

OUR SELF-IMPERILED HERITAGE: SOME OBSERVATIONS ON STANFORD'S "WESTERN CIVILIZATION" BECOMING "CIV: CULTURE, IDEAS, & VALUES"

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ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS

309 L. Eliz. Dr., Craigville, MA 02636
Phone 617.775.8008

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Like every other civilization, ours is imperiled by threats internal as well as external. The internal threat this Thinksheet addresses is the current historical revisionism, at all levels of American education, aiming negatively to obscure the dominance of the white male & positively to "be fair" to latecomer contributors, as it were grafts on the white-male stock. Indeed, so successful has been this revisionism that some among us even deny, being ignorant of the fact, that our root-system is white-male. The evasion tactics of this revisionism have become more sophisticated, even to the point where anyone pointing out the root fact of white-male dominance is considered not only boorish but unscholarly! A sad recent parallel is the homosexual community's efforts to obscure, in governmental & private AIDS-education, two crucial facts: (1) Only about 5% of AIDS cases are traceable to other than anal intercourse, & (2) in anal intercourse, condoms are less than 50% effective. Rational thinking would suppose the primary victims of AIDS would be eager for the facts to be known, but humans are rational inversely to the heat of a public issue; & this axiom applies also to the concern of this Thinksheet. Another parallel: Those who would rewrite history, leaving the Holocaust out. Again: Altering the past by bowdlerizing its literary products (always done "for the best of reasons")--eg, "inclusive language.".... Politics is power, & distorting history is power-motivated--in the words of a power victim, Milan Kundera (THE BOOK OF LAUGHTER & FORGETTING), "The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting."

1. What's the proper thing to do with one's heritage-tradition? OPTIONS: (1) Deny it (in the struggle for respectability and/or survival). (2) Flaunt it. Always, the behavior of the ins over the outs. (3) Humbly, gratefully transmit it untarnished. In this view, editing the ancestors is a form of pollution, tarnishing. (4) Accept it critically for everything it is, "the bad with the good," "warts & all," transmitting one's critical edition of it without distortion. (5) Distort it by pruning & grafting, to (according to the particular generation's view) fumigate-purify-rectify in the interest of "fairness & justice."....(5) is the current fashion in American education at all levels. The Bible is the West's iconic book, but forget it. In "interpreting" our history, elevate the supporting roles of women & coloreds into partnership roles. ... (4), the historical-critical attitude & action, seeks to balance fact & interpretation, objective & subjective. It is the "liberal," ie free & freeing, intellectual tradition in the West...never perfectly reached, never till these "liberation"-minded times attacked in academia.

2. Whether or not humankind will ever agree on a definition of human greatness, each civilization has criteria of what is great-in-it, viz what enhances its vitality &, vis-a-vis both nature & the rest of humanity, its competitiveness. In terms of its influence on other civilizations, the West, Euamerica, is by far the most successful civilization on this planet. Power corrupts etcetc, so the West is not free from corruption; but fairness entitles it to have its corruptions set alongside, for comparison with, the corruptions of other civilizations past & present. Some account must be given as to why the West became & is, influence-wise, #1. (Why, eg, did the ideas of a German Jew working mainly in London come to dominate presentday China?) Some in the West feel guilty about this success & so present as negative an account of it as they can manage. They consider illegitimate, even oppressive, the educational goal of transmitting "Western Civilization," which they see as albinoandrocentric (white-male dominated in its products & present)--which analyzes out as Eurocentric, sexist, & racist (the white-male model dominant in white males & their surrogates, eg Thatcher & Ragiv Ghandi). They preach values-free, canon-free (no Great Books) education. Says Max Lerner, Allan Bloom's THE CLOSING OF THE AMERICAN MIND, in its huge success, shows a reaction is setting in against this global (both senses) neorationalism.

3. All of America's formative literature was written in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, & English. In drawing up a canonical list, are you sexist & racist if you can't come up with nonmale, nonwhite authors? Add them, of course, past the formative period.