

HIGHER EDUCATION AND DIVERSITY IN THE UNITED STATES

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Thank you for your kind invitation to be part of the 1999 CULCON Symposium on "National Identity and Cultural Interchange in the 21st Century." I am delighted to join so many distinguished colleagues to discuss the issues facing higher education as we focus on diversity and multi-culturalism.

E pluribus unum

The United States of America is a nation of peoples from all races and ethnicities, yet historically we have laid claim to one common denominator: all members of our society identify themselves as "Americans." Our credo is *E pluribus unum* --out of the many, one-- but we have gone from a "melting pot" view of American society to the discussion of other, more diverse models. This national discussion is by no means resolved, and American education is one of its most animated arenas.

The United States has a history of diversity. With the exception Native Americans -- American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians-- the United States is a country of immigrants. Our nation has been forged from the 17th Century Pilgrims of New England and the English Catholic settlers of Maryland, the descendants of the original Spanish Conquistadors in the so-called New World, the 19th Century waves of Irish, German, Eastern European, and Chinese immigrants, and more recently, the 20th Century Asian and Central and South American migrations

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Immigrants then and now do not leave their fatherland lightly. They pursue the opportunity for a better life for them and for their children: economic prosperity, religious freedom, and political liberty. The Pilgrims who migrated from England came to the shores of America to seek religious freedom. The waves of immigrants that followed from all quarters of the globe have come to the United States to seek a better life, often driven by political and economic forces beyond their control.

In the 19th Century, our country's land base was growing. Our first census, in 1790, when the United States covered 900,000 square miles, showed a population of 4 million, of which over 3 million were "white" -- primarily of English descent. By 1850, our country had expanded westward, as "Manifest Destiny" became our credo, and the country grew to 3 million square miles with a population of 23 million residents. At that point, while the great majority of the population (19.5 million) was still identified as "white", this banner included the Hispanics of the American southwest and persons of many European nationalities. To our shame, the majority of the "black" population was held in slavery, and the indigenous populations were dispossessed of most of their original land. The consequences of those events still weigh upon us in a number of ways.

Today, the United States covers 3.7 million square miles and houses a population over 250 million: 209 million "white" Americans from many different nationalities; 31 million African-American, 2 million American Indians and Alaska Natives, 8 million Asian and Pacific Islanders, and 23 million Hispanics. Within these broad racial and ethnic categories we find tremendous diversity. Asian-Americans include persons from 29 different nationalities, among them Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Asian Indian, Hmong, Burmese, and Vietnamese. "White" Americans comprise persons mostly from European descent, but from varied national origins. . Hispanics share a common historical language but include diverse races and ethnicities, as well as two dozen different nationalities. African-Americans also have diverse origins, nationalities, and cultures -- some are recent immigrants from the African continent; many come from the Caribbean; most trace their roots to the slave trade which forced them to abandon the language and culture of their native lands. It is fascinating to trace the enduring elements of the African heritage in the distinctive features of African American culture and the many routes those elements have taken to arrive --and thrive-- in the United States.

Today, a visitor to a public school in one of our larger cities, such as New York, can view a "mini United Nations" -- with students from all races and nationalities, whose languages span Korean, Arabic, Japanese, Urdu, Chinese, Croatian and Spanish, to name only a few, whose ancestries reflect a veritable *mapamundi*, and whose colors put the rainbow to shame! It is a strongly held American belief that a common thread through this remarkable diversity is that all these children have one goal -- the same goal as the first immigrants to the United States. That goal is to attain the American dream of liberty, justice, and also prosperity for all. Americans believe that, if you work hard and play by the rules, you can achieve the American dream. And in so believing, and in so striving, they somehow become "American," increasingly sharing in a dynamic and evolving American ethos, and viewing themselves through the eyes of a broad and multi-faceted American identity.

Images of Identity of Identity

The United States began life as a country whose first entitled citizens came from England. Thus, it was a society schooled in the English language, culture and political ideals, that first settled, developed, and ruled the colonies and the new republic of the United States. As immigration brought increasingly diverse populations into the country --immigrants whose languages and cultures differed as dramatically from one another (e.g., Irish and German), as they did from the original Anglo-American citizenry-- the country faced a crisis of national identity: What was the United States? Who was American? To forge one nation from the many, *E pluribus unum*, we developed the metaphor of melding all cultures into one "American" culture -- and prided ourselves on being a "melting pot." The idea was that the U.S. melting pot took all the various cultures and melded them into one American culture -- based on its Anglo-American stock, and garnished with other European flavors. English was the language for all citizens, and the political structure continued as developed by the Anglo-American founding fathers. The goal of the melting pot process was both to create an American standard, and to "Americanize" all who came to our shores.

Education was an essential tool to attain this goal, and indeed to attain the American dream. Learning the English language, and with it, American ways, was the crucial achievement on the arduous route to becoming American and to achieving economic success. This often meant leaving the old ways behind and losing touch with the languages of the countries of origin. By the second or third generation, the melting process would be completed as the American alloy would emerge.

However, the "melting pot" metaphor does not describe entirely accurately what has actually happened. It certainly captured the experience and beliefs of many Americans, but as more and more diverse groups were added to the mix, the results were not as homogeneous as expected. People of color did not melt so easily, indeed, were often not allowed to melt. Links with the country of origin were not always severed. In some cases proximity and the vast improvements of transportation fostered a flux and reflux of

migrants, with the subsequent continuous replenishment of the migrant generation within our borders. Mexico and Central America are a case in point. And the Caribbean island of Puerto Rico, since 1898 a member of the broader American community, has remained substantially Spanish-speaking, even as half of all Puerto Ricans --all of whom are American citizens-- reside in the continental United States.

It is fairly evident that today there are in the United States numerous ethnic and racial groups that continue to define themselves as such, and are viewed that way by others. Many of these groups wield significant local and national political power. Some of them entered the educational arena in the sixties. They claimed a right to learn, not only about the history of their countries of origin, but also about the migrant experience, and the experience of minority groups in the United States. This became one of the fastest-growing areas in interdisciplinary research and teaching across the country.

Some groups denounce American society as racist, pointing out that the darker the color of your skin, the more likely it is that you will find yourself at the bottom of the economic scale. Others describe the ideal American society as a rainbow, a mosaic, or as a salad bowl. These metaphors allude to the coexistence of diverse cultures in the United States. In these ideal models, the elements that make up the whole do not discard what is unique to them, even as they add on a common American identity, and add to the American identity of others. Children in American schools who are told to "Celebrate diversity!" are encouraged to enjoy the distinctive flavors, colors and sounds of their respective ancestries. However, even the most committed and optimistic proponents of multiculturalism acknowledge that the ideal is for the most part not close to reality. Critics warn that multiculturalism in the schools can become a sort of cultural tourism, and that common values and a shared tradition, the forces that hold society together, may be dangerously weakened in the process.

It would seem that today many ethnic groups in the United States are able to maintain a private, traditional culture, and at the same time participate in a public national culture of the United States. The ability to maintain this "private," family-oriented, traditional culture and language usage is possible because of the existence of a "public" culture and language in which we all share, and which is rewarding to all of us who participate in it. It is also possible because an important part of this "public" culture is a respect, even a veneration, of privacy and the family values it protects. Even this "public" culture is continuously evolving, adapting to and incorporating multiple features and values of the "private" cultures of its diverse populations. The resultant "American culture" is, by the way, perhaps one of our most important exports, much to the chagrin of certain authorities in certain countries....

We could describe our country as a kaleidoscope -- where the many, different cultures of our population combine and recombine to create a series of multicolored images, a picture that will change as do the pieces from which it is made, but also a picture that remains constant in its basic rules of engagement, composition, and change.

The demographic picture is quite clear. If present rates of population growth continue, in the next quarter century --a mere eye blink in history-- whites will no longer be the absolute majority in the United States. Rainbow, mosaic or kaleidoscope, it will be the diversity of our people that will allow America to achieve greatness in the 21st Century. To empower these future generations --and to ensure that the kaleidoscope still forms a picture of one nation with a national American identity-- society, through higher education, must respond to the needs of the many:

E pluribus unum.

A Policy of Inclusion

Many people agree that the use of the English language in the schools was a key factor in forging a national identity in a nation of immigrants, but it is also true that English posed hardships for many of our children. From the inception of the public school system, English was the language of instruction for all, regardless of national origin or ethnicity. All children --the few non-English-speaking ones as well as the many native speakers of English-- were immersed in an English milieu in school, and either succeeded or failed. If they succeeded, many doors were opened to them in higher education and in employment. If they failed, there were plenty of opportunities for success in business, trade or manufacture.

In the early years of our nation an education was not essential to obtaining the American dream, and a higher education was available only to the wealthy classes, and those wishing to enter religious service. These early institutions maintained classical curricula, and focused on providing religious leaders and education to the higher classes. There was little to no practical application of learning in these institutions.

When the United States was established under the Constitution, the Federal government did not envision itself as playing a role in education. Education was viewed as a local and individual effort. The Federal role in higher education has grown in response to national needs under Constitutional provisions for the "general welfare." One of the first Federal actions involving higher education was the enactment of the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 --a reaction to the nation's westward expansion-- allocating public lands to each new state and territory for the establishment and support of colleges. To a large extent, recent immigrants --hungry for land of their own, and with agrarian backgrounds-- hurried to settle these new lands. The Norwegians, the Irish, the Germans, and the Basque moved into the farmlands of the west, and the Chinese came in waves to build the railroads and mine for gold -- as did equally significant waves of the "older" migrants from the cities in the East. The new state institutions of higher education --mainly devoted to agriculture and the mechanic sciences--largely took their students from these diverse populations. Thus, higher education in the United States began to include the children of the working and farming classes, to meet pressing national needs in our

westward expansion, and thereby to empower these waves of immigrants in the process of incorporation into the American economy of the times.

The end of the Civil War saw a large population of recently freed slaves in need of higher education. The Federal government, responding to this new national need, chartered Howard University in 1867 for the education of African-American youth in the liberal arts and sciences.

Viewing its responsibilities in terms of the general welfare, the Federal government's role in higher education has evolved to ensure that all members of society, regardless of their race, religion, sex or national origin, have access to a higher education. However, the Federal government grew slowly into this role. It was only after World War II that the Federal

government actively moved into higher education. In 1944, Congress enacted the "GI Bill of Rights" to provide financial assistance for education and training to all returning World War II veterans. This resulted in 1.1 million veterans enrolling in colleges and universities within fourteen months of the war's end, and 3.7 million veterans obtaining training in the new fields of production and technology. This was the beginning of Federal intervention in guaranteeing access to higher education through financial assistance. And, this was also the beginning of real opportunity for people from all ethnic and economic backgrounds to obtain a higher education. The impact on higher education was immediate. By the 1950's greater numbers of Americans than ever before enrolled in colleges and universities, and higher education became an expectation of society, rather than a luxury enjoyed by the privileged. As more Americans became financially able to enter college, society began to view higher education as a necessity, and the Federal government sharpened its role as a facilitator of access to higher education through financial support to needy students.

The Cold War provided further incentive for Federal involvement in financial access to higher education. In response to the Soviet launch of Sputnik, we enacted the first comprehensive Federal education legislation. In 1958, to ensure that we had highly trained citizens that would enable us to compete with the Soviets, we enacted the National Defense Education Act (NDEA), which included loans for college students and graduate fellowships in the sciences, mathematics, and modern foreign languages. Thus, by the end of the 1950's, America --its sons and daughters of immigrants as well as its established Anglo-American families-- had grown into a country that envisioned higher education as a necessary step towards achieving the American dream. And the Federal government responded with financial assistance. However, there still existed barriers to real access to for college for many of our citizens.

The Civil Rights Legislation

The anti-poverty and civil rights laws of the 1960's led the Federal government further into the area of access to higher education. The "Great Society" of the 1960's envisioned

the right of all citizens to access higher education, and acknowledged that real --rather than just possible-- access to colleges and universities required federal financial intervention. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 responded to the social consciousness of the nation, and provided an additional basis for the Federal role in higher education: to create educational opportunity for all citizens regardless of "race, creed, gender or national origin." In 1965, Congress enacted the Higher Education Act which authorized financial assistance for needy college students, through federally awarded individual grants and loans. The legislation also established graduate fellowship programs to assist talented students to pursue academic and research careers regardless of individual need or resources.. In 1978, as more students enrolled in college and the costs of higher education began to rise, the Federal government expanded Federal financial assistance to middle income students.

Through these two ground-breaking pieces of legislation --the Civil Rights Act and the Higher Education Act-- the Federal government began to open real access to higher education by

providing financial assistance to students directly, and by enforcing financial sanctions on colleges that failed to meet the anti-discrimination requirements of the law.

The Civil Rights Act and the Higher Education Act emerged at the same time that members of America's minority groups --notably African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans-- were demanding equal treatment in education and the labor market. The "Great Society" vision of America stressed non-discrimination and acceptance of all persons in their full diversity. America saw the emergence or revival of many voluntary associations dedicated to obtaining equal rights --including equal education opportunity-- for the diverse racial and ethnic groups.

Let me underscore the extremely important role of voluntary associations in American politics and life in general. America has always been unique in its reliance on associations to bring issues to the forefront of society -- to insist on changes to meet the growing needs of America. As early as the 1830's Alexis de Tocqueville, in his book, "Democracy in America," chronicling his travels in the United States, said, "Whereas, at the head of a social movement in Britain you will find a peer, and in France the government, in the United States you will find an association." The 1960's rise of associations of ethnic groups, ensured that the "Great Society" responded to their needs through Federal intervention to ensure that all groups received equal treatment under the law -- from housing to health to education... It was these associations that led the way toward such powerful and far-reaching legislation as the Civil Rights Act and the Higher Education Act. Their militancy, their refusal to turn back, their resourcefulness, and their commitment to the rule of law allowed them to perform the unique role, envisaged by de Tocqueville more than a century earlier, of leading the way, interpreting the national needs, and guiding Congress in the performance of its law-making responsibility.

Language Policy and Economic Diversity

While the Civil Rights Act forbade discrimination based on national origin, sex, race and religion, there were still a number of pitfalls for many of our diverse ethnic groups in their quest for higher education. One of the biggest problems was the language barrier faced by recent immigrants and children in whose homes the English language was unknown. While this was not new, the vast numbers and the concentration of non-English-speaking migrants in certain parts of the country generated a qualitatively different phenomenon that resisted the traditional approaches to linguistic assimilation.

All too often the result was the opposite of what was expected: the children, not knowing the English language, were unable to learn any of the basic skills necessary for all kinds of further education. This new phenomenon was acknowledged by Congress in 1968 with the enactment of the Bilingual Education Act which gave the Federal Government an additional tool to address the specific needs of these migrant children. Bilingual instruction provided to these new Americans an additional access route to real equal opportunity in elementary education, and dramatized to society at large the uniqueness of the diverse cultures present within the American paradigm. This was one of the first national actions taken in the area of education to acknowledge cultural and linguistic diversity in the nation.

After four decades, there is not a definite national consensus as to the effectiveness of the many bilingual approaches to education practiced during that period of time. Enmeshed in political and socioeconomic issues, and unable to document its effectiveness to the satisfaction of all concerned, bilingual education programs continue to be at the forefront of national policy debates as to how best to provide educational opportunity to migrant children, youth and adults.

Perhaps as significant as the language issue is the direct correlation between language needs and economic status. There is abundant data documenting the direct relationship between poverty and certain specific race-ethnic variables. For example, people who view themselves as African-Americans or Hispanic-American make up a percentage of the poor population that is several times their percentage of the middle and upper class population... and it is poor Hispanics that make up the lion's share of those who are not proficient in the use of the English language and are concurrently lacking in the skills that are absolutely necessary for economic improvement. National policy has tried to break this quasi-structural vicious cycle at different points, but the fact remains that there is a reciprocal relationship between language proficiency, education, job skills, and economic solvency. To put it quite bluntly, if you have lots of money you can afford not to speak English fluently, but if you are not wealthy, you need English proficiency, education, and job skills in order to become an active participant in the mainstream of the American economy and culture.

Higher Education and Poverty

As real opportunity for access to higher education is made available to all Americans -- from the recent Hmong immigrants to the descendants of the Mayflower-- they will take one more step on the ladder to the American dream of economic prosperity. We have learned that the melting pot vision was insufficient for the 20th century. We have learned that cultural diversity and national identity are not mutually exclusive, and that indeed, cultural diversity is intrinsic to the national fabric and to the continued growth of the national economy. We have also learned that language acquisition is a matter of both public and private policy, and that both policies are in agreement as to the claim made for English as the public language and the *lingua franca* of the nation.

The issue of national policy then becomes one of assuring that opportunities are readily available to all Americans -- opportunities for English language acquisition, for access to all kinds of education, especially higher education, and for entry into the labor market. Such an assurance is not solely, nor even predominantly, a matter of discrimination or of civil rights -- although discrimination continues to be a major national issue in its own right. Beyond discrimination, however, there is the barrier of economic resources. Again, if you have a lot of money, your race or your ethnicity recedes as a significant barrier to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." It is the poor who are the disenfranchised, and they are disenfranchised largely because they are poor. The federal government cannot transform a poor person into a wealthy one. But it can "level the playing field" economically by providing different kinds of financial tools for students to overcome economic barriers to higher education. The principal beneficiaries of this kind of government intervention will be the poor, and by reason of the vexing correlation between race-ethnicity and poverty, the members of minority groups traditionally under-represented in higher education because of financial reasons.

In the pursuit of this policy of economic intervention, for example, the United States during 1998 has:

- Awarded \$7.2 billion in grants to attend postsecondary programs to about 4 million students throughout the nation.
- Provided for loans to 8.4 million students amounting to over \$30 billion, and guaranteed an outstanding student loan volume of close to \$110 billion.
- Funded 3200 institutional work-study programs that provide part-time employment to 1.0 million needy college students throughout the nation.
- Appropriated close to \$600 million to institutions to assist them in operating programs to provide academic assistance to more than 750,000 disadvantaged students by reaching out to them before, during, and after their transition from high school to college and beyond.
- Bestowed over 1200 fellowships to students pursuing doctoral programs in

disciplines that would prepare them to meet the demand for university faculty and researchers.

It is important to bear in mind that this leadership in federal support is in addition to approximately \$150 billion targeted for those same purposes by institutions, foundations, and state and local governments throughout the fifty states. It is also important to bear in mind that this assistance is overwhelmingly targeted on disadvantaged students, especially the most talented ones, in order to “level the playing field.” Finally, it is important to bear in mind that the proportion of racial, ethnic and linguistic minorities among those students is several times their representation in the national population at large.

The New Millennium

As a result largely of this policy of inclusion, I feel safe in asserting that as we approach the new millennium, we also approach a new milestone in opportunity for access to higher education. This milestone is a deceptively simple one: I believe that every person in America who has the motivation and the required preparation will be able to attend college regardless of economic need. Said differently, we have so many different kinds of public and private institutions --community colleges, four year colleges, comprehensive universities-- that there is room in at least one of them for every motivated and prepared person seeking access, and that tuition and other costs will not be a barrier given the existing programs of Federal, state, local, and institutional financial aid available to those persons. It may not be necessarily the institution of your first choice --although often it is-- but it will be an accredited institution providing a viable program that will enable you to continue higher education in progressively more selective programs. Truly, there is at least one institution compatible with each person's financial means.

There is a catch, however. You probably noticed how carefully I have noted two very specific conditions for this “theorem” to hold. Motivation and preparation are indispensable requirements for success in college, regardless of ability to pay all the costs associated with attendance. Since the rate of failure in college among economically disadvantaged students is about 50 percent, and since a combination of family, institutional, state, and federal resources is available to overcome the financial barrier, it follows that, by and large, the explanation for failure in college is not to be found in economics, but rather in psychology and academics. The same situation holds for failure to reach the point where access to college is a real option for high school students.

Cognizant of this fact, President Clinton recently proposed, and Congress enacted, a new program to address the motivation and preparation factors at the very earliest stage possible. This new program was given the rather cumbersome name of “Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs” -- so we, with our knack for acronyms, call it GEAR-UP. This program calls for the formation of partnerships

involving colleges and universities, middle and high schools, and community organizations to provide whatever services are needed to entire classes of 7th graders in order to motivate them to stay in school and pursue the kind of academic curriculum required for admission to college. Each partnership receiving a Federal grant will typically be able to follow a cohort of students during the six years needed for 7th graders to reach college – and also to add a new cohort of 7th graders until the entire 7-12 group is being served. It follows a number of highly successful programs established in New York, California, and other states under private auspices. For the first year's operations, Congress appropriated \$120 million, and the President is asking \$240 million for 2000. Our goal is to reach 1,000 of the 6,000 middle schools that have more than half their students living in poverty, and thereby reach close to 400,000 students throughout the nation.

Again, because of the perverse relationship between race, immigrant status, and poverty, the overwhelming majority of students to be served by GEAR UP will be African-American, Hispanic-American, Native-American, and the members of the myriad ethnic and linguistic groups that are part of our national population. Since poverty is not limited to these groups, GEAR UP will also serve all other categories of students of students in poverty, regardless of race, ethnicity or language.

Consistent with the GEAR-UP philosophy, our first priority as we enter the 21st century is to expand access to higher education by improving the motivation and preparation of students as they make their way through the elementary-secondary system. This requires that our policy move beyond the guarantee of a free, universal elementary and secondary education, to the reality of a superior pre-college preparation.

We are really talking about a pipeline leading students through middle school, high school and then on to college. Not only must we look toward the pre-college years in order to create real access, we also need to improve performance along the undergraduate continuum on to graduation. We now guarantee the overcoming of financial barriers to access college. As we enter the 21st century we must take the next step: the successful completion of undergraduate studies. Access to college -- admission-- must now become access to a higher education -- graduation. Our emphasis in federal intervention will be aimed at the successful completion of undergraduate studies, rather than just enrollment in college. We will emphasize outcomes, results, and success.

The logical projection of this policy is to take yet another step: opening graduate and professional education to all Americans with the preparation and motivation. This familiar theme again resonates at the transition from undergraduate to graduate and professional education. Currently our graduate and professional school enrollment does not reflect American society. We need to assure that our graduate and professional degree programs do reflect our society -- as do our four-year and two-year colleges. For this we must build upon our success in promoting undergraduate access. We will attain this goal by supporting programs that promote access to graduate and professional

fields, in order to advance simultaneously two major national goals: to improve participation by under-represented groups, and to increase manpower in critical subject-matter areas.

As we move towards ensuring that our students complete their undergraduate programs and enter graduate and professional schools, we must also respond to the need for technological skills. This need is twofold: First, institutions of higher education must have the resources and know-how to use technology [computers and telecommunications, as a bare minimum] as they engage in research and instruction. Second, students must have access to that technology and the expertise to use it in their academic endeavors. The Federal issue is not so much the level of general access to this technology as it is the difference in access between wealthy institutions and developing institutions, between those able to attend the Harvards and Yales of the nation and those attending the poorer, tuition-driven institutions. It is therefore a major goal for the 21st century to assure that, as they strive for success with quality, our colleges and universities are empowered to use technology both as a tool for instruction and research, and as a field of study by itself.

We have many goals for the 21st century -- and they are all equally important. We cannot push for any one of them without concurrently pushing for all of them. We are dealing with a pipeline leading from elementary school to college and beyond. It is a leaky pipeline, and one to which all do not have equal access. We lose many students we should not lose. The students we lose are the poorer ones, those who need financial resources as well as those who need to improve their academic preparation in order to reveal their true talent. If we plug one leak it will help some, but we need to plug all our leaks: if a pipeline has one hole, most of the water will fall through that hole. It is the same with higher education. As long as there is one leak, sooner or later students will fall through it. Therefore, we must work to ensure that our pipeline has no leaks. To do this, we must advance all of our goals at the same time, all the time.

Conclusion

The growth of our nation has gone hand in hand with the progressive diversification of its people. As we shifted from agriculture to industry to technology, our population diversified from the original Anglo-American settlers to a kaleidoscope of all races and colors, a microcosm of the entire world. The major tool not only to ensure progress but also to define our national personality has been, and continues to be, education. From an initial role as a minor player, higher education has developed into a key player in today's --and tomorrow's-- world of high technology. Therefore, access to higher education -- real access, not just admission, but success through graduation-- has become a central component of our national policy and our American values. In order for this access to be truly real, we must level the playing field, so that opportunity is available to all our citizens, truly regardless of race or ethnicity. [2/17/99]

Thank you.