

### **Join the Multicultural Debate**

Consider the issues raised in this chapter and read the following statements by different authors who discuss multicultural social studies:

James A. Banks (1993): “One misconception about multicultural education is that it is an entitlement program and curriculum movement for African Americans, Hispanics, the poor, women and other victimized groups. . . . Multicultural education . . . is not an ethnic- or gender-specific movement. It is a movement designed to empower all students to become knowledgeable, caring, and active citizens in a deeply troubled and ethnically polarized nation and world.”

Maxine Greene (1993: 17): “Learning to look through multiple perspectives, young people may be helped to build bridges among themselves; attending to a range of human stories, they may be provoked to heal and to transform. Of course there will be difficulties in affirming plurality and difference and, at once, working to create community. Since the days of De Tocqueville, Americans have wondered how to deal with the conflicts between individualism and the drive to conform.”

Octavio Paz (1993: 57-58): “You are already a hybrid culture, which to me is a positive thing. I believe all cultures are richer when they assimilate others, and change. I don’t believe in a pure culture. Here we are sitting and talking in New York, a city populated by the minorities that are the world’s majority. It is marvelous, no?”

Diane Ravitch (1990c: 3): “Almost any idea, carried to its extreme, can be made pernicious, and this is what is happening now to multiculturalism. . . . Advocates of particularism propose an ethnocentric curriculum to raise the self-esteem and academic achievement of children from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds. Without any evidence, they claim that children from minority backgrounds will do well in school only if they are immersed in a positive, prideful version of their ancestral culture.”

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. (1992: 29): “The use of history as therapy means the corruption of history as history. . . . Let us by all means teach black history, African history, women’s history, Hispanic history, Asian history. But let us teach them as history, not as filiopietistic commemoration.”

Albert Shanker (1995): “As practiced by some, ‘multiculturalism’ takes the shape of something approximating a new ideology of separatism. It challenges the idea of a common identity and rejects the possibility of a common set of values. . . . Often, the claims of multiculturalists and other separatists reflects the attitude that no one group may make a judgement on any other, since all ‘depends on your point of view’. This extremely relativistic viewpoint conflicts with the need that all societies have of establishing some basic values, guidelines and beliefs.”

Christine Sleeter (1991:12): “Education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist forges a coalition among various oppressed groups as well as members of dominant groups, teaching directly about political and economic oppression and discrimination, and preparing young people directly in social action skills.”

#### **Add your voice to the discussion:**

1. Which statement(s) come(s) closest to your understanding of multiculturalism? Why?
2. Which statements do you disagree with? Why?
3. What are the implications of this chapter and the quotations for planning social studies curricula?