

SECOND EDITION



The Intersection of Cultures

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN THE
UNITED STATES AND THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

Joel Spring

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Multicultural Education in the United States and the Global Economy

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Joel Spring
SUNY New Paltz

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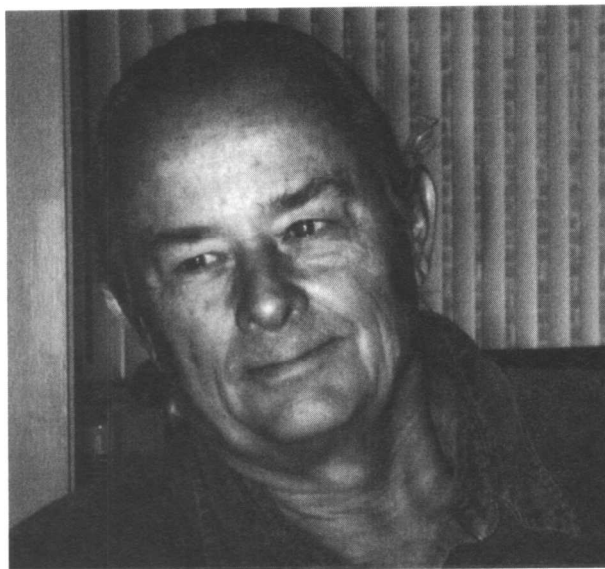
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Preface

This second edition contains two new chapters— “Immigrant Cultures” and “Multiculturalism in the Global Economy.” In addition, I have added the following sections and topics.

- In Search of American Culture
- American Culture and Equality of Economic Opportunity
- Black Mobility and Assimilation to the Dominant Culture
- The Culture of Success for Jews, Women, Asians, Latinos/Latinas, Lesbians/Gays and Low-Income Whites
- Teaching Hawaiian Culture: Alternative or Transition to Economic Success
- Is “White Trash” a Dominated Culture?
- Educating for Cultural Power
- Muslim Schools: Finding a Safe Haven
- Summer Camps for Cultural Survival
- Shooting at a Convenience Store
- Rebellion and School Uniforms
- Wearing Your Knicks Jacket at the Zocalo
- Transnationalism: The Multicultural Immigrant
- Varieties of Educational Experience
- Knowing Immigrant Cultures
- Singapore
- The European Union: The World’s Most Ambitious Multicultural Education Program
- English Language Imperialism?
- The Right to Language and Culture in the Global Economy
- The Multicultural and Language Debates
- Models of Indigenous Education: Educating for the Child, Family, and Community
- Child Centered (Maori)
- Holistic Education (Okanagan)
- Three Baskets of Knowledge (Maori)
- Stimulating and Language-Based Education (Native Hawaiian)
- Linking Native People to the Spirituality of All Life (Cochiti Pueblo)

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--Joel Spring"

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PART ONE

Multiculturalism

What Is the Dominant Culture of the United States?

"They should all become Americans," declared Eric, a white student born and raised in suburbia, as my class examined the effect of immigration on U.S. schools.

The last time I asked students how they would introduce a recently arrived immigrant to U.S. culture, one student responded, "Take'm to a mall. Get'm a happy burger at the food court and go shopping at the Gap."

"Okay," I responded, "let's divide this class into groups and each group prepare a short definition of what it means to be an 'American.' We'll call this our search for the dominant culture of the United States."

I didn't know what would result from the exercise. My father was a Native American, and my mother was of English and German descent. Did my father embody what it meant to be an American? I don't think the Americanism of my father is what Eric had in mind. On the other hand, my mother's family pioneered the West in the nineteenth century. Was she the embodiment of what it means to be an American?

Eventually, I wanted to describe the dominant culture of the United States and raise the issue of whether or not schools should reflect the dominant culture or other cultures.

"That's only for whites! Your freedom is not my freedom," Carla, an African American woman, angrily blurted out when the first group defined Americanism as a commitment to freedom and liberty. "*You* can talk about freedom. I define being American as learning how to oppress other people."

"Well," I thought, "my father would agree with Carla, and my mother would agree with the group."

"Look at you," an obviously hostile European American female named Linda said to Carla, "you're all dressed up. I know you drive a nice car. You *could* be back in Africa swinging from a tree."

"That's racist," Shawn, a white student, yelled, pounding his desk. I could feel the class slipping out of control. We were moving deeper and deeper into people's strongest emotions. Discussions of multicultural education can cause students and communities to retreat behind walls of hatred and fear.

"Look," I said, trying to soothe feelings and engage in a multicultural conversation, "my father would agree with Carla. America has meant oppression to many Native Americans. On the other hand, my mother would agree with Linda. She claims my father would still be shooting bows and arrows at deer rather than driving a car if it had not been for white people. Besides the issue of whether my father would have been happier hunting as opposed to owning a car, we can see that people have different perspectives about America as the land of liberty and freedom."

"Carla, how did you feel about the comment 'swinging from a tree'?" I asked.

"Just white trash talking," Carla answered. "It was ignorant and stupid. Besides, I have white blood in me. Am I African or European? How do you define race? I would rather think of myself as African."

"I'm not white trash," Linda snapped back. "Just because my family's poor doesn't mean we're white trash. At least we're not niggers."

A loud moan came from the class. Shawn leaped to his feet, "That's racist! I can't believe a future teacher would use that word."

"She called me white trash," Linda shouted back. "What's the difference between calling someone white trash or nigger? Why don't you yell at Carla for using white trash?"

"It's not the same thing. The 'N' word is unacceptable," responded Shawn, unable to repeat the racial slur. "I don't know what white trash means."

"White trash are ignorant and poor whites," Carla explained. "They're rednecks. Drive out to the trailer parks. You'll see plenty of white trash. Car parts and junk all around their trailers. Bunch of racist slobs."

"We had a white trash part of our fashion show in high school," giggled Paula, a white student. "We dressed in flour-sack dresses with straw hats and overalls. We made jewelry from crushed beer cans and car parts. It was a gas."

"It seems," I interrupted, "like we have a lot of issues, such as 'they should all be Americans,' 'only whites have freedom,' 'niggers,' and 'white trash.'"

By now I was emotionally involved. One could easily characterize my childhood as white trash. After the divorce, we lived off my mother's meager income as a low-level government clerk supplemented with a small child-support check from my alcoholic father who continued his enlisted career in the U.S. Navy. For Native Americans, and other groups, the military is an equal opportunity employer. Certainly, crushed beer cans symbolized my father's life.

"I'm feeling upset by the exchange that just took place," I continued. "I think we need to balance this emotional outburst with a little bit of thought. Also, we're going to have to talk about some of the language that was used."

Wanting to reestablish my authority over the class, I turned to the chalkboard and composed a list of questions:

- What is the dominant culture of the United States?
- Are there oppressed cultures in the United States?
- How should we define "culture" and "race"?
- What is the meaning of terms such as "nigger" and "white trash"?
- What is the purpose of multicultural education?

"I wanna talk about that last question," said Linda, as I completed the list. "Why do we have to take this course? It's just another chance for people to