

by Samuel Francis

The Other Face of Multiculturalism

“The values of the weak prevail,” wrote Friedrich Nietzsche, “because the strong have taken them over as devices of leadership.” This brief and rather cryptic remark contains virtually all we need to know about why contemporary movements like multiculturalism, feminism, homosexuality, and anti-white racism are such powerful trends in modern American and other Western societies. It is easy enough to say that these movements are merely the revolt of Nietzsche’s *Untermenschen* and the natural consequence of mass democracy and civilizational decline. But what Nietzsche grasped that many modern conservatives, who dislike Nietzsche almost as much as Karl Marx and Hillary Clinton, don’t grasp is that what looks like decline, decadence, and decay to conservatives appears to the champions of such trends as progress and the birth of a new civilization. Because conservatives often fail to understand this, they perceive an apocalyptic collapse into anarchy and disorder where there is only an emerging structure of alternative power. The strong—those who like and want to use power—make use of unfashionable and forbidden ideas to gain power for themselves. Insofar as they are successful, the results do represent the decline of the kind of social and political order that conservatives are disposed to defend, but that does not mean that some sort of order is not at the same moment about to lurch forth from the apparent chaos.

Multiculturalism, for example, is less the result of ignorance and uninformed fantasies than a deliberate device by which the power-hungry can subvert a culture, whose moral codes deny them power, and build an alternative culture whose different moral codes yield power for themselves and none for their rivals. Much of the multiculturalist agenda that today rots the minds of children and students from daycare centers to the post-graduate level of education and research in fact originates in an important but little-known organization that calls itself the National Association for Multicultural Education, or NAME. Every year

NAME holds a convention that is attended by more or less innocent but nonetheless power-hungry educators—not only teachers but also school administrators, superintendents, and education professors—as well as by an inner circle of what can be described only as the professional nucleus from which most of the nutty concepts of applied multiculturalism derive.

This past year the NAME folks convened in Albuquerque, New Mexico—a suitably obscure location for plotting the subversion of civilization—and wove their many-tangled webs. The 600 attendees spent their time in seminars with titles like “Power Consciousness: Understanding Educator Power in the Classroom,” “Building Race Unity,” “Racial Identity, Jungle Fever, and the Politics of Interracial Relations,” “Enhancing Diversity from Self to Others,” “Challenging Cultural and Educational Hegemony,” and “Educating for Equity and Excellence: A Challenge for Black Learners to Use Anger as a Catalyst.” There were at least two keynote addresses, one of which was delivered by Peter McLaren of the University of California at Los Angeles and entitled “Towards a Revolutionary Multiculturalism,” and another, by Ward Churchill of the University of Colorado at Boulder, called “Assimilation or Liberation? Crossroads for Multiculturalist Theory.” Essentially what NAME and similar organizations do is transmit multiculturalist doctrine to the general run of dim-witted school teachers, show them how to apply it in classrooms, defend it against angry parents and skeptical community leaders, and construct a national cadre through which their will to power may blossom.

In a statement of “NAME’s philosophy,” the organization tells us that “Xenophobia, discrimination, racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia are societal phenomena that are inconsistent with the principles of democracy and lead to the counterproductive reasoning that differences are deficiencies.” The premises of that statement, of course, are that the social institutions and identities—the “phobias” and “isms” listed—that define a particular order are (a) pathologies (hence the pseudo-psychiatric nomenclature) and (b)

undemocratic. The implicit meaning of “democracy” in the statement is perhaps not what most Americans understand by the term, nor for that matter are most of the phobias and “isms” mentioned of the truly anti-social variety. The statement also says that NAME “rejects the view that diversity threatens the fabric of a society.”

But in enunciating such disclaimers the organization, like the multiculturalist, wears two faces. One face tells us that American society is imbued with exclusionary and repressive pathologies and calls for the extirpation of the basic mechanisms by which the pathologies and repression are sustained; the means to extirpate them is the enhancement of “diversity” and the challenging of the dominant institutional categories that in effect define the social order. The other face denies any such goal and assures us that diversity is no threat at all. Pointing to this contradiction is important, not so much to expose and refute the muddled thinking of the multiculturalist mafia, but rather to make clear the tactics by which this mafia seeks power.

Multiculturalism is entirely correct in one of its major premises, that American society or any other kind of social order defines itself by the exclusion or subordination of some kinds of beliefs and behaviors, and therefore also the partial exclusion of those groups that are culturally wedded to them. A moment’s reflection shows that this is universally true, that the pagan Roman Empire or Christian medieval monarchies could not have been the kind of societies they were had they not excluded and repressed alternative beliefs and groups that did not share their identity. In the United States, where Americans have historically boasted of their tolerance and openness, the processes of exclusion and repression have generally been lacking in the formal apparatus of the state, and the absence of state action against social deviance has enticed many Americans into believing that those processes don’t exist, that America is a unique and exceptional society that defines itself by its tolerance and “openness.”

The fact is that American society, in part because of the weakness of its national state throughout its history, has re-

lied on informal mechanisms of exclusion and repression to control deviations from its norms and to enforce its own identity, and those informal mechanisms are located primarily in what we think of as the “culture.” What the multiculturalists call “xenophobia” (the restriction of membership in American society to people who are culturally identifiable as Americans), “discrimination” (the exclusion of certain groups from certain kinds of participation because they do not adhere to an identifiable American identity), and all the rest of the “isms” they list are rooted not in the formal laws and Constitution of the American state but in the family, religion, communities, and schools.

The multiculturalists are entirely right: in order to challenge the mechanisms of exclusion and repression, overthrowing the state is not terribly important. What is important is to overthrow the culture. If it’s revolution and liberation from these “pathologies” and forms of repression you’re looking for, forget the Pentagon, the FBI, and the CIA. The real enemies with whom you have to grapple are the family meal, the Sunday school, the barber shop, and the commonly held beliefs that are reinforced and transmitted in those places.

Given this strategy and the correctness of its assumptions, the other face of multiculturalism acquires considerable importance as a tactic in carrying it out. The other face of multiculturalism insists that its challenge is not really radical or revolutionary at all but merely the fulfillment of “democracy” and what the NAME statement of philosophy elsewhere calls “the individual’s noble quest to define one’s relationship and responsibility to our global society.” In other words, the other face of multiculturalism mobilizes its revolutionary agenda by using commonly accepted words and icons of the contemporary dominant culture — “democracy” and the “global society,” not to mention the ubiquitous clichés that “America is a nation of immigrants” or the “first universal nation” or is “founded on a proposition” too abstract to permit real cultural content. It uses these words and icons in order to gain a sympathetic hearing from the commonplace centers of cultural power. This suggests that multiculturalism is as powerful as it is because the groundwork for its revolutionary attack on traditional American culture has been laid for it by the contemporary dominant culture and

by the jargon that the dominant culture has popularized and with which it defines itself.

What we have in the United States today, then, are ostensibly three different cultures (or subcultures, if you will). One is the traditional patriarchal, family-centered, Euro-American culture that defines and enforces itself through largely informal mechanisms and with which most who call themselves conservatives identify to one degree or another. The second is the dominant culture of the imperial metropole—the dominant media, the major universities, and national politics. The third is the largely imaginary culture championed by the multiculturalists as the alternative to the first two (though they usually don’t distinguish between the first two in the delusion that the dominant culture is simply an extension of the traditional one).

In fact, multiculturalism is not distinct from the dominant culture. It survives because of the ascendancy of the dominant culture’s beliefs (embedded in such terms as “democracy” and the “global society”) and enforced behaviors; it flourishes because it is lodged in the educational and governmental bureaucracies of the dominant culture; it is legitimized by the propaganda apparatus of the dominant culture; and its agenda is simply an intensification and a continuation of the agenda of the dominant culture, which is the replacement of the traditional culture by itself. Under the Clinton administration in particular, the dominant culture has intensified its war on traditional culture, in explicit alliance with multiculturalist legions. Hence, the president’s fatuous “race initiative,” which tolerates only perspectives based on nonwhite resentment and white guilt; hence, the administration’s obsession with “hate crimes,” the “stealth agenda” of which, as Robert Knight of the Family Research Council recently noted, is to “elevate homosexuality [and for that matter, all other victim categories excluded and subordinated by traditional cultural identity] to specially protected minority status.”

It is true that multiculturalism differs from the dominant culture in much of its rhetoric and some of its tactics. The “diversity” it is always chattering about is not characteristic of the dominant structures of the state, media, and the higher perches of the economy, but because the dominant culture does not define itself through the same exclusions and repres-

sions that traditional culture does, “diversity” is no real threat to it. What the dominant culture excludes and represses is the traditional culture itself, and “diversity” is today the principal weapon by which it seeks to achieve that goal. By enforcing “diversity” as both an ideal and an actual practice through affirmative action, forced integration, mass immigration, and multiculturalism itself, the dominant culture undermines the defining mechanisms of the traditional culture and renders its continued functioning impossible. Since the dysfunctions in traditional culture that result often engender genuinely pathological behavior, that simply reinforces the image of traditional culture as inherently pathological.

Conventional conservatives are generally correct that the dysfunctions they perceive in American society are signs of decadence—the weakening of families, the erosion of communities, the inversion of sexual morality, and all the other chants in the litany of decline. These are symptoms of the decadence of traditional culture, whether induced by its enemies or not; but they are also signs of the triumph of the dominant culture, which regards them at worst as insignificant irritants or at best as indications of impending liberation from traditional restraints and the defeat of its adversary, traditional culture. The values of the weak, the weird, the excluded, and the repressed prevail because those who inhabit the dominant culture have taken them over as devices by which their own leadership is entrenched. Nietzsche understood this long before the tactic had a name and long before groups like NAME discovered how to use the tactic to entrench their own power. <C>

LIBERAL ARTS

OFFICIAL HISTORY

“John and Robert [Kennedy] were assassinated in the midst of crusades—against communism, for civil rights—that they were prepared to die for.”

—from *Time*, January 12, 1998

Letter From Venice

by Curtis Cate

Illusion and Reality, Then and Now



Years ago—so long ago indeed that I hesitate to record the date—a wise lady of Hungarian origin said to me in Vienna: “Oh, to be able to see Venice again for the first time!” It was one of those casual remarks which, behind the smiling mask of a truism, reveals a hidden, monitory depth.

Contrary to what Thomas Jefferson and many other 18th-century optimists believed, human happiness is not something that can be methodically pursued. In its supreme forms or visitations, where it approaches or attains the pinnacle of ecstasy, it is a delicious surprise, a “gift of the gods,” and for all of us that blessed moment when the expectation is equaled or surpassed by the attainment. It is that magic instant, so delicately evoked by Joyce, when on the occasion of his *first* kiss, his autobiographical hero, Stephen Daedalus, experienced with a thrill the “soft, sweet swoon of sin.” It is that extraordinary moment in the life of a young male, described by Stendhal with such psychological penetration in *Le Rouge et le Noir*, when for the first time an adolescent proves his virility with the trembling consent of his female partner.

In citing these two examples, I do not wish to suggest that the “firstness” of any truly happy experience is limited to erotic pleasure—which fortunately for all of us is not the case. It is simply because Venice—the *serenissima* Republic of the Doges, the proud maintainer of a Mediterranean fleet that was long a match for all others, the home of Paolo Veronese, of Jacopo Robusti (better known as a *dyer’s son* by his nickname of Tintoretto), of Tiziano Vecellio (whom Kenneth Clark once called the greatest portrait painter of all time)—was also the city of that exuberant lecher, Giovanni Giacomo Casanova, and of his libertine

friend, “Abbate” Lorenzo da Ponte—the poet and librettist who persuaded Mozart to compose *Don Giovanni*.

Two centuries ago, many were the travelers who came to Venice with no clearly defined impression of the wonders that awaited them. They were moved by the vivid tales they had heard of this floating city and which, like everything read or heard about, were embellished and embroidered in their feverish imaginations. But in our age of illustrated magazines, travel leaflets, and tourist posters, this kind of visual innocence has virtually ceased to exist. The no longer distant destination must now vie with the pre-existing photographic image which, even before the alluring goal is reached, has robbed it of much of its mystery.

For this 20th-century plight there is of course a kind of ersatz remedy or crutch—the hired or self-appointed tourist guide. As the great art historian, Ernst Gombrich, has never ceased to point out, knowledge of the circumstances in which a great painting, a great piece of sculpture, or a great edifice was created *adds* to one’s enjoyment of what might otherwise be casually dismissed as inexplicably puzzling, quaint, and explorably “unmodern,” just one more artistic extravaganza sponsored or financed by members of an inexcusably pampered “leisure class” (to use the language of Thorstein Veblen). The extent to which the puritanical “subconscious” adversely affects and cripples aesthetic judgments is, I think, matched in our contemporary democratic world only by the crass ingratitude the *willfully ignorant* tourist displays towards extraordinary works of art that it took years, and sometimes even decades, to complete. For the willfully ignorant tourist is also, in this age of supersonic transport and *spoudiphilia* (love of haste) the itinerant tourist-in-a-hurry. As my brother, no lover of museums, once said to me, after accompanying a Canadian friend to the Palace of Versailles, “I normally go through a museum on a bicycle, but he roared through on a motorbike!”

When I made my first visit to Venice in 1949—for the truth at last “must out”—the floating city did not yet boast an airport. It was linked to the mainland

town of Mestre (since become, o scandal of scandals, an oil-refining center) by a narrow causeway paralleled by a track leading to the railway station. I arrived with a friend by car (more exactly a Jeep), which we left in a large garage or *autorimessa*, which to this day adjoins the Piazzale Roma and the fluvial terminus for the *vaporetti* that ply up and down the Grand Canal. Night had already fallen, cloaking the darkly silhouetted buildings in a mantle of nocturnal mystery in the midst of which, like golden sequins, a row of receding birthday candles seemed to offer us a wobbly greeting.

Even though it was undertaken in a diesel-powered *vaporetto* (steam-driven river ferries were already a thing of the past), that first trip up the Grand Canal, with a long necklace of lanterns illuminating the facades of neo-Gothic palazzi, each with its small wooden wharf and gaily colored barber-poles for the hitching of its gondolas, was an unforgettable experience. Had I been richer, I would have insisted on making the trip by gondola—then, as now, an expensive luxury reserved for leisurely millionaires.

It was only much later, when I was doing research for my biography of George Sand—whose *Lettres d’un voyageur* (written during her six-month stay in 1834) are among the most enchanting pages ever written about this city by a non-Italian author—that I realized what I had missed. Her description of her own approach to Venice with her poet-lover Alfred de Musset is worth quoting, if only as a sad reminder of how much our modern, time-pressed world has lost in terms of *slowly unfolding* beauty ever since the automobile replaced the horse-and-buggy, and the water-churning *vaporetto* the kind of hooded gondola, poled by three stout gondoliers, in which the two French “honeymooners” were silently propelled toward the heart of the city.

Suspended like a lantern over the twinkling lights of the Giudecca waterway up which they were gliding, the moon now came into view with an almost theatrical sense of timing, a sultry, heavy-lidded moon, against whose huge blood-