

Article IV

Multi-cultural or Cross-cultural Perspectives

A first suggestion is to switch our terminology from multicultural to cross-cultural. The new adjective must go with an action. This action, I call "bridge-building."

Putting two ethnic groups together, a simple multicultural approach, can be, without due preparation, counterproductive to inflammatory. Police know that when you have White Supremacists and Black Lives Matter groups both marching for their cause, you don't propose just put them together, so they'll learn about each other and get along fine. Tutsi and Hutus living together in Rwanda have managed to alienate and kill each other genocidally by the hundreds of thousands. The Islamic Arabic Sudanese government with a penchant for genocidal killing of its compatriots exterminated millions more fighting non-Arab Christians and animists in the south and Darfur tribes in the west who resisted "acculturation" efforts and economic inequities. Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Pakistan, India, Myanmar, and China are all plagued by deadly ethnic-racial violence with peoples within and on their borders. In fact, if multiculturalism were a fix, America would be a haven of harmony. Instead, the list of such multicultural violence and conflict throughout the world and throughout history is endless. Proximity

and exposure to a different culture is not *per se* a remedy, and may even be the tinder for conflagration.

The term *multiculturalism* in its simplest form and its implementation expresses no will to get to know one another or to cooperate. I believe that we can do better. "Cross-cultural," means, more appropriately, according to Collins Dictionary, "involving or bridging the differences between cultures." A multicultural school is an integrated school, but as school integration in Little Rock, Alabama in 1957 demonstrated, integration does not automatically teach harmony. Despite Federal Airborne Division escorts, the brave Little Rock Nine Black school children were relentlessly and violently harassed and attacked with acid in the face, kicks in the stomach, shoves down the stairs, intimidation, and exclusion. Bridge building was nowhere in the curriculum.



Today the curriculum is not much better and, in fact, often builds more walls than bridges. Texas Board of Education may be

America's leader in selective white-washed history. The Board has effectively all but eliminated the evils of slavery, lynching history, the Trail of Tears, the Mexican-American War, and the like. Worse still, Texas's textbook purchasing power has dictated to publishers how to write history not only for Texas, but with ripple effects all over the South and all the way north to the conservative prairie and mountain states. The Texas Board has, in effect, overridden the supposed goal of the US Supreme Court's *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* that was supposed to integrate schools. Had the Court mandated *cross-cultural* (bridge-building) schools, the outcome may have been different.

Our schools like our society at large both wittingly and unwittingly perpetuate a segregationist multiculturalism. Real-estate-banking red lining, reservations, Africa-Asia-Euro-Latin-centric studies, and American history courses all contribute to hardening our tribal divisions. Unwittingly, our 60's to 70's "peace brother!" tolerance movement unwittingly taught us that we need to respect each other. We did not have in mind genocidal ISIS beheaders or Boko Haram enslavers and ransomers of school girls. We did not envision **misogynist** Taliban as part of the "salad bowl" or "mosaic" society that came to replace "melting pot" society as the new value. Nevertheless, "acculturation" became a naughty word. Salad bowls taste good by enhancing the flavor of each independent ingredient keeping its own flavor, but enhanced when mixed with other ingredients. Mosaics, likewise, become beautiful by their combination of individual

perhaps less impressive pieces keeping their character, but enhanced in beauty when combined with other such pieces. The new metaphorical aspiration descriptions or goals are preferable to a homogeneous Euro-centric melting pot as preferred by historian Arthur Schlesinger.

The melting pot creates a homogeneous society that is less conflictual, yes. But melting pots when coerced, e.g., China or to lesser degree America and epitomized by the Texas Board of Education, engender authoritarian, oppressive, unfriendly, highly conflictual methods to reach that homogeneity – if it is ever to be reached at all.

But the salad bowl, another way of saying multicultural, is not without caveats. Salad bowls, may also be conflictual if all of the ingredients do not automatically blend their flavors compatibly. In America's early history, with many exceptions, Northern European salad elements seemed to work better than when Southern and Eastern European ingredients began to arrive in the 1800's and early 1900's. More rural and less technologically developed, the newcomers were considered slow to learn. Chinese, Mexicans, Mestizos, and indigenous peoples were still more incompatible to the salad bowl as they had also been largely unmelted in the melting pot.

Furthermore, the "salad bowl" may even be at times a new iteration and glorification of the old segregationist separate-but-equal culture imagined as tasty or beautiful. But again, with all of its good intentions, if salad bowls condone each of our culture's heritage preservation and with no attempt

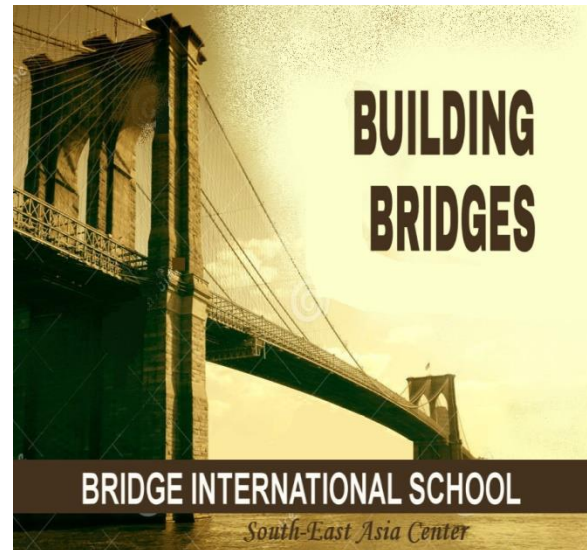
to harmonize, but an disingenuous institutional condonation of competition, we have a treacherous conflictual, inequitable situation on our hands.

What we did in the 60's and 70's was to dispose of the melting pot and substitute the salad bowl.

We demanded respect for students, youth, Blacks, women, etc. The paradoxical outcome was still divisiveness – disrespect for teachers, Blacks vs. Whites, women vs. men, poor vs. rich, etc. The inadvertent outcome of every-group-for-itself, respect-for-everyone promoted just the opposite of Hippie harmony and peace. Each group vying for a piece of the pie did not promote a cross-cultural-bridge-building positive-sum mindset.

The failed propagandistic mono-culturalistic authoritarian Euro-centric melting-pot approach was now copied by minorities in their efforts to ascend the hierarchy. Ethnocentric cultural pride now became a respected new value and new goal for each and every group – not just the Euro-centric majority. Today's besieged and besieging White supremacists, Southern "lost causers," rebellious, uncontrollable youth, rogue African-American looter rioters, and Asians tightening their ethnic enclaves even more are in much part ripple effects of the well-meaning 60's-70's. And neither melting pots nor salad bowls have achieved equitable human rights protections for women, Blacks, indigenous peoples, immigrants, children, or other minorities. We got our wish, but we may need more wishes to come true to fine-tune the first

wish – for salad-bowl respect. The salad bowl has not brought harmony and peace.



So how then do we switch our metaphor to one more appropriate? I'd say, how can we build bridges instead of inadvertently erecting walls of separation, hate, despair, and counter-productive conflict? In our first three articles, we have already explored how to stress commonalities, positive-sum solutions, and getting to know ourselves and others much more profoundly and objectively. Great start for a more harmonious less dysfunctional society. This article has shown us one more pitfall on our path to harmony. Lessons started early in life that we are all part of the *human* race have the largest impact. In our next article we will discuss the dangers of small-pictures and the importance of big-picture thinking to change ourselves and the world.

What else can we do now? No, we do not want to go back to the melting pot. We do not want to quash creativity or cultures. What we can do is to recognize what doesn't work quite as we expected. We

must work to correct these mistakes that we now know that we made. We can begin to defuse group-centric, cut-throat competitive culture that we have wished upon ourselves. We need to reimagine how our society can reformulate itself from infancy, parenting, school, governance, and economic and judicial systems. We need to think *cross-cultural bridge building* in whatever we do or organize.

Cross-cultural means to us *deliberate* action to bring about a *deeper* awakening about our own culture *and* that of others in an attempt to learn from others and understand the dynamic interchange between cultures. This deliberate process when done thoughtfully and compassionately will change for the better all cultures involved. There is no ideological, ethno-centric, sectarian goal. We do not know how each culture will change except to know that we will all be more skilled at dealing with one another and living together on an ever smaller planet. All ships anywhere on the planet will rise with the tide.

This article is part of an 8 part series by Peter Porr that can be downloaded as an e-book at SouthEastAsiaCenter.org

Dana Goldstein, "Two States. Eight Textbooks. Two American Stories. American History Textbooks Can Differ across the Country, in Ways That Are Shaded by Partisan Politics," *New York Times*, Jan 12, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/01/12/us/texas-vs-california-history-textbooks.html>.
 Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society*, W.W. Norton Company, New York, NY, 1991.
 Robert Dahl, *How Democratic Is the American Constitution?* Yale University Press, 2003.



As part of a statewide Healing Illinois project, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) partnered with Chicago Community Trust have enabled South-East Asia Center

(SEAC) to share ideas and provide actionable steps that individuals and organizations may consider implementing to promote better racial understanding amongst diverse community groups.

Through a series of email messages directed to faith leaders, political leaders, educators, and social service providers SEAC will share thought provoking insights designed to discourage zero-sum thinking and instead encourage a deeper understanding of cultural relations that focuses on our commonalities.

In addition to the eight action oriented messages, SEAC will host two one hour online webinars presented by the center's founder Peter Porr aimed at challenging assumptions, offering cross-cultural insights, and explaining how we unwittingly go wrong in our approach to intercultural interactions.

Two Online Webinars Promote Racial Understanding

June 29, 2021 (11:30 AM CST)
**How Zero-Sum thinking
 leads to conflict in society
 and the classroom**

June 30, 2021 (3:30 PM CST)
**Systemic Racial Injustice,
 The David Tom Story, What We Can Learn**

Presented by Peter Porr

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