

English-Only, Cura 1

English-Only Multiculturalism in Red-State America

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March 31, 2009

“We know with our gut, values, ethics, mother wit, our rationale, left and/or right minds, our quantitative and qualitative analyses that **diversity is about human beings striving to “become” more whole as individuals and more “real” as a global village**” –Sandra Rios Balderrama, former Director of the Office for Diversity of the American Library Association and former President of REFORMA.

Immigrants and Americanness Stew

Libraries have been aiding immigrants optimize their Americanness since the late 19th Century. In fact, as early as 1890, “Frederick M. Crunden, a well-respected librarian” (Clay, 2006, 10) published an article in *Library Journal* that “describes the role of the library in helping to integrate immigrants into society” (Clay, 2006, 10). In addition, Edwin S. Clay, contributor to *Virginia Libraries* and a librarian-administrator at Fairfax County Public Library writes that, “The initial emphasis of library programs for immigrants in the 1920s was on the individual. The major goal was assimilation into the American mainstream” (2006, 11). Libraries stewarded immigrants through the straits of Americanness; and while it is hard to say whether those libraries collected materials in languages other than English, they did “contribute pamphlets written by library personnel in native languages describing community rules and laws, prevailing wages, cost of living, health codes, and other information” (Clay, 2006, 11). Materials in English were given preference because it was believed that if immigrants were going to learn English using library materials, then those materials should be in English.

From Ethnic Stew to Pluralism Consommé

Since the 1990’s, Multiculturalism has been threatening to transform the equation between patron and materials or services. Multiculturalism is the belief that broad differences in culture should be embraced; it shifts the emphasis of “culture” to “Cultures,” and champions a “pluralism in which ethnic and cultural diversity is embraced” (Parrish and Katz, 1993, 4). Multiculturalism argues that you better service a

larger portion of your community when your materials and services reflect their tastes, preferences, and information needs. In terms of acquisitions, the Multicultural Model is substantiated by community demographics; if your community is 80% Latino, then 80% of your materials should be appropriate for a Latino audience. This would usually mean greater proportions of books in Spanish, programming that assists the Latino community in areas where they most need help, i.e. health, education, and housing, etc., and accession of materials in Spanglish (the lingua franca of Latinos), like Junot Diaz's Pulitzer Prize winning book *The Brief, Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007).

In *Multicultural Acquisitions* (1991), Gillian D. Leonard explains, "Critics fear that it [Multiculturalism] has gone too far; than in its more radical forms multiculturalism promotes separatism and is antithetical to the values upon which America was founded." (1993, 4). Americans feel that acute pluralism breeds radicals that hide behind their ethnicity, or exploit their ethnicity to justify divisive, un-American behavior. In response, Multiculturalism has adopted an empirical stance and an ethos of surgical impartiality when it comes to acquisitions and services, basing them entirely on demographic needs. The critics of Multiculturalism have managed to bully adherents of Multiculturalism into tapping all the fun out of being curious about other cultures. As a result, Multiculturalism has been reduced tolerating diversity, "maintain[ing] a neutral position in response to social issues[,] while at the same time providing services and materials appropriate to the communities they serve," instead of the self-directed exploration prompted by genuine curiosity that Multiculturalism intends (Leonard, 1993, 4).

Los Federales Respond

The *Guidelines for the Development and Promotion of Multilingual Collections and Services* (2007) “systematically addresses” the needs of libraries “on a national scale” to “serve the needs of library-users whose native language is not English” (2007, “Guidelines...”). Created by the Reference and User Services Association of the American Library Association, the guidelines delineate protocols for “Collection and Selection,” “Programs, Services, and Community Relations” and “Staffing,” but say surprisingly little about how to juggle these disparate facets (2007, “Guidelines...”). The guidelines are clear, though, in that they recommend libraries: “Purchase materials in the languages, dialects, etc of the groups served,” “Provide language-learning materials to encourage heritage language retention,” and “Provide reference and information services in the most commonly used languages” (2007, “Guidelines...”).

The *Guidelines* prompt librarians to provide materials “in the languages and dialects, etc. of the groups served,” but it also propels them to “encourage heritage language retention” (2007, “Guidelines...”). The *Guidelines* emphasize Service, and disregard the politics associated with those Services. Accordingly, the *Guidelines* don’t say anything about irate taxpayers, public outrage, and xenophobia. Most recently, for example, communities in Lewisburg, TN and Gwinnet County, GA have rebuked the acquisition prerogatives of their libraries. In Lewisburg, Tennessee residents protested “\$130 [of the budget] and five shelves allocated for Spanish-language books” (Dezarn,

2008, 25); and, in Gwinett Country, Georgia there was severe backlash after residents "feared that their tax dollars might be benefiting illegal immigrants" (Dezarn, 2008, 25).

In response to this backlash, library administrators in Gwinett County "eliminated funding for adult fiction in Spanish [and] fired the library director whose collection policy was favorable towards such acquisitions" (Dezarn, 2008, 25). The actions of the library administrators in Gwinnet County, GE and protesters in Lewisburg, TN both underscore the current attitude towards Multiculturalism in red-state America. And, they prompt us to ask serious questions about Multiculturalism. Can it thrive in a monolingual environment? Can residents in red states be convinced that it is in the best interest of their communities to embrace Multiculturalism? Must Multiculturalism's popularity as an idea in red states be completely dependent upon unemployment and immigration rates in that region? What are the dangers of Multiculturalism? Does it engender ethnic divisiveness? Is it tearing us asunder?

The Big Stink

Rural library-users feel that allotments of their tax monies should not fund services and materials for library patrons that do not pay taxes, like illegal immigrants. Paying taxes is an odious American necessity, so it only seems fair that libraries should ensure that materials and services they provide target tax-payers before members of the community that evade this responsibility. In addition, critics of Multiculturalism (not all from red-states) feel that the library should only provide service and materials to immigrants that will assist with their process of acculturation into American citizens

because that is how it has always been done.

Rural library-users may not grasp the historic role public libraries have played integrating immigrants, but that may be because most of the acculturation happened at “Branch libraries...[in]...immigrant neighborhoods” of free library systems in cities (Maxwell, 2006, 71). Regardless, in 2008, the ALA produced a toolkit resource titled, “How to Serve the World at your Library: Serving Non-English Speakers in U.S. Public Libraries,” which addresses the exponential rise in materials and services to patrons whose native language is Spanish. The toolkit resource, based on the “2007 analysis of library demographics, services, and programs” (2008, “How to...”), posits various figures that reflect current conditions in “484 of all responding libraries” (2008, “How to...”).

And, what do the figures say? They say that, “Seventy eight percent of libraries reported Spanish as the priority #1 language to which they develop services and programs” (2008, “How to...”) and that, “the majority of libraries serving non-English speakers are in communities with fewer than 100, 000 residents” (2008, “How to...”). According to ALA’s toolkit resource, the highest proportion of Spanish speaking materials and services are going to libraries that service communities of 100, 000 or less (2008, “How to...”), and not the dense library systems in big cities where millions of heterogeneous citizens live. The inundation of rural libraries with materials and services in languages other than English—to better service burgeoning immigrant communities—is a relatively new phenomenon in the Library World, but it would behoove library administrators in rural libraries to develop, in the very least, an action plan for this contingency.

The Slippery Slope

In 1991, Arthur Schlesinger, noted Harvard historian, published *The Disuniting of America* (1991), which created great controversy because Schlesinger was widely recognized as a liberal academic, and had served on Kennedy's cabinet. Perhaps, Schlesinger is one of the "Critics" that Leonard writes about in *Multicultural Acquisitions* (1993); in the Foreword to the 1998 edition of *The Disuniting of America* (1991), Schlesinger characterizes the situation created by political correctness in our universities as "vogueish blather," and believes that "If separatist tendencies go on unchecked, the result can only be fragmentation, resegregation, and tribalization of American life" (1998, 23). In addition, Schlesinger believes that the current ethos of Multiculturalism enables immigrants to entrench themselves in enclaves where there is little incentive for them to amplify their Americanness by learning English. Multiculturalism, Schlesinger believes, impedes immigrants from becoming visible, productive, empirical Americans in our society.

Almost ten years later, in an article for *American Libraries*, Julia Stephens would echo the argument that libraries are not prepared for "the huge task of reaching out to the millions of both legal and illegal immigrants who are illiterate in English" (2007, 44). Sadly, Stephens couches her arguments by making indirect reference to illegal immigration and lagging education rates, instead of sticking to the question which "concern[s] outreach to Hispanic patrons and their right to materials in their native language" (2007, 43). Therefore, Multiculturalism's critics have been using the same

failed arguments to try to convince librarians and educators that Multiculturalism is noxious to learning; even though Multiculturalism might be a tad obnoxious (in that it requires one to always laud the bounty of cultures in our country), it is hard to believe that “want[ing] to deal with reality as it is, as it has been, as it will be” can prove antithetical to education (Rios Balderrama, 2007, 15). And their argument—namely, that providing patrons with services and materials in their native language will accelerate the ethnic tribalization of American life—has yet to come to fruition.

The Middle Ground

The real culprit in this debate is the persistently pernicious bias towards immigrants who prefer to speak their native language instead of English. Historically, immigrants coming to the U.S. have assimilated thoroughly, especially when it comes to learning English. But, Nativism cliques in the red states of America have persisted with the stereotype that people that don't speak English are de facto illegal. Fortunately, the ALA does not base their service criteria on a patron's residency status, and their highly-publicized Bill of Rights explicitly forbids libraries to deny service to potential patrons because of “origin, age, background, or views” (2006, “Library...”). Moreover, “The IFLA Multicultural Library Manifesto,” an international standard, challenges libraries at the “international, national, and local levels” to “reflect, support, and promote cultural and linguistic diversity” (Nielsen, 2008, 204). Therefore, the question remains: are there great differences between the immigrants that have customarily come to our shores and the immigrants who are currently arriving that have made the current immigration

situation untenable? And, how are those particular differences affecting Multiculturalism's gospel?

Lisa Dezarn writes about immigrants and rural libraries in her study, "The Challenge of Latino Immigration for the Rural Library" (2008). The study explains that, "In the past [,] Latin American immigrants were concentrated in the Southwestern Portion of the U.S. However, immigration patterns have significantly changed so that many are now settling permanently in rural areas of the Southwest and Midwest" (Dezarn, 2008, 29). In addition, "Another contributing factor is the requirement for large numbers of low-skill laborers in rural areas" (Dezarn, 2008, 29). Contrary to popular myths about immigrants in red states, immigrants do not teleport here from distant shores. Immigrants are "actively recruited in Latin America" by "industries such as meat processing, carpet manufacturing, oil extraction, construction, and timber harvesting" (Dezarn, 2008, 29).

Many immigrants come to the U.S. because they are enticed by businesses that save on overhead by hiring cheap labor; immigrants do not come specifically to apply "downward pressure on labor wages" like many in red states feel (Dezarn, 2008, 30). But, the concerns of red staters are well founded; "60 % [of immigrants] are more likely to work in low-skill positions due to deficient education levels" (Dezarn, 2008, 30). When there are few low-skill positions in a region and immigrants move into that region, it saturates the market value for low-skill labor and forces companies to go with laborers that require less remuneration. Immigrants inevitably shrink the prospects of red staters with limited education that have traditionally taken low-skill positions, but they do not do

this on purpose. The immigration dilemma has more to do with businesses in red state America shaving overhead costs, than with immigrants hoarding all the low-paying, low-skilled jobs.

Multilingual items not only help immigrant populations acquire English; they help rural Americans learn a different language, like Spanish or Mandarin Chinese. Learning a new language expands rural Americans bases of knowledge and conceptual frameworks so that they can transition from low-skill, manufacturing jobs and obtain high-skilled, knowledge jobs. Knowing a language other than English lends you a competitive edge that distinguishes you from others seeking low-skill jobs. Or, in the words of Carol Brey-Casiano in the March 2005 issue of *American Libraries*, “Serving a Hispanic population of nearly 80% and a majority who speak Spanish as their primary language at home, our library system has recognized the need to promote reading at all levels and in any language” (5). In addition, Rochelle Arsenault and Penny Brown, writing in *California School Library Association’s* journal, state that “Through reading about people from all cultures, students can gain an appreciation for their own cultures...[and]...realize that despite our differences there is a basic sameness to life, which is slightly altered, but not basically changed, across ethnic lines” (2007, 21).

If minorities who speak English, and function publicly in English, can learn from the whites that dominate the Educational and Library realms, then surely—if race is not an obstacle—those whites can stand to learn a little something from a bilingual minority who may have much to impart. For example, Sandy Shuckett, writing in *California State*

Library Association's journal, states that "The Public School Summary Statistics for 2005-2006 shows that only 30.3% of students enrolled were white...However, the Number of Teachers by Ethnicity Report for 2004 shows that 72.1% of the teachers in California schools were white" (2007, 17). There seems to be an unequal distribution of power and race in the fields of Education and Librarianship, which might be the truer form of the ethnic tribalism that Schlesinger speaks about. Therefore,

it would seem that we majority white educators who are library media teachers have the task of providing an education for our majority nonwhite students. But we have an equal responsibility to prepare our white students to become good citizens in the culturally and linguistically diverse world they are inheriting. (Nielsen, 2007, 17)

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