

Anthro Notes

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REFUGEE CHILDREN IN SCHOOL: UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE CLASSROOM

INTRODUCTION

For an adult refugee, successful adaptation to the US sociocultural system is usually measured in economic terms, such as obtaining and holding a job. An equally objective measurement for refugee children is how well they are adapting to their school environment, measured in terms of grades achieved, and ability to pass through the school system to receive a high school diploma.

The last fifteen years has witnessed a massive influx of refugees coming to the United States, particularly from Asia and Latin America. In the 1960's, the United States admitted 200,000 to 300,000 immigrants a year. Last year the ceiling was raised to 700,000, a number that does not include illegal immigrants who are entering at an estimated rate of 200,000 a year. (Roberta Weiner, "New Faces At

School: How Demographics are Reshaping American Education," *Education Daily*, March 22, 1991, p.5). These newcomers are often fleeing situations that involve the traumas of war, ravaged economies, and religious and political persecution. For schools and teachers across this nation, refugee students challenge anew the educational system's ability to perform its traditional role: providing support, democratic opportunity, and educational advancement to a culturally diverse school population. The last decade's immigration explosion and the increased cultural diversity in the classroom are reflected in a new Census Bureau Report. That report shows the number of Hispanics nationwide rose 50 percent since 1980, from 14.6 million to 22.4 million in 1990; and the nation's Asian American population doubled, from about 3.5 million in 1980 to 7.3 million in 1990 (*Education Daily* March 13, 1991: p.1).

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HUMPHREY-91

Anthropologists have much to offer teachers and other school professionals struggling to understand and work with refugee students from culturally diverse backgrounds. One of the most important contributions anthropology brings to the understanding of students' ethnic background is a compact package of facts, figures, concepts, and insights reflecting a wide variety of cultural variables. Anthropologists also can work with trained educational or social work personnel to develop an individual student's profile of factors influencing that student's experience in the school environment.

THE MULTIFACETED APPROACH

It is important to stress first that each individual refugee student comes with a complex cultural heritage. Many teachers are aware of the need to understand something about their students' cultural background but nevertheless are not trained to sort through the wide number of variables that can affect an individual refugee student's performance.

The following multifaceted set of factors was developed to help service providers within school settings (teachers, counselors, case workers) come to know their refugee students/clients better and to help guide the selection of intervention strategies for low achieving refugee students. It is often not until there is difficulty within the school environment that a given student will come to the attention of school personnel as needing assistance. Hence, if a student is "at risk" (i.e. may not complete high school due to excessive absences or inappropriate behavior in the school environment), a range of factors needs to be assessed before the teacher or other professional is in the best position to help the student. These factors are grouped into seven categories discussed below.

Cultural Background

Ethnic socio-cultural traditions; religious persuasion (not only at the level of the Great Traditions of Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, and Islamic beliefs, but also at the level of the more localized, popular beliefs found in oral traditions); patterns of interaction and linguistic communication; level of techno-economic environment.

Students' Gender

Expectations concerning the role of males and females in his or her homeland; which gender is considered more essential to the continuation of the family: i.e., matrilineal or patrilineal; economic involvement of each gender (marketing; farming; land, animal, property ownership) in the homeland. This is an area often overlooked by American service providers who unconsciously draw heavily on their own male-oriented society for standards and expectations of others.

Trauma

The level of trauma involved in the initial refugee experience is often difficult to ascertain; however, it can be critical to understanding the daily behavior of a student. Conditions under which the person and his/her family left the country of origin; amount of time spent in refugee camps, which family members made it out, which did not; did any parents or siblings die or become permanently disabled due to their escape; how old was the student when he/she left his/her country and how old was the student when he/she settled in the US?

Conditions in the U.S.

National and local ethos concerning accepting foreigners; cultural similarity or disparity within a refugee's ethnic community in the U.S.; economic opportunities; religious affiliation.

Family Environment

Socioeconomic background of the family; education level of the parents; age of parents when they left home country as well as how long they have resided in the US; current status of family (chronically ill parents, unemployment...)

Educational Background

What, if any, schooling did the student receive in his/her own language; expectation level the parents have for their children in American schools; expectations by parents and students of teacher's role in the education of a student, and of students' role in the classroom (passive, active).

Psychological Factors

Coping mechanisms, level of mental health, but individual variation is very important to consider; otherwise, we might take all of the above factors into account and still not be able to understand the individual student we are concerned with at the moment.

How does one find answers for all the above questions? For some information, personal interviews with the student and his/her parents and other family members may be the most useful avenue, but in other cases, anthropologists at a local college or university can help locate appropriate information and literature describing the cultural background of individual students. Files at the school or from the student's resettlement agency can be helpful. Finally, other social agencies or religious organizations involved in resettlement efforts can be consulted.

Armed with information about the multifaceted variables of culture, gender, post-traumatic stress disorders, new country conditions, family environment, educational background and psychological characteristics of an individual refugee student, the teacher or staff member can begin to understand the student. However, there is even one more condition essential to this mix: change. Nothing is written in stone, all variables may and will change. Resettlement is a dynamic situation for the young refugee, and teachers must be sensitive to the potential for change.

PREVENTING STEREOTYPING

The multi-faceted approach to working with refugee students is particularly important as a strategy to prevent stereotyping among school personnel. Stereotyping easily develops when only one or two variables are used to define an entire ethnic group.

For example, in the mass media, as well as in the educational literature, there has been an emphasis on the disproportionate amount of educational success by Asian refugees.

A disconcerting element in much of this research is the tendency to refer to Asians in the US as a homogenous group (Hsia, J., *Asian Americans in Higher Education and at Work*, 1988). Further, much of the Asian

population referred to consists largely of people of Japanese descent, and sometimes of Vietnamese descent. The Japanese obviously are not refugees, and may not even be first generation migrants. So, what we have is a discussion of a diverse Asian population as if they are all quite homogenous, or at most dichotomous; and perhaps, a confusion of those Asians who migrated to the US versus those Asians who came as refugees.

While both of these errors are understandable, they also impede our comprehension of the situation. It is a common and understandable human approach to lump similar ethnic groups under one heading: for example, Hispanic usually refers to those of Mexican, Cuban, Honduran, Peruvian, etc. descent; Black usually refers to those of African-American, African-Puerto Rican, Garifina (Black Carib), Zulu, Nigerian, etc. descent; White usually refers to those of English, Italian, Canadian, Euro-American, Spanish, Russian, etc. descent. The reason this situation impedes our comprehension is obvious. In most normal classroom situations we work hard to differentiate within groups as well as between groups. Regardless of good intentions, however, many teachers work from the perspective that multiethnic groups can be lumped into single understandable categories, such as Asians or ESL/foreign students.

Among those teachers and researchers who recognize the need to consider individual ethnic factors, we find a slightly refined version of the above tendency to "lump" people under a single ethnic category. That is, they look at one factor and over-simplify that factor's impact to explain what is happening to their young refugees. When considering the population from a cultural perspective, that one factor is often religious, for example, Buddhism. When considering the population from an educational perspective (as many ESL teachers and other language teachers might), the impact of literacy in their own language becomes a dominant theme. When considering the population from a socio-psychological perspective (as many social workers and medical case workers do), the trauma of the process of being torn from your family and homeland becomes the critical factor to consider.

Certainly, any one of the above approaches is essential to understanding the young refugee, but none of them in itself explains enough to allow a teacher or case worker to really help the individual.

ST. LOUIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS: A CASE STUDY

The St. Louis Public School System (SLPS) is a large urban school system with a sizable refugee student population. An English as a Second Language Program (ESL) was established in 1981 to serve 135 refugee students (83 Vietnamese and 52 Lao). By the late 1980's, the ESL Program served an average of 500 students per year, and included students from 34 countries, including 38% Vietnamese and 12% Laotian. From interviewing the ESL social worker and other SLPS staff, it became clear that various ethnic groups are viewed within the schools as having certain characteristics, and that these group characterizations obscure some of the complex reasons behind refugee performance.

For example, Afgani boys are often seen as surly and having a chip on their shoulder, yet they manage to achieve. The parents encourage these boys to make the best of their school situation. On the other hand, according to school personnel, the girls are not encouraged at all. The parents even come up with reasons to keep them home. The social worker summed up the parental attitude about girls and school: the parents are "so old-fashioned, they don't think girls need to go to school at all." Undoubtedly, when these girls turn 16, the parents will no longer send them. Thus, the male students stay in school and are not considered at risk of dropping out; however, the girls are often chronically absent and in danger of dropping out before completing high school.

Among the few Ethiopian children attending school, however, the picture is different. While the mother is considered second to her husband, and, as school personnel put it, "at the mercy of the father," this lower female status within the family is not translated into poor school performance for the girls who both attend class and do well in their school work. This difference between Afgani and Ethiopian girls highlights the need to consider individual variation involved in

resettlement's dynamic process. In the Ethiopian example, one mother very much wants her children to have more than she herself had, and she believes education will help her children achieve more.

The Vietnamese, the group so often heralded in the national mass media as the "successful" Asians, are the largest group represented in the St. Louis School System. As with any large group there are successes and failures. Apparently, school personnel do not see an obvious difference between male and female Vietnamese students who are doing well or at least all right in their studies. However, a larger number of male Vietnamese students are at risk of dropping out of high school without graduating than are female Vietnamese students. More males than females tend to fall out at the bottom, largely due to their aggressive behavior toward other American students who harass them.

Teachers feel that low-achieving girls are trying, that they are not a behavior problem. One explanation for their poor grades is that they are too "country." A large group of the underachieving boys, on the other hand, stand out in the school setting: they do not seem to be able to focus on their schoolwork; they show little respect for authority and school, and they are often in trouble at school. These boys elicit little sympathy or tolerance from their teachers.

Among the Khmer, who make up about 8% of the ESL population, the boys and girls seem to receive the same parental treatment concerning their schooling. That is, the parents believe that the teacher should take care of all aspects of their child's life concerned with schooling. The parents are not inclined to push their children to succeed. And, once the children start to fail, the parents feel that it is beyond their control to force their children to turn their school work around and become successful. Some of this attitude toward the inability of parents to mold their children is seen to come from their perception of Buddhist tenets such as: "Don't push the river, it floats on its own." By the time the child is over 17, the parents feel helpless in getting their children to attend school. The threat of juvenile court will scare the parents, but

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MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

[Editor's Note: The statement below is excerpted from a background paper on multicultural education issued by The Quality Education for Minorities (QEM) Network, and is one of a series of QEM analyses of current issues in education.

The Quality Education for Minorities (QEM) Network was established in July 1990, as a non-profit organization in Washington, D.C., dedicated to improving education for minorities throughout the nation. Although its efforts are focused on members of those groups historically under-served by our educational system (African Americans, Alaska Natives, American Indians, Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans) the QEM Network advocates quality education for all students.]

Background

The United States has long been recognized as the most pluralistic and diverse of the industrialized nations in the world. That is one of the characteristics that makes us unique among nations. Our diversity places us in a strong position to provide leadership in an increasingly global society. Further, that diversity (ethnic, racial, religious and cultural) is projected to increase in the 21st century. For example approximately 29% of all school aged children enrolled today in our country's public schools are racial and ethnic minorities. It is projected that by the year 2030, this figure will rise to more than 35%.

Our children need to understand that while we are a multicultural people, we are a single nation--a nation bound together by decades of struggle to nurture a common set of values, mores and principles. However, adequate opportunities have not existed for all citizens to learn of the contributions that various groups have made and continue to make toward the building of our great nation. Our children need to understand and to value the strength of the pluralism and diversity which comprise our national heritage. In order to achieve this goal, our children need a multicultural education. In this article, the term multicultural education

is used to mean education that values cultural pluralism and advances equal opportunity within schools. Students need an education that will enable them to understand and appreciate the contributions made by all of America's people--an education that binds rather than rends the cultural, social and political fabric of America.

Currently, two schools of thought are dominant in the multicultural education debate about how the curriculum should be structured and to whom it should be taught. Those who advocate the centrist or separatist position (also called the particularist view) believe there should be separate courses emphasizing each of the primary ethnic/racial groups in America: African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans and Native Americans. The second group advocates the pluralist or infusion approach that means that multicultural education should be integrated into every course at every grade level, thus all students would learn more about our pluralistic and diverse society.

Thus, neither Afrocentrism nor Eurocentrism would dominate the curriculum; rather, the emphasis would be on inclusion--a curriculum which reflects the contributions of all groups in America.

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MAJOR ISSUES/PERSPECTIVES

1. Multicultural education curriculum materials and programs should be characterized by the highest degree of integrity and quality.

2. Multicultural education curriculum materials and programs should be predicated upon clearly articulated goals that promote:

- * the strengthening and valuing of cultural diversity
- * human rights and respect for diversity
- * alternative life choices for people (e.g., respecting the rights of individuals and groups to adhere to their religious or cultural heritage within the larger society)
- * social justice and equal opportunity for all people
- * the empowerment of members of all ethnic, racial and religious groups.

3. Certification requirements for all practicing teachers and teacher candidates should include training in multicultural education. Teacher workforce projections suggest that fewer than 5% of all teachers will come from ethnic minority groups while more than 35% of all students will be from racial minority families. It is imperative, therefore, that all teachers be prepared to teach in a multicultural classroom environment.

4. Publishing companies need to work with educators, experts in multicultural education and other community leaders to revise textbooks and other instructional materials to more accurately reflect the pluralism and diversity in our society. Textbooks should reflect the contributions and heritage of the diverse races, ethnic groups, classes and religions which comprise America.

For further information or comment, please contact Mary Futrell, Senior Consultant at the QEM Network (1818 N St., N.W., Suite 350, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 659-1818).

THE NEVILLE MUSEUM CELEBRATES DIVERSITY

How can a museum help teachers develop a multi-cultural perspective?

Earlier this year in Green Bay, Wisconsin, the Neville Public Museum organized a one-day teachers' conference, "Cultural Collage ...Valuing Diversity," with the support of St. Norbert College; the University of Wisconsin--Green Bay; and Edimpro, Department of the Green Bay Public Schools. Instead of presenting distant cultures and peoples, the museum's education director, Jeanne Schuldes, focused the teacher program on learning about and appreciating the different ethnic groups in the community.

In the Opening Session, "What is Culture and How is it Transmitted?," Lanouette presented the anthropological answers to those questions and offered criteria for evaluating textbooks that present different cultures. A panel followed representing the cultural and social diversity of Northeast Wisconsin, including the experience of being homeless, Hispanic, Menominee, and African-American in the Green Bay community.

A dance and poetry performance presented the issues and emotions of growing up as an African-American in the community and how African-Americans create pride in their ethnic identity. The afternoon session ended with the NEWACE (Northeast Wisconsin Alliance for Continuing Education) Social Action Theatre. Through short performances, the players re-enacted "stories" of cultural diversity based on actual experiences. The scenarios that day involved name calling and ethnic jokes; prejudice toward the Hmong, the most recent immigrants from Laos, by a Vietnam vet; the experience of the Oneida, whose reservation is just outside Green Bay; and stereotypes about African-Americans expressed in a supermarket. Each scenario was followed by a dialogue between the actors and the audience. In the evening the Ko-Thi Dance Company demonstrated traditional and contemporary African-American dances and songs.

JoAnne Lanouette

TEACHER'S CORNER: ANCIENT AFRICA AND THE PORTLAND CURRICULUM RESOURCE

School systems in Washington, D.C., Atlanta, Indianapolis, and Baltimore among others are examining or adopting forms of African-centered (AC) curricula. AC proponents argue that social studies textbooks and curricula are warped by "Eurocentric" values, distortions, and exclusions, and that major revisions are needed. An example of an AC curriculum resource is the Portland, Oregon African-American Baseline Essays, revised 1990, consisting of six long survey essays on "Social Studies" [SS], "Language Arts" [LA], "Mathematics" [MA], "Science and Technology" [ST], "Music" [MU] and "Art" [AR]. Some of these essays (e.g. music and mathematics) make a strong case for previously ignored African contributions to world knowledge and culture based for the most part on sound scholarship. However, other essays contain inaccuracies which lessen the impact of their arguments and should be corrected because of the importance of these essays in developing school curricula.

Teachers who wish to design new curricula or to incorporate more material on Africa into existing curricula are faced with a dilemma. How should this new Afro-centric view of history be evaluated?

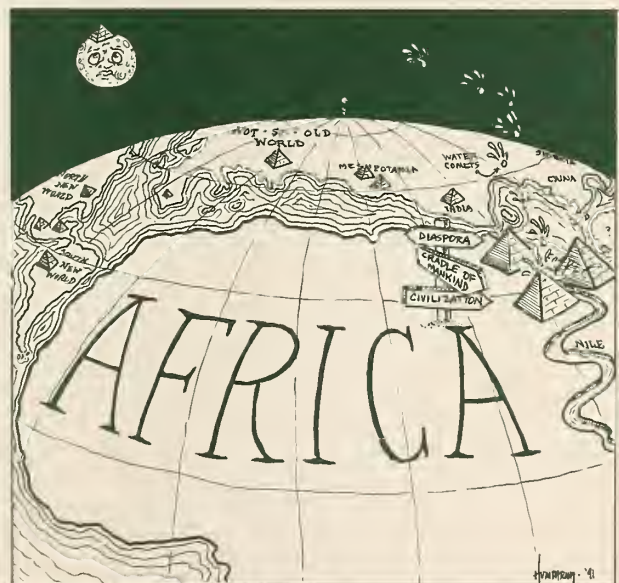
This article addresses limited issues of historical and archaeological interpretation presented in the African American Baseline Essays. It is based on detailed critiques of the ancient Egypt portions of each essay by Egyptologist Frank Yurco of Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History together with a current perspective on African prehistory provided by Alison Brooks, Professor of Anthropology (African archaeology) at George Washington University. Excavations and historical scholarship including works by African and Afro-American scholars are referenced here and in the longer critiques (e.g. Keita, Kanimba).

"Egypt-centric"

About forty percent of the material in the six essays focusses on the contributions of ancient Egypt. Another 1/4 to 1/3 deals with contributions of African-Americans in the

New World, while most of the remaining portions are concerned with prehistoric Africa. A few pages are devoted to the rich archaeological and protohistoric record of African states and kingdoms south of the Sahara. The tremendous emphasis on ancient Egypt is in response to two accurately-perceived biases in current curricula: 1) courses in the history of western civilization often begin with the Greeks and ignore non-European antecedents and 2) if non-European antecedents are discussed, Egypt is often treated as if it were part of the Near East and not part of Africa. Differences between early Egyptian and Mesopotamian states, and the evidence for some degree of separate development, are ignored.

Briefly stated, the AC historical view holds that: (1) "Ancient Egypt was a Black nation" (Portland, Intro:A-6), or "The Land of the Blacks" (MU:2); (2) "the original home of the [ancient Egyptian] prehistoric ancestors was south in ... the neighborhood of Uganda and Punt [Ethiopia/Somalia] (SS:22); (3) West Africa, where most African-Americans trace their ancestry, was peopled from the Nile Valley (Diop 1974), as "invasions and conquests by Asians, Europeans, and Arabs...pushed Blacks further south" (AR:7); (4) Egypt was "the first great civilization" (SS:21), since it was only "During the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties" of ancient Egypt (i.e. after 2563 BCE) that "The nations and people in the other river valley, the Tigris



and Euphrates, were laying the foundation of Sumerian civilization" (SS:30); (5) the culture and achievements of ancient Greece and Western Civilization were largely derived from ancient Egypt (Bernal 1987); and (6) Olmec Civilization in Meso-America (Van Sertima 1976) and most other Old World civilizations were largely the products of an ancient African diaspora. This latter view is the most discredited aspect of the curriculum and has been largely (but not entirely) dropped from the current revised version.

All of the above assertions are problematic. "Black," like "White," may be hard to define. While there is mounting evidence that Egypt's origins were fundamentally African (see *Anthro. Notes* vol. 11, no. 1, 1989), studies in both physical anthropology and ancient Egyptian art suggest that the ancient Egyptians like the modern Egyptians varied in skin color and skeletal features from North to South. The early predynastic population of Southern Egypt clearly has affinities with tropical Africans (see reviews and data in Keita 1990). There is no evidence that Egypt was a forerunner or a major factor in the formation of Mesopotamian civilization, since the beginnings of the two are approximately contemporaneous. While Egyptian influence on the ancient Aegean precursors of Greek civilization is undeniable, Mesopotamian civilization also contributed to the development of Greek civilization in major ways. Finally, evidence for a large-scale Egyptian diaspora to the south in the face of Asian invaders is lacking, and is refuted by most African scholars in this field. Most "invasions," as correctly noted in the "Math" essay (MA:29), involved small numbers of people, often soldiers only, and did not displace the vast majority of local peoples (Kanimba, 1986).

Problems in the Baseline Essays

Inaccuracies in the Baseline Essays include both facts and interpretations. Characteristics with world-wide distribution (pentatonic scale, use of prophecy, body language, creation stories, rock art) are often treated as if they diffused from an African center, while other traits that might be considered Africa-specific such as trickster stories are not highlighted. Some essays do highlight major African

contributions to world-wide culture; the mention of call-and-response in the music section is one example, and the Egyptian origin of Euclidean geometry (MA) is another.

The richness of cultural diversity within Africa is generally ignored in these essays. In the LA essay, the "unity" of African languages (which number more than 800 mutually unintelligible languages) is established by referring only to the "Bantu" language "family" (actually a subgroup of one of the 5-6 African language families), and by an incorrect assertion that most of the ancestral languages of the slaves were tonal.

Dates and dynasties are confused. In the Social Studies essay, almost all the dates associated with human evolutionary stages are incorrect according to current evidence. In addition, dates and periods overlap and contradict each other and are not consistent among the six essays. Contrary to assertions in several essays (AR:14-16, MU:3-6) the earliest pottery (Japan, 12,000 yrs), sculpture (Germany 34,000 yrs) and musical instruments (Hungary 31,000 yrs) are not found in Africa, at least not according to current knowledge. On the other hand, early southern African rock art and the Ishango "calendar" bone, used variously in the essays to represent the beginnings of literature, art and mathematics have actually been redated to a much older period, between 20,000 and 30,000 years ago, about the same time as similar manifestations in Europe, Siberia and Australia which are not mentioned in the essays (except in the Social Studies essay).

Afrocentric "Science" Essay

The "Science and Technology" essay endorses such concepts as the "extra-terrestrial origin of the Nile theory," whereby "water-laden micro-comets...were the source of the ocean's waters" and "of rivers' water like the Nile." (ST:15) Mystical powers are attributed to the pyramids, and the author misinterprets artifacts such as bird effigies to prove that the ancient Egyptians experimented with aeronautics, antennas and electricity. This essay also states that "for the ancient Egyptians as well as contemporary Africans world-wide, there is no distinction and thus no separation between science and religion"

(ST:14). While the pursuit of scientific knowledge in the west and the earlier flourishing of Islamic science have certainly been deeply affected by religion and cultural values, most scientists including African scientists would accept that science seeks to describe the workings of the material world, and that scientific propositions must be testable (potentially falsifiable) through observations of natural phenomena. The science essay's perspective is reflected in its list of "the first set of scientific paradigms: the basis from which the ancient Egyptians did all types of scientific investigations" (ST:12). These paradigms include "acknowledgement of a supreme consciousness," "divine self-organization," "consciousness survives dissolution of the body," "transmaterial cause and effect," *etc.* None of these propositions are testable. This essay's approach to science is inconsistent with accepted scientific methodology as it is practiced world-wide.

Evaluating Afrocentric and Multicultural Histories

How do we establish historical affinities or ancient contacts using archaeological data or oral histories? When does a contact reflect human migration on a large scale, versus the voyages of a single traveller or even indirect trade at a distance without direct contact? Archaeologists suggest that when we attempt to suggest direct links between two ancient societies, the traits used to establish the tie must consist of related complexes of traits, and must reflect similar complexes of behavior in the two societies being compared. Isolated traits such as pyramids, circumcision, and stringed instruments are too generalized to be used for this purpose, since such traits could easily have developed separately (Feder 1990:64-5). On the other hand, the presence, in two societies, of pyramids associated with an elaborate funerary ritual involving mummification and belief in a material afterlife constitutes fairly strong evidence of direct continuity. When we trace people by their biology, we must recognize the variability inherent in all human populations, and that single biological traits do not establish historical ties. For example, the ancient ice-age "migrations out of Africa" do not "account...for the appearance of African physical-type people in widely-

scattered areas outside of Africa" (SS:18). According to genetic evidence, Europeans and east Asians are at least as closely related to these ancient African migrants as are Australian Aborigines or other non-African dark-skinned peoples. In each case local environmental adaptation (microevolution) has caused some ancestral features to be retained and others lost. For example, Australian Aborigines differ biologically from tropical Africans in many traits other than skin color.

The authors of the Portland essays and their consultants are, for the most part, not scholars of ancient Egyptian or African history, and many of the references they cite are outdated secondary sources. Other writings often cited by these authors derive from an earlier group (ca. 1900-1925) of mostly British anthropologists and historical theorists, the extreme diffusionists or "Heliocentric" school. These theorists asserted on the basis of widely distributed single traits that Egypt was the center of all basic human invention. Citations of their work (especially Breasted) in the Baseline Essays do not reference the numerous criticisms which caused the Heliocentric School to be discredited. Recent Egyptological and archaeological scholarship is not generally reflected in the essays, even when it would support the assertions of the authors.

How can teachers and curriculum writers judge the accuracy of materials presented for inclusion in curricula? First, we should develop contacts with recognized scholars and university and museum departments in their regions. Second, we should stay informed of developments in our fields through professional journals and conferences.

Teachers, parents, and students are justified in wanting multicultural curricula that reflect the achievements of the world's diverse cultures, including those of Africa. Older curricula do reflect a bias that often denied or neglected the achievements and contributions of Africa. We must be careful, however, that new curricula are based on genuine scholarship. Indeed, when viewed from the perspectives of current archaeological, anthropological and linguistic research, the ancient cultures of Mesopotamia, the Levant, Greece and ancient Africa

including Egypt exhibit a long and rich experience of multicultural development. Efforts should be made to bring together scholars and experts in these fields along with educators to develop multicultural curricula based on sound scholarship.

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[Teachers wishing copies of Egyptologist Frank Yurco's and other critiques of each of the six Portland essays or the packet "Ancient Egyptians: Were They Black?" can write to:

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("Refugee Children" continued from p. 4)

take control of their children, and their certainty that such control is beyond their capabilities.

The Lao, another Buddhist oriented cultural group, react to the school situation somewhat differently. The girls seem to work despite difficult odds. Within the context of school, the Lao female students do better and are more consistent as students, compared to their male counterparts, who tend to be chronically tardy and somewhat aggressive. These girls can be considered successes, in that they are not considered to be at risk of dropping out before graduating from high school. On the other hand, even among the educated Lao, many of the sons exhibit problematic behavior: cutting classes, skipping school, losing their tempers and getting into fights (particularly over anything that strikes them as being an affront to their manhood.)

When looking at this particular population of ESL students, most of whom are refugees, we find that there is a definite pattern of difference by gender. However, as we have seen, this pattern is not consistent for all females or all males across ethnic lines. Nor can we say that those influenced by the same Great Tradition religion such as Buddhism will react to schooling in the same way. Individual variation is apparent within every ethnic group.

Overall, the reactions of St. Louis classroom teachers to the ESL students are two-pronged. On the one hand, the teachers often praise their Asian students (most of whom are ESL) and express pleasure at having such well-motivated, well-behaved, high achievers in their classrooms. On the other hand, there is little sympathy for the underachieving, problematic misfits. In the latter case, the ESL students are perceived as a group (i.e. foreigners) and are not broken down by ethnicity. The sense among some teachers is that these foreigners should be doing better, that they are now in America, and that it is up to them to embrace this educational opportunity. In either reaction--to high or low achievers--there is little or no recognition of cultural variation, much less the impact of the dual forces of culture and gender. It is often gender that is overlooked as a significant

variation, much less the impact of the dual forces of culture and gender. It is often gender that is overlooked as a significant variable, which school personnel must assess, if they are to help their individual students.

CONCLUSION

The complexity surrounding refugee students demands that teachers and school personnel search out new ways of understanding the many factors influencing the school experience of refugee students. Many teachers are well aware of the need to understand their students' cultural backgrounds. Unfortunately, sometimes gleaned a little cultural information can lead to increased stereotypic thinking. For example, teachers who believe that all Vietnamese feel education is important, often also believe that Vietnamese students will do well even with minimal teacher/school assistance. On the other hand, those teachers who believe that because Lao or Khmer students are Buddhist, their parents will not encourage or push them to work hard in school or try to overcome initial poor performance. This assessment can lead to teachers feeling it is futile to encourage these students. However, since Vietnamese students are also Buddhist, these two stereotypes prove to be contradictory as well as unhelpful in understanding individual students. Such stereotyping can easily cloud the issue of a student's success in the school environment. The multifaceted approach described in this article is one possible tool that can prevent stereotyping individual students.

As more and more of our schools become culturally diverse, anthropologists can do much to assist teachers in utilizing a multifaceted, anthropological approach to understanding the cultural backgrounds of their individual students. Teachers should be encouraged to study anthropology during their years of pre-service training, and school systems should be encouraged to employ anthropologists for the in-service training of teachers. Cultural Diversity is not a "fad" that will disappear in the future and an anthropological perspective on culture is an indispensable tool for teachers working with culturally diverse classrooms.

America's shifting demographic profile, brought about by immigration and

differential birth rates, is inexorably changing the face of American schools and colleges, altering their mission, their student bodies, and their curriculum. "If birth and immigration rates hold, by the year 2000, the nation's school-age populace will be one third minority: black children, who now comprise 15% of the school-age population, will constitute 17%, and Hispanic children, now 10%, will climb to 13%" (Weiner, p. 7).

As our country's classrooms become increasingly diverse, the anthropological perspective becomes ever more helpful, not only in working with refugee students, but with all individual students from culturally diverse backgrounds.

[This article, edited by Ruth Selig, is based on a longer, heavily documented paper presented at the American Anthropological Association's 1990 Annual Meeting in New Orleans. The original paper can be obtained by writing the author at 11829 Claychester Drive, Des Peres, MO 63131.]

For Further Reading

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Critical Thoughts on Mount Vernon's "Authentic" Past

[Editor's Note: This article focuses on Mount Vernon, but the issues it raises about historical houses, living history sites, and museums applies to many similar sites throughout the country. Encouraging students to visit these sites with a more critical perspective such as the one presented in this article may help them develop not only critical thinking skills but a more thoughtful approach to the study of history and the various ways each generation re-interprets its past.]

History museums are one of many ways that people learn about the past, yet the pasts presented by these and other museums are creations. Tourists to Mount Vernon know that they are not seeing the "real" past, a landscape frozen in time. Regardless, many leave the site believing what they have seen is an objective rendering of the past. Museums are convincing because they serve up "authentic" landscapes that appear accurate and true. The authenticity of the museum's landscape, in turn, gives its particular reading of history greater authority.

What may be less apparent is that the pasts seen are partial and changing. There is no one complete, objective history. Historic sites and history museums stress certain themes or facts over others. Interpretive programs impart specific knowledge during a visit. These interpretive strategies also change over time, as a result of changing conventions in museum practice or as a response to changing social discourse about culture.

In any given year, approximately one million visitors come to Mount Vernon, George Washington's plantation home. For some an act of pilgrimage, for others part of the checklist of must-see sites in Washington, D.C. Visitors come to see the mansion, tour the grounds, and pay their respects at Washington's tomb. The present Mount Vernon estate is situated on 500 acres, only a small part of the approximately 8,000 acres that the Washingtons once held. Following Washington's death in 1799, the estate was

kept in the Washington family until 1858. At this time the estate was purchased for \$200,000 by a private organization, the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association (hereafter MVLA) (Marling 1988, Wallace 1986). Their purchase of the plantation marks the approximate beginning of the historic preservation movement in the United States (Marling 1988).

The goal of the Association was and is to restore the plantation to its appearance in 1799--to create an authentic, timeless landscape. This idea was explicitly stated as early as 1874 at which time the first Regent of the organization said that, "The mansion and the grounds around it should be religiously guarded from change--should be kept as Washington left them. Upon you rests this duty" (MVLA Annual Report 1988, p. 89).

The Regent's charge embraces a serious problem since the landscape that the MVLA purchased was not the same one that Washington left over a half century earlier. Fire and general decay had already compromised a number of buildings. At the time of its purchase, the mansion was basically empty and parts were at risk of falling down. The Association stabilized the structure and began a process of refurnishing the house with either Washington family objects or appropriate period pieces.

(continued on p. 13)



Consequences and Contradictions of Authenticity

In meeting the first Regent's mandate, authenticity, understood as accuracy and truth, undergirds the museum's interpretation of the plantation and is the source of its authority. The term appears over and over in the literature of the Association and is frequently mentioned by interpreters on the house tour. The concept has guided the collections policy of the museum and has been the inspiration for the changes that have taken place both within the house and throughout the grounds.

Despite this, the contemporary landscape is in truth no more a picture of the Mount Vernon of 1799 than the decrepit landscape of the mid-1800's. Regardless of the placement and style of buildings and the historical research that went into filling them, Mount Vernon remains a contemporary cultural construct. The history of the cultural landscape at Mount Vernon can be read as the result of the Association's changing vision of what Mount Vernon was.

Authenticity is an important concept and we need to understand it. How is it determined? Who decides what is authentic? Were the Association to embrace a concept of authenticity that dictated the display of only artifacts and buildings that could be attributed to Washington, the effect on the landscape would be tremendous. The mansion would lose about 75% of the furniture. The surrounding outbuildings would be almost entirely empty of objects and modern facilities, and the museum would have to be taken down. Staff would also need to mess up the grounds and trim the trees. Of course, the million plus visitors would have to be excluded.

If absolute veracity is not Mount Vernon's concept of authenticity, what is? Superintendent Charles Wall suggests that "Restoration, like diplomacy, might be described as the art of the possible" (1974:4). Wall means that some aspects of the landscape should receive authentic restoration and some must be compromised, whether it be for lack of funds or information.

The constraints on interpretation, however, go beyond information and money. The

museum must take into consideration the number of visitors, the length of the average visit and its own sense of its mission. Although the restoration of the grounds is a readily acknowledged goal of the Association, special significance is and always has been given to the mansion. Wall points out that the mansion dependencies (outbuildings) are just that, dependencies.

The search for the authentic landscape encounters ideological contests as well. The MVLA has shown itself to be very protective of Washington and his image. It is not uncommon to see rumors about the General rebutted in the pages of the annual report (MVLA Annual Reports 1965, 1970). While it is easy for the museum to interpret Washington the hero, statesman, and farmer, it is more difficult to represent Washington the slave owner.

Landscapes and Ideology

All these factors force the MVLA to make choices about how the plantation should look. The interpreted landscape remains a representation of the past, an ideological and negotiated space that promotes a particular vision of Washington. The focus of active interpretation on the estate is the mansion house. The house tour provides the setting in which we learn about farming but not the farm, and the presidency, but only as it relates to events taking place within the mansion. The pre-eminence of the house points to the interpretation of the plantation as a domestic rather than as an economic space. This is an important distinction, since the farm served both as an administrative center for the plantation and also as the Washingtons' home. In its interpretation, the house has been abstracted from its economic context.

Domestic life is stressed, but only in a limited sense. It is the domestic life of the Washingtons' that is of paramount concern, that not of the slaves. And generally, it is the General's domestic life that is of interest. Certainly Martha, her children, and grandchildren are mentioned in the house tour and on some of the signs about the estate, but the focus is undeniably on George.

Along with the favor given the Washington family domestic environment, the

outbuildings are given a lesser status in the literature of the Association and within the landscape itself. Rooms within the mansion are separately described in the tourist's handbook while the outbuildings are described all together under the heading "Plantation Life" (Wall et al. 1985). While the house is interpreted by people, the dependencies are interpreted by signs that talk about the function of the building. The house is depicted and discussed as filled with individuals while the outbuildings were used by anonymous people. Outbuildings are filled with uninterpreted objects that serve as passive reflections of the activities undertaken within them. These buildings stand as mute reminders of the day-to-day tasks of the plantation rather than of the slaves and others who performed them (Ettema 1987, Gibb and Davis 1989, Pearce 1990).

Not surprisingly, the subject of slavery is a sensitive one to the Association. The MVLA erected a monument near the slave burial ground in the 1920's, another in the 1980's, and reconstructed the slave quarter in 1951. Current school guides confront and address the subject, and there is an interest amongst the staff to better interpret slavery. It did, however, take ten years to open and interpret the Greenhouse Quarter, the primary slave quarter, to the public, due more to the fear of controversy than lack of information (Dennis Pogue personal communication). It was not until the early 80's that the Association published a small pamphlet about slavery at Mount Vernon, and only in 1985 did the *Mount Vernon Handbook* use the word slave. The subject is still only slightly, if ever, mentioned in the house tours.

The MVLA's sensitivity to the subject is also visible on the landscape. On the grounds of the plantation, slavery is downplayed. In the Greenhouse Quarter only one quarter of the space is used to depict slave living conditions, with the rest used for storage, the location of a museum shop, and a museum extension. The Museum, which is actually housed in a reconstruction of an early slave quarter, is used entirely as a repository for Washington family relics. The Association's de-emphasis of slavery within the interpreted landscape may be entirely unconscious, but that makes it no less ideological.

Interpretation at Mount Vernon

I am not trying to suggest that Mount Vernon is out of the ordinary nor is it a particularly egregious portrayal of the past. In fact, interpretation at Mount Vernon is similar to that practiced at most history museums and is a model for many. Some may view this as Mount Vernon's appropriate role--to present objective facts, not value judgments. But as Chappell (1989:248) notes, this attitude is "conservatism, not objectivity." It is conservatism because it reflects a belief that objects and facts speak for themselves, without regard to what facts are not presented, and what others might be. Further, the portrayal denies alternative interpretations as biased while never reflecting on its own subjectivity.

The past presented at Mount Vernon is not invalid; rather it is a partial, subjective past. It offers only one reading of history. There are alternatives, for example, to the presentation of women at Mount Vernon that currently focuses on such things as where Martha Washington did her embroidery and where Nelly played the harpsichord for the General. These images of gender at Mount Vernon are not wrong. They are no doubt the result of research. How else might we look at gender?

One could imagine using the house tour or an exhibit to point out how the vision of the Washington family fits nicely with our contemporary gender stereotypes. Or perhaps the image of the family could provide the basis for pointing out the complexity of gender relations on the plantation. The family life of the Washington's and one of the slave families could be contrasted. Martha Washington's role on the plantation could be explored in more depth. She may have spent much of her time engaged in sewing and embroidery, but her dower slaves were the major source of labor for all of the Washington farms (Wall et al. 1985). She owned more slaves than her husband, yet this is never mentioned.

Conclusion

What Mount Vernon needs is to open a dialogue and engage its audience. At present, the mansion tour is passive and

informative, but decidedly not interactive. Rather than presenting authoritative and unquestioned information, interpreters and exhibits should pose questions and offer alternative ways of looking at the past. In this way, visitors including students would be encouraged to use critical thinking skills to evaluate what they are seeing.

Archaeology can play an important role in this change. Excavations are a popular draw at the plantation and interpretation at the archaeological sites provides the visitors contact with researchers. By concentrating research interests in different areas on the plantation, archaeology can shift the weight of interpretation away from the mansion. Since excavations recover artifacts from both before and after 1799, archaeology helps to rehistoricize this ahistoric landscape. Finally, since excavation inevitably leads to the discovery of something previously unknown, archaeology also points out the boundary between what is known and what is not known. Visitors realize that the past is something that is in the process of being made and understood, not something that is finished (Leone, Potter and Shackel 1987).

Museums must recognize the ideologies implicit in their interpretation and exhibitions, and make them explicit. They should do this not simply because it exposes bias, but also because museums play an important role in disseminating visions of history and shaping the public conscience. Since they can no longer hide behind the myth of objectivity and authenticity, museums need to be aware of the social implications of their messages. This need not lead to some form of interpretive anarchy. The point is not to make up stories, but to provide multiple perspectives on the past. Mount Vernon can tell stories about power, gender, and race while remaining true to the historical data and true to Washington. It only has to want to tell these stories.

[An expanded version of this paper was presented at the symposium, "Mount Vernon: Transformation of an 18th-Century Plantation System," Society for Historical Archaeology Annual Meeting, Richmond, Virginia, January, 1991.]

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