The Disuniting of America

Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.

The fading away of the cold war has brought an era of ideological conflict to an end. But it has not, as forecast, brought an end to history. One set of hatreds gives way to the next. Lifting the lid of ideological repression in eastern Europe releases ethnic antagonisms deeply rooted in experience and in memory. The disappearance of ideological competition in the third world removes superpower restraints on national and tribal confrontations. As the era of ideological conflict subsides, humanity enters—or, more precisely, re-enters—a possibly more dangerous era of ethnic and racial animosity.

For the mutual antipathy of tribes is one of the oldest things in the world. The history of our planet has been in great part the history of the mixing of peoples. Mass migrations produce mass antagonisms. The fear of the Other is among the most instinctive human reactions. Today, as the twentieth century draws to an end, a number of factors—not just the evaporation of the cold war but, more profoundly, the development of swifter modes of communication and transport, the acceleration of population growth, the breakdown of traditional social structures, the persistence of desperate poverty and want—converge to stimulate mass migrations across national frontiers and thereby to make the mixing of peoples a major problem for the century that lies darkly ahead.

What happens when people of different ethnic origins, speaking different languages and professing different religions, settle in the same geographical locality and live under the same political sovereignty? Unless a common purpose binds them together, tribal hostilities will drive them apart. Ethnic and racial conflict, it seems evident, will now replace the conflict of ideologies as the explosive issue of our times.

On every side today ethnicity is the cause of the breaking of nations. The Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, India, South Africa are all in crisis. Ethnic tensions disturb and divide Sri Lanka, Burma, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iraq, Lebanon, Israel, Cyprus, Somalia, Nigeria, Liberia, Angola, Sudan, Zaire, Guyana, Trinidad—you name it. Even nations as stable and civilized as Britain and France, Belgium and Spain and Czechoslovakia, face growing ethnic and racial troubles. "The virus of tribalism," says the Economist, "risks becoming the AIDS of international politics—lying dormant for years, then flaring up to destroy countries."

Take the case of our neighbor to the north. Canada has long been considered the most sensible and placid of nations. "Rich, peaceful and, by the standards of almost anywhere else, enviably successful," the Economist observes: yet today "on the brink of bust-up." Michael Ignatieff (the English-resident son of a Russian-born Canadian diplomat and thus an example of the modern mixing of peoples) writes of Canada, "Here we have one of the five richest nations on earth, a country so uniquely blessed with space and opportunity that the world's poor are beating at the door to get in, and it is tearing itself apart... If one of the top five developed nations on earth can't make a federal, multiethnic state work, who else can?"

The answer to that increasingly vital question has been, at least until recently, the United States.

Now how have Americans succeeded in pulling off this almost unprecedented trick? Other countries break up because they fail to give ethnically diverse peoples compelling reasons to see themselves as part of the same nation. The United States has worked, thus far, because it has offered such reasons. What is it then that, in the absence of a common ethnic origin, has held Americans together over two turbulent centuries? For America was a multiethnic country from the start. Hector St. John de Crévecoeur emigrated from France to the American colonies in 1759, married an American
woman, settled on a farm in Orange County, New York, and published his Letters from an American Farmer during the American Revolution. This eighteenth-century French American marveled at the astonishing diversity of the other settlers—"a mixture of English, Scotch, Irish, French, Dutch, Germans, and Swedes," a "strange mixture of blood" that you could find in no other country.

**Ethnic and racial conflict will now replace the conflict of ideologies as the explosive issue of our times.**

He recalled one family whose grandfather was English, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a Frenchwoman, and whose present four sons had married women of different nationalities. "From this promiscuous breed," he wrote, "that race now called Americans have arisen." (The word race as used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries meant what we mean by nationality today; thus people spoke of "the English race," "the German race," and so on.) What Crévecoeur mused, were the characteristics of this suddenly emergent American race? Letters from an American Farmer propounded a famous question: "What then is the American, this new man?" (Twentieth-century readers must overlook eighteenth-century male obliviousness to the existence of women.) Crévecoeur gave his own question its classic answer: "He is an American, who leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles. . . . Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men." *E pluribus unum.* The United States had a brilliant solution for the inherent divisibility of a multiethnic society: the creation of a brand-new national identity, carried forward by individuals who, in forsaking old loyalties and joining to make new lives, melted away ethnic differences. Those intrepid Europeans who had torn up their roots to brave the wild Atlantic wanted to forget a horrid past and to embrace a hopeful future. They expected to become Americans. Their goals were escape, deliverance, assimilation. They saw America as a transforming nation, banishing dismal yesterdays and developing a unique national character based on common political ideals and shared experiences. The point of America was not to preserve old cultures, but to forge a new American culture.

One reason why Canada, despite all its advantages, is so vulnerable to sloth is that, as Canadians freely admit, their country lacks such a unique national identity. Attracted variously by Britain, France, and the United States, inclined for generous reasons to respect diverse ethnic inheritances, Canadians have never developed a strong sense of what it is to be a Canadian. As Sir John Macdonald, their first prime minister, put it, Canada has "too much geography and too little history."

The United States has had plenty of history. From the Revolution on, Americans have had a powerful national creed. The vigorous sense of national identity accounts for our relative success in converting Crévecoeur's "promiscuous breed" into one people and thereby making a multiethnic society work.

This is not to say that the United States has ever fulfilled Crévecoeur's ideal. New waves of immigration brought in people who fitted awkwardly into a society that was inescapably English in language, ideals, and institutions. For a long time the Anglo-Americans dominated American culture and politics. The pot did not melt everybody, not even all the white immigrants.

As for the nonwhites—those long in America whom the European newcomers overran and massacred, or those others brought against their will from Africa and Asia—deeply bred racism put them all—red Americans, black Americans, yellow Americans, brown Americans—well outside the pale. The curse of racism was the great failure of the American experiment, the glaring contradiction of American ideals and the still crippling disease of American life.

Yet even nonwhite Americans, miserably treated as they were, contributed to the formation of the national identity. They became members, if third-class members, of American society and helped give the common culture new form and flavor. The infusion of non-Anglo stocks and the experience of the New World steadily reconfigured the British legacy and made the United States, as we all know, a very different country today from Britain.

Crévecoeur's vision of America prevailed through most of the two centuries of the history of the United States. But the twentieth century has brought forth a new and opposing vision. One world war destroyed the old order of things and launched Woodrow Wilson's doctrine of the self-determination of peoples. Twenty years after, a second world war dissolved the western colonial empires and intensified ethnic and racial militancy around the planet. In the United States itself new laws eased entry for immigrants from South America, Asia, and Africa and altered the composition of the American people.

In a nation marked by an even stranger mixture of blood than Crévecoeur had known, his celebrated question is asked once more, with a new passion—and a new answer. Today many Americans turn away from the historic goal of "a new race of man." The escape from origins has given way to the search for roots. The "ancient prejudices and manners" disowned by Crévecoeur have made a surprising comeback. A cult of ethnicity has arisen both among non-Anglo whites and among nonwhite minorities.

The eruption of ethnicity had many good consequences. The American culture began at last to give shamefully overdue recognition to the achievements of minorities subordinated and spurned during the high noon of Anglo dominance. American education began at last to acknowledge the existence and significance of the great swirling world beyond Europe. All this was to the good. Of course history should be taught from a variety of perspectives. Let our children try to imagine the arrival of Columbus from the viewpoint of those who met him as well as from those who sent him. Living on a shrinking planet, aspiring to global leadership, Americans must learn much more about other races, other cultures, other continents. As they do, they acquire a more complex and invigorating sense of the world—and of themselves.

But, pressed too far, the cult of ethnicity has had bad consequences too. The new ethnic gospel rejects Crévecoeur's vision of individuals from all nations melded into a new race. Its underlying philosophy is that America is not a nation of individuals at all but a nation of groups, that ethnicity is the defining experience for most Americans, that ethnic
The curse of racism was the great failure of the American experiment, the glaring contradiction of American ideals and the still crippling disease of American life.

Lum is a debate about what it means to be an American.

The militants of ethnicity now contend that a main objective of public education should be the protection, strengthening, celebration, and perpetuation of ethnic origins and identities. Separatism, however, magnifies differences and stirs antagonisms. The consequent increase in ethnic and racial conflict lies behind the hullabaloo over “multiculturalism” and “political correctness,” over the iniquities of the “Eurocentric” curriculum, and over the notion that history and literature should be taught not as intellectual disciplines but as therapies whose function is to raise minority self-esteem.

One wonders. Do not the ethnic militants see any dangers in a society divided into distinct and immutable ethnic and racial groups, each taught to cherish its own apartness from the rest? What is ultimately at stake is the shape of the American future. Will the center hold or will the melting pot give way to the Tower of Babel?

I don’t want to sound apocalyptic about these developments. Education is always in ferment, and a good thing too. Schools and colleges have always been battlegrounds for debates over beliefs, philosophies, values. The situation in our universities, I am confident, will soon right itself once the great silent majority of professors cry “enough” and challenge what they know to be voguish nonsense.

The impact of ethnic and racial pressures on our public schools is more troubling. The bonds of national cohesiveness are sufficiently fragile already. Public education should aim to strengthen those bonds, not to weaken them. If separatist tendencies go unchecked, the result can only be the fragmentation, resegregation, and tribalization of American life.

I remain optimistic. My impression is that the historic forces driving toward “one people” have not lost their power. For most Americans this is still what the republic is all about. They resist extremes in the argument between “unity first” and “ethnicity first.” “Most Americans,” Governor Mario Cuomo has well said, “can understand both the need to recognize and encourage an enriched diversity as well as the need to ensure that such a broadened multicultural perspective leads to unity and an enriched sense of what being an American is, and not to a destructive factionalism that would tear us apart.”

Whatever their self-appointed spokesmen may claim, most American-born members of minority groups, white or nonwhite, while they may cherish particular heritages, still see themselves primarily as Americans and not primarily as Irish or Hungarians or Jews or Africans or Asians. A telling indicator is the rising rate of intermarriage across ethnic, religious, even (increasingly) racial lines. The belief in a unique American identity is far from dead.

But the burden to unify the country does not fall exclusively on the minorities. Assimilation and integration constitute a two-way street. Those who want to join America must be received and welcomed by those who already think they own America. Racism, as I have noted, has been the great national tragedy. In recent times white America has at last begun to confront the racism so deeply and shamefully inbred in our history. But the triumph over racism is incomplete. When old-line Americans, for example, treat people of other nationalities and races as if they were indigestible elements to be shunned and barred, they must not be surprised if minorities gather bitterly unto themselves and damn everybody else. Not only must they want assimilation and integration; we must want assimilation and integration too. The burden to make this a unified country lies as much with the complacent majority as with the sullen and resentful minorities.

The American population has unquestionably grown more heterogeneous than ever in recent times. But this very heterogeneity makes the quest for unifying ideals and common culture all the more urgent. And in a world savagely rent by ethnic and racial antagonisms, it is all the more essential that the United States continue as an example of how a highly differentiated society holds itself together.

Low self-esteem is too deep a malady to be cured by hearing nice things about one’s own ethnic past. Institutionalized separatism only crystallizes racial differences and magnifies racial tensions.
THE DECOMPOSITION
OF AMERICA

Low self-esteem is too deep a malady to be cured by hearing nice things about one’s own ethnic past. History is not likely to succeed where psychiatry fails. Afrocentrism in particular is an escape from the hard and expensive challenges of our society—the need for safer schools, better teachers, better teaching materials, greater investment in education; the need for stable families that can nourish self-discipline and aspiration; the need for jobs and income that can nourish stable families; the need to stop the ravages of drugs and crime; the need to overcome the racism still lurking in the interstices of American society. “The need,” William Raspberry observes of his own people, “is not to reach back for some culture we never knew but to lay full claim to the culture in which we exist.”

I

The ethnicity rage in general and Afrocentricity in particular not only divert attention from the real needs but exacerbate the problems. The recent apotheosis of ethnicity, black, brown, red, yellow, white, has revived the dismal prospect that in happy melting-pot days Americans thought the republic was moving safely beyond—that is, a society fragmented into ethnic groups. The cult of ethnicity exaggerates differences, intensifies resentments and antagonisms, drives ever deeper the awful wedges between races and nationalities. The end game is self-pity and self-ghettoization.

Now there is a reasonable argument in the black case for a measure of regrouping and self-reliance as part of the preparation for entry into an integrated society on an equal basis. Integration on any other basis, it is contended, would mean total capitulation to white standards. Affirmation of racial and cultural pride is thus essential to true integration. One can see this as a psychological point, but as a cultural point?

For generations blacks have grown up in an American culture, on which they have had significant influence and to which they have made significant contributions. Self-Africanization after 300 years in America is playacting. Afrocentricity as expounded by ethnic ideologues implies Europhobia, separatism, emotions of alienation, victimization, paranoia. Most curious and unexpected of all is a black demand for the return of black-white segregation.

“To separate [black children] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race,” Chief Justice Warren wrote in the school-integration case, “generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone.” In 40 years doctrine has come full circle. Now integration is held to bring feelings of inferiority, and segregation to bring the cure.

This revival of separatism will begin, if the black educator Felix Boateng has his way, in the earliest grades. “The use of standard English as the only language of instruction,” Boateng argues, “aggravates the process of deculturalization.” A “culturally relevant curriculum” for minority children would recognize “the home and community dialect they bring to school.” (Not all black educators, it should be said, share this desire to handicap black children from infancy.) “One fact is clear,” notes Janice Hale-Benson of Cleveland State University “Speaking standard English is a skill needed by Black children for upward mobility in American society and it should be taught in early childhood.”

If any educational institution should bring people together as individuals in friendly and civil association, it should be the university. But the fragmentation of campuses in recent years into a multitude of ethnic organizations is spectacular—and disconcerting.

One finds black dormitories, black student unions, black fraternities and sororities, black business and law societies, black homosexual and lesbian groups, black tables in dining halls. Stanford, Dinesh D’Souza reports, has “ethnic theme houses.” The University of Pennsylvania gives blacks—6 percent of the enrollment—their own yearbook. Campuses today, according to one University of Pennsylvania professor, have “the cultural diversity of Beirut. There are separate armed camps. The black kids don’t mix with the white kids. The Asians are off by themselves. Oppression is the great status symbol.”

Oberlin was for a century and half the model of a racially integrated college. “Increasingly,” Jacob Weisberg, an editor at The New Republic, reports, “Oberlin students think, act, study, and live apart.” Asians live in Asia House, Jews in “J” House, Latinos in Spanish House, blacks in African-Heritage House, foreign students in Third World House. Even the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Union has broken up into racial and gender factions. “The result is separate worlds.”

Huddling is an understandable reaction for any minority group faced with new and scary challenges. But institutionalized separatism only crystallizes racial differences and magnifies racial tensions. “Certain activities are labeled white and black,” says a black student at Central Michigan University. “If you don’t just participate in black activities, you are shunned.” A recent study by the black anthropologist Signithia Fordham of Rutgers concludes that a big reason for black underachievement is the fear that academic success will be taken as a sellout to the white world. “What appears to have emerged in some segments of the black community,” Fordham says, “is a kind of cultural orientation which defines academic learning in school as ‘acting white.’ ”

Militants further argue that because only blacks can comprehend the black experience, only blacks should teach black history and literature, as, in the view of some feminists, only women should teach women’s history and literature. “True diversity,” according to the faculty’s Budget Committee at the University of California at Berkeley, requires that courses match the ethnic and gender identities of the professors.

The doctrine that only blacks can teach and write black history leads inexorably to the doctrine that blacks can teach and write only black history as well as to inescapable corollaries: Chinese must be restricted to Chinese history, women to women’s history, and so on. Henry Louis Gates criticizes “ghettoized programs where students and members of the faculty sit around and argue about whether a white person can think a black
confined to the black community. Another salient expression is the bilingualism movement, ostensibly conducted in the interests of all non-English speakers but particularly a Hispanic-American project.

Bilingualism is hardly a new issue in American history. Seven years after the adoption of the Constitution, a proposal to print 3,000 sets of federal laws in German as well as English was narrowly defeated in the House of Representatives. (This incident gave rise to the myth, later cherished by Nazi propagandists like Colin Ross, that German had nearly displaced English as America's official language.) In the nineteenth century, newly arrived immigrants stayed for a season with their old language, used it in their homes, churches, newspapers, and not seldom in bilingual public schools, until acculturation reduced and the First World War discouraged the use of languages other than English.

The separatist impulse is by no means confined to the black community. Another salient expression is the bilingualism movement.

In recent years the combination of the ethnicity cult with a flood of immigration from Spanish-speaking countries has given bilingualism new impetus. The presumed purpose is transitional: to move non-English-speaking children as quickly as possible from bilingual into all-English classes. The Bilingual Education Act of 1968 supplies guidelines and funding; the 1974 Supreme Court decision in Lau v. Nichols (a Chinese-speaking case) requires school districts to provide special programs for children who do not know English.

Alas, bilingualism has not worked out as planned: rather the contrary. Testimony is mixed, but indications are that bilingual education retards rather than expedites the movement of Hispanic children into the English-speaking world and that it promotes segregation more than it does integration. Bilingualism shuts doors. It nourishes self-ghettoization, and ghettoization nourishes racial antagonism. Bilingualism "encourages concentrations of Hispanics to stay together and not be integrated," says Alfredo Mathew, Jr., a Hispanic civic leader, and it may well foster "a type of apartheid that will generate animosities with others, such as Blacks, in the competition for scarce resources, and further alienate the Hispanic from the larger society."

Using some language other than English dooms people to second-class citizenship in American society. "Those who have the most to lose in a bilingual America," says the Mexican-American writer Richard Rodriguez, "are the foreign-speaking poor." Rodriguez recalls his own boyhood: "It would have pleased me to hear my teachers address me in Spanish. . . . But I would have delayed . . . having to learn the language of public society. . . . Only when I was able to think of myself as an American, no longer an alien in gringo society, could I seek the rights and opportunities necessary for full public individuality."

Monolingual education opens doors to the larger world. "I didn't speak English until I was about 8 years of age," Governor Mario Cuomo recently recalled, "and there was a kind of traumatic entry into public school. It made an immense impression on me." Traumatic or not, public school taught Cuomo the most effective English among politicos of his generation.

Yet a professor at the University of Massachusetts told Rosalie Pedalino Porter, whose long experience in bilingual education led to her excellent book Forked Tongue, that teaching English to children reared in another language is a form of political oppression. Her rejoinder seems admirable: "When we succeed in helping our students use the majority language fluently . . . we are empowering our students rather than depriving them."

Panicky conservatives, fearful that the republic is over the hill, call for a constitutional amendment to make English the official language of the United States. Seventeen states already have such statutes. This is a poor idea. The English language does not need statutory reinforcement and the drive for an amendment will only increase racial discrimination and resentment.

Nonetheless, a common language is a necessary bond of national cohesion in so heterogeneous a nation as America. The bilingual campaign has created both an educational establishment with a vested interest in extending the bilingual empire and a political lobby with a vested interest in retaining a Hispanic
constituency. Like Afrocentricity and the ethnicity cult, bilingualism is an elitist, not a popular, movement—"romantic ethnicity," as Myrdal called it; political ethnicity too. Still, institutionalized bilingualism remains another source of the fragmentation of America, another threat to the dream of "one people."

III
Most ominous about the separatist impulse is the meanness generated when one group is set against another. What Harold Isaacs, that acute student of racial sensitivities and resentments, called the "built-in we-they syndrome" has caused more dominating, fearing, hating, killing than any other single cause since time began.

Blacks, having suffered most grievously (at least in America) from persecution, have perhaps the greatest susceptibility to paranoia—remembering always that even paranoids may have real enemies. After all, considering what we now know about the plots against black Americans concocted by J. Edgar Hoover and executed by his FBI, who can blame blacks for being forever suspicious of white intentions?

Still, the New York Times—WCBS-TV poll of New Yorkers in 1990 is startling. Sixty percent of black respondents thought it true or possibly true that the government was making drugs available in black neighborhoods in order to harm black people. Twenty-nine percent thought it true or possibly true that the AIDS virus was invented by racist conspirators to kill blacks.

When Mayor Edward Koch invited the irrepressible Leonard Jeffries of CCNY to breakfast to discuss the "ice people-sun people" theory, Jeffries agreed to come "but said he would not eat because white people were trying to poison him. When he arrived," Koch reports, "I offered him coffee and danish, but he refused it. I then offered to be his food taster, but he still declined."

On another occasion, Jeffries observed that "AIDS coming out of a laboratory and finding itself localized in certain populations certainly has to be looked at as part of a conspiratorial process." After a Jeffries class, 10 black students told the Times reporter that AIDS and drugs were indeed part of a white conspiracy. "During the Carter administration," one said, "There was a document put out that said by the year 2000, one hundred million Africans had to be destroyed." "Because of who's being devastated the most, and growing up in the U.S. and knowing the history of slavery and racism in this country," an older black man said, "you can't be black and not feel that AIDS is some kind of experiment, some kind of plot to hit undesirable minority populations."

Nor is such speculation confined to the feverish sidewalks of New York. "Let me make a speech before a black audience," testifies William Raspberry, "and sometime during the Q & A someone is certain to ask if I believe there is a conspiracy against black Americans. It doesn't matter whether the subject is drugs or joblessness, school failure or teen pregnancy, politics or immigration. I can count on hearing some version of the conspiracy question."
The black case is only a more extreme version of the persecution complex—the feeling that someone is out to get them—to which nearly all minorities on occasion succumb. Mutual suspicion and hostility are bound to emerge in a society bent on defining itself in terms of jostling and competing groups.

IV
"The era that began with the dream of integration," Richard Rodriguez has observed, "ended up with scorn for assimilation." Instead of casting off the foreign skin, as John Quincy Adams had stipulated, never to resume it, the fashion is to resume the foreign skin as conspicuously as can be. The cult of ethnicity has reversed the movement of American history, producing a nation of minorities or at least of minority spokesmen—less interested in joining with the majority in common endeavor than in declaring their alienation from an oppressive, white, patriarchal, racist, sexist, classist society. The ethnic ideology inculcates the illusion that membership in one or another ethnic group is the basic American experience.

Most Americans, it is true, continue to see themselves primarily as individuals and only secondarily and trivially as adherents of a group. Nor is harm done when ethnic groups display pride in their historic past or in their contributions to the American present. But the division of society into fixed ethnicities nourishes a culture of victimization and a contagion of inflammable sensitivities. And when a vocal and visible minority pledges primary allegiance to their groups, whether ethnic, sexual, religious, or, in rare cases (communist, fascist), political, it presents a threat to the brittle bonds of national identity that hold this diverse and fractious society together.

A peculiarly ugly mood seems to have settled over the one arena where freedom of inquiry and expression should be most unconstrained and civility most respected—our colleges and universities. It is no fun running a university these days. Undergraduates can be cantankerous and cruel in their exclusion, their harassment, their heavy pranks, their wounding invective. Minority students, for the most understandable reasons, are often vulnerable and frightened. Racial cracks, slurs, insults, vilification pose difficult problems. Thus posters appear around the campus at the University of Michigan parodying the slogan of the United Negro College Fund: A MIND IS A TERRIBLE THING TO WASTE—ESPECIALLY ON A NIGGER. Decent white students join the protest against white bullies and thugs.

Presidents and deans begin to ask themselves, which is more important—protecting free speech or preventing racial persecution? The Constitution, Justice Holmes said, embodies "the principle of free thought—not free thought for those who agree with us but freedom for the thought that we hate." But suppose the thought we hate undercuts the Constitution's ideal of equal justice under law? Does not the First Amendment protect equality as well as liberty? How to draw a bright line between speech and behavior?

One has a certain sympathy for besieged administrators who, trying to do their best to help minority students, adopt regulations to restrict racist and sexist speech. More than a hundred institutions, according to the American Civil Liberties Union, had done so by February 1991. My own decided preference is to stand by the First Amendment and to fight speech by speech, not by censorship. But then, I am not there on the firing line.
The black case is only a more extreme version of the persecution complex to which nearly all minorities on occasion succumb.

One can even understand why administrators, not sure what best to do for minorities and eager to keep things quiet, accept—even subsidize—separatist remedies urged by student militants. They might, however, ponder Kenneth Clark's comment: "The white liberal . . . who conceives black separatism so hastily and benevolently must look to his own reasons, not the least of them perhaps an exquisite relief." And it is sad, though instructive, that the administrations especially disposed to encourage racial and ethnic enclaves—like Berkeley, Michigan, Oberlin, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst—are, Dinesh D'Souza (himself an Indian from India) points out, the ones experiencing the most racial tension. Troy Duster, a Berkeley sociologist, finds a correlation between group separatism and racial hostility among students.

Moderates who would prefer fending for themselves as individuals are bullied into going along with their group. Groups get committed to platforms and to welthey syndromes. Faculty members appease. A code of ideological orthodoxy emerges. The code's guiding principle is that nothing should be said that might give offense to members of minority groups (and, apparently, that anything can be said that gives offense to white males of European origin).

The Office of Student Affairs at Smith College has put out a bulletin listing types of oppression for people belatedly "realizing that they are oppressed." Some samples of the Smith litany of sins:

ABLEISM: Oppression of the differently abled by the temporarily able.

HETEROSEXISM: Oppression of those of sexual orientation other than heterosexual, such as gays, lesbians, and bisexuals; this can take place by not acknowledging their existence.

LOOKISM: The belief that appearance is an indicator of a person's value; the construction of a standard for beauty/attractiveness; and oppression through stereotypes and generalizations of both those who do not fit that standard and those who do.

Can they be kidding up there in Northampton? The code imposes standards of what is called, now rather derisively, "political correctness." What began as a means of controlling student incivility threatens to become, formally or informally, a means of controlling curricula and faculty too. Clark University asks professors proposing courses to explain how "pluripartisist (minority, women, etc.) views and concerns are explored and integrated in this course." A philosopher declined to sign, doubing that the university would ask professors to explain how "patriotic and pro-family values are explored and integrated."

Two distinguished American historians at Harvard, Bernard Bailyn and Stephen Thernstrom, offered a course in population history called "The Peopling of America." Articles appeared in the Harvard Crimson criticizing the professors for "racial insensitivity," and black students eventually presented them with a bill of particulars. Thernstrom, an advocate of ethnic history, the editor of the Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups, was accused of racism. He had, it developed, used the term "Indians" instead of "Native Americans." He had also referred to "Oriental" religion—the adjective was deemed "colonial and imperialistic." Bailyn had recommended diaries of Southern planters without recommending slave narratives. And so on, for six single-spaced pages.

The episode reminds one of the rightwing students who in Joe McCarthy days used to haunt the classrooms of liberal Harvard professors (like me) hoping to catch whiffs of Marxism emanating from the podium. Thernstrom decided to hell with it and gave up the course. A signal triumph for political correctness.

Those who stand up for what they believe invite smear campaigns. A favorite target these days is Diane Rovitch of Columbia's Teachers College, a first-class historian of American education, an enlightened advocate of school reform, and a steadfast champion of cultural pluralism. She is dedicated to reasoned and temperate argument and is perseveringly conciliatory rather than polemical in her approach. Perhaps the fact that she is a woman persuades ethnic chauvinists that they can bully her. Despite nasty efforts at intimidation, she continues to expose the perils of ethnocentrism with calm lucidity.

Rovitch's unpardonable offense seems to be her concern about unum as well as about pluribus—her belief that history should help us understand how bonds of cohesion make us a nation rather than an incoscrutable collection of unaffiliated groups. For in the end, the cult of ethnicity defines the republic not as a polity of individuals but as a congeries of distinct and inviolable cultures. When a student sent a memorandum to the "diversity education committee" at the University of Pennsylvania mentioning her "deep regard for the individual," a college administrator returned the paper with the word individual underlined: "This is a red flag phrase today, which is considered by many to be racist. Arguments that champion the individual over the group ultimately privileges "sic" the individuals belonging to the largest or dominant group."

The contemporary sanctification of the group puts the old idea of a coherent society at stake. Multicultural zealots reject as hegemonic the notion of a shared commitment to common ideals. How far the discourse has come from Créceurcoeur's "new race" from Tocqueville's civic participation, from Emerson's "smelting pot," from Bryce's "amazing solvent," from Myrdal's "American Creed"!

Yet what has held the American people together in the absence of a common ethnic origin has been precisely a common adherence to ideals of democracy and human rights that, too often transgressed in practice, forever goad us to narrow the gap between practice and principle.

The American synthesis has an inevitable Anglo-Saxon coloration, but it is no longer an exercise in Anglo-Saxon domination. The republic embodies ideals that transcend ethnic, religious, and political lines. It is an experiment, reasonably successful for a while, in creating a common identity for people of diverse races, religions, languages, cultures. But
The Painful Demise of Eurocentrism

Arthur Schlesinger cannot see his own Anglo-Saxon bias nor multiculturalism’s nourishing contribution to America’s core identity.

Molefi Kete Asante

Molefi Kete Asante is professor and chair of the Department of African American Studies at Temple University. He is the author of thirty-two books including three seminal works on the Afrocentric philosophy Afrocentricity, The Afrocentric Idea, and Kemet, Afrocentricity, and Knowledge.

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., won Pulitzer prizes for his books The Age of Jackson (1945) and A Thousand Days (1965). These works and the Age of Roosevelt, The Imperial Presidency, and Robert Kennedy and His Times established him as a leading American historian. Yet Schlesinger’s latest book, The Disuniting of America, serves to call into question his understanding of American history and his appreciation of diversity. As a designated great American historian, he is supposed to know something about what he writes. However, one of the most obvious manifestations of hegemonic thinking in cultural matters is pontification. Measuring the amount of pontification in The Disuniting of America, one comes away with a certain distrust of Schlesinger’s writing as well as his perspective on American society. This is doubly so if one is an African American.

Schlesinger envisions an America rooted in the past, where whites, actually Anglo-Saxon whites, defined the protocols of American society, and white culture itself represented the example to which others were forced to aspire. He loves this vision because it provides a psychological justification for the dominance of European culture in America over others. In his vision, there is little history of enslavement, oppression, dispossession, racism, or exploitation. In effect, there is no disunion in the Union; adjustments need to be made, for sure, but they are minor ripples in the perfect society. Fortunately, many whites as well as African Americans see this vision as corrupted by the arrogance of political, academic, and cultural dominance. How, they ask, can one have such a vision of America with what we know of our history? Yet this is Schlesinger’s perspective on American society.

Alas, the vision is clouded by Afrocentrists, the bad guys in Schlesinger’s book, who bring disunity to this perfect world. Trapped in his own cultural prison, Schlesinger is unable to see the present American cultural reality, and I believe he has missed the point of the past as well. The evidence suggests that he holds a nearly static view of America. Perhaps the America of his youth—its academic life, social life, business environment, and political institutions—was framed for him in some version of the white American dream.

There is, of course, a nightmarish side to Schlesinger’s vision or fantasy. He peoples his vision with negations, colored by axioms that support no truth but that are ultimately structured to uphold the status quo of white male privilege and domination. Had Schlesinger admitted this as a goal of his book, it would have allowed a more honest footing for discussion and debate. Nevertheless, this mixture of fact and fiction presents itself for analytical deinvention, not national disunity.

DISUNION AND DISBELIEF

Schlesinger might have cited any number of issues as disuniting America: unequal protection under the law, taxation without representation, gender strife, economic class antagonisms, corrupt politicians, rampant anti-Africanism, growing anti-Semitism, or pollution of the environment. Instead, he focuses on the African-American challenge to the educational system, calling it a disuniting element; indeed, he believes it is a frightening development. Why should an Afrocentric position—that is, a position where Africans describe themselves as subjects rather than objects—create such an uproar?

Are we to conclude that Schlesinger does not see the hegemonic imposition of the Eurocentric idea? Or do we conclude that he sees it and understands it and supports it? If he does not see it, then he will not understand the substance of what I am saying in this essay. Hegemonic thinking is like a person standing on the lid of a manhole. The fact that another person will rise out of that manhole means that the person standing on the lid will have to change positions.

6. NEW DIRECTIONS FOR AMERICAN HISTORY

Will the Afrocentric perspective affect the Eurocentric hegemony on information and in education? Absolutely, because our perceptions are altered by new information whether we admit it or not. A lifetime of delusion that denies Africans and Africa a place in human history creates a basic disbelief in facts that are presented in an Afrocentric framework. Indeed, *The Age of Jackson* did not indicate any real appreciation of the nature of Jackson’s racism and anti-Indian sentiments. Schlesinger’s glorification of Andrew Jackson, whom even Davy Crockett considered a scoundrel, is demonstrative of Schlesinger’s disregard for the multiracial, multicultural, pluralistic reality of American society.

Schlesinger envisions an America rooted in the past, where whites, actually Anglo-Saxon whites, represented the example to which others were forced to aspire.

One must be factual, and in trying to be factual I have always believed primary description is better than secondary interpretation. Thus, when Afrocentrists say that George Washington and Thomas Jefferson were slaveowners, *inter alia*, who did not believe in the equality of Africans, that is a fact descriptive of those two individuals. One can excuse the fact on the grounds of interpretation, one can claim ignorance, one can argue that their good points outweighed their bad points, and so on; but the fact is that they believed in the inferiority of Africans. Students must be introduced to this factual information in order to make proper assessments and judgments. Schlesinger would insist that we not mention the racist heritage of the “founding fathers” because that would create disunity. If that be creating disunity, I am guilty, as he claims in his book, and I will create more disunity. Nothing is more valuable than the truth in bringing about national integration.

Eurocentric control of space and time in publishing and the media has meant that legitimate intellectual and scholarly voices of African Americans are seldom heard by whites who refuse to read African-American scholarly journals. The *Journal of Black Studies*, the *Journal of Negro Education*, the *Journal of African Civilizations*, *Western Journal of Black Studies*, and *Imhotep* are a few of the prominent journals that are accessible to scholars. They remain relatively unread by writers such as Schlesinger, who apparently believes that there is little outside of the “white” journals worth reading. That is a serious mistake in scholarship, because reading the African-American journals would greatly increase appreciation for new findings and new ideas.

Can Schlesinger really believe that only whites or blacks who believe they are white have reasonable ideas? Afrocentrists, who got their degrees from the same institutions as white scholars, tend to have a far broader reading program that allows for more critical leverage to analysis. The fact that cyclopean stone tombs dating from 5700 B.C., among the earliest in the world, have been found in the heart of the Central African Republic may not be a part of one’s knowledge base, but if it were known, it would add to any discussion of historical time lines. Yet without reading any of my books or those of other Afrocentrists in depth, as far as I can discern, Schlesinger attempts to paint Afrocentrists as some kind of wild bunch out to create disunity in American society.

What this celebrated white American historian seeks is a dismissal of historical facts related to Africans as insignificant in the American nation. He seems to operate within a closed system of thought, and such systems are prodigious in producing closed minds. Education within such a system is found to produce those who speak a certain restrictive language, use a handed-down political vocabulary, and believe in elves.

**UNITY IN AMERICA**

The unity of America is based upon shared goals, a collective sense of mission, a common purpose, and mutual respect. It should be clear to the reader, upon reflection, that Schlesinger’s view of America is too provincial; it is as if he has not outgrown the way of thinking he expressed in *The Age of Jackson*. I believe his view is planted in the narrow confines of a particular ethnic or racial identity. Thus, it cannot produce a harvest of unity. The unity of the American nation is not a unity of historical experiences or cultural backgrounds. Because each of us could give a different version of the same story, there must be an
acceptance of pluralism without ethnic or cultural hegemony. Only in this manner can we build a common culture. For the present we have many cultures, occasionally interacting with each other, but we have only one society. This means that it is no longer viable for white cultures to parade as the only American culture.

I find it curious that Schlesinger, who has spent a lifetime championing an elitist educational program, is now interested in a multicultural one. This may be a result of his professorship at City University of New York, or of the controversy surrounding a number of his colleagues at the City University. I should not be mistaken. I like the idea that Schlesinger sees multiculturalism as important; it is just that he would be the last person I would consider knowledgeable of this field.

There is no particularist multiculturalism or pluralist multiculturalism; there is, quite simply, multiculturalism. I pointed out in response to Diane Ravitch (a deputy assistant secretary of education) who came up with the notions of particularist and pluralist multiculturalisms, that the first is an oxymoron and the second a redundancy. Multiculturalism is not a complicated proposition; it is clear and simple. In a multicultural society, there must be a multicultural curriculum, a multicultural approach to institution building, and so forth.

Afrocentrists say that one should not be able to declare competency in music in America without having been introduced to the spirituals, Duke Ellington, or the blues. Yet every year this happens in major American universities.

AFROCENTRIC ORIENTATION

What Schlesinger dislikes in the Afrocentric position is the emphasis on re-centering of African Americans in a subject position vis-à-vis history, culture, and science. However, 374 years of white domination have disoriented, dislocated, and displaced many African Americans. This is the legacy of stealing us from Africa, of dehumanizing and enslaving us. So fearful of Africans were the slave masters that they sought to rob us of our heritage, memory, languages, religion, customs, traditions, and history. In the end, it is true, some of us did lose our way and our minds, and decentered, disoriented, and often alienated—would claim that we came to America on the Mayflower.

Afrocentrists do not take anything away from white history except its aggressive urge to pose as universal.

Afrocentrism seeks to understand this phenomenon by beginning all analysis from the African person as human agent. In classes, it means that the African-American child must be connected, grounded to information presented in the same way that white children are grounded, when we discuss literature, history, mathematics, and science. Teachers who do not know this information when it comes to Africans must seek it out from those who do. Afrocentrists do not take anything away from white history except its aggressive urge to pose as universal.

The meaning of this school of thought is critical for all Americans. I make a claim that we must see ourselves within American society, with points of reference in our culture and history. Our children as well as other children must know about us in the context of our own history. The Afrocentric school of thought becomes useful for the expansion of dialogue and the widening of discourse—the proper function of education. The white self-esteem curriculum now present in most school systems is imposed as universal.

We know this curriculum is not universal, of course, but rather specific social studies and humanities information centered on a particular culture. There is nothing fundamentally wrong about a Eurocentric curriculum so long as other cultures are not denied. The real question is whether Eurocentrism can exist without denial of the Other. To speak arrogantly of this model as a conquest model is to assert a claim of right by force, not on the basis of facts nor on the ground of what is useful for this society. We ought to be able to develop a curriculum of instruction that affirms all people in their cultural heritages.

A FINISHED PARADIGM

It is bizarre to find that Schlesinger attacks my vision of a multicultural nation without having read any of my works. At the end of the twentieth century, the United States must be spared the intellectual intolerance, xenophobia, ethnic hatred, racist thinking, and hegemonic attitudes that now seem to be running rampant in Europe.

Schlesinger makes judicious use of the critical remarks of African-American scholars such as John Hope Franklin, Henry Louis Gates, and Frank Snow in order to divide African-American intellectuals into two camps. There are also women who accept the male view of history. There were Jews who accepted the German version of culture. There will always be members of the dominated group who will accept certain ideas from those dominating. We all experience our particular dislocations. But as for me, an American citizen of African descent, I shall never abandon my ancestors’ history. Neither would I expect Schlesinger to abandon his, though that is his right. Whatever he does about it, I will not say he is sowing disunity.

Dividing African scholars in order to set off conflict is an old game, but it avoids raising the issue discussed by the Afrocentrists. Why should a monocultural experience and history dominate a multicultural and multiethnic nation? There is no good answer to this question, so Schlesinger believes in shoring up the old, “perfect” order as the best procedure. But it will not wash. His description is of a paradigm that is finished. It is not enough for Schlesinger to cite majority support, since popular belief and mass acceptance are not adequate for validating ideas. Description and demonstration are the principal calling cards of proof, not authoritative pronouncements, even if they come from a well-known historian. Neither hegemony nor power can determine truth.

NATIONALITY AND CULTURE

Schlesinger’s book is unfortunate at this stage in national integration and develop-
ment. He confuses American nationality with American culture. Whether by choice or circumstance, we are American in nationality. So one can say that my nationality and citizenship are American, but my historical and cultural origins are African. My ancestors did not arrive in this country from Europe. They did not see a mountain of possibility but a valley of despair.

It is this distinction, this historical cleavage, that cannot be resolved by some mythical idea that we all came here on the Mayflower. The preferred resolution of such dual experiences is a true multiculturalism, where Europeans are seen working for national purpose alongside other people, not in a hegemonic position. This takes a measure of humility that is not evident in Schlesinger’s book. Without a reorientation from conquest, from dominance, from superiority, the whites in this country can never understand the discourse of unity expressed by Africans, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans.

I agree with Franklin Roosevelt’s observation that “Americanism is not a matter of race and ancestry but of adherence to the creed of liberty and democracy.” This means that the litmus test for Americanism must not be how Eurocentric a person becomes but whether the person adheres to the idea of mutual individual and cultural respect. One cannot equate a Chinese American’s love of Chinese motifs, food, decorations, and myths with a rejection of Americanism: It is Americanism. Of course, we all are free to reject our ethnic or cultural past, but that does not mean we do not possess culture.

Afrocentrism is not about sympathy or insult; it is about the proper presentation of factual information in a multicultural society.

Schlesinger writes in a very condescending manner: “Nor is there anything more natural than for generous-hearted people, black and white, to go along with Afrocentrism out of a decent sympathy for the insulted and injured of American civilization, either concretely or philosophically, at the same level as ancient Egypt. Even were one to take evidence from the ancient Egyptian, Hebrew, Greek, and Ethiopian peoples, one would find that the Nile Valley of Africa rather than the Tigris Euphrates Valley was considered the most ancient cradle of human civilization.”

Plato’s corpus includes twenty-eight extant dialogues; in twelve of those dialogues, he discusses Egypt, not Mesopotamia, Sumer, or Babylon. Of course, Plato himself was taught in Africa by Seknoufis and Kouノufis. He did not think of Mesopotamia as a high civilization on the level of Egypt. The Hebrew Bible mentions Egypt nearly one thousand times but refers to Mesopotamia no more than twenty times. The Ethiopians refer to Egypt, not to Mesopotamia, in their ancient sacred books, the Kebrā Nagaṣt and The Book of Henok. While I believe Mesopotamia is a significant civilization, I also believe that it is advanced as a sort of contemporary anti-African project, a kind of counterpoint to the African origin of civilization. This is why some writers claim that Mesopotamian civilization can be dated one hundred years prior to the First Egyptian Dynasty. However, dynastic Egypt was not the beginning of civilization in the Nile Valley. There had been at least sixteen kings of Upper (Southern) Egypt before Narmer (Menes), who is normally given as the first dynastic king. My point is that the ancients did not consider Mesopotamia more important than Egypt; this is preeminently a contemporary project.

Let us examine Schlesinger’s assault on the Egyptian scholarship of African scholars. He admits that he is no expert on ancient Egypt and, in a broad stroke for justification, claims, “neither are the educators and psychologists who push Afrocentrism.” I do not know what special criteria Schlesinger is using for expertise, but Cheikh Anta Diop, Theophile Obenga, Wade Nobles, Jacob Carruthers, Maulana Karenga, Asa Hilliard, and others have spent more than one hundred collective years in the study of ancient Africa. Their research and publications are accessible and well known to those of us who consider ourselves Afrocentrists. All of these scholars are students of ancient languages: Mdu Netr, the language of the ancient Egyptians, Ge’ez, Greek, and Latin. Although my knowledge of ancient languages is not
nearly at the level of the scholars I have mentioned, my familiarity with the ancient literatures is indicated in many of the books that I have written. My book Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge explores various aspects of the historiography of ancient Africa.

Schlesinger’s attack seeks to undermine the Africanness of the ancient Egyptian. Indeed, he brings three witnesses to his case: Frank Snowden, Frank Yurco, and Miriam Lichtheim. All three of these people have deeply invested interests in the Eurocentric paradigm of history (that is, the projection of Eurocentric concepts in African people). Snowden, a retired Howard University professor, has written on the African image in Greece and Rome. He does not read Mdu Netr and certainly is no scholar of ancient Africa. Yurco, a librarian at the University of Chicago, has produced nothing of the caliber of any of the Afrocentrists. From his Regenstein Library desk at the University of Chicago, Yurco has made a career of responding to Diop, Carruthers, Bern, Hilliard, and, lately, my book Kemet, Afrocentricity, and Knowledge. His ideological perspective appears to fog his analysis. His essay, cited by Schlesinger, in Biblical Archaeology Review is a nasty little piece written against Martin Bernal.

 Afrocentrists claim that Eurocentric scholars have attempted to take Egypt out of Africa and to take Africans out of ancient Egypt in a whitening process of the earliest civilizations.

Lichtheim is by far the best-known ancient Egyptian scholar, but the comment Schlesinger chooses to use from Lichtheim is rather strange. I do not wish to waste any of my time refuting the errant nonsense which is being propagated in the American black community about the Egyptians being Nubians and the Nubians being black. The Egyptians were not Nubians, and the original Nubians were not black. Nubia gradually became black because black peoples migrated northwest out of Central Africa. The “Nile Valley School” is obviously an attempt by American blacks to provide themselves with an ancient history linked to that of the high civilization of ancient Egypt.

Neither Schlesinger nor Lichtheim names or quotes any African or African-American scholar as saying anything “about the Egyptians being Nubians.” However, it is possible to say that the difference between Nubians and Egyptians was much like that of Sicilians and Italians, Icelanders and Danes, or Germans and Austrians. Lichtheim’s comment and Schlesinger’s use of it is meant to suggest that the ancient Egyptians and ancient Nubians were of different races. Nubians and Egyptians looked alike and came from the same general culture. In addition, both were black-skinned peoples.

Lichtheim’s denial of the blackness (that is, the black-skinnedness) of the ancient Nubians borders on intellectual incompetence because it disregards the available concrete evidence in texts, sculptures, paintings, and linguistics. Lichtheim’s statement that the “Egyptians were not Nubians” is correct but misleading. One can say that the French are not Spanish or the Swedes are not Norwegians, but that is not a statement about the color of skin. I can say that the Yoruba are not Ibo, but that tells me something about ethnicity and perhaps national identity, not about their complexes. So to say that the Egyptians were not Nubians is to say no more than that the two people who lived along the Nile occupied different geographical areas.

The fact is that the Egyptians saw themselves and Nubians as looking exactly alike in physical appearance as well as dress. One only needs to know the first ethnology in the world, the Biban el-Moluk bas-relief from the tomb of Sesostris I, to see that Egyptians painted themselves and Nubians as coal black and whites and Asians as lighter in complexion. There are four people on the bas-relief, representing four different cultures: Egyptian, Nehasi (Nubian), Namou (Asian), and Tamhou (Aryan). The Egyptian and the Nehasi are exactly alike, even to their clothes. They are visibly different from the Namou and the Tamhou.

But the greater nonsense is Lichtheim’s statement that the “original Nubians were not black.” Does Lichtheim mean to imply that they were what we would call white today? Does she mean they were lighter complexioned blacks? Or does Lichtheim mean to suggest, as some white Egyptologists suggested in the past, that the people were black-skinned whites? The problem here is racist thinking. Since the discourse under which white academics have often operated is Eurocentric, it is difficult for them to admit that civilization started in Africa and that it was black people who started it.

As far as we know, human beings originated on the African continent and migrated outward. No scientist suggests that the people who migrated outward and who peopled the continent of Africa were white.4 Indeed, the monogenesis thesis argues that hominids, the Grijaldi, migrated to Europe and emerged after the Ice Age as white in complexion because of environmental and climatic factors.

To apply e pluribus unum, a term of political structure, to the American cultural reality is to miss the point of both politics and culture. A nation of more than 130 cultural groups cannot hope to have all of them Anglo-Saxonized.

The Nubians were not only black physically but shared with the Egyptians and others of the Nile Valley the same African cultural and philosophical modalities. Present-day Egypt, like present-day America, is not a reflection of its ancient past. Arabs came from Arabia with the jihads of the seventh century A.D. Therefore, Arabic is not indigenous to Africa, as English is not indigenous to the United States.

The aim of Schlesinger’s remarks and Lichtheim’s quote is not the Nubian issue but the question of the complexion of the ancient Egyptians. Afrocentrists claim that Eurocentric scholars have attempted to take Egypt out of Africa and to take Africans out of ancient Egypt in a whitening process of the earliest civilizations. Children’s books still exist with Egyptians looking like Scandinavians.

The evidence of the blackness of the ancient Egyptians is overwhelming. The early Greeks said that the Egyptians were black. They never wrote that the Egyptians were white. In fact, Aristotle wrote in *Physiognomonica* that both the Egyptians and the Ethiopians (Nubians) were black. Herodotus writes in *Histories* that the people of Colchis must be Egyptians because “they are black-skinned and have woolly hair.” One could cite Sfrabo, Pindar, and Apollonius of Rhodes as making similar attestations about how the Egyptians looked.

Thus, Lichtheim’s statement is not only errant but pure nonsense. It flies in the face of all available evidence and, beyond that, it defies logic. Perhaps this style of written pontification by white scholars is the source of confusion in the minds of the American public. Lichtheim proposes what Bernal has aptly called the Aryan Model of Ancient History, which suggests, among other things, that civilization could not have started in Africa, and, if civilization is found in Africa, it had to be the results of an external movement into Africa.

**E PLURIBUS UNUM**

Schlesinger likes to quote Diane Ravitch. But both Schlesinger and Ravitch are wrong when they suggest that *e pluribus unum* meant out of many cultures, one. Actually, this expression was initially applied to the fact that several colonies could produce one federal government. Thus, out of many colonies, one central government. To apply this term of political structure to the American cultural reality is to miss the point of both politics and culture. A nation of more than 130 cultural groups cannot hope to have all of them Anglo-Saxonized. Such a vision is disastrous and myopic. What we can wish for and realize is a society of mutual respect, dynamism, and decency. Rather than labeling or setting cultural groups against each other, we should empower a vision that sees the American kaleidoscope of cultures as uniquely fortunate. Schlesinger sees multiculturalism as a danger. I see it as a further indication that the shift to a new, more operable paradigm in this mighty nation is well on its way.

---