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Multiculturalism is not History

The New York State Board of Regents has just adopted a controversial report calling for the public school social studies curriculum to be revamped in order to promote a leftwing agenda. It's all described in an 89-page report released in June by the Social Studies Syllabus Review and Development Committee.

The report attempts to impose a world view on public school students that is labeled “multiculturalism” and “cultural diversity" but can better be described as divisive, destructive, and false. It is so “way out" that it has been criticized even by such authentic liberals as Governor Mario Cuomo and Kennedy court historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., who was a member of the committee.

As Schlesinger explained it, “The underlying philosophy of the report is that ethnicity is the defining experience for most Americans, and that a main objective of public education should be the protection, strengthening, celebration and perpetuation of ethnic origins and identities.” That's a prescription for dividing the young into separate ethnic and racial groups, each taught to cherish its own separateness from the rest instead of to revere our common heritage.

It should not be the mission of the public schools to promote ethnic separatism and thereby heighten racial tensions. The public schools have been a major factor in uniting us as a nation, in taking immigrant children from countries all over the world and educating them to be Americans, speaking one language and cherishing our American institutions.

We've been spared the ethnic divisions and animosities which so many other countries have suffered, such as Yugoslavia, Iraq, Canada, and Ireland, to mention only a few that have boiled up in recent years. Surely, w€ don't want to promote that kind of ethnic assertiveness!

In the past couple of years, as the American public has awakened to the failure of the public schools, we have witnessed a growing demand to remedy the academic deficiencies of the public schools. This New York report diverts the entire reform movement into pursuing the foolish illusion that schools should teach self-esteem and cultural identity instead of knowledge and skills.

The report rejects the fundamental principle that education means teaching students knowledge; indeed, it calls for a shift away from “mastery of information" and adopts the notion that hi-story must be presented through the prism of “politically correct" social policy. Specifically, it asserts that “the subject matter content should be treated as socially constructed and therefore tentative -- as is all knowledge.”

The report clearly promotes its particular political agenda, starting out with the alien concepts of “world citizenship,” “interdependence,” and “global village,” which the report calls a “truism" (that is, no evidence needed). However, Americans do not want the public schools to teach our children to be citizens of the world or to believe that we are dependent on other nations; we want our children taught to be good American citizens, patriotic and proud of our country, and determined to maintain our independence, liberty, and uniquely American governmental institutions.

The report starts out with the statement that “The United States is a microcosm of humanity today.” That, of course, is totally false; America, with its extraordinary freedom and prosperity, cannot accurately be viewed as a microcosm of the rest of the world with its repression, never-ending wars, inhumanity, poverty and starvation.

This report follows one of the many obnoxious trends of modern-day public schools, namely, concealing from parents what is going on in the classroom. It does this, first, by demanding that “multicultural perspectives should infuse the entire curriculum, preK-12." “Infuse" is a code word used by the educators to mean integrating something within all school subjects (the report specifically includes mathematics) so that parents can't find it.

Secondly, the report wants “to move away from focusing on textbooks.” Without textbooks, parents have an almost impossible task of finding out what is really being taught to their children.

The report wants to rewrite the language in the name of “language Sensitivity.” Teachers and students are to be forbidden to talk about Latin America because some Caribbean islands are non-Latin, to refer to “slaves" instead of “enslaved. Persons,” to “the Far East" instead of “East Asia," or to the “Middle East" instead of “southwest Asia and North Africa.” “The New World" would be another prohibited concept, Christopher Columbus would become a voyager instead of a

discoverer, and Thanksgiving would be censored out because the Indians didn't have anything to be thankful for.

Those who thought George Orwell was writing about some planet other than ours when he wrote his famous 1984 had better take another look. Political commissars who would drop our history down the Memory Hole are holding forth in the New York public schools.