

The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a **Multicultural Society**

By Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.



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What does it mean to be an American? Is the republic a unified whole or a collection of disparate ethnic groups? In this book, the Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr, examines the changing face of American history and shows how an increasing focus on ethnicity has affected life both in academic circles and on the street. America has always been a nation of immigrants striving towards the common goal of a better life than they had known in the old country. But the melting pot no longer seems an apt metaphor for the American experience: racial and ethnic minorities are drifting apart, focusing on individual heritage and becoming more bitterly divided. However, Professor Schlesinger ultimately believes that the old ideals of "e pluribus unum" are still strong enough to bind the United States together.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In a courageous, important, forcefully argued essay, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Schlesinger contends that America as melting pot has given way to an "eruption of ethnicity" that threatens to replace assimilation with fragmentation, and integration with separatism. As a case in point, he critiques Afrocentric curricula in schools and colleges which, in his view, glorify a mythic past and make such highly dubious claims as the notion that black Africa is the birthplace of science, philosophy, religion and technology, and the trendy but totally unsubstantiated theory that ancient Egypt was essentially a black African country. Those who attempt to use the schools for "social and psychological therapy" to promote minority self-esteem are doomed to failure, asserts Schlesinger, because "feel-good history" is factually flawed and does not equip students to grapple with their lives. Schools should certainly teach about other cultures and continents, he stresses, while faulting multiculturalists who forget that Europe is the unique source of liberating ideas of individual autonomy, political democracy and cultural freedom to which most of the world today aspires. The book was originally published in 1991 by Whittle Communications for selective distribution.

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From Kirkus Reviews

A passionate criticism of multiculturalism by the two-time Pulitzer-winner. Schlesinger, a lifelong advocate of human rights, believes that this "eruption of ethnicity" has had many good consequences, that the belated recognition of the pluralistic character of American society has had a bracing impact on the teaching and writing of history, and that nothing is more natural than for black Americans to assert pride and claim identity. But cultural pluralism is not the issue, he says--"the issue is the teaching of bad history under whatever ethnic banner." When Oregon students learn that Africans visited the Americas before Columbus, or that Pythagoras and Aristotle stole their mathematics and philosophy from black scholars in Egypt, it is not only wrong, the author says, but it is the use of history as therapy. When black educators argue that black minds work in genetically distinctive ways, it is "just another word for racism." The Ku Klux Klan, says Schlesinger, could not devise a curriculum more effective in handicapping and disabling black Americans. Moreover, the author sees the multiculturalism movement as attacking the very fundamentals of American democracy, finding that its underlying philosophy is that "America is not a nation of individuals at all but a nation of groups, that ethnicity is the defining experience for most Americans." Schlesinger is blunt in his rebuttal: "It may be too bad that dead white European males have played so large a role in shaping our culture. But that is the way it is." A refreshing, outspoken treatment of a phenomenon too often clothed in euphemism. -- Copyright ©1991, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Review

One of the most devastating and articulate attacks on multiculturalism yet to appear.--Wall Street Journal

A brilliant book.... We owe Arthur Schlesinger a great debt of gratitude.--New Republic

A passionate criticism of multiculturalism by the two-time Pulitzer-winner. --Kirkus Reviews

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Frank Hall:

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Allison Carson:

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Arthur Faust:

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