

**MULTICULTURALISM**

**Remarks by  
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*not given*

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**Thank you very much.**

**This morning I've been asked to talk about**

- **"Educating in a multicultural world."**

**How can we in a deeply divided nation**

- **achieve a greater sense of cultural cohesion?**

**And I'd like to begin by telling you a story.**

**I.**

**In 1972, I was sitting at my desk in Albany, New York.**

**It was a dreary Monday morning, and to avoid the pressures of the day**

- **I turned instinctively to the stack of third-class mail that I kept perched precariously on the corner of my desk**
- **to create the illusion of being very, very busy—it's an old administrative trick.**

**On top of the heap was the student newspaper from Stanford.**

- **And the headline announced that the faculty had reintroduced a required course in "Western Civilization," after having abolished all requirements just three years before.**
- **Bear in mind, this was 1972.**

**The students, I discovered,**

- **were mightily offended by the faculty's brash act.**

**And in a front page editorial, they declared that**

- **"A Required Course is an Illiberal Act."**

**And then the editors concluded with this blockbuster question:**

- **"How dare they impose uniform standards on nonuniform people?"**



**And while reflecting on this puzzling proposition,**

- **my mind "flashed back"**
- **to the days of Cambodia and Kent State,**

**to the time—not long before—when I was, with regularity,**

- **locked in**
- **and locked out of my office.**

**And frequently shouted down by students,**

- **failing to receive the honor and adulation I deserved.**

**And I recalled that these irreverent students,**

- **most of whom I liked very much,**

**would reassure me that**

- **I should not take it personally,**
- **the problem was—they said—I was**
  - **over 30**
  - **and running a corrupt system.**

**They were right on at least one count and perhaps two.**

**But what I found most revealing was that**

- **during these endless confrontations, the students kept insisting that**
- **there was nothing that we had in common.**

**There we were, sitting in my office,**

- **getting hungry,**
- **wanting sleep,**
- **shouting,**
- **laughing,**
- **talking to one another,**
- **angry about the war.**

**And yet, according to the students,**

- **there was absolutely nothing that we shared together.**

**And that's what troubled me the most,**

**I was troubled that some of America's most gifted students**

- **after 14 or more years of formal learning**

**still had not learned the simple truth that**

- **while we're "nonuniform,"**
- **we still have many things in common.**

**They had not discovered the fundamental fact that**

- **while we are all autonomous human beings**
- **with our own aptitudes and interests**

**we are—at the same time—**

- **deeply dependent on each other.**

**To put it simply,**

- **we're all alone,**
- **and we're all together.**

## **KEY POINT**

**And this brings me to the central theme of my remarks today.**

### **Educating students in a multicultural world**

- **surely means affirming the sacredness of every individual.**
- **It means celebrating the uniqueness of every culture.**
- **And as the Stanford students put it**
  - **it means acknowledging the "nonuniformity" that separates us from each other.**

**But there's another side to the equation.**

**But it is becoming increasingly apparent that diversity,**

- **while important, is insufficient.**

**In our deeply divided world, students also must begin to understand that**

- **while we're all alone,**
- **we're also all together.**

**And while we celebrate individualism in education, I'm increasingly convinced**

- **that we go beyond our separations and divisions**
- **and celebrate the spirit of community,**

**and begin to identify the commonalities we all share.**



## **HUMAN COMMONALITIES**

**But where do we being?**

**Just what are the points of cultural cohesion?**

**Several years ago, in a book called**

- ***A Quest for Common Learning,***

**I suggested that we organize the core curriculum in the nation's colleges and schools,**

- **not on the basis of disciplines or departments,**
- **but on the basis of what we called**
  - **the human commonalities,**
- **those universal experiences that are found in**
  - **all cultures**
  - **and among all peoples on the planet.**

**And I concluded that there are, in fact,**

- **eight commonalities that bind us all together,**

**and that as students study these human commonalities, they can learn about**

- **not only our diversity,**
- **but our community as well.**

**And through such a study the disciplines are used to illuminate larger, more integrative ends.**

**Creating a greater sense of cultural cohesion.**

## **I. THE LIFE CYCLE**

**First, at the most basic level,**

- **we all share the universal human experiences of birth and growth and death.**

**The life cycle binds us all together.**

**And yet the sad truth is**

- **that most of us go through life without reflecting on the mystery of our own existence,**
- **not understanding conception,**
- **not considering the sacredness of our own bodies,**
- **not learning about how to sustain wellness,**
- **or pondering the imperative of death.**

**My wife is a certified nurse midwife and delivers babies**

- **including seven grandchildren of our own.**

**And Kay tells of delivering the babies of teenage girls.**

**These are children having children**

- **who for nine months have fed their unborn infant  
coke and potato chips.**

**And then we wonder why children come to school**

- **not well prepared to learn.**

**Pablo Casals spoke to this concern in his book *Joys and Sorrows*:**

- **"When will we teach our children in school what they are?" he wrote.**
- **"We should say to each of them: Do you know what you are?"**
  - **You are a marvel.**
  - **You are unique.**
- **In all of the world there is no other child exactly like you.**
- **In the millions of years that have passed there has never been another child like you.**
- **And look at your body—what a wonder it is!**
  - **Your legs, your arms,**
  - **your cunning fingers,**
  - **the way you move. . . .**
- **Yes, you are a marvel.**
- **And when you grow up can you then harm another who is, like you, a marvel?**

**I'm suggesting that above all else**

- **we all share the mystery of birth and growth and death.**

**And educating in a multicultural world means**

- **not only having students learn about the life cycle we all share,**

**it also means**

- **helping students discover how these most basic human experiences**
- **differ from one culture to another.**

**Those experiences that make us unique and, at the same time, very much alike.**

## **II. LANGUAGE**

**This leads me to commonality number 2.**

**In addition to the life cycle**

- **all people on the planet use symbols**
  - **to express feelings and ideas.**

**Our sophisticated use of language**

- **sets human beings apart from all other forms of life.**

**And it's through words**

- **that we are all connected to each other.**



**Consider the miracle of this very moment.**

- **I stand here vibrating my vocal cords.**
- **Molecules are bombarded in your direction.**
- **They hit your tympanic membrane;**
- **signals go scurrying up your eighth cranial nerve, and**
- **there's a response deep in your cerebrum that approximates, I trust, the images in mine. But do you realize the audacity of this act?**

**I'm suggesting that it's the exquisite use of symbols that makes us truly human.**

- **And I would like to see a core curriculum in which students**
  - **not only study the way in which language is used in our culture,**
  - **but also how symbol systems differ across cultures, and how they profoundly shape our lives.**

**Looking down the road, I'm convinced we, as the human species,**

- **will make it on the planet Earth only to the degree that we understand our sacred use of symbols especially of language.**

**Writing recently in the *New York Times*, Malcolm Bradbury said:**

- **It is an old truth that**
  - **if we do not have mastery over language,**
  - **language itself will master us.**

**Today we live in a world where**

- **where obscenities abound,**
- **where politicians use 60 second sound bites to destroy the integrity of opponents.**

**We live in a world where**

- **cliches have become substitutes for reason**
- **and where prejudice is frozen into hurtful slogans**
  - **even on a college campus.**

**In response to this challenge,**

- **I propose that all students complete a course in expository writing—and oral discourse.**
- **I propose that all seniors be asked to write an essay on a consequential topic**
  - **to test their capacity to think critically**
  - **and integrate ideas.**

- **I suggest as well that all students be asked to complete**
- **a course on The Ethics of Communication,**
  - **a seminar where the use and abuse of language would be considered,**
  - **where political debates would be carefully critiqued,**
  - **and where the integrity of one's own discourse would be thoughtfully confronted.**

**I'm suggesting that educating students in a multicultural world**

- **means teaching them that language is a shared trust**
- **and that truth is the obligation we assume**
  - **when we are empowered in the use of words.**



### **III. THE ARTS**

**This brings me to human commonality #3.**

**I'm convinced that**

- **beyond the life cycle,**
- **beyond the use of symbols,**

**all people on the planet respond to the aesthetic**

- **since art is a universal language, too.**

- **Dance is a universal language.**
- **Architecture is a universal language.**
- **Music is a universal language.**
- **Painting and sculpture**
  - **are languages that can be understood all around the world.**

**Consider how the gospel song "Amazing Grace" can stir a common bond among people**

- **whether they are from Appalachia or Manhattan.**

**And consider also how "We Shall Overcome,"**

- **sung in slow and solemn cadence,**
- **can stir powerful feelings**
  - **regardless of race or economic status.**

**I'm suggesting**

- **that for the most intimate,**
- **most profound,**
- **most moving experiences,**
- **we turn to music and dance and the visual arts to express feeling that words cannot convey.**

**And this is true for all people on the planet.**

#### **IV. HISTORY**

**This brings me to human commonality #4.**

**Even though we are all nonuniform, the simple truth is that**

- **all people on the planet have the miraculous capacity**
  - **to recall the past**
  - **and anticipate the future.**

**We are, in fact, the only species on the planet**

- **that can put itself in time and space.**

**T.S. Eliot wrote**

- **time present and time past are both present in**
  - **time future.**
- **And time future is contained in time past.**

**And yet, how often we squander**

- **this truly awesome capacity to look in both directions.**

**Educating in a multicultural world means asking students to study**

- **both the richness of their own heritage**
- **and that of other cultures, recognizing**

**as Diane Ravitch put it well when she observed that**

- **cultural pluralism is one of the norms of a democratic and free society,**
- **Which suggests that students study the rich tapestry of diversity, while awaiting the perniciousness of arrogance or cultural domination.**

**"Critics" of multiculturalism insist that such an approach will lead to a**

- **diminished respect for Western heritage.**

**But "multiculturalism"—at its best—is not an attack on anyone's ideals.**

**It's a candid recognition that**

- **in a nation as diverse as ours we must respect the differences of other people,**
- **while also acknowledging that the world is becoming more interdependent every single year.**



**To put it simply, in the days ahead,**

- **students should study Western civilization to understand our past.**
- **And they should study non-Western cultures to understand our future.**

**And I'm also convinced that in this context of increased diversity, ethnic and women's studies**

- **will enrich the curriculum rather than dilute it.**

**But the larger truth is that**

- **even with the great diversity of our roots we all have this awesome capacity to place ourselves in time and space.**

## **V. GROUPS AND INSTITUTIONS**

**This brings me to another commonality we all share.**

**In addition to**

- **the life cycle,**
- **and the use of symbols,**
- **and our response to the aesthetic,**
- **and our sense of time,**

**all people on the planet are also members of groups and institutions that**

- **consequently shape their lives.**

**Our son, Craig, lives in a Mayan village in the jungles of Belize**

- **with his Mayan wife and 3 Mayan children,**

**who are incidentally**

- **the three smartest**
- **and most handsome grandchildren**

**on the planet Earth.**

**And when we visit Craig each year, I'm impressed that Mayans and Americans**

- **who may be separated by**
  - **a thousand miles**
  - **and a thousand years,**

**still carry on their work in very basic ways.**

**The Mayans, just like us, have their family units. They have**

- **elected leaders,**
- **and village councils,**
- **and law enforcement officers,**
- **and jails,**
- **and schools,**
- **and places where they worship.**

**It's all very different**

- **but it's also very much the same.**

**And in educating in a multicultural world,**

**I'd love to see students**

- **do a paper in which they compare**
  - **Santa Cruz, California**
  - **with Santa Cruz, Belize.**

**There are, after all, groups and institutions we all share.**

## **VI. NATURAL WORLD**

**This brings me to commonality #6.**

**It's true that we are all different.**

**But it's also true that we are all connected to the**

- ecology of planet Earth**
- in which we are embedded as working parts,**
  - as Lewis Thomas put it.**

**David, my 3-year-old grandson in Belize,**

- **understands his connectedness to nature very well as he**
  - **chases birds,**
  - **bathes in the river**
  - **and watches corn being picked and pounded into tortillas.**

**But David's cousins who live with**

- **appliances**
- **and asphalt**
- **in Boston and New Jersey**

**find it enormously more difficult**

- **to discover their connections to nature.**



**When I was United States Commissioner of Education, Joan Cooney,**

- **the brilliant creator of "Sesame Street,"**

**came to see me one day.**

- **She said they wanted to start a new program at Children's Television Workshop**
  - **on science and technology for junior high school kids,**
- **so they could understand a little more about their world and what they must understand to live.**
- **It subsequently was funded and called "3-2-1 Contact."**

**In doing background work for that project, they surveyed some junior high school kids in New York City, and asked such questions as:**

- **"Where does water come from?" A disturbing percentage said "the faucet."**
- **And they asked, "Where does light come from?" They said "the switch."**
- **And they asked, "Where does garbage go?" "Down the chute."**

**I'm suggesting that with all our differences every single one of us**

- **is inextricably connected to the natural world**

**and that our very survival on this planet**

- **increasingly will depend on our ability to**
  - **respond sensitively**
  - **to the earth home we share together.**

## **VII. WORK**

**This brings me to human commonality #7.**

**The simple truth is that**

- **all people on the planet spend their time**
  - **producing and consuming.**

**Work is universal,**

- **it's something we all do.**

**And students need to understand that,**

- **if they're consumers**
- **they also need to be producers.**

**And they should learn as well how**

- **"work patterns" vary from one culture to another.**

**When Kay and I first visited the Peoples Republic of China in 1974**

- **we saw an elementary school—in Shanghai—**
- **where every afternoon the children went to their "little factory" down the hall.**

**Students in that school were making little games of "checkers"**

- **which then were taken to the local store and sold.**

**They were learning very early**

- **the reality of production and consumption.**

**And in the twenty-first century students should confront**

- **the urgent need for conservation**
- **which will be a challenge for all people.**
- **But most especially for countries that are most affluent.**

## **VIII. SEARCH FOR MEANING**

**Finally, I'm convinced that all people on the planet,**

- **regardless of their unique heritage or tradition,**
- **are searching for a larger purpose.**
- **We all seek to give special meaning to our lives.**



**Reinhold Niebuhr put it most precisely when he said,**

- **"Man cannot behold unless he be committed,**
- **he cannot find himself,**
- **unless he finds a purpose beyond himself."**

**Again, the search for meaning varies greatly from one culture to another.**

**But it's my own conviction that**

- **at this moment,**
- **and in this culture.**

**Life is made most authentic as we engage in service.**

**Martin Luther King, Jr. said**

- **everyone can be great**
- **because everyone can serve.**

**And I'm convinced that the young people of this country are**

- **ready to be inspired by a larger vision.**

**And in the Carnegie report**

- ***High School and***
- ***College***

**propose that services programs become an integral part of high school and collegiate education.**

## **IX. JUSTICE**

**This morning I've suggested that**

- **while we're all different**
- **we are—at the same time—very much alike.**

**We are all born to live and die.**

**We all send messages to each other.**

**We all respond to music and dance and the visual arts.**

**We all recall the past and anticipate the future.**

**We all are member of groups and institutions.**

**We all are an inseparable part of nature.**

**We all engage in producing and consuming.**

**And we all seek to give meaning to our lives.**

- **And this is the glue—the social cohesion—that holds it all together!**

**In the twenty-first century**

- **would it be possible to organize the core curriculum in our college and schools**
- **in a way that moves beyond the fragmented? An approach that scholars themselves no longer find very useful?**
- **Instead could we use the human commonalities as a new, more integrative framework for student learning?**

**In this new curriculum,**

- **students would not only study academic content;**
- **they'd study themselves.**

**They would not only discover the human commonalities;**

- **they would discover the many ways in which humans around the world express these commonalities.**

**In such a curriculum, the academic subjects would be put to larger, more consequential ends.**

- **Education would become more applicable to the student,**
- **and multiculturalism would be understood within a larger context of common ground.**

## **CONCLUSION**

**Here, then, is my conclusion.**

- **Let's celebrate diversity.**
- **Let's reaffirm community.**

**But let's also acknowledge**

- **that terrible injustices still persist,**
- **and let's pledge to work together**
- **to build for all of us, and especially for our children,**
  - **a better world.**



**I do not expect miracles overnight.**

**And yet it is my deepest wish that**

- **David, my 3-year-old grandson in Belize.**
- **and Julie, his 3-year-old cousin in New Jersey.**
  - **who speak different languages**
  - **and have different colored skins,**
- **still will grow up knowing deep down inside**
- **that regardless of their great diversity, they are, at the same time, members of the same human family.**

**And to me this is what**

- **social cohesion**
- **is all about.**