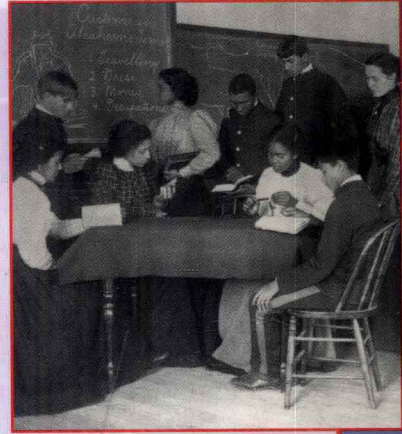


★ FOURTH EDITION ★

Deculturalization and the Struggle for Equality

**A Brief History
of the Education
of Dominated
Cultures in the
United States**



JOEL SPRING



FOURTH EDITION

G571.29/W3

Deculturalization and the Struggle for Equality

A BRIEF HISTORY
OF THE EDUCATION
OF DOMINATED CULTURES
IN THE UNITED STATES

Joel Spring
New School University



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DECULTURALIZATION AND THE STRUGGLE FOR EQUALITY

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This book is printed on acid-free paper.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 FGR/FGR 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

ISBN 0-07-256383-4

Publisher: *Thalia Dorwick*

Developmental editor: *Terri Wise*

Senior marketing manager: *Pam S. Cooper*

Media producer: *Lance Gerhart*

Project manager: *Diane M. Folliard*

Production supervisor: *Janean Utley*

Senior designer: *Violeta Diaz*

Lead supplement producer: *Marc Mattson*

Cover design: *Susan Breitbard*

Cover credits: Clockwise from top left—© Bettmann/Corbis; © Corbis; © Rykoff Collection/Corbis; and Underwood & Underwood/Corbis

Typeface: *10/12 Palatino*

Compositor: *ElectraGraphics, Inc.*

Printer: *Quebecor World Fairfield, Inc.*

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Spring, Joel H.

Deculturalization and the struggle for equality : a brief history of the education of dominated cultures in the United States / Joel Spring.— 4th ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

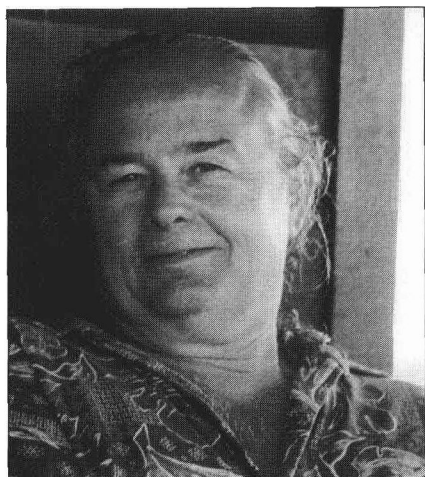
ISBN 0-07-256383-4 (soft cover : alk. paper)

1. Minorities—Education—United States—History. 2. Discrimination in education—United States—History. 3. Segregation in education—United States—History. 4. Multicultural education—United States—History. I. Title.

LC3731.S68 2004

371.829—dc21

2003043420



About the Author

JOEL SPRING is on the faculty of the New School University. He received his PhD in educational policy studies from the University of Wisconsin. His major research interests are history of education, multicultural education, Native American culture, and the politics of education. Professor Spring is the author of many books including *The Cultural Transformation of a Native American Family and Its Tribe 1763–1995: A Basket of Apples*; *Images of American Life: A History of Ideological Management in Schools, Movies, Radio, and Television*; *American Education* (in its eleventh edition); *Wheels in the Head: Educational Philosophies of Authority, Freedom, and Culture from Socrates to Paul Freire*; *The Intersection of Cultures: Multicultural Education in the United States*; *Education and the Rise of the Global Economy*; *The Universal Right to Education: Justification, Definition and Guidelines*; and *Globalization and Educational Rights: An Intercivilizational Analysis*.

Preface

In this fourth edition, I rewrote Chapter 3, “African Americans: Deculturalization, Transformation, and Segregation,” to highlight the complexity of the process of deculturalization and cultural transformation of enslaved Africans. In North America, education and cultural policies affecting enslaved Africans varied from region to region depending on the economic system. For instance, the first Africans brought to North America were Atlantic Creoles who had already assumed a partially European identity. Many had European names and spoke European languages. They worked alongside white indentured servants. In sharp contrast to the Atlantic Creoles were those from the African interior who were herded into the brutal southern plantation system. With little previous contact with European cultures, these Africans arrived in North America speaking a variety of languages coming from differing cultural traditions. Adding to the complexity of the story, most enslaved Africans living in the North were freed after the Revolutionary War and immediately tried to enhance their educational opportunities. In contrast, southern states outlawed education of enslaved Africans and, as a result, when the Civil War ended there occurred a great literacy campaign to rectify the educational deprivations of the plantation system.

In Chapter 6, I added a section on the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 because the legislation significantly reversed some of the educational changes of the twentieth century’s civil rights movement. One educational goal of the civil rights movement was the preservation of minority languages and cultures. By imposing uniform testing and stressing English acquisition, the No Child Left Behind Act ensures that public schools will teach a single, monolithic culture. At the conclusion of Chapter 6, I added a section on international educational rights documents. The protection of minority cultures and languages in schools will require action by human rights groups.

Also, despite constant struggles, equality of educational opportunity has not been achieved in the United States. I believe that equal educational opportunity will only occur when an educational rights amendment is added to the U.S. Constitution.

Throughout the book, I have added new chapter openings and conclusions to tighten and clarify the book's general theme of the use of educational policies to change and eradicate cultures and languages. The reaction to the No Child Left Behind Act indicates that cultural and language issues will continue through the twenty-first century.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following instructors for the feedback they provided during the development of the fourth edition.

Jody S. Hall,
The University of Massachusetts—Boston

Carolyn M. Siemens Ward,
Western Illinois University

Charles C. Jackson,
Augusta State University

Traki L. Taylor,
The University of Michigan—Flint

Scott McNabb,
The University of Iowa

Winston Vaughan,
Xavier University

Monica A. Medina,
Indiana University

Adah L. Ward Randolph,
Ohio University

Patricia L. Prado-Olmos,
California State University—San Marcos

Sally H. Wertheim,
John Carroll University

William G. Ruff,
The University of Texas—San Antonio

Joshua Carter Woodfork,
The University of Maryland

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Deculturalization and the Claim of Racial and Cultural Superiority by Anglo-Americans

This book is intended to clarify the language, cultural, and racial issues related to education. These issues are increasingly important with the mass migration of the world's peoples in search of improved economic, political, and social conditions. Most countries are multicultural nations having school systems that must deal with multiple languages and cultures. The United States is not unique in developing educational policies related to linguistic and cultural diversity.

In North America, the clash of languages and cultures has been accompanied by economic exploitation, cultural intolerance, and racism. Educational policies have served the interests of those wanting to take advantage of others. For instance, I will begin this book with the English invasion of North America. In North America, linguistic and cultural diversity already existed between the various Indian nations. While recognizing the cultural diversity of Native Americans, the English tended to think of all Native Americans as the "other" or as significantly different from themselves in basic human qualities. In the minds of most English invaders, Native Americans were "savages," "pagans," and "degenerates." Using these descriptors, it was easy for English invaders to turn cultural differences into racial differences and for them to consider all Native Americans as racially inferior.

The educational policies of the English, and later of the United States government, were formulated with this vision of Native Americans as inferior. Consequently, schools were created to destroy Native American cultural and linguistic traditions and replace them with the English language and Anglo-American culture.

A similar pattern emerged, as I discuss in Chapter 3, with the enslavement of Africans. Europeans also viewed Africans as inferior. In the South, slave owners feared that any form of education might generate revolt against the slave system, so slaves were denied educational rights altogether. The brutal

hand of slavery itself served to strip enslaved Africans of their cultural heritage. In the North, also buttressed by imagined beliefs in their own racial superiority, Anglo-Americans prior to the Civil War supported educational segregation among free African Americans. This system of educational segregation continued in the North and South after the Civil War.

Economic exploitation was central to the educational policies for Native Americans and African Americans. In the case of Native Americans, the issue was conquest and expropriation of land. The final conquest of Native American lands occurred in the later part of the nineteenth century. During this period, Anglo-Americans rationalized their brutal subjugation of Indian nations and expropriation of Native American lands by claiming that Native Americans were racially and culturally inferior. The same racial and cultural rationalizations were used with the enslavement of Africans and the expropriation of their labor.

As did African Americans, Asian Americans experienced, as I discuss in Chapter 4, both the denial of an education and segregated schools. Like African Americans, the issue was expropriation of labor. This expropriation of labor was achieved through the maintenance of low wages rather than actual enslavement. In contrast, the experiences of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, as I discuss in Chapter 5, paralleled those of Native Americans. Both groups were subjects of conquest by the U.S. government. They experienced attempts to destroy their language and cultures, and educational segregation.

The issues surrounding the educational history of these groups, as I discuss in the last chapter, continued into the twenty-first century with the passage of the federal government's No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. These issues will continue into the future as globalization spurs the migration of the world's people. Within this framework, this book can serve as both a warning and a guide to all nations engaged in the education of multiple language and cultural groups.

CULTURE AND RACE AS CENTRAL ISSUES IN U.S. HISTORY AND EDUCATION

Certainly, some of the most violent and troubled parts of American history involve cultural and racial clashes, including

- Almost 1 million dead from the U.S. Civil War.
- The Trail of Death covered by the bodies of European Americans and Native Americans from the Indian wars lasting from the time of the arrival of the first European settlers to the late nineteenth century.
- The lynching and beating of Chinese in nineteenth-century California.
- The killing and beating of enslaved Africans.
- The lynching and beating of African Americans during reconstruction and segregation periods in the South.
- Race riots in northern cities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
- The murder and beating of Mexican Americans during the "Zoot Suit" riots in 1943.

- The murders, riots, and church bombings during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

Unfortunately, violence and racism are a basic part of American history and of the history of the schools. From colonial times to today, educators have preached equality of opportunity and good citizenship, while engaging in acts of religious intolerance, racial segregation, cultural genocide, and discrimination against immigrants and nonwhites. Schooling has been plagued by scenes of violence, including

- Urban riots between Protestants and Catholics in the 1840s over the religious content of public schooling.
- The punishment of enslaved Africans for learning to read.
- Racial clashes over the education of African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Mexican Americans.
- The riots and killings over integration of schools from the 1950s to the 1970s.
- The racially motivated killing of a black student along with fourteen others at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, in 1999.

Cultural genocide—the attempt to destroy other cultures—is an important part of the history of violence in the U.S. Often, U.S. educational policies have involved cultural genocide. “Deculturalization” is the term I use for the process of cultural genocide.

Deculturalization is one aspect of a strange mixture of democratic thought and intolerance that permeates American history. The concept of deculturalization demonstrates how cultural prejudice, racism, and religious bigotry can be intertwined with democratic beliefs. Deculturalization combines education for democracy and political equality with cultural genocide.

Deculturalization is the educational process of destroying a people’s culture and replacing it with a new culture. Language is an important part of culture. In the case of the United States, schools have used varying forms of this method in attempts to eradicate the cultures of Native Americans; African Americans; Mexican Americans; Puerto Ricans; and immigrants from Ireland, Southern and Eastern Europe, and Asia. Believing that Anglo-American culture was the superior culture and the only culture that would support republican and democratic institutions, educators forbade the speaking of non-English languages, particularly Spanish and Native American tongues, and forced students to learn an Anglo-American centered curriculum.

DECULTURALIZATION AND DEMOCRATIC THOUGHT

On the surface, it would seem strange that a nation that identifies itself as democratic should have such a long history of racial and cultural conflicts and would have adopted deculturalization policies. These seemingly contradictory beliefs have had tragic results, as measured by the number of lives lost in racial

and cultural conflicts, and represent a deep flaw in the unfolding history of the United States and American schools. It is important to understand that *for some Americans, racism and democracy are not conflicting beliefs, but they are part of a general system of American values.*

In *Civic Ideals*, Rogers Smith's massive and award-winning study of U.S. citizenship, he contends that most historians neglect the importance of racist viewpoints in the forming of U.S. laws. As Smith demonstrates, U.S. history is characterized by a long tradition of discrimination and bigotry. After evaluating the combination of legal restrictions on voting rights, and immigration and naturalization laws, Smith concludes "that for over 80 percent of U.S. history, American laws declared most people in the world legally ineligible to become U.S. citizens solely because of their race, original nationality, or gender. For at least two-thirds of American history, the majority of the domestic adult population was also ineligible for full citizenship for the same reasons."¹

Understanding how republicanism, democracy, and equality are compatible with racism and religious intolerance in some people's minds is key to understanding American violence and the often tragic history of education. However, *many Americans of European descent have fought against racism and religious bigotry.* For those believing in racial equality, those European Americans who were abolitionists and civil rights advocates are the real exemplars of democracy and equality in American history.

RACE, RACISM, AND CITIZENSHIP

The concepts of race and racism are rather vague. Race is primarily a social construction. Consider, for example, southern states during the years of segregation. The "drop of blood" rule was usually applied in determining who should attend white or black segregated schools. For instance, if a child's father was African American and the mother was European American, then the child was classified as African American and was required to attend a segregated black school. Or consider, as I will discuss in Chapter 4, that **Chinese were classified** in the 1850s as Native Americans by California courts **based on the theory** that Native Americans originally were Asians who crossed the Bering Straits and populated North America.

Given the changing meaning of race throughout U.S. history, I am relying on *legal definitions of race as expressed in U.S. laws and in court rulings.* Consequently, I have provided in Chapters 2 through 4 citizenship time lines. These time lines indicate when each group—Native American, African American, Asian American, and Hispanic/Latino American—gained full citizenship rights. For instance, as I will discuss in Chapter 2, Native Americans were not granted U.S. citizenship until 1924, and they did not receive full citizenship rights until the 1960s and 1970s. These citizenship laws and court decisions provide a concrete understanding for the constantly changing meaning of race in the United States.

Also, without a clear definition of race, racism becomes difficult to define. I have often used the definition that racism is prejudice plus power. This means that when power can be used to serve feelings of prejudice, such as through the establishment of segregated schools for Mexican Americans in the Southwest, then it is a racist act. Therefore, throughout this book *I am defining racism in concrete terms as citizenship laws, education laws, and court rulings that are prejudicial toward a particular group of students.*

CONCEPTS OF CULTURAL AND RACIAL SUPERIORITY

English colonists brought their feelings of racial and cultural superiority about their Protestant beliefs and English culture to North America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Many English during the colonial period believed that they were a people chosen by God to protect and spread the Protestant version of Christianity and that the English had a divine mission to spread doctrines of political liberty. Therefore, concepts of political liberty and racial superiority coexisted in English thought.²

Technically, the term “Anglo-Saxon” refers to the Germanic peoples (Angles, Saxons, and Jutes) who invaded England in the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. According to racial mythology, the Anglo-Saxons are the source of English traditions of political liberty and equality. The continuing belief in the superiority of Anglo-Saxon culture is reflected in its most extreme form in the Nazi Party USA’s call for reunification with the British commonwealth. Today, white nationalists, such as the Ku Klux Klan, persist in their advocacy of the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon “race” and traditions.

As Carl Kaestle argues in *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860*, public schools in the nineteenth century were primarily designed to protect the ideology of an Anglo-American Protestant culture. Most of the common-school reformers, he documents, were native-born Anglo-American Protestants, and their public philosophy “called for government action to provide schooling that would be more common, more equal, more dedicated to public policy, and therefore more effective in creating cultural and political values centering on Protestantism, republicanism, and capitalism.”³ Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Catholics often referred to the public schools as “Protestant schools” in contrast to Catholic schools. The Protestant and deculturalization practices of the public school system caused the development of the Catholic school system in the nineteenth century.⁴

This English belief in their cultural superiority can be traced to the invasion of Ireland in the twelfth century, which initiated a long period of colonial expansion. From Ireland in the twelfth century to India in the nineteenth century, the English were convinced that colonial expansion was just because it spread Anglo-Saxon culture around the world. According to historian Ronald Takaki, the English considered the Irish inferior savages who could only be redeemed

by adopting English culture. Eventually, English opinion was divided between the possibility of civilizing the Irish and a belief in the innate inferiority of the Irish. The latter position became part of a generalized English belief in their racial superiority.⁵

In the British colonial empire, English feelings of cultural superiority and racism were used to justify economic exploitation and expropriation of lands. For many European Americans, Indians were an obstacle to the spread of white Europeans from coast to coast. To make room for the expansion of whites, Indians were subjected to genocide or containment on small farms and reservations. In Takaki's words, "This social construction of race occurred within the economic context of competition over land."⁶

Therefore, English beliefs in their cultural and racial superiority over Native Americans and, later, enslaved Africans, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Asians, were not born on American soil. They were part of the cultural baggage English colonists brought to North America. English beliefs in their cultural and racial superiority were reinforced by the justifications given for taking over Native American lands. North America acted as a hothouse for the growth of white racism and cultural chauvinism. Again, this phenomenon was not unique to North America, but it followed the British flag around the world.

The English colonizing North America compared their experiences with Indians to their experiences with the Irish. Takaki found many written comparisons during colonial times between the "wild Irish" and the "wild Indians." As with the Irish, English opinion was divided over the possibility of civilizing Native Americans.⁷ Extreme racist opinions led to the conclusion that the only solution to the Indian problem was genocide. This attitude is captured in General Philip Sheridan's comment in 1867 after defeating the Cheyenne, "The only good Indians I ever saw were dead." This statement was refined by one of Sheridan's officers to the famous saying, "The only good Indian is a dead Indian."⁸

Also, many Anglo-Americans envisioned North America as a land that would be primarily inhabited by whites. Benjamin Franklin worried that there were larger numbers of Africans and Asians in the world than European whites. In addition, Franklin often expressed anti-German concerns and worried about their growing numbers in Pennsylvania. He considered expansion into North America an opportunity to increase the white race. Shortly before the American Revolution, as Takaki points out, Franklin argued that the English were the "principle body of white People" that should populate North America. The clearing of the forests, Franklin noted, would serve to make room for more whites. "Why," he asked, "increase the Sons of Africa, by planting them in America, where we have so fair an opportunity, by excluding all Blacks and Tawnys, of increasing the lovely White? . . ."⁹

In addition, most colonists were strongly anti-Catholic—a pattern that existed until the 1960s when John F. Kennedy became the first elected and only Catholic president of the United States. Political freedom was only intended for Protestants. Virginia banned Catholics from public offices in the 1640s; Massachusetts expelled Catholic priests in 1647; and after 1689 New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Maryland refused to grant citizenship to immigrant Catholics.

Maryland, where half the colonies' Catholics lived, eliminated legal protection of Catholics in 1654. According to Rogers Smith, "By the end of the [seventeenth] century, restrictions on Catholic worship were nearly universal in the colonies, remaining light only in Rhode Island and Pennsylvania."¹⁰ Therefore, during the colonial period, political equality and freedom were only intended for white, male Protestants. Excluded from citizenship were enslaved Africans, Native Americans, and women.

THE NATURALIZATION ACT OF 1790 AND WHAT IT MEANS TO BE WHITE

Congressional approval of the Naturalization Act of 1790 highlights the racial and cultural attitudes of early government leaders. The Naturalization Act excluded from citizenship all nonwhites, including *Indians*. Indians were considered domestic foreigners and, therefore, ineligible for citizenship.¹¹ The legislation specifically stated that citizenship would be granted only to a "free white person."¹² As I will discuss later, U.S. Supreme Court rulings in the 1920s narrowed the definition of "free white person" to exclude Asians with pale skin and East Indians who claimed to share common ancestors with Europeans. Until the 1950s, Asian immigrants were denied citizenship though their children born in the United States were automatically citizens.¹³ All Native Americans were not granted citizenship until 1924.

In the minds of some early leaders, the term "white" was primarily reserved for those of British Protestant descent. By the early twentieth century, most Americans applied the term "white" to all Americans of European descent. However, it required a social struggle for the Irish and Southern and Eastern Europeans to gain acceptance as "whites." *How the Irish Became White* is Noel Ignatiev's fascinating history of the struggle of Irish Americans to gain status in the "white" community.¹⁴ For the Irish, their Catholicism was a major problem in gaining acceptance. Jewish, Muslim, and Eastern Orthodox immigrants also encountered problems because of their differing religious beliefs.

The writers of the U.S. Constitution and leaders of the new republic were divided over the issue of immigration. However, there was almost universal agreement among this group that citizenship should be limited to free whites. This agreement was based on the opinion that a republican form of government could only survive with a homogenous white population. Of the two political factions, the Jeffersonian Republicans and the Federalists, the Jeffersonian Republicans favored immigration and, in the words of Rogers Smith, "sanctioned slavery and the conquest of the tribes [Native Americans], often alleging their racial inferiority."¹⁵ Reflecting the conflicting strains in U.S. history up to the present, the Federalists preferred "native-born" citizenship as opposed to the naturalized citizenship of immigrants and "expressed hope for peaceful assimilation of the tribes and the eventual demise of slavery, though few championed racial equality."¹⁶ The advocates of limiting citizenship to the native-born are