

What's Happened to Liberal Education?

Carol Iannone

What has happened to liberal education in America is part and parcel of what has happened to liberal society as a whole. Both are being transformed into their opposites.

For the last couple of decades and more, higher education has consecrated itself to the utopian project of diversity, group equality, and multiculturalism, thus abandoning its core mission, which is the transmission of knowledge and the search for truth. Liberal society too has embarked on the utopian project of diversity, group equality, and multiculturalism, thus departing from the belief in Western civilization and the ideals of individual rights and equality before the law that have been the bedrock of the American system. There is little dispute about the fact that these momentous developments have taken place; the question to be addressed here is, *how* did they come about? To begin to find an answer, we turn to Allan Bloom, one of the most astute critics of modern liberal education and contemporary society. Bloom ignited nationwide interest in the decline of liberal education with his engagingly written and spectacularly best selling book, *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987), and he thus provides a logical starting point and guide for the discussion, though he is not, I would add, an ultimate authority. While Bloom's distinction between the old "natural-rights" liberalism which he admires and the "openness" liberalism which he says has replaced it is most illuminating, the older liberalism, I will argue, was marked by inherent inadequacies that may have rendered it incapable of defending itself from the more radical contemporary version.

What Is Man?

In Bloom's view, liberal education must be "guided by the awareness, or the divination, that there is a human nature," and that the educator's task is to assist in its fulfillment. Education should help students begin the "search for a good life," by posing the question, "What is man?" and posing it "in relation to his highest aspirations as opposed to his low and common needs."¹

But, Bloom argues, alongside such exalted goals, education serves the particular requirements of each particular society:

Every educational system . . . wants to produce a certain kind of human being In some nations the goal was the pious person, in others the warlike, in others

Carol Iannone is editor-at-large of *Academic Questions* and a vice president of the National Association of Scholars.

the industrious. Always important is the political regime, which needs citizens who are in accord with its fundamental principle. Aristocracies want gentlemen, oligarchies men who respect and pursue money, and democracies lovers of equality. Democratic education, whether it admits it or not, wants and needs to produce men and women who have the tastes, knowledge, and character supportive of a democratic regime.

For Bloom, America represented an ideal fusion of the two imperatives, uniting the good—based on an understanding of human nature and of the “natural right” that proceeds from human nature—with the good of “one’s own”—one’s own family, culture, nation, and so on. In traditional societies, such as those of Europe, national identity is much more strongly tied to history, custom, language, culture, and ethnicity than in America. “Belonging to one of these peoples may be explained as a sentiment,” Bloom explains, “an attachment to one’s own, akin to the attachment to father and mother,” inspiring an “instinctive” kind of patriotism. America, on the other hand, fostered a “reflected, rational, calm, even self-interested loyalty—not so much to the country but to the form of government and its rational principles,” namely, freedom and equality. It is thus “possible to become an American in a day,” Bloom asserts, simply by adhering to these principles, while it is “impossible, or it was until only yesterday, to become a Frenchman,” “for a Frenchman is a complex harmony, or dissonance, of historic echoes, from birth on.”

This “entirely new experience in politics” called for a “new education.” Above all, the democratic man

was to know the rights doctrine; the Constitution, which embodied it; and American history, which presented and celebrated the founding of a nation “conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” A powerful attachment to the letter and the spirit of the Declaration of Independence gently conveyed, appealing to each man’s reason, was the goal of the education of democratic man.

Moreover, young people needed to study the civilization out of which these doctrines arose, to consider the alternatives to democracy embodied in the tradition, and to arrive at a considered appreciation of what the American experiment signified. More broadly, students needed to be acquainted with the ideas and sentiments of the great cultural artifacts of Western civilization. This too would bring them into a national conversation that would signify their participation in our society—a society built not on ethnicity but on ideas, a nation bound together not by shared race, but, paradoxically, by shared allegiance to universal truths.

The End of Majoritarianism

What Bloom saw as the genius of the American system—its capacity to combine the good of our own nation and culture with natural or universal prin-

ciples standing above and apart from it—was the very thing that came most under attack in the academic revolution that grew out of the campus disturbances of the 1960s. Far from being honored for their embodiment of universal truths, our political arrangements were branded a pretense by which the majority preserved its privileges at the expense minority groups. A reasoned allegiance to the majority culture was eventually replaced by slavish accommodation to minority cultures. “For the Founders,” Bloom explains, “minorities are in general bad things, mostly identical to factions, selfish groups who have no concern for the common good.” Bloom traces the anti-majoritarian strain of thought to early in the twentieth century, but it was during the continued aftershocks of the cultural revolution of the Sixties that it came to fruition, and protecting minority interests became the first order of government. By now, of course, the protection of minorities has broadened into the enforced and ecstatic celebration of ourselves as a multicultural society committed above all to “diversity,” in which all cultural expressions are equal.

This constituted a profound change in America’s self-understanding. Under the old order, America was fulfilled by the affirmation of a shared human nature and of the rights and common citizenship proceeding from that shared nature, broadening over time to incorporate people from ever more diverse backgrounds, whose acceptance as equal citizens was assured by their commitment to natural rights. In the new order, America becomes a universal nation of diverse groups, in which all the groups, except for the majority group, now designated as European-Americans, demand and receive separate and official recognition and are entitled to the proportional representation which has become the new understanding of “equality,” with the whole project held together by political correctness. P.C. forbids any criticism of the respective minority groups’ agendas, claims, and conduct, or even any mention of their negative aspects, except perhaps to blame these on the majority.

The transformation of the civil rights movement illustrates this momentous change in the definition of American identity. “In its early days,” Bloom explains, “all the significant [civil rights] leaders, in spite of tactical and temperamental differences,”

relied on the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. They could charge whites not only with the most monstrous injustices but also with contradicting their own most sacred principles. The blacks were the true Americans in demanding the equality that belongs to them as human beings by natural and political right.

On the other hand, the “Black Power movement that supplanted the older civil rights movement” presaged the identity politics that now informs both education and society in general. Black Power, writes Bloom,

had at its core the view that the Constitutional tradition was always corrupt and was constructed as a defense of slavery. Its demand was for black identity, not universal rights. Not rights but power counted. It insisted on respect for blacks as blacks, not as human beings simply.

The new order, like the old, requires a specific type of education aimed at creating a specific type of human being appropriate to the regime: the “culturally competent” person, the person who accepts the artificial constructs of multiculturalism and the intellectual lies, half-truths, and distortions attendant upon it. Moreover, while the old education was devoted to developing judgment and refining the sensibilities by making distinctions between good and bad, better and worse, the new education is devoted to inclusion, or, as Bloom calls it, openness, which is really indiscriminateness—the imperative to avoid judgment among various cultural expressions. Men are no longer “permitted to seek for the natural human good and admire it when found, for such discovery is coeval with the discovery of the bad and contempt for it,” Bloom explains. In the new dispensation, education ceases to be guided by the divination that there is a human nature, or by a shared belief in rationality and truth, or by the accumulated wisdom of the Western tradition, but only by what the new factions *say* it is, namely a program to achieve “justice” by advancing the power of formerly “oppressed” groups over their former “oppressors.”

The New Curriculum

The attack on truth, and the attack on the academic and literary tradition as a particular expression of the search for truth, were part of one movement. Central to the revolution, therefore, was the targeting of the traditional curriculum, the works that comprised it, and the culture it represented. All were caricatured as instruments of a partisan political agenda, the aim of which, the radicals claimed, was to support the power structure of the oppressors (white European males) over the oppressed (everybody else). Traditional works were “de-privileged,” stripped of their high status—not on account of any alleged inferior worth—since the very concept of “worth” was a mere mask for white male power—but on account of their being white and male; while minority and feminist works were “privileged,” granted high status, not on account of any alleged *superior* worth—since “worth,” once again, was a mere mask for white male power—but on account of their supposed capacity to “represent” minority and female identities.

Far from accepting the existence of a human nature, the academic insurgents, aided by various leftist and quasi-Marxist movements and “theories”—feminism, deconstruction, new historicism, postcolonialism—fashioned various “studies,” all based on some aspect of cultural, ethnic, or sexual identity—African-American, Hispanic, Women’s, Gay and Lesbian, among others. These

studies elevated subjective experience and advanced themselves through the notion that groups that had purportedly been excluded from consideration were now entitled to “recognition” as the “Other.” This meant that there were no standards by which to judge these newly formed fields, but that they and their “truth” claims—their “narratives”—had simply to be acknowledged and incorporated into the curriculum, exactly as they were. Thus, even as the old notion of objective truth and the culture that was based on it and the scholarly standards that derived from it were debunked as false masks of power, the new cultures with their anti-majority agendas were elevated into absolutes.

Entire liberal-arts disciplines such as literature, history, and art history were radicalized, their standards torn down, their traditions of scholarship abandoned, in order to advance the egalitarian political agenda. The reconstituted disciplines are now full of multicultural sub-specialties. One curious journalist searched the Brown University catalogue for the 1999–2000 academic year and found 42 courses with the words “black” or “African” in the course descriptions, two courses mentioning the Constitution—one of them “Race, Ethnicity, and the Law in the United States, 1780-1900”—and no courses mentioning Washington, Lincoln, or the Federalist Papers. A handful of courses mentioned the American Revolution and the Civil War, but it’s not hard to see where the weight lies at Brown, with courses like “African Cinema,” “The Search for Black Identity in America,” “Black Leadership in Ethnic Communities,” and “Black Lavender: A Study of Black Gay and Lesbian Plays, and Dramatic Constructions in American Theatre.”²

Those of us who had grown up thinking of the great works of Western culture as a noble and inspiring heritage open to all who were attracted to it, and of America as a blessed nation whose ongoing achievement of constructing a vast and free yet unified society inspired profound affection and loyalty, were amazed to see our shared culture and history suddenly re-defined in terms of class or group warfare. The anger, ingratitude, and abysmal historical ignorance that fed and were fed by this propaganda assumed a sacred tinge of revolutionary righteousness, and this righteousness, combined with threats, intimidation, and the occasional violence of leftist and minority activism, proved extraordinarily effective in winning concessions from a majority that was suddenly seized with inexplicable guilt and less inexplicable fear.³

Even as the new dispensation granted unprecedented and undeserved power to the minority groups as groups, however, it also enslaved them spiritually. As Thomas Short warned in these pages years ago:

The new, “multicultural” curriculum is not a curriculum for free men and women, prepared to take control of their own futures. It is, instead, a curriculum for those who will remain slaves to their origins, to their sex, race, age, class, handicap, or other peculiarity. It is, thus, inimical to democracy.⁴

The Rise of Hyperindividualism

Connected to these changes is yet another development that has been extensively treated in *AQ*, particularly in the hilarious satires on the contemporary academy by Thomas Reeves.⁵ I am speaking of the emergence of the candy-coated, fun-centered university, in which professors have become mere facilitators and attendants—even porters and valets—to their students, many of whom arrive on today's campuses expecting to be served, stroked, and entertained rather than to discipline themselves to the task of learning.

The fault lies less in these pampered young people than in the system that has, quite deliberately, shaped them to be that way. Just as the loss of faith in our common culture has led to the fatuous idealization of ethnic and cultural minorities, so the loss of belief in truth and scholarly inquiry has led to the idealization of unformed youth still in or barely out of their teens. With a constant eye on the ubiquitous and all important student evaluations that have given youth the power over their elders that Plato portrayed in Book VIII of *The Republic*, professors have learned to fuss over every claim, impulse, and utterance issued by their demanding charges.

In a recent article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Kenyon College's writer-in-residence, P.F. Kluge, describes the transformation of one of the country's premier liberal arts institutions into "Kamp Kenyon"—a virtual recreational facility, replete with theatres, courts, rinks, pools, and juice bars, and presided over by an army of counselors, advisors, and therapists who coddle the students through every step of their education. At the suggestion of the student affairs office that the faculty devise "comfort zones" for students during the stress of examination time, one department arranged for local masseuses to administer in-chair back rubs. Professional masseuses are not the only adults who cater to students' personal needs at Kamp Kenyon. For some years now, the administration has prompted faculty to meet incoming freshman in the school's parking lots to help them move their considerable equipages—including the massive sound systems that today's young people cannot live without—into their dormitory rooms.⁶

Those of us from an earlier generation who came perhaps from immigrant or working class backgrounds and arrived awestruck at even modestly ranked campuses, feeling immensely privileged to be entering a community of ideas and culture, are torn between laughter and pain at such stories. Kluge himself contrasts the first-year experience at today's Kenyon with his own experience as an entering freshman in the early 1960s, when the "eloquent, sardonic" chairman of the English department, Denham Sutcliffe, soberly addressed the students on the seriousness of the intellectual journey they were about to take, and read to them from Pope's "Essay on Man."

The Opposition

In reaction to this radical transformation of liberal education and liberal society, a revival of conservative, traditional, and classical liberal thought on many levels of American culture took place in the 1980s and 1990s. In the academic arena, the National Association of Scholars was formed, joining Sidney Hook's University Center for Rational Alternatives in combat against the radicalized academy, and later joined in turn by yet other organizations. With the fall of Soviet Communism and the end of the Cold War, the domestic "culture war," of which the battle to restore higher education was a crucial part, assumed even greater importance. Writing in the *National Interest* in 1993, Irving Kristol stirringly described this culture war as yet another cold war:

So far from having ended, my cold war has increased in intensity, as sector after sector of American life has been ruthlessly corrupted by the liberal ethos. It is an ethos that aims simultaneously at political and social collectivism on the one hand, and moral anarchy on the other. It cannot win, but it can make us all losers. We have, I do believe, reached a critical turning point in the history of the American democracy. *Now that the other "Cold War" is over, the real cold war has begun.* We are far less prepared for this cold war, far more vulnerable to our enemy, than was the case with our victorious war against a global Communist threat. We are, I sometimes feel, starting from ground zero, and it is a conflict I shall be passing on to my children and grandchildren. But it is a far more interesting cold war—intellectually interesting, spiritually interesting—than the war we have so recently won, and I rather envy those young enough for the opportunities they will have to participate in it.

Thanks to intellectual commitments of the kind expressed so nobly by Kristol, the academic traditionalists achieved some important victories. In the late 1980s and early '90s, their critiques of campus outrages helped make political correctness a topic in the mainstream media and even an everyday expression in the popular culture. Books emerged exposing various aspects of academic decline and irresponsible scholarship: Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987), Roger Kimball's *Tenured Radicals* (1991), Dinesh D'Souza's *Illiberal Liberalism* (1991), and Christina Hoff Sommers's *Who Stole Feminism* (1994) were among the first of many. In the ensuing years the traditionalists launched initiatives throughout the country to create and preserve enclaves for liberal education and Great Books curricula.

As if to bear out Kristol's contention that a critical turning point had been reached in the history of American democracy, a raging battle over racial preferences in higher education was fought out in the courts during the 1990s and early 2000s, with the anti-affirmative action forces winning some major victories. In 2003, however, giving unprecedented approval to racial preferences in university admissions in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, the unelected justices of the United States Supreme Court changed America into a society constitutionally committed to group rights, a.k.a. "diversity." Those traditionalists who did not simply throw up their hands and surrender to this revolutionary victory of the

left (as many did), now faced as a grim reality the “twilight struggle” that Kristol had foreseen.

Too Universal for Our Own Good?

Why did a political and cultural system built on universal truths fragment into diversity and relativism?

Part of the answer has already been touched on. The Black Power movement became the model for the anti-majoritarian identity politics of an array of variously defined groups. But this movement was soon fortified by another development in American society that also rose to the surface in the post-1960s period. To understand this, we return again to *The Closing of the American Mind*.

Bloom observes that “the root of the change in morals” (by which he means the defining of America as a *pluribus* rather than an *unum*) “was the presence in the United States of men and women of a great variety of nations, religions, and races, and the fact that many were treated badly because they belonged to these groups.” In one sense, Bloom is referring to the waves of immigration that brought millions of Europeans to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and whose presence on our shores sparked the notion of a radically redefined American culture. Speaking in the name of these groups, anti-majoritarian writers of the 1920s and ‘30s such as Horace Kallen articulated a proto-multicultural vision of America as a collection of semi-autonomous nationalities. Fortunately, these profoundly un-American ideas, though reflecting a discontent with the majority culture on the part of some ethnic minority intellectuals, failed to find any foothold in the mainstream institutions of that time or in the immigrant communities themselves. Thus the great waves of European immigration of 1880–1920 did not fundamentally change the American identity. Bloom’s observation about ethnic diversity leading to what he calls a “change in morals” therefore seems more apt with regard to the demographic changes resulting from the more recent post 1960s immigration—changes that have been used to feed the multicultural ideology that was in the process of taking over American education even as Bloom was writing *The Closing of the American Mind*.

As was true of the earlier waves of immigration, so it was true of the later, that “the natural rights inherent in our regime are perfectly adequate to the solution of this problem [the presence of “outsiders”], provided these outsiders adhere to them (i.e., they become insiders by adhering to them).” However, Bloom continues, “this did not satisfy the thinkers who influenced our educators,” for those thinkers wanted economic and cultural equality. As every American school child *used* to understand, true equality of political rights—the very foundation of the old liberal order—does not lead to economic or any other types of equality, although the civic equality it produced was once a matter of great pride for Americans up and down the economic ladder.

Instead, the “outsiders,” or rather their leaders (which in practice amounts to the same thing), resisted having “to give up their ‘cultural’ individuality and make themselves into that universal, abstract being who participates in natural rights.” Indeed, they became angry “at the majority who imposed a ‘cultural’ life on the nation to which the Constitution is indifferent,” that of the dominant Anglocentric, or WASP, majority, “with its traditions, its literature, its tastes, its special claim to know and supervise the language, and its Protestant religions.”

Just as the nation’s changing demographic profile contributed to the multicultural re-definition of America as a collection of equal cultures with no central culture, so the greatly expanded admission of minorities and women to universities helped foster the multicultural re-definition of education. The expanded admission in itself need not have produced this outcome, of course, but the way in which it was facilitated did. For as the Black Power movement demanded that blacks in America be respected as blacks, not simply as human beings or as Americans, so the newly admitted groups on campuses demanded to be recognized as blacks, Hispanics, women, and so on, not simply as students. These demands were fueled by the reality that many of the new students had been admitted under significantly lowered standards, and that many of their professors had been expressly designated as advocates of group identity. These radically new institutional facts inevitably generated social and political pressures that precipitated massive changes in the curriculum, as the newly favored groups insisted on academic courses specially designed to promote minority group identity and advance minority group interests, even while denigrating American culture and Western civilization.

No one, at the start of the universalist experiment, seemed to have anticipated that any of this might happen. None of the champions of the old liberalism, including perhaps Bloom himself, seemed to have asked himself: “If America is indeed an ‘idea’ (or ‘proposition’ or ‘creedal’) nation, and not a historically grounded, particularist culture, and if all that is needed to become an American is that single day in which a former ‘outsider’ accepts the ‘idea,’ what will happen if the ‘outsiders’ refuse to accept the idea, or redefine it as a form of majoritarian oppression?” Well, what *would* happen in that case—what, in fact, *has* happened—is that liberal individual rights have been substantially displaced by socialistic group rights, and the former common culture has been replaced by multiculturalism. Deprived of the support and authority of the Western and American culture that was its carrier, liberal individualism (reversing Bloom’s tale of happy assimilation) was overthrown in a day, and group entitlements became the organizing principle of a new America.

Under this new system, the very notion of a common American culture in which all may share is gleefully mocked—in *mainstream* publications. Writing in the *Los Angeles Times*, liberal historian Stanley Karnow observes the effects

of the demographic changes brought about by the post-1965 immigration, and, by no coincidence, resurrects the name of Horace Kallen:

The “melting pot” concept . . . turned out to be an illusion, primarily because people sought to preserve their distinct identities. We are closer to the notion of “cultural pluralism” broached in 1925 by the Jewish philosopher Horace Kallen. Dismayed by the thought of dissolving his pedigree in an Anglocentric caldron, he suggested a “loose federation of nationalities . . . cooperating voluntarily through a multiplicity of autonomous institutions.”

While “die-hard conformists,” as Karnow calls them, feared and denounced Kallen’s vision of a disunited America, he was, Karnow asserts with undisguised *schadenfreude*, “remarkably prescient . . . The syrupy Norman Rockwell illustration of the country as an exclusive WASP domain has faded into oblivion as we evolve into a land of diverse minorities.” While crowing over the destruction of America’s historic Anglo-Protestant culture, Karnow nevertheless sees some possible problems, namely that

unum may be eclipsed by *pluribus*, and we become a fragmented society. The phenomenon is apparent on college campuses, where student activists, prodded by their politically correct professors, stridently clamor for segregated dining halls, fraternities, lounges and curriculums.⁷

Thus, having celebrated America’s transformation into a collection of ethnic nationalities, Karnow is shocked, shocked that these ethnicities want separate curricula and campus facilities. Clearly, Karnow’s “second thoughts” are not serious. As liberals are wont to do, he is merely indulging in a bit of insincere regret about the ruinous impact on society of his own ideology, before he proceeds once again toward the abyss, gleefully dragging the rest of us along with him.

The fatal error of the old liberal universalism, which opened the way to Kallen-type pluralism, lay in the widespread liberal belief that the Constitution has no cultural context. Important American thinkers from John Jay in the late eighteenth century to Samuel Huntington today have rejected this notion, arguing that the Constitution, while it does not, of course, formally recognize any culture, depends upon a specific cultural formation shared by the majority of the citizenry. As Huntington summarizes it in a recent article:

Most Americans see the creed [of the Declaration of Independence] as the crucial element of their national identity. The creed, however, was the product of the distinct Anglo-Protestant culture of the founding settlers. Key elements of that culture include the English language; Christianity; religious commitment; English concepts of the rule of law, including the responsibility of rulers and the rights of individuals; and dissenting Protestant values of individualism, the work ethic, and the belief that humans have the ability and the duty to try to create a heaven on earth, a “city on a hill.”

In the past, Huntington continues, “millions of immigrants were attracted to the United States because of this culture and the economic opportunities and political liberties it made possible.” While these newcomers made contributions that “modified and enriched the Anglo-Protestant culture of the founding settlers,” the “essentials of that founding culture remained the bedrock of U.S. identity . . . *at least until the last decades of the 20th century*” (emphasis added). By way of illustration, Huntington asks if the United States would be the country it is “if it had been settled in the 17th and 18th centuries not by British Protestants but by French, Spanish, or Portuguese Catholics? The answer is clearly no,” Huntington answers. “It would not be the United States; it would be Quebec, Mexico, or Brazil.”⁸

Striking a note similar to Huntington’s, Bloom also acknowledges a cultural aspect to American identity, a broadly religious one:

In the United States, practically speaking, the Bible was the only common culture, one that united simple and sophisticated, rich and poor, young and old, and—as the very model for a vision of the order of the whole of things, as well as the key to the rest of Western art, the greatest works of which were in one way or another responsible to the Bible—provided access to the seriousness of books.

Though Bloom makes it clear that this Bible-based outlook was an organic feature of the common American culture of the past, his overall treatment in *The Closing of the American Mind* tends to present the natural-rights philosophy as a sufficient basis for American identity. In invoking, and then forgetting, the formative Biblical dimension of America, Bloom seems to replicate the fatal error made by the old liberalism of which he is such an eloquent exponent, namely, to make *explicit* the regime’s universal liberal principles, while leaving *implicit* its historical, religious, and cultural substance. As a consequence of this formal silence as to its underpinnings, American culture is increasingly defined as really *nothing*, thus paving the way for the multicultural takeover by other cultures and sub-cultures.

Back to Basics

To return to where we began, any civilized society—and not just a democracy—is constituted of two complimentary realizations: the shared belief in a transcendent truth, and the concrete embodiment of that truth in the society’s mores, customs, institutions, and cultural and religious expressions. Particularism in this sense is not mere tribalism or exclusivity; it is an expression of the natural need for a larger whole of which we feel ourselves a part and through which we realize ourselves as concrete human beings participating both in a distinct culture and way of life, *and* in truths that are common, at least potentially, to all mankind.

It was the old liberalism’s definition of America as a rarefied abstraction, without a culture of its own, that helped create the hunger for multiculturalism.

A publication of the American Association of Colleges and Universities designed to promote diversity in higher education, *The Drama of Diversity and Democracy*, calls attention to the inadequacy of the concept of “the rights-bearing individual, autonomous, unfettered, self-determining,” and suggests that “as human beings, each of us must have a place, traditions, webs of associations to which we centrally and vitally belong, where we are readily recognized, where we do not have to explain each aspect of ourselves, our histories, our idiosyncrasies, our standpoints.”⁹ As this passage suggests, there are some acolytes of multiculturalism who see it not as a revolutionary movement aimed at group power and group revenge, but as an expression of the natural human need for a sense of wholeness and belonging, an experience they find lacking in a liberal education and a liberal society that have been abstracted from their cultural base. They thus fall prey to the false particularisms of diversity offered by ideologues who are eager to exploit such desires for political gain. As C.S. Lewis remarks in *The Abolition of Man*, “By starving the sensibility of our pupils we only make them easier prey to the propagandist when he comes. For famished nature will be avenged and a hard heart [i.e., a heart formed by abstractions] is no infallible protection against a soft head [i.e. a head that is prey to multiculturalist propaganda].”

Just as America with its natural-rights philosophy could not have come into being without the underpinning of a particular cultural essence, we have no hope today of restoring America without a renewed appreciation of that essence. We need to remind ourselves that the dominant Anglo-based culture—like any worthy culture—united the universal with the particular, in literature and education as well as in the culture as a whole. We read Hawthorne and Melville, Emerson and Thoreau, not because they are white Anglo-Protestant males, but because their work uniquely defines an American character and sensibility, while still speaking to the larger human condition. Thus Melville and Hawthorne convey a tragic vision of the individual in the American setting of which most multicultural works are utterly bereft, due to their contemporary ideological view of human suffering as the result of oppression. Melville’s great and wonderfully fantastical novel, *Moby Dick*, can tell us more about our multicultural project and its potential for disaster than we may care to know, and his engaging short story, “Benito Cereno,” is a letter-perfect allegory of America’s blind refusal to recognize the nature of its terrorist enemies before the September 11th attack. Hawthorne’s evocative short story, “My Kinsman, Major Molineaux,” is an exposure of the dark side of revolution and the leveling effects of egalitarian thought. His magnificent *Scarlet Letter* is a study of the lonely precincts of the Puritan soul, but also a tale of the transformation of suffering and isolation into wisdom and affective connection that is possible only in a morally serious society. The core culture represented by such canonical works was open enough to allow itself to be expanded by writers from all sorts of backgrounds. To disparage our culture as the product of

an illegitimate privileged class is to cut the roots of the national memory that ultimately informs and nourishes us all.

Notes

1. *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987). All quotations from this book come from pages 19–61.
2. Jonah Goldberg, “Black History Month: Why? And The Ivy League’s Misplaced Emphasis,” *National Review Online*, 15 February 2001.
3. Bloom maintains that the attack on the American Founding preceded the countercultural outbreak of the Sixties. Marxism, Pragmatism, and even the Southern Partisan movement strove to demean that great achievement long before America began to be spelled with a “k.” Still, as far as the academy was concerned, the broad outlines and strictures of liberal education held up under these assaults. The old Marxists and Pragmatists, pernicious as their influence may have been at times, mainly adhered to the normal rules of scholarship and argumentation, and had a kind of appreciation for the cultural tradition even as they assailed it. So, too, the philosophical sceptics and logical positivists managed to thrive within accepted scholarly boundaries and without undermining the basic liberal arts disciplines such as literature and history.
4. Thomas Short, “What Shall We Defend?” *Academic Questions* (Fall 1991): 18.
5. See Spring 2001, Fall 2001, and Spring 2003. See also my article, “Turning from Truth to Dubious Pursuits,” *Academic Questions* (Spring 1999): 14.
6. P.F. Kluge, “Our Coddled Students,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 21 February 2003.
7. Stanley Karnow, “Keep Your Tired, Poor Stereotypes,” *Los Angeles Times*, 24 February 2004.
8. Samuel Huntington, “The Hispanic Challenge,” *Foreign Policy* (March/April 2004). See also Lawrence Auster, “America: Multiethnic, Not Multicultural,” *Academic Questions* (Fall 1991): 88.
9. *The Drama of Diversity and Democracy*, publication of the American Association of Colleges and Universities (Washington, D.C., 1995), 18, 29.