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selves within hours. No matter. "In the collective running amok," notes Enzensberger, "the concept of 'future' disappears."

Unfortunately, the future seems to hold a good deal more such "nationalism" in store. The most recent manifestation came in Rwanda, where the Hutus slaughtered the Tutsis while the Western nations wrung their hands. Indeed, these ethnic upsurges pose a particular challenge to the West. The confusion was perhaps best illustrated when, toward the end of the Cold War, the United States actively sought to perpetuate the existence of the Soviet empire for fear of East European nationalist desires. President George Bush went to rather extensive lengths to prop up Mikhail Gorbachev's ailing regime, and his recognition of the new Baltic countries was notably reluctant. The Baltic states, however, did not represent ethnic groups bent on exterminating one another; they were countries seeking to recover, not establish, their right to self-determination.

The question of national self-determination will continue to present an all-but-intractable problem for the West, both in domestic politics and in international dealings. Even something that looks as innocent as multiculturalism has its own explosive potential for separating communities rather than creating broad ethnic harmonies. The problems are no less complex in non-Western countries. Per-

haps instead of drawing artificial distinctions between civic and ethnic nationalism, scholars might usefully draw contrasts among three varieties of ethnic nationalism: the one that represents legitimate aspirations for independence in response to oppression by an imperial power (as in the case of the Baltic states), the one that represents illegitimate claims based on spurious grievances (see Quebec), and the one that represents nothing more than warlords bent on ethnic cleansing (as in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia). The first should be encouraged, the second should be shunned, and the last should not even be dignified with the label "nationalist."

Given the horrors of Rwanda and Bosnia, it is understandable that the authors of these three books view the concept of nationalism with apprehension. But in finally taking nationalism seriously, these writers risk making the same mistake as the imagined-community scholars. Both sides ignore the positive aspect of nationalism. The Baltic states, the Czech Republic, Hungary—these represent the successes of nationalism. They provide room for a cautious optimism.

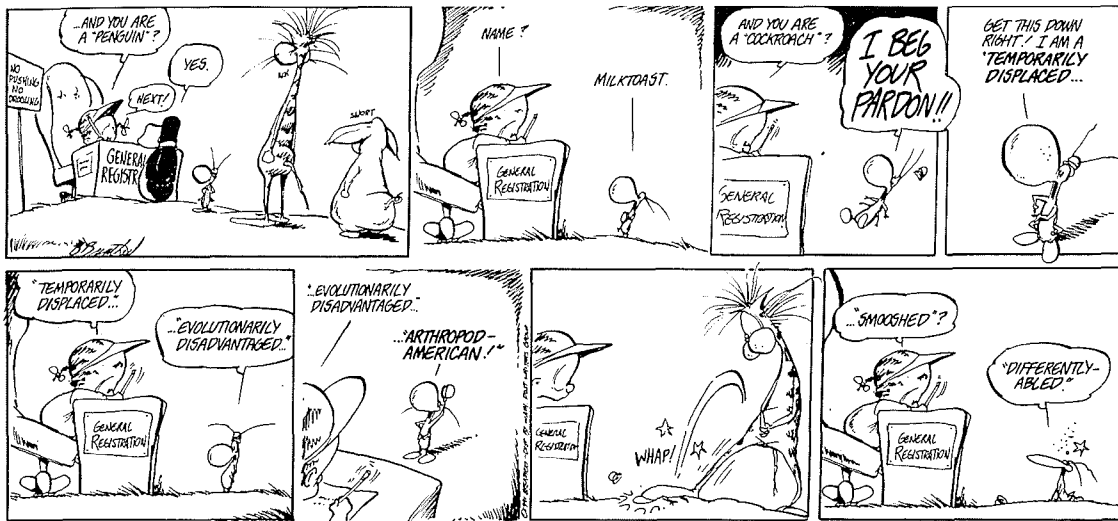
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## Beyond Multiculturalism

**DICTATORSHIP OF VIRTUE:** Multiculturalism and the Battle for America's Future. By Richard Bernstein. Knopf. 367 pp. \$25

New York Times correspondent Richard Bernstein, who at one time reported from France, believes that America's current battles over multicultu-

ralism are "the *dérâpage* [rough translation: the "slippery slope"] of the civil rights movement." Just as Robespierre's insistence on virtue led to terror, Bernstein cautions, so the campaign to root out racism and sexism in school is the first step on the road to Maoist-style thought control. (Bernstein also worked in China.)



Bernstein certainly finds enough examples to justify his alarm. At the University of New Hampshire, a writing instructor's illustration of a simile—"belly-dancing is like jello on a plate with a vibrator under the plate"—was defined as sexual harassment by university bureaucrats, in part because of methods of investigation that "bear a chilling resemblance to those of true dictatorships." The University of Pennsylvania tells students that if "you are perceived to be racist, sexist, heterosexist, ethnocentric, biased against those with religions different from yours, or intolerant of disabilities, you must be willing to examine and change that behavior." The Modern Language Association asserts that describing feminist scholarship as "partisan," "narrow," or "lacking in rigor" can be defined as "anti-feminist harassment." Figures compiled by the National Institute Against Prejudice and Violence include, as examples of "ethnoviolence" a letter from a white student claiming that Louis Farrakhan is a bigot and a campus newspaper article that claimed that "many black students gained entrance into universities they were neither qualified nor prepared to attend."

In Bernstein's view, the multicultural police—academic reformers charged with implementing affirmative action policies and complying with feminist concerns—are ambitious,

power-seeking, and ruthless. Most disturbing, they have come to dominate academia as a kind of "bureaucracy of the good." Convinced of their virtue, they are intolerant of those who disagree with them and oblivious to anyone else's rights. "The whole point of the liberal revolution that gave rise to the 1960s was to free us from somebody else's dogma," Bernstein writes, "but now the very same people who fought for personal liberation a generation ago are striving to impose on others a secularized religion involving a set of values and codes that they believe in, disguising it behind innocuous labels like 'diversity training' and 'respect for difference.' "

Not only are the multiculturalists authoritarian, says Bernstein, but they are also hypocritical. They actually detest traditional cultures. They want everyone to speak in one tongue—the language of the Left (which, ironically, is Western and hegemonic). And they hate the one country, the United States, that has done more than any other to make diversity real.

Bernstein's indictment has been heard before. (How many times do we have to hear that the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women distorted statistics on the failure of young girls in school?) But his account of academia run amok differs from others by

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offering an explanation of how this peculiar situation has come to pass. The story of multiculturalism, in his words, is really a story about generations.

Bernstein relates the life of Gizella Braun, who, like my grandparents, arrived in the United States from Hungary in 1920. Awful things happened to Braun: near deportation, her husband's death when the children were young, a loveless second marriage, the Great Depression. Good things did too: assimilation, prosperity, successful children. How is this story of the struggles of a typical immigrant different from what is happening now? It isn't. "What has changed is our attitude toward ourselves, our unwillingness to see the American identity as worthy enough to expect newcomers to adopt it as their own."

Generations on either side of Gizella Braun have little sense of what genuine diversity means. Before America began to experience mass immigration in the late 19th century, elites were content to imagine America as a culturally uniform Protestant republic. Today's multicultural police also strive for uniformity. They want everyone to conform to their own deeply ingrained views of what true racial and sexual equality resembles: living in one well-sensitized "harmonious garden," as Bernstein puts it. Indeed, although they deify diversity and globalization, they really don't seem to understand it. They are American innocents bewildered by real-world difference.

**T**oday, near the Queens neighborhood that Gizella Braun made home, live hundreds of thousands of immigrants from all parts of the world. It was, ironically, members of these "minority groups" who opposed the efforts of the New York City Board of Education to teach respect for gay lifestyles throughout the public school curriculum. "We came [to the school board meeting] saying that God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve," one black minister told Bernstein. Queens is a place where the desire to "make it" often comes into conflict with a suspicion of change—but neither of these at-

titudes is acceptable to the multiculturalists. Many recent arrivers, for instance, desperately want to hold on to their religious beliefs but know full well that coming to America means that their children may abandon the faith. By dismissing the more traditional views of many immigrants and treating them collectively as "people of color," the multiculturalists pave over real diversity in favor of a uniformity that exists only in their political fantasies.

Moreover, as Bernstein shows, these immigrants see themselves as victims neither of American imperialism nor of middle-class values. They take rather quickly to American culture. Bilingual education drives them up the wall. Their great fear is not discrimination but crime. Yet the multiculturalists, in their contempt for "bourgeois" aspirations and values, come dangerously close to depriving recent arrivals of the very advantages that enabled the multiculturalists themselves to rise to power in universities and foundations.

*Dictatorship of Virtue* tells a powerful story, even if Bernstein's reporting is often sloppy. (Glenn Loury is an economist at Boston University, not a sociologist at Boston College.) Moreover, for reasons that make little sense, Bernstein concludes that the multiculturalists have won the war. Their rhetoric, he writes, "has the rest of us on the run, unable to respond for fear of being branded uncultural, or racist." The rebellious disenchantment of the 1960s may not have had that much of an impact on the national mood. After all, Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980. But, according to Bernstein, it did have a remarkable impact on elite institutions such as universities, the media, and foundations—all places where multiculturalism thrives. This triumph constitutes a "secret victory" for those who would install a dictatorship of virtue in the United States. They protest their powerlessness, but it is they "who have come to determine much of the moral tone, the orthodoxies, and the taboos of life in the 1990s."

To be sure, there is a problem here, and not just at universities. An obsession with victimization, a fear of elitism, and a penchant for

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equality of outcomes are distinctive features of recent American experience. Perhaps the crowning achievement of this perspective is the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990—which forces many businesses to accommodate a wide variety of mental and physical conditions—for it puts the stamp of approval of a Republican president (George Bush) on the idea of using government to enforce a multiculturalist ideal. But the war is hardly over. After all, who won the crucial battles Bernstein himself describes?

**H**is fascinating account of a writing requirement at the University of Texas that would substitute rank political indoctrination for English composition is the story of how that proposal *lost*. What made efforts to dumb down the public school curriculum in Brookline, Massachusetts (in order to de-emphasize European history) so noteworthy, as Bernstein notes, is the fact that so many parents fought back and *won*. New York City had to drop the idea of teaching first graders about sex, and the superintendent was

forced to resign. If Bernstein really believed the war was over, his book would not be as highly spirited as it is—nor would there be so many other similar books.

*Dictatorship of Virtue* is certainly the best of the anti-p.c. critiques. However, it may be precisely this type of overheated counterattack that is getting in the way right now. Bernstein says he doesn't want to be "melodramatic," but he is. He knows that "we are not in danger of the guillotine," yet he can't resist the analogy. Concluding, he writes: "The time has come for liberals to recapture the high ground from the demagogues of diversity, to declare their diversity fake, fraudulent, superstitious, cranky, sanctimonious, monotonous." Actually, that time has passed. The time now is for a sober discussion. If education remains the best path to a life of reason, intelligence, and faith in merit—the story of Gizella Braun—then a less hyperbolic, more nuanced debate ought to be the next step.

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## OTHER TITLES

### *Contemporary Affairs*

**A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE:** Reshaping the American Suburb. By Philip Langdon. Univ. of Mass. 288 pp. \$29.95

**THE NEW URBANISM:** Toward an Architecture of Community. By Peter Katz. McGraw-Hill. 245 pp. \$49.95

What may be most astonishing about the vast suburban landscape created in America during the past 50 years is not its scandalous ugliness or its protean vigor, but the fact that it was built virtually without benefit of town planning. America's town-planning tradition, older than the nation itself, perished when its

practitioners retired or died during the long post-1929 construction standstill of depression and war. The postwar generation of designers and architects, steeped in European modernism, regarded the old town planning as quaint and viewed the American desire to live in a single-family house surrounded by a green lawn with disdainful incredulity. So by and large they decided—with the happy concurrence of developers and many public authorities—to have nothing to do with suburbia. Instead, they chose to mastermind urban renewal and other disastrous schemes in the cities.

Today, the New Urbanist planners and architects, led by the Miami-based husband-wife team of Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-