

Multiculturalism Reconsidered

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I hope you enjoy this copy of Professor Brand's speech, "Multiculturalism Reconsidered," which was recently delivered at the Third Annual Final Word Lecture program. His introspective look at multiculturalism and his thoughts on how it does and should affect the University's curriculum make for fascinating reading.

The premise behind the Final Word lectures is that the lecturer has only six months to live and would like to sum up a career of teaching and scholarship for colleagues, students, and friends. While the selected professor is, in fact, healthy, the hypothesized death adds focus and urgency to the lecture.

David

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Introduction

In the contemporary American university few topics are as controversial as multiculturalism. Proponents of multiculturalism charge that the traditional liberal arts curriculum has been biased in favor of a few "great" books written almost exclusively by dead white European males. Such a curriculum is dismissed as racist, sexist, and Eurocentric. The "great" books approach allegedly closes the mind to alternative understandings which the multiculturalists believe have been developed in the writings of women, blacks and other minorities, and in the third world generally. They therefore demand the inclusion of books by such authors in a liberal arts curriculum.

In response traditionalists argue that culture is not a domain for affirmative action programs and that the race, gender, or European roots of an author are irrelevant in assessing a great book. Great books transcend the cultural milieu in which they are written and speak to the ages because they are the quintessential product of human reason and because reason has the capacity to transcend its conditions, including such conditions as historical period, nation, ethnicity, class, race or gender. Insofar as the traditionalists defend the transcendental qualities of reason, they are defending the possibility and meaningfulness of philosophy as a way of life.

In support of the traditionalist's contention I would cite a book that figures prominently in my own discipline, political science. That book is Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. It is arguably the best book ever written on American politics. If students at Wilkes could read only one book on American politics, it is the one I would choose for them. I would

choose it *despite* the fact that Tocqueville was a white male, a French aristocrat writing during the 1830s, and a devout Roman Catholic. I would choose it because none of the circumstantial factors concerning who Tocqueville was as a person determined what he understood about American democracy. I would not choose it because I think it is important that students understand how French aristocrats reacted to the rise of democracy and *Democracy in America* is a good representative of that class. I would choose it because Tocqueville transcended that class and understood characteristics of democracy which every serious student of democracy, male or female, black or white, rich or poor, Catholic, Jew, Muslim, Protestant, or secular humanist, should understand.

If a great text can transcend its context, and if this possibility in turn reflects a capacity of human reason; then the multiculturalist denial that a text can transcend its context is clearly bound up with a critical analysis of the limits of human reason. At a certain point skepticism concerning the powers of human reason may become skepticism concerning the virtues of a life of reason altogether. Immanuel Kant's great work, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, was a philosophical exploration of the limits of human reason, but the radicalization of Kantian themes that one finds in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche or Karl Marx led to a questioning of either the possibility or the virtue of a philosophic life. Thus Marx argued that "philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point is, to change it." When intellectuals follow in the footsteps of Nietzsche and Marx and put advocacy and action before understanding, the university becomes corrupted.

Could the multiculturalists have gone so far in their quite legitimate attempts to counter racism and sexism that an attack on racist or sexist reasoning unintentionally becomes an attack on reasoning altogether? Moreover, could the multiculturalists be fueling the very phenomenon they seek to combat? By treating individuals first and foremost as representatives of groups, they may be legitimating the very practice of group stereotyping that they find so offensive. I have observed multiculturalists react with outrage to instances of behavior where an individual failed to differentiate individuals in racial groups. This outrage is justified and implies a recognition that one's racial identity is secondary to one's identity as a human being. Yet in the very next breath multiculturalists demand the inclusion of authors

from each of the races in a curriculum, as if the most important element in an author's identity is race.

Traditionalists worry that there is a close linkage between the multiculturalists, critique of western civilization and the offensive attacks on intellectual liberty in the name of political correctness that have marred campus life in recent years. If a healthy respect for intellectual freedom ultimately depends upon a belief in the power of human reason, then it would not be surprising that the radical skepticism concerning the power of human reason that one finds in true multiculturalism leads to political and moral dogmatism at the expense of intellectual freedom.

What is Multiculturalism?

Before we can investigate such questions we must first clarify what we mean by multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is not simply openness to people of all races, genders and cultures participating in the life of the mind and the dialogues associated with it. In fact that openness to people of all races, genders and cultures may be better protected by traditional conceptions of the life of the mind, which multiculturalists are so eager to criticize, than it is by the doctrine of the multiculturalists.

The traditional understanding of the life of the mind as it was developed in Western civilization has at its core the concept "nature," which implies a transcultural horizon. Science and philosophy are modes of investigating the natural universe. Science, for instance, tries to identify the laws that govern natural phenomena. Reason is the human faculty that enables us to investigate the natural order. However elusive a comprehensive grasp of that natural order remains, the meaningfulness of a life committed to the investigation of that order can be affirmed. The philosopher or the scientist pursues wisdom, even though he or she may never possess it. To assert that wisdom is in principle unattainable and that the life committed to its pursuit is therefore misguided is both dogmatic and dehumanizing. It is dogmatic because claims to human wisdom can only be tested in dialogue; the assertion that wisdom is unattainable dismisses claims to wisdom before they have been tested. It is dehumanizing because the most human life is a life of dialogue and the purported "wisdom" of the skeptic discourages people from engaging in dialogue on the grounds that it is a waste of time.

upon the equal validity of all cultures. The true multiculturalist is a cultural relativist.

We must pause here long enough to note two consequences of the multiculturalist position. The first consequence is that cultural relativism cripples our capacity to respond appropriately to the world. While cultural relativism may seem attractive because it undercuts the arrogance of those who assert the superiority of their culture on dubious grounds, it simultaneously undermines the capacity to reject cultural practices that everyone in this room would find offensive. On what grounds would the cultural relativist criticize a culture which encouraged cannibalism or headhunting? On what grounds would radical feminists, who are among the most vocal multiculturalists, condemn traditional cultures that subordinate women to men? We cannot simply presuppose the value of equality. More precisely, if equality is no more than a value, an orientation towards others that reason can neither affirm nor deny, then there is no reason to prefer equality over inequality, to prefer a society which treats women as equals over a society which subordinates them.

There are more sensible ways to deter cultural arrogance than turning to cultural relativism. Socrates was quite effective at puncturing the hollow pretensions of Athenians who claimed to know more than they really knew, including Athenian cultural imperialists who asserted the superiority of Athens to all other known societies, yet Socrates was no cultural relativist.

A second consequence of multiculturalism is evident from its rejection of "hierarchical" thinking. There is a distressing vagueness to such claims. It is clear that multiculturalists are offended by political and socio-economic inequalities between the genders and the races, and that they believe that culture and language can legitimate those inequalities in subtle and not so subtle ways. Pursuing equality, they advocate not only political and socio-economic reform, but also cultural reform. Modes of thinking which have dominated the Western intellectual tradition are dismissed as "hierarchical" or "linear," to be replaced or at least supplemented by modes of thought which are non-hierarchical and holistic or intuitionist.

The problematic status of such claims is particularly clear from the latter claims. If thought is to be holistic or intuitionist, then it must avoid traditional forms of analysis in which more complex entities are broken down into discreet components that

can be examined separately and then reassembled to provide greater understanding of the whole. But if we reject a more rigorously analytic approach in favor of methods which emphasize an intuitive grasp of wholes, how are we to distinguish valid and invalid intuitions? As modes of thinking that can be assessed by their adherence to objective, logical canons of thought give way to approaches which are inherently more subjective, thought becomes increasingly solipsistic. Linear thinking, one might suggest, gives way to circular thought, and circular thought is no thought at all.

If multiculturalists had confined their critique of knowledge and culture to an attack on a narrow-minded positivism, then the multiculturalists would have had a good case. The extraordinary successes of the natural sciences did lead to excessive claims associated with the methodologies of those sciences. Dubious assertions were made that the only real forms of knowledge were those generated in conformity to these models. These assertions in turn led to exaggerated expectations concerning the rigor and measurability of social phenomenon, and the denial that any forms of thought which did not mimic the rigor of the natural sciences could claim to be knowledge. The claims of positivism have been subjected to severe scrutiny for over fifty years now, and many of its key assertions have proven untenable. Philosophically, it is very much in retreat.

Multiculturalism, however, goes far beyond a critique of positivism. It is possible to dispute the claim that all knowledge takes the form of causal laws describing relationships between quantifiable variables while still retaining the belief that knowledge involves objective and verifiable assertions. Multiculturalism precludes the possibility of objective and verifiable assertions because it insists that all claims to truth can be deconstructed into assertions of power and will. Multiculturalism therefore necessarily denies that a university is an arena in which the disinterested pursuit of truth can take place. To portray the university as an institution wielding power and to dismiss its knowledge-seeking function as an ideological rationalization which masks its exertions of power is to delegitimize the university. Multiculturalism does not strengthen the university, it weakens it.

Multiculturalism and Liberalism

We gain a better understanding of multiculturalism if we contrast multiculturalism with liberalism. A true multiculturalist is a radical, not a liberal, though the two are often confused and many people who consider themselves multiculturalists are in fact liberals who have failed to appreciate the extent of the repudiation of liberalism implicit in multiculturalism.

Liberals are people who believe that the end of government is to secure individual rights. I am using the term liberal in a broad philosophic sense that encompasses both liberals and conservatives in the contemporary political sense of those terms. Liberals and conservatives in this latter sense both agree that the object of government is to protect rights; they simply disagree about the relative importance of different kinds of rights (like property rights and the right of free speech) or the best means to secure rights. Multiculturalism properly understood is not committed to the doctrine of rights as a fundamental truth, for such a commitment would denigrate cultures not founded on the doctrine of rights (all traditional cultures), and it implies a set of normative criteria that could be used to compare different countries and even rank them, however crudely, in terms of their respect for individual rights.

The differences between liberalism and multiculturalism become even more apparent as you turn from the explicit political teaching of liberalism to its theoretical foundations. The Declaration of Independence is justifiably considered a classic statement of liberal political thought. According to the Declaration, human beings have unalienable natural rights. Governments are instituted to secure those natural rights, and when they fail to do so they can be justifiably overthrown. The concept "natural rights" in turn presupposes the concept "nature," which we have identified as the central philosophic conception of western philosophic thought. "Nature" as a concept implies that reality is an ordered whole and that human beings can best be understood by understanding their place within that ordered whole. Human beings have a human nature which can be cultivated and nurtured to bring to fruition its innate potentials or it can be stifled and repressed in ways which cripple it. Governments that do the former are in accord with nature; those that do the latter violate nature. Nature, however problematic the understanding of her may be, provides a non-arbitrary

standard by which one may judge governments. It is the natural standard that allows the Declaration to assert that there are "truths" that all Americans accept as "self-evident."

Multiculturalism properly understood is a denial of the existence of "nature," because multiculturalism is an affirmation of unfettered human freedom, especially the freedom to create cultures, and nature is perceived, correctly, as a limitation on human freedom and creativity. Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger are the patron saints of multiculturalism, and Nietzsche argued that culture is not a perfection of nature but rather a response to the primeval void or existential abyss. Human beings are free to create any sort of culture they choose precisely because nature provides no guidance, or more precisely because there is no nature to guide us.

Critics of multiculturalism believe this is the source of the nihilistic multicultural attack on reason since reason is the faculty through which we can most adequately grasp the natural order. Reason and nature are inextricably intertwined, and the attempt to salvage the former while abandoning the latter is self-defeating. Martin Heidegger's assertion that reason is "the most relentless enemy of thought" epitomizes the spirit of multiculturalism.

Liberalism can accommodate a great deal of diversity. Liberalism arose during an age of religious warfare when Catholics and Protestants vied for control of Europe and at times rival Protestant sects competed for preeminence. Ending religious warfare was the primary political goal of all enlightened thinkers. Liberals sought to achieve this by privatizing religion and separating church and state. Religion was to be a matter of individual conscience and the compulsory mechanisms of the state could not be used to enforce religious beliefs or practices. No one religion would be preferred; a liberal state would accommodate religious diversity.

Two aspects of the liberal solution to the theological-political problem deserve attention. First, while liberalism opened the door for the accommodation of diversity, it neither celebrated diversity for its own sake nor extended its tolerance to every religion. Any religion which agreed to abandon the use of coercion to win converts and sustain membership was welcomed within the liberal fold, but any religion which refused to compete for members in the voluntary marketplace of religious ideas could justifiably be excluded from toleration. Thus John Locke

excluded Catholics from toleration in his *Letter on Religious Toleration*. Locke did so not because he was biased against Catholics but because at the time he wrote his "Letter" the Catholic Church had not renounced the use of state power to enforce orthodoxy. Needless to say, as Catholicism evolved and began to operate within the rules of the game of a liberal political order, Catholics could claim that they deserved toleration as well, and it would have been a violation of liberal principles to deny it at that point. The political systems most influenced by liberal political principles did extend toleration to Catholics.

A second aspect of the liberal solution to religious diversity was that unity was affirmed at the same time that diversity was accommodated. Liberals recognized that individuals differed in their religious beliefs and practices but they all shared such insecurities as fear of crime and fear of poverty. If the ends of political life could be confined to matters of shared concern, then diversity in other areas need not jeopardize a liberal community. Furthermore, if individuals of various religions could recognize that however much they differed from others in their substantive commitments, they all needed the freedom to decide for themselves what their religious commitments would be. Consequently, their common commitment to freedom would be more fundamental than the diversity of things freely chosen. Unity resulting from shared concerns was the ground upon which liberal tolerance of diversity was built.

The liberal response to religious diversity became a paradigm for the liberal response to other forms of diversity. The United States, the most thoroughly liberal country in the world, demonstrated a capacity to form a nation out of a people of heterogeneous ethnic backgrounds. We could be a melting pot because the demands of American citizenship were modest and one did not have to totally sacrifice one's ethnic identity to become an American. Ethnicity persisted in the private sphere through ethnic communities. Partial assimilation to the American way of life was all that was demanded, but it is also important to see that partial assimilation was demanded. Many of the people who flocked to the United States came from authoritarian political systems and they had cultural mores regarding authority and deference that were not conducive to citizenship in a liberal democracy. These people could be assimilated because they were socialized to accept liberal democratic norms. A liberal respect for diversity did not preclude an education for citizenship which

entailed substantial modifications in ethnic identities. Under the guise of contemporary multiculturalism, on the other hand, values and practices inimical to a liberal democratic polity often find protection.

Why has the moderate and sensible treatment of diversity associated with liberalism lost support in the contemporary world, increasingly displaced by the more radical treatment of diversity which one finds in multiculturalism? In part the explanation may be that the persistence of racism and sexism in liberal polities, not to mention significant disparities in incomes among the races and among the sexes, has fueled a disenchantment with liberalism and a turn to more radical approaches.

Multiculturalism and the Civil Rights Movement

The judgment that the United States has been racist and sexist despite its commitment to liberal principles leads to the inference that liberalism is inadequate as a public philosophy and makes multiculturalism appear more attractive. For the sake of precision it is important that we distinguish the actual practices of nations identified with liberalism from their liberal ideals. Nations can aspire to cultural ideals that they do not fully practice. Sometimes a people may simply fail to see how their practices contradict their theory; sometimes they may willfully deny any discrepancy. If they become aware of a gap between their theory and their practice, they may seek to alter their theory to accommodate their practice, in which case theory becomes no more than a rationalization or an apology for the existing power relationships. In other cases, rarer but all the more impressive for that reason, a people may introduce reforms which bring their practices more closely in accord with their ideals.

In the 1960s the civil rights movement succeeded in focusing national attention on the discrepancy between the practice of racial segregation in the South and liberal ideals of liberty and equality. A national consensus developed among whites and blacks that this situation was intolerable. The 1964 Civil Rights bill and the 1965 Voting Rights Bill were two dramatic reforms enacted in response to the civil rights movement. The rapidity with which a national consensus concerning discrimination developed was a sign that fundamental public values were not changing, almost always a very slow process, but rather that the

public had come to recognize that their practices contradicted their fundamental values. Liberalism had shaped the moral conscience of America, and that moral conscience became a force for racial justice.

Let me call your attention to one additional aspect of the civil rights movement. The means that this movement used to focus national attention on segregation was civil disobedience. Martin Luther King, Jr., the leader and spokesman of the movement, defended the use of civil disobedience in his justly famous "Letter from the Birmingham Jail." Consider the following quotations from that letter:

(1) "Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half-truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, we must see the need of having nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood."

(2) "We have waited for more than three hundred and forty years for our constitutional and God-given rights."

(3) "There are just and there are unjust laws. I would be the first to advocate obeying just laws....Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with Saint Augustine that 'An unjust law is no law at all....To put it in terms of Saint Thomas Aquinas, an unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal and natural law.'"

(4) "Was not Abraham Lincoln an extremist—'This country cannot survive half slave and half free.' Was not Thomas Jefferson an extremist—'We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal.'"

What all these quotes demonstrate is that Martin Luther King did not have to turn against Western Civilization nor against the American political tradition to find justification for his actions. Augustine, Aquinas, Henry David Thoreau, the Declaration of Independence, even the Constitution provided the principles of freedom which justified action against oppression. The fact that Augustine, Aquinas, Jefferson, and Thoreau were all white males of European descent did not seem to matter to King. If King had been educated under a multiculturalist curriculum rather than a traditional liberal arts curriculum I can only presume that he would have been more likely to refer

to Franz Fanon than to any of the aforementioned authors. I shudder to think what kind of civil rights movement we would have had in those circumstances.

Franz Fanon, for those of you who are not familiar with him, was an Algerian writer who justified terrorism and the slaughter of European women and children in the anti-colonial struggle for independence. Multiculturalists seem to believe that we should overlook his moral barbarism simply because he was a member of the third world and therefore a "victim" of Western imperialism. That victimhood constitutes a claim to moral superiority is a constant refrain of multiculturalism, a refrain which I believe is utterly without foundation.

Just as Martin Luther King profited from his familiarity with the great books of Western Civilization, so did W.E.B. DuBois, the great Afro-American leader of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In *The Souls of Black Folks* DuBois argues that higher education must be available to blacks so an educated elite can emerge that will provide the leadership needed to elevate the black race. DuBois did not campaign for a multicultural curriculum in higher education; he campaigned for the rights of blacks to have access to higher culture as traditionally conceived. Culture and civilization are singular nouns as DuBois uses them, not plurals as the multiculturalists would insist.

The final paragraph of Chapter 6 beautifully illustrates DuBois's perspective:

I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not. Across the color line I move arm in arm with Balzac and Dumas, where smiling men and welcoming women glide in gilded halls. From out the caves of evening that swing between the strong-limbed earth and the tracery of the stars, I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what soul I will, and they come all graciously with no scorn nor condescension. So, wed with Truth, I dwell above the Veil. Is this the life you grudge us, O knightly America? Is this the life you long to change into the dull red hideousness of Georgia? Are you so afraid lest peering from this high Pisgah, between Philistine and Amalekite, we sight the Promised Land?

The classical education which DuBois received hardly blinded him to the racism around him, but it did allow him to distinguish what was degrading and what was uplifting in the history of the West. DuBois sought access to the dialogue of great minds for

blacks. He wanted blacks to read Balzac, Aristotle and Aurelius, though none were black, because their reasonableness was quintessentially human, not black, nor white, nor male nor female.

The reasonableness that one finds in the greatest works of Western literature and philosophy has also influenced, although certainly not determined, the history of the West and more specifically the history of the United States. The civil rights movement is not an exception to the rule in American history; it exemplifies the dominant pattern of our history. The liberal democratic ideals articulated at the very founding of the nation have repeatedly inspired reform movements that have challenged oppression and illegitimate inequalities. There have been triumphs and there have been setbacks in the struggle to realize our ideals, but multiculturalists have placed too much emphasis on injustices in American history and too little emphasis on its achievements.

Multiculturalism and the American Founding

Consider the American Founding, a term I use broadly to encompass the American Revolution and the ratification of the Constitution. The American Founding was an event of world historical significance. Before the American Founding democracy had few defenders among serious political thinkers. Previous democratic city-states like ancient Athens had been unstable and factionous. No nation state, the political entity which was displacing the city state, had ever successfully institutionalized democratic rule. The American Founding established the first viable liberal democracy in a nation state. It proved that democracy could be reconciled with a respect for liberty and the marriage of liberalism and democracy was indispensable for the eventual flowering of each component. We who live in an age where liberal democracy has become an almost universal ideal should never forget the debt of gratitude that we owe to the American Founders. Liberals properly celebrate the American Founding.

The multiculturalist view of the American Founding is very different. Rather than noting its achievements, multiculturalists are obsessed with what it did not achieve. What it did not achieve was the abolition of slavery or the granting of full equal citizenship to women. It does not seem to matter to the multiculturalists

that neither of these latter goals were even remotely practicable at the time of the American Founding. Nor does it seem to matter that insofar as the American Founding established the viability of liberal democracy as a regime and basically secured liberty and equality for white males, it thereby made it far more likely that full liberty and full equality would eventually be extended to African-Americans and women.

Insofar as the multiculturalists have called attention to the issue of race and the American Founding, which means fundamentally the problem of slavery and the American Founding, they have performed a useful service. We must do justice to the complexity of this topic, however. First we must note that slavery as an institution has not been a uniquely American institution, nor even an institution uniquely associated with Western Civilization. Slavery properly conceived should encompass such institutions as feudal serfdom, untouchability in a caste system, or the forced labor systems of totalitarian states. So understood, slavery and the slave trade have been found in China, India, the Middle East, Africa, Western Europe, and the Americas. In short, the tendency to enslave and oppress others appears sufficiently universal that I suspect it corresponds to some lamentable propensity in human nature rather than being derived from any specific cultural configuration. I add this observation because there is a strong strand of hostility to Western Civilization which runs through multiculturalism that is often justified on the grounds that the West gave us slavery.

The American Framers did not establish slavery in the United States; they inherited it. By the time of the Founding it was already almost 100 years old. How did they respond to slavery? What conceptual resources did liberalism provide to respond to it? The Declaration of Independence states that all men (using man in the generic sense to include men and women) are created equal and endowed by their creator with inalienable rights. Slavery is a violation of natural rights and a denial of natural equality. Not one prominent American Founder did not understand that.

With his customary eloquence, Jefferson articulated the consensus of the American Founders regarding slavery. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia* there are several discussions of the injustice of slavery, but I have always found the following discussion from Query XVIII particularly poignant and I quote it at some length.

There must doubtless be an unhappy influence on the manners of our people produced by the existence of slavery among us. The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submission on the other....The parent storms [at a slave], the child looks on, catches the lineaments of wrath, puts on the same airs in the circle of smaller slaves, gives al loose to his worst of passions, and thus nursed, educated, and daily exercised in tyranny, cannot but be stamped by it with odious peculiarities. The man must be a prodigy who can retain his manners and morals undepraved by such circumstances. And with what execration should the statesman be loaded, who permits one half the citizens thus to trample on the rights of the other, transforming them into despots, and these into enemies, destroys the morals of the one part, and the amor patriae of the other.... Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep forever: that considering numbers, nature and natural means only, a revolution of the wheel of fortune, an exchange of situation, is among possible events: that it may become probable by supernatural interference! The Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest.

If the American Framers recognized that slavery was unjust, why didn't they abolish it? They didn't abolish slavery because they were democratic statesmen who were constrained by public opinion. They understood that the democratic consensus needed to undertake a major moral reform like the abolition of slavery simply did not exist. Slavery had become so deeply embedded in the economic life of the South that extraordinary self-sacrifice would have been required to abolish slavery. Many southerners were torn between their economic self-interest and their liberal moral ideals. Self-interest generally proved more powerful in the short-run.

If the American Framers from the northern states had attempted to introduce anti-slavery provisions into the Constitution it would never have been ratified by southern states. Had the north set up a separate union without slavery, slavery would still have existed in the South and the weakness of a divided nation would have jeopardized the liberties of all. The American Framers did as much as they could have reasonably been expected to do under these circumstances. They stigmatized slavery as an injustice and expressed the hope that by ratifying

the Constitution we would be setting slavery on the path to ultimate extinction.

The multiculturalist version of American history tends to ignore the ways in which slavery was stigmatized by the Founders. I have already noted Jefferson's condemnation of slavery in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* and there are comparable judgments found in the letters and writings of most of the prominent American Framers. The same judgment is found in a muted form in the public laws of the United States. The Northwest Ordinance governing the settlement of the Northwest Territories, the largest unsettled lands claimed by the United States at the time of the Founding, forbade the introduction of slavery into those territories. Why would Congress have forbade the introduction of slavery if they considered it a positive good?

Even the Constitution, which multiculturalists condemn because of its compromises with slavery, is carefully drafted to avoid any suggestion that compromises, which accommodated the institution of slavery and were necessary to win ratification of the document, bestowed any moral legitimacy upon slavery. The word slave is never mentioned in the document. Slaves are referred to as persons, not as property. For purposes of direct taxes and representation slaves are counted as three-fifths of a person, but this is one of the most frequently misunderstood clauses in the Constitution. *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787*, Madison's recorded minutes of the deliberations in Philadelphia, make it clear that no one at the convention held that slaves were three-fifths of a person. Three fifths was an arbitrary compromise between those who wanted to count the slaves as a full person and those who did not want to count the slaves at all. Interestingly, it was southerners who wanted to count the slaves as full persons because this would give them more representation in Congress. It was northern anti-slavery delegates who did not want to count the slaves at all, arguing that it was not the slaves' interests that would be represented but the interests of their white slaveholders.

The moral status of slavery in the Constitution becomes even clearer if we examine the drafting process which led to the fugitive slave provision in Article IV Sec 2[3]. The fugitive slave provision reads: "No person held to Service or Labor in one State, under the Laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in Consequence of any Law or Regulation therein, be discharged from such Service or Labour, but shall be delivered up on Claim of the

Party to whom such Service or Labour may be due." This clause was demanded by southerners fearful that a safe haven in the north for runaway slaves would encourage slaves to flee their bondage in ever-increasing numbers.

The moral sensibilities of the Constitutional Convention were evident when this wording is contrasted with the wording originally proposed. The first proposed version of this clause read as follows: "If any person *bound to service or labor* in any of the United States shall escape into another State, he or she shall not be discharged from such service or labor, in consequence of any regulations subsisting in the State to which they escape, but shall be delivered up to the person *justly claiming* their service or labor[emphasis mine]." The Committee on Style changed "person justly claiming their service" to "Party to whom such Service or Labour may be due" to remove any suggestion that slavery was just. When the Committee on Style was preparing to substitute "legally held to service or labour" for "bound to service or labor," Madison insisted that "legally held to service or labor" was objectionable because it might imply that "slavery was legal in a moral view," and he persuaded the committee to substitute "under the laws thereof" for "legally." Madison was shortcircuiting any tendency to identify the legal with the just by making it clear that slavery was strictly an institution of positive law, or law in the narrowest sense of the term.

Subtle as the stylistic changes may appear to be, they are deeply important. They make it clear that the Framers were struggling to avoid giving any moral legitimacy to slavery even as they were forced to make concessions to slaveholders who demanded accommodations for their peculiar institution. Lincoln understood this perfectly when he suggested that the Framers never used the word slave in the Constitution "just as an afflicted man hides away a wen or a cancer, which he dares not cut out at once, lest he bleed to death." Lincoln read the Constitution as a document of freedom, and he used it effectively as a resource in the battle to free the slaves. Had the abolitionists who damned the Constitution as a compact with the devil because of its compromises with slavery [a moralistic stance comparable to the moralism of contemporary multiculturalists] succeeded in discrediting the Constitution with the public at large, Lincoln's task would have been rendered incomparably more difficult.

The American Framers did not abolish slavery because they

were prudent and moderate statesmen who had to operate within the bounds of the possible even when this meant compromising their moral ideals. Prudence and moderation do not rank high in the pantheon of multiculturalist values, and they are therefore far more critical of the Framers. The multiculturalists are right when they argue that Americans must face up to the history of slavery in this country. But Americans can also take pride in the fact that slavery was abolished and in the fact that a generation of Americans was willing to pay a terrible price, over five hundred thousand dead, to fulfil the moral promise of the Declaration of Independence.

Multiculturalism and the New Deal

I can give personal testimony concerning another example of the distortions of American history encouraged by multiculturalism. I recently served as a discussant on a panel at the Northeastern Political Science Association meetings. The panel examined the New Deal and the Second World War from a multiculturalist perspective. One paper criticized the New Deal for failing to achieve wage equality between men and women. A second paper faulted Franklin Roosevelt for failing to take steps to assure that the employment advances of women in WWII were not lost in the postwar period. A third paper criticized Roosevelt for failing to advance the cause of American blacks more fully both in the New Deal and during WWII. None of these papers seriously investigated the practicality of the reforms they advocated, either explicitly or implicitly. None of these papers considered the role of a democratic statesman and the ways that public opinion limits the options for reform. None of these papers took seriously the historical context of the 1930s and the 1940s.

The paper which criticized Roosevelt for failing to take steps to maintain the employment advances of women provides the clearest example. Women moved into the workforce in unprecedented numbers during this period because so many men were overseas fighting fascism. If those men, many of whom were voluntarily risking their lives in the service of their country, had known that the costs of military service included reduced prospects for employment in the postwar economy because of increased competition from women who had not served in the armed forces, what would have been the effect on the morale of

our troops? The moral imperatives of the day were to fight fascism, not sexism. The evils of sexism in America in the 1940s were real, but they pale by comparison with the evils of fascism. All Americans were asked to make sacrifices in the 1940s to fight Hitler and Tojo, including feminists who were tacitly asked to shelve their cause and unite in the war effort until victory was achieved. Contemporary feminists who question the choices made during the 1940s can be accused of suffering from tunnel vision. Everything is judged on the basis of whether or not it advanced the cause of women, as if this were a comprehensive moral horizon.

Multiculturalism and the Wilkes Curriculum

The goals of multiculturalism are laudable. Who among us does not seek to eradicate racism and overcome the blight of prejudice? Who among us cannot support the liberation of women? It is the means which multiculturalists have chosen which are objectionable. By stressing the ways in which we are different, our divisions into a multiplicity of cultures, the multiculturalists have ignored the ways in which we are all alike. By treating the group as the fundamental unit of identity, they have hardened and deepened divisions among groups. In an age where a civilized country like Yugoslavia has been torn asunder and collapsed into the unspeakable barbarism of ethnic warfare, it should hardly be necessary to warn of the dangers of an excessive fragmentation of human identity.

It is the mission of the university to encourage young people to transcend their particularistic identities, identities of family, race, gender, class, sexual preference, ethnicity, and nationality, and to engage them in the universal life of reason. When educators turn from this mission and seek to fortify or glorify any of these particularistic identities, they have betrayed their vocation and subverted the mission of the university.

As a veteran of the Wilkes curriculum committee it seems fitting that I conclude this lecture by reflecting upon the curricular implications of this line of analysis. Wilkes is committed to providing its undergraduates with a liberal arts education, and the core of a liberal arts education has always been an exposure to the dialogue of the great minds, a dialogue found in great works of literature and philosophy. I believe the great books approach to education is a sound one if carried out in the spirit

in which it was intended, which is open and non-dogmatic.

A great books approach to education presupposes that the distinction between great books and books of lesser merit is meaningful. Merit is not simply in the eye of the beholder. Anyone who cannot recognize that Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is a great work and that Erich Segal's *Love Story* is not, is either aesthetically obtuse, or, far more likely, blinded by ideology. Merit is objective, but it is not beyond dispute. Indeed, the assessment of merit is inescapably controversial. It does not require great powers of discrimination to distinguish great works from trivial works, but it does require great powers of discrimination to distinguish great work from very good work, and a great books approach to education presupposes the latter distinction just as much as the former.

Which authors gain admission to the pantheon of the greats? It is intrinsic to the great books approach that a final answer can never be given to this question. Every proposed list of great books must be accompanied by a justification of why these books were selected and others were not. Every proposed list of great books can be challenged, and a dialogue should ensue in which the respective merits of books is discussed. I would argue that any list that excluded Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, whether that exclusion reflected the sexism of the evaluator or some skewed aesthetic criteria, was deficient because that novel satisfies all the criteria of a great novel. I am prepared to defend that judgment, as I must be if I am to remain faithful to the great books approach. I am also convinced that the *Analects* of Confucius should be on the list of great books, and that it has not received the attention it deserves because it is a non-Western work.

Such judgments proceed book by book, and they focus on the text rather than upon the author. The form of dialogue associated with such judgments is very different from the form of dialogue derivative from the charge that a proposed list of great books is deficient simply because women, blacks, and other minority authors are underrepresented on the list. The presupposition of such a charge is that reason cannot transcend the experience of the author and I have argued in this lecture that this represents such an underestimation of the power of reason that it makes a commitment to a life of reason incoherent and thereby threatens the university as an institution.

I would make the following concession to multiculturalism. The critique of reason which lies at the foundation of

multiculturalism cannot be dogmatically dismissed. The possibility of philosophy, of a life of reasoned dialogue in pursuit of truth, cannot be assumed; it must be repeatedly vindicated in practice. As long as multiculturalists are willing to engage in dialogue—although their willingness to do so may not be consistent with their most fundamental premises—then they should be welcome in the university.

Indeed, the multiculturalist critique of reason should occupy center stage. A curriculum which institutionalized the debate between multiculturalism and philosophy would truly be a liberal arts curriculum. For such a debate to be institutionalized multiculturalists must stop dismissing the concerns of philosophy as rationalizations which simply disguise sexism or racism and philosophy must take more seriously the moral concerns of multiculturalists.

If we should evaluate curricular proposals in terms of their tendency to encourage debate and discussion, then a multicultural provision which would require Wilkes students to take a course in women's studies, Afro-American studies, or third world cultures is not likely to advance the university's cause. These are not areas of study where critics of multiculturalism are well-represented and such courses will therefore be viewed, rightly or wrongly, as one-sided and ideological. To the extent that these courses identify their aim as socialization or consciousness-raising and adopt pedagogical techniques which imply that there is only one proper stance on race, gender or sexual orientation issues, their contribution to a liberal arts education will be minimal at best.

What we need are team-taught core studies courses, some of which raise questions about racism and sexism. Ideally, the team should include a multiculturalist and a critic of multiculturalism. Given the polarization of the contemporary campus it is unrealistic to think that one professor can do justice to both sides. Students can then be encouraged to participate in the debate between the professors. Such a proposal would encourage diversity at Wilkes. At least it would encourage the only form of diversity which every university should wholeheartedly embrace, a diversity of ideas.

Recommended Reading

Illiberal Education: the Politics of Race and Sex on Campus by Dinesh D'Souza, *Dictatorship of Virtue: Multiculturalism and the Battle for America's Future* by Richard Bernstein, and *The Disuniting of America* by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. are all very good on the impact of multiculturalism on the University. *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science* by Paul Gross and Norman Levitt is a thematic analysis of the confrontation between modern science and multiculturalism. It is written by two scientists who have also extensively examined some of the trendy writings of multiculturalists. Alan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* remains a controversial but indispensable reference in the debate. The theoretical foundations of multiculturalism are developed in the works of Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger. *The Genealogy of Morals* and *Beyond Good and Evil* are two of Nietzsche's more accessible works. Plato is the ultimate antagonist of both Nietzsche and Heidegger. The best contemporary commentaries on Plato which bear upon the themes of this lecture are *Plato's World* by Joseph Cropsey and *Socratic Rationalism and Political Philosophy* by Paul Stern. I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Professor Stern, who has been a brilliant teacher and steady interlocutor for many years. Jean Bethke Elshtain's *Public Man, Private Woman* is a very interesting study of the relationship of feminism to political philosophy. Herbert Storing's work on the American Founding is indispensable. I would particularly recommend his article "Slavery and the Moral Foundations of the American Republic," which is included in a collection entitled *The Moral Foundations of the American Republic* edited by Robert H. Horowitz. Another useful source is *Slavery and Its Consequences: The Constitution, Equality, and Race* edited by Robert Goldwin and Art Kaufman.

Concerning the Speaker

Donald R. Brand received his B.A. in Political Science from Williams College and his M.A. and Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Chicago. While on route to these degrees he took time off to spend one year as a VISTA volunteer working on community organization in Phoenix, Arizona and three years as a Peace Corps volunteer teaching high school math and science in Nepal. In 1980 he was awarded a Brookings Doctoral Fellowship and spent a year in Washington DC at the Brookings Institution. Brand's areas of specialty are American politics and the American Presidency. He also has a strong interest in political philosophy. His doctoral dissertation was a study of the National Recovery Administration, the central program in Franklin Roosevelt's early New Deal. His dissertation was revised and published by Cornell University Press under the title *Corporatism and the Rule of Law: A Study of the National Recovery Administration*. Brand has also published numerous articles in political science journals and is currently preparing a book on Christianity and the American Presidency.

Brand lives in Schnecksville, Pennsylvania with his wife, Jacqueline, and his two children, Laura and Christopher. He also has taught at College of the Holy Cross, the University of Pennsylvania, and Franklin and Marshall College. He joined the Wilkes faculty in 1991.

Concerning the Lecture

The premise of the Final Word Lecture is that the lecturer has only six months to live and would like to sum up a career of teaching and scholarship for colleagues, students, and friends. While the selected professor is, in fact, healthy, the hypothesized death adds urgency and focus to the lecture. The idea is borrowed from the University of Michigan's "Last Lecture."

The Final Word Lecture is given on the evening of Wilkes University's Faculty Recognition Day, at which faculty are lauded for their achievements as teachers and scholars. A number of awards, including the Carpenter Award for teaching, are announced at this annual event.

The Final Word lecturer is chosen by a committee of Wilkes professors and receives a \$1,000 award through the generosity of an anonymous donor. At a subsequent time, and at the donor's discretion, the title of the award and lecture series will be changed to include the donor's name.

Previous winners were:

- 1993 James L. Merryman
Reinventing Humanity for Survival in the Twenty-first Century:
Salvaging Our Best through Prehistory and Multiculturalism
- 1994 Dennis P. Hupchick
Nation or *Millet*? Contrasting Western European and Islamic
Political Cultures in the Balkans

