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BOOK REVIEWS

Glazer, Nathan. *We Are All Multiculturalists Now*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997. Pp. 179. \$19.95 (cloth).

Nathan Glazer is a prominent sociologist who has written many distinguished works on American ethnicity. He is perhaps best known for his early attack on affirmative action in *Affirmative Discrimination* (New York: Basic, 1975), and, because of this, has often been identified as a former liberal and current neoconservative.

We Are All Multiculturalists Now—an informative and insightful series of related essays, with a fair degree of overlap—is written with an eye toward critics of multiculturalism such as Diane Ravitch, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Dinesh D’Souza, and Robert Hughes. In it, Glazer decisively distances himself from the view that multiculturalism in school and society is a deeply troubling social and educational force, one that is important to resist. At the same time, he sometimes pulls his punches when discussing these critics. For instance, one of the best parts of the book (chap. 3, “What Is at Stake in Multiculturalism?” the most theoretically interesting of the eight chapters) is a discussion of the conservative critique that multiculturalism rejects pure historical truth as a criterion of curricular choice in favor of various kinds of ethnic boosterism. Glazer notes that the conservatives, however, depart from their own strictures when they criticize multiculturalism for undermining national loyalty by focusing on historical injustice and oppression. Yet he does not forthrightly call this stance inconsistent or hypocritical.

Glazer’s personal involvement in multiculturalism grew out of his participation (described in detail in chap. 2, “The New York Story”) on a board appointed by the commissioner of the New York State Board of Regents to revise an earlier draft of history and social studies curricular standards for the state school system. Glazer writes with a chastened tone about three things he learned from this experience: first, the uniform acceptance by the committee members involved in the K–12 world of what Glazer takes as the basic tenet of educational multiculturalism—“a greater degree of attention to minorities and women in American history and social studies and literature classes in schools”; second, the hardening of positions on multiculturalism, shown in the (mostly conservative) hysteria over the (as he saw it) moderate and reasonable draft produced by his committee; third, the inevitability of conflicting views of history informing both the history profession and school history curricula.

Discussing the degree to which America’s failure to live up to its ideals should be emphasized in school curricula, Glazer states (at other points in the book as well) his own view: “If one looked at the larger picture of the history of the United States, one saw greater and greater inclusion, less and less discrimination, a steady increase in the protection of the rights of minorities, and constitutional protections and guarantees becoming more and more effective” (p. 46). Glazer is perplexed and troubled by his inability to convince one of his fellow committee members of this view. Yet it is striking how simplistic and misleadingly framed this view is. Notwithstanding the expansion of formal rights in various antidiscrimination legislation of the 1960s and 1970s, equally noteworthy is

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the widespread judicial and legislative retreat in the 1980s and 1990s from various attempts to redress discrimination and historically generated inequities in federal job programs, college admissions, educational equity, and school segregation.

Perhaps equally important, although attitudinal prejudice, personal discrimination, and legally sanctioned discriminatory policies have certainly diminished during this period, these hardly exhaust the forces preserving and even intensifying important dimensions of social and economic injustice, especially for blacks and Latinos. Inferior schools, the loss of quality unskilled work from urban centers, the strong push to dismantle affirmative action programs, continuing housing, mortgage lending, and other sorts of formally illegal yet widely practiced racial discrimination have sustained these inequities and led to *greater* immiseration for approximately the bottom third of the black population.

Oddly, elsewhere in the book, after the early chapters' focus on education, Glazer seems to recognize this bleak racial landscape, in connection with the one important historical thesis he advances. (In general, *We Are All Multiculturalists Now* does not aspire to striking new insights or perspectives, resting content with a lucid presentation of many of the important issues without attempting to come to grips with them.) This is that the rise and now immovable status of multiculturalism in schools is a product of our nation's failure to bring blacks to full equality. (Actually, Glazer does not consistently put this point in terms of the concept of equality but rather the less decisively egalitarian and, as he recognizes, now largely discredited concept of assimilation.) This failure leads blacks, so often concentrated in majority black schools, to be attracted to multicultural curricula (and often Afrocentric, though, as Glazer rightly notes, this protean term covers an extremely wide range of educational practices and theories) which put their own experience at the center of historical study, and which often promise deliverance from the injustice and exclusion of their condition (pp. 95, 120). Glazer thinks that other ethnic groups—especially those “of color”—have then jumped on the bandwagon begun by African Americans.

Chapter 6, “Where Assimilation Failed,” traces the historical development of the American conception of assimilation, noting how both assimilationists/Americanizers and anti-assimilation cultural pluralists (such as Horace Kallen and John Dewey) ignored blacks in their favored conceptions of American identity. Glazer observes that these viewpoints also omitted other people of color, focusing entirely on European immigrant groups; but he fails to see that this provides counterevidence to the claim that it is primarily *blacks* whose situation drives the responses of Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, and other non-white groups toward current multiculturalism.

In chapter 7, “Can We Be Brought Together?” Glazer reexamines his view in a 1974 article—reflecting the main thrust of *Affirmative Discrimination*—that the full inclusion, or integration, of blacks would proceed as did that of European immigrants, without an activist government attempting to redress historical injustices against blacks. Residential and school segregation would slowly wither away under the benign forces of American culture in the context of color-blind anti-discrimination laws.

Glazer devotes the remainder of the chapter to demonstrating how this happy result failed to materialize. Invoking Andrew Hacker, he says, “We are still, in some key respects, two nations” (p. 149). Whites continue to find ways to keep

blacks out of their neighborhoods, or to abandon neighborhoods in which blacks begin to move in. Residential segregation leads to school segregation, and, for a myriad of reasons, segregated schools are generally inferior ones. Glazer means that black majority, or Latino majority, or both, schools are inferior. He does not, however, note the deficiencies in education for a pluralistic society received by students in “lily white” schools—students who never learn to deal with peers different from themselves racially and economically and who frequently lack attitudes of civic responsibility toward the society as a whole, with its multiple economic and cultural groups.

So Glazer does very much recognize the continuing failure to deliver on the promise of equality especially to blacks, and his expressed attachment to a rosy picture of continual progress on the equity front comes to seem arbitrary and hollow.

Glazer’s social science orientation prevents him from exploring in any depth important normative questions raised by multiculturalism. Yet his descriptive mode often has a normative tilt—toward an acceptance of the status quo. For example, after describing various governmental efforts to encourage residential and school segregation, Glazer says, “Governmental measures inspired by an ideal of fairness, equality, and integration cannot overcome the stubborn commitment of parents to what they consider best for their own children and neighborhood” (p.139). Implying as it does the futility, or at least severely limited possibilities, of these government programs, this speculation about human nature cries out for scrutiny. Is it “best” for middle-class white children to be deprived of the opportunity to attend school with children of other races and classes; to develop the intense “we/they” mentality toward children from urban areas, with the frequently attendant stereotypes, fears, discomforts, and ignorance that are so pervasive a feature of white suburban school and neighborhood culture?

Glazer’s book also contains quite helpful discussions of whether students “need to see themselves in the curriculum” in order to learn; of the importance of self-esteem in motivation to learn; of the loss of a concern with class as an important analytical and political variable in multiculturalist thought; of conservatives, and public debate more generally, collapsing concerns about racial and gender justice (e.g., in affirmative action programs) with the cultural and identity recognition issues involved in multiculturalism.

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Kjellberg, Paul, and Ivanhoe, Philip J., eds. *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the “Zhuangzi.”*

Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1996. Pp. xx+240. \$59.50 (cloth); \$19.95 (paper).

A classic of early Daoist thought, the *Zhuangzi* (sometimes romanized as *Chuang Tzu*) is a fascinating anthology of short essays, narratives, and dialogues on topics such as knowledge, language, action, self-cultivation, and death. The nine thought-provoking essays in this collection seek to interpret *Zhuangzi* passages that have a skeptical or relativist flavor and explore their relationship to other