

Much of the current media furor over "political correctness" was triggered by a report to the New York State Board of Regents (overseeing all public education curricula) by the Task Force on Minorities, Equity and Excellence chaired by Thomas Sobol. Below we present the 'Executive Summary' of the report.

A CURRICULUM OF INCLUSION

African Americans, Asian Americans, Puerto Ricans/Latinos, and Native Americans have all been the victims of an intellectual and educational oppression that has characterized the culture and institutions of the United States and the European American world for centuries. Negative characterizations or the absence of positive references have a terribly damaging effect on the psyche of young people of African, Asian, Latino, and Native American descent, and an equally damaging, though different, effect on young people of European American descent. Task Force members and curriculum consultants found that the current New York State Education Department curricular materials, though improved recently, are contributing to the miseducation of all young people through a systematic bias toward European culture and its derivatives.

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All curricula published by the Education Department were reviewed to determine the extent to which they met the Regents' goal of having all students "develop the ability to understand, respect, and accept people of different races; sex; cultural heritage; national origin; religion; and political, economic, and social background". With some notable exceptions, the curricular materials fail to meet this goal. After highlighting some of the contributions to American society by non-European culture, the Report documents how these contributions have been systematically distorted, marginalized, or omitted.

The problem is framed in its historical context of the nation developing as a preserve of European culture and values, with nearly all textbooks and popular writings omitting any mention of significant contributions from the many peoples from other cultures who have been part of the development of America since the beginning. Recent attempts to include in history books and social studies materials information about non-European achievements are shown to be appendages rather than integral to the main body of information. In the Report, European

culture is likened to the master of a house ruling over a dinner table, himself firmly established at the head of the table and all other cultures being guests from some distance down the table from the master, who has invited the others through his beneficence.

The Report then identifies some curricular materials that are of high quality, indicating that some progress has been made. But because the entire structure of the curriculum is shown to be flawed, an alternative conceptual approach is presented. The Task Force promotes the idea that all curricular materials be prepared on the basis of multicultural contributions to the development of all aspects of our society. Such a balanced, integrated approach is seen as serving the interests of all children from all cultures: children from Native American, Puerto Rican/Latino, Asian American, and African American cultures will have higher self-esteem and self-respect, while children from European cultures will have a less arrogant perspective of being part of the group that has "done it all." Again using the dinner table analogy, the new model is likened to the fabled Round Table of King Arthur, with all cultures offering something to the collective good, each knowing and respecting others, and each gaining from the contribution of others; no culture is master of the new table.

The Task Force makes nine recommendations to accomplish what it sees as necessary reforms in the state's curriculum, ranging from a revision of many curricular materials to the revision of teacher education and school administrator programs. ■