children."

The reasons for creating such a task force are no doubt many, including the desire of the newly appointed Commissioner, whose professional experience had been limited to affluent suburban schools, to reach out to his minority critics. Another may well have been the genuine need to explore ways

to improve the state's urban schools, which are increasingly incapable of coping with the large influx of immigrant children from every corner of the globe.

Statistics compiled by the New York Department of Education tell the story. In the Fall of 1970 white children constituted 38.3 percent of the public school population in New York City. In 1990 that figure was down to 19 percent. By contrast, Hispanics made up 25.7 percent of the city's school population in 1970, and 35 percent in 1990. The category of 'other minority,' which is almost entirely Asian, more than quintupled between 1970 and 1990, going from 1.5 percent to 7.9 percent. Black enrollment went up more slowly from 34.5 percent twenty years ago to 38 percent last Fall. A sizeable portion of that growth comes from the city's large community of immigrants from Haiti, Jamaica, and the Dominican Republic.

Much hope had been placed in bilingual education in the early 1970s as a way to reach students and upgrade their performance. In the Fall of 1988 over 100,000 children in the New York City public schools were classified as "Limited English Proficient" — a number expected to rise sharply, both as a result of more immigration, and because of a Board of regents reclassification scheme that makes more children eligible for bilingual instruction.

Bilingual education, however, has failed to deliver on its promise. It was to be expected, therefore, that the next magic remedy would eventually be discovered: the deconstruction of the American experience and the rewriting of history to serve the 'self-esteem' needs of minority children.

The task force report wastes no time getting right to the point. Its opening sentence reads: "African Americans, Asian Americans, Puerto Ricans/Latinos, and Native Americans have all been the victim of an intellectual and educational oppression that has characterized the culture and institutions of the United States and the European world for centuries." The academic achievement of minority children has been disappointing because this oppression has "a terribly damaging effect on the psyche of young people of African, Asian, Latino, and Native American descent" who have undergone "intellectual victimization" and therefore can't develop "positive self-esteem and self-management skills." "European American" students have also been damaged by the oppressive curriculum because they tend to "overvalue their self-worth" and must be shown the error of their ways.

The reviewers, searching for "Eurocentric conceptualization and modality" found plenty to complain about. Much effort was spent on counting the number of times African Americans appeared in textbook pictures, and though people of all races are portrayed in the textbooks, the ratio of blacks to whites was found wanting. Yes, they allow, there is a multicultural perspective in the curriculum, but it is "additive, not at the center of the endeavor," and it

"projects dominant European American values."

The Asian, Latino, and Native American consultants each took pains to point out the rich diversity within their own groups, and regretted the tendency of the curriculum to make short shrift of it and treat the group too monolithically. Mercifully, the Native American consultant eventually recognized that since there are "over 300 tribes/Indian nations, plus over 200 Alaska native villages," New York State students might get away with studying the Six Nations tribes, the Shinneckocks and the Poospatucks first — though eventually they must "learn about the total matrix of Indian tribes throughout the US."

"On the other hand, Dr. Leonard Jeffries, the chairman of the Black Studies department at City College who served as the Task Force's African American specialist, strikes a unifying theme by insisting on teaching about the black culture of ancient Egypt as the direct heritage of every African American. The Latino expert recommends the singing of the Puerto Rican national anthem in the classroom and presenting Pedro Albizu Campos as a role model (yes, the very same one whose terrorist squads tried to assassinate President Truman in 1950, and injured five Congressmen in a 1954 shooting spree).

The tone throughout the entire report is one of deliberate debasement of, and hostility toward, America's majority population—its culture, its history, and its values. With the excision of the hated Western culture from its core, the envisioned "Curriculum of Inclusion" is in reality a "Curriculum of Incoherence," in which bits and pieces about a multitude of cultures are served up without any foundation or framework, other than the artifice of shared victimization at the hands of European Americans.

The report is quite a unique document in the annals of educational history. Surely, there can't be many reports prepared by experts and addressed to officials charged with the education of young children that find fault with students because they are too self-confident and successful in school, and then suggest that it would be best to take these youngsters down a few notches and undermine their self-confidence, all on the basis of the color of their skin. It has often been said that good intentions can easily go awry and create mischief, but what we have here are undisguised bad intentions, clearly meant to tear American society further apart.

With the release of this report we have arrived in the nightmarish land of George Orwell's *1984*, where the rewriting of history to suit a tyrannical regime is an ongoing project, and a hateful symbolic figure known as 'Goldstein' is presented to the masses for daily hate sessions designed to vent their frustrations. The task force's recommended new bureaucracy, to be built under a Special Assistant for Cultural Equity, would be well-suited to carry on the necessary rewriting of history into politically correct myths, and

the report's compression of the majority population into a single image of a composite 'European American' provides a useful Goldstein-figure for daily ritual flogging.

Outright racism, which animates virtually every page of "Curriculum of Inclusion," was also displayed in the treatment of a noted critic, Professor Diane Ravitch. A distinguished scholar in the history of education, Dr. Ravitch responded to the report with a series of high-profile articles which called attention to its follies. A few months later, Commissioner Sobol invited her to address the task force members about her concerns. As she tells it, Ms. Ravitch was seated next to Regent Adelaide Sanford, who suddenly told her: "Your grandparents owned my grandparents." Informed that Ravitch's grandparents were not on the American scene but were themselves victims of pogroms in Europe, Sanford then accused them of owning—'ethnically speaking'—the ships that brought the slaves to America, an allusion to Dr. Jeffries' teaching that an international Jewish cartel brought the slaves to America.

Later, Ms. Ravitch was rebuked by Ms. Hazel Dukes, the chairman of the New York State chapter of the NAACP who headed the task force, for saying that all groups have known pain and suffering, and making a reference to the Holocaust. She told Ravitch that she was tired of hearing about the Holocaust, and then referred angrily to the Jews' criticism of Jesse Jackson and also the plight of Mayor David Dinkins, who, she said, "has worn a bald spot on his head by wearing so many yarmulkes..."

The academic failure of so many black and Hispanic children is indeed a tremendous loss, not only to the children who will suffer most directly, but also to this country which is greatly in need of their unrealized potential. It is very doubtful, however, that the institutionalization of racial hatred in our schools will do much to improve the destinies of these children.

It may not please the task force members, but at this juncture in the historic, social and cultural evolution of the United States, the culture and people of Europe are not a sideshow of irrelevant relics, but the dominant influence pervading national life. To pretend otherwise is dishonest and foolish.

Yet there is no doubt that this statement will be less true in the future. The 1990 census has confirmed the momentum for further rapid growth within the minority communities, due to record immigration and higher fertility. The face of America is changing, and the contribution of minorities will play an ever more important part in shaping our common future.

But you've got to be carefully taught! ■