

BOOKS, ARTICLES, AND ITEMS OF ACADEMIC INTEREST

Compiled, with Commentary, by Carol Iannone

American Education as Disneyland?

Diane Ravitch writes of the truly idiotic results of a 1976 California law that mandates positive portrayals of specified groups in school textbooks. Recently, for example, Hindu organizations complained of descriptions of the caste system and the treatment of women in the India of the past. One group wanted the statement that women had “fewer” rights in ancient India changed to “different” rights. “PC Textbooks Full of Skewed History,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 May 2006.

What an irony! America has truly become a Disneyland, a World’s Fair, a theme park in which one can visit prettified exhibits of various cultures. Instead of immigrants coming to America and being grateful to leave behind the backwardness, the stifling customs, the bitter history, the sectarian violence of their homelands, they want to falsify these histories and convey only positive impressions of their backgrounds. So, American children learn of all the sins and faults of their own history, while absorbing sanitized versions of the history of other cultures.

Is it any wonder that a few decades of this has produced a generation so steeped in white guilt, as Shelby Steele writes (“White Guilt and the Western Past: Why is America So Delicate with the Enemy?” *Opinion Journal*, 2 May 2006), that it can no longer exercise authority in upholding American ideals?

Yale Alums Roused to Action

Opposition has arisen from Yale alumni to the admission of Sayed Rahmatullah Hashemi, a former ambassador for the Taliban, as a student at Yale. Clint Taylor, one of the founders of the blog *Nail Yale* (a reference to the Taliban’s cruelty to women who wore nail polish), says, “We wanted to make it clear that alumni were upset about this. It’s a betrayal of Yale’s core values. We’re still at war with the Taliban. They’re massacring schoolteachers in Afghanistan and fighting American soldiers.” Alan Finder, “Request Stokes Debate over Yale Student with a Taliban Past,” *New York Times*, 4 May 2006.

More Fallout from Lawrence Summers Debacle

The Department of Education and the National Science Foundation are using Title IX to conduct a review of math, physics, and engineering departments at selected universities to root out supposed bias against women and girls. Although most people associate Title IX with mandating gender equity in

college sports, Jessica Gavora writes that Title IX is in fact a sweeping law that applies to every aspect of education ("The Math and Science of Quotas: Title IX Is Alive and Well in the Bush Education Department," *Weekly Standard*, 24 April 2006). Gavora indicates that the Department of Education has backed away from some of the worst aspects that the new efforts seem to portend, namely actual *quotas* for women in these fields, as has been mandated by Title IX in sports. Nevertheless, the review of math and science departments is ongoing, according to Christina Hoff Sommers ("Title IX Shouldn't Be Used as an Academic Weapon," *USA Today*, 17 May 2006).

And how have feminists used Title IX in college sports? According to Sommers, in order "to achieve the illusion of equity, men's participation in sports is being calibrated to the level of female interest. The unhappy result is that men's wrestling, diving, and gymnastic teams have been decimated, along with associated scholarship opportunities." As Gavora puts it, "in the 1990s, for every woman who gained an opportunity to play organized collegiate sports, 3.4 men had the opportunity taken away from them."

One can only say to the feminists: nice work, girls. It used to be said sometimes that women don't play fair, but of course that's just a stereotype. Isn't it?

Universities Train for Jihad?

The *Los Angeles Times* reports that there is an "effort by terrorist networks to use universities . . . to replace former training camps in Afghanistan." (Sebastian Rotella, "Terrorists Seen Turning to Campuses for Skills: France's Arrests of Students with Alleged Ties to Militants Point to New Kind of Training Camp," 13 April 2006.) The fact that so many Muslims are studying engineering, electronics, telecommunications, and computer science provides opportunities for jihad because they can orient their studies to learn terrorist techniques.

The *Times* article refers mainly to France, but Christopher Orlet wonders in the *American Spectator* what America is doing about the possibility that such recruitment might be taking place in the United States ("Osama U.," 25 April 2006). He finds that "Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has announced that in an effort to spread democracy to the Middle East more Iranian students will be issued visas."

"Iranian students," Orlet wonders. "Where have we heard that before? How about the U.S. embassy hostage crisis? Time for a reality check. Does anyone seriously believe that Iranian students will gain a deeper appreciation for democracy, capitalism, and diversity of opinion at Bard or Berkeley? If the U.S. government's goal is to teach Middle Eastern students about freedom and democracy it should provide visas to students interested not so much in bomb-making (sorry, I mean engineering), but history, political science, economics, art and philosophy and preferably not enrolled in one of the top ten liberal colleges."

Well, Orlet is not naïve, as his reference to eliminating the top ten liberal colleges indicates. But we wouldn't count on Muslim students learning the great humane values of Western civilization in any of our humanities departments these days.

Down with the Shah

Apropos of the subject of Muslim foreign students, the runaway bestseller, *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2004), by Azar Nafisi, reveals something of the part Iranian students in America played in the Iranian Revolution of 1979. These students were filled with the radical leftist ideas they encountered or at least found reinforced on American campuses. "Many quoted Comrade Stalin approvingly," writes Nafisi, "spouting lines from a fashionable book, *A Brief History of the Bolshevik Party* or some such, about the need to destroy once and for all the Trotskyites, the White Guards, the termites and poisonous rats who were bent on destroying the revolution." Many Iranian students were swept up by the revolutionary fervor, or were intimidated into supporting it, and were vociferous in demanding the downfall of the shah who had been an ally of the United States. Many, like Nafisi herself, had no idea what they wanted to replace him with, and didn't realize that radical Islam was ready to take over, or misunderstood what Khomeini was all about, or in some cases, thought he could eventually be pushed aside for a more liberal leadership after he had served his purpose.

Nafisi's literary criticism can seem a little odd, as she kind of stretches things to compare *The Great Gatsby*, for example, with the situation in Iran under the mullahs, but her picture of Iran, Iranians, and recent Iranian history is most compelling.

Iranians Demand Freedom, Again

On 18 March 2006, Harvard students, Democrat, Republican, and Iranian, held a concert to raise awareness of the Iranian government's human rights abuses and to express solidarity with students in Iran seeking to end these violations. See the website, "Iran Freedom Concert." See also Nicholas B. Manske and Alex M. McCleese, "Support Reformers in Iran," *Harvard Crimson*, 16 March 2006.

This is promising, but few who were alive and sentient in the late 1970s and early 1980s could forget the image of Iranian students on the streets rabidly demanding the departure of the shah. After his downfall, in what seemed like no time at all, the students were back on the streets, rabidly protesting the human rights abuses of the Islamic theocracy they evidently didn't see coming in their blind rage to be rid of the shah, who was actually a much more liberal ruler than the mullahs.

Multi-noncultural Britain

“In an interview with *NRO*, the conservative British columnist, Melanie Phillips, author of *Londonistan* (2006), remarks:

For three decades and more, the British education system has stopped transmitting the story and values of the nation on the grounds that national identity is racist, xenophobic, inhospitable, and so on. So English literature and, even more so, British political history are only minimally taught. If anything is racist, of course, it's that attitude itself because it means that recent immigrants are excluded from equal participation in British society because they are left in ignorance of it.

This is true as far as it goes, but some of these immigrants want less to participate in Britain than to change it (Colin Brown, “Let Us Adopt Islamic Family Law to Curb Extremists, Muslims Tell Kelly,” *The Independent*, 15 August 2006). Ruth Kelly is Great Britain's Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

As to the origins of Britain's civilizational surrender, Phillips traces it back to the post WWII period and the end of the British Empire, and then “much further back, to the loss of religious faith in the 19th century and the rise of romantic hyper-individualism which had an impact in the U.S. too—Britain's education meltdown, after all, derived from the ‘child-centered’ theories of the American educationist John Dewey—and which you can trace back to Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the 18th century.” “A Friendly Warning: Melanie Phillips on London's Identity Crisis,” *NRO*, 8 May 2006.

The West without Apologies

One of the best analyses ever made of multiculturalism is “‘Multicultural’ Education,” by the inimitable Thomas Sowell, available at tsowell.com. Here are some excerpts:

“Why do we study Western civilization, to the neglect of other civilizations?

Why is that question asked in English, rather than in some non-Western language? Because English is what we speak. Why do we concern ourselves with the Earth, which is an infinitesimal part of the known universe? Because that is where we live. If we want to understand the cultural and institutional world in which we carry on our daily lives, we need to understand the underlying rationale and the historical evolution of the way of life we have been born into

Why don't we study other civilizations equally? The most obvious answer is the 24-hour day and the limited number of days we spend in college. It is stretching things very thin to try to cover Western civilization in two semesters. Throw in a couple of other civilizations and you are just kidding yourself that you are educating anybody, when all that you are really doing is teaching them to accept superficiality. Those whose real agenda is propaganda are of course untroubled by such considerations.

Any suggestion that any aspect of Western civilization has been admirable, or better in any way than the corresponding aspect of any other civilization, will of

course be loudly denounced as showing bias instead of being “non-judgmental.” However, the one thing that no civilization has ever been is non-judgmental. Much of the advancement of the human race has occurred because people made the judgment that some things were not simply different from others, but better. Often this judgment was followed by abandoning one cultural feature and using the other instead. . . .

Many of those who talk “non-judgmental” rhetoric out of one side of their mouths are quick to condemn the evils of “our society” out of the other side. Worse, they condemn American society or Western civilization for sins that are the curse of the human race all across the planet. Indeed, they condemn the West for sins that are worse in many non-Western societies.

Perhaps the classic case is slavery. The widespread revulsion which this hideous institution inspires today was largely confined to Western civilization a century ago, and a century before that was largely confined to a portion of British society. No one seems interested in the epic story of how this curse that covered the globe and endured for thousands of years was finally gotten rid of. It was gotten rid of by the West—not only in Western societies but in other societies conquered, controlled, or pressured by the West.

The resistance put up by Africans, Asians, and Arabs was monumental in defense of slavery, and lasted for more than a century. Only the overwhelming military power of the West enabled it to prevail on this issue, and only the moral outrage of Western peoples kept their governments’ feet to the fire politically to maintain the pressure against slavery around the world. Of course, this is not the kind of story that appeals to the multiculturalists. If it had been the other way around—if Asian or African imperialists had stamped out slavery in Europe—it would still be celebrated, in story and song, on campuses across America. . . .