

It's Okay to Be Westocentric

Multiculturalism is all the rage in today's school curriculums in the West. The theory is that giving equal treatment to a diverse array of peoples, histories, and customs will teach students to be more open-minded, tolerant, and informed in a global society.

In actuality, I suspect the opposite is the case. Both educationally and socially, students would probably be much better off with a more Westocentric curriculum.

Why?

I know there are plenty of theories out there about the influences driving this push for multiculturalism: political correctness, efforts to create a more global society, cultural Marxism. But here, I want to simply offer the suggestion that multicultural education is a bad educational strategy.

Practically speaking, there simply isn't enough time to learn about very many other cultures. As it is, modern curriculums are chock-full of various subjects that did not exist in the curriculums of previous centuries. Students' aptitude in basic skills have suffered as a result, forcing a large percentage of them to take remedial courses when they get to college. Add multicultural requirements into the mix, and you end up with not jacks of all trades, but simply masters of none.

Given curriculum constraints, most students receive only a superficial knowledge of other cultures. To use a phrase from T.S. Eliot, it's a multicultural education "measured out in coffee spoons": two weeks devoted to studying this culture, a week that one, a poster board project on another. There are a couple of dangers in this: 1) we risk giving students the false impression that they are more culturally aware and astute than they in fact are; 2) we risk disrespecting other cultures, whose identities are much more than can be

encompassed in a few pages in a textbook.

To truly appreciate other cultures, I firmly believe that today's student must learn to appreciate his own. He must study its languages, its history, its literature, its religions, its customs. Such a study provides him with a necessary foundation to understand the world, a lens through which he can maturely interpret reality and dialogue with others. It is precisely this foundation that many students are missing today. As a result of their ignorance, they tend to be more insecure, and it is *this* insecurity and ignorance that usually breeds intolerance.

The proverb says that you should never judge a man before you've walked a mile in his moccasins. I think Western students need to walk a mile in their own culture's moccasins before they can begin to have a true appreciation for other cultures.