

# NewOptions

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## Multiculturalism Will Make Us Whole

Like most of us, I grew up in white America. All my playmates were white. One of my high schools was legally segregated, the other might as well have been. When I first heard the song "California Girls," there was no question in my mind what they looked like.

That America is fast disappearing. Already 25% of us are nonwhite. Over the next 30 years, the number of nonwhite U.S. residents will more than double (to 115 million), while the number of whites will stay the same or even decline. In 65 years most of us will trace our descent to Africa, Asia or Latin America — not to Europe.

Our most important states will become nonwhite even sooner. In New York State today, 40% of schoolchildren are minorities. White high-school-age "California Girls" are already a minority.

### Fullness of heart

The press does not often give these facts the attention they deserve. When it does, it comes up with basically three kinds of stories:

- Some, like the recent story in *Time*, "Beyond the Melting Pot" (April 9), stress that the "browning of America" is **inevitable**.

- Others, like one recent story in *The New York Times*, "California Is Proving Ground for Multiracial Vision in U.S." (June 16), stress that it's in white people's **economic self-interest** to adjust to the new realities. For example, in a less than inclusive America, will a majority-nonwhite workforce happily agree to pay Social Security for retired whites?

- Finally, some stories, such as "Whose America Is This, Anyway?," in *The Village Voice* (April 24), stress that multiculturalism is **simple justice**, since it would give The Oppressed their richly deserved seats at the table.

All three kinds of stories make valid points. But none of them stresses what is surely the

most important point of all.

Multiculturalism is not only inevitable, necessary and just. If it's done right, it will expand our mental horizons. It will enrich our interpersonal lives. It will make us whole.

Many traditional activists have a hard time understanding why that's the most important point. So let me spell it out:

Multiculturalism will never be fully or happily embraced in this country if we choose it because we feel we "have to" or "should." It will only really flourish if we choose it with fullness of heart.

### Twenty voices

What *is* multiculturalism, exactly? How can it be "done right"? How would it affect our common culture? Why would it make us whole?

Those are some of the questions we ask in this special "theme" issue of NEW OPTIONS.

The answers we've come up with draw on many people's expertise. Over the last month, we interviewed 20 prominent advocates of a multiracial, multiethnic, multisexual America. They ranged from corporate consultants to gay poets, from Hispanic politicians to professors of African-American studies. All the quotations below are from those interviews.

As you'll see, our "experts" disagree about many things. But on one thing they are in full accord. Multiculturalism will make this country better, and each of us better. Listen to them long enough and you'll begin to suspect that multiculturalism may be the next great social movement of our time.

## Great monocultural melting pot

Maybe the best way to approach multiculturalism is by looking critically at its opposite, namely, the cultural style we have now —

"monoculturalism," aka the great American melting pot.

"Monoculturalism is when each person feels unworthy unless they fit in to the dominant culture," says Sarah Pirtle, author of an award-winning children's book that features an African-American and an Asian-American as its two principal role models (*An Outbreak of Peace*, 1987).

"Monoculturalism has given us just such a narrow, restrictive view of how everything should be done," adds Joan Lester, director of the Equity Institute, which conducts "interrupting racism" workshops at many of our colleges and corporations.

Many of the people we spoke with have thought critically about monoculturalism. They make three major points. In the *society at large*, monoculturalism is responsible for the loss of ethnic richness and vitality. Among *immigrants and minorities*, monoculturalism has taken a terrible personal toll. And among so-called *white people*, in some ways it's done even greater damage.

### Losing that flavor

"You can't force people to be Northern Europeans," says Molefi Kete Asante, chair of African-American Studies at Temple University and author of *The Afrocentric Idea* (1987). "But that is what we have done since the beginning of this country! [Even] Eastern Europeans have been psychologically forced to be Northern Europeans."

Because we've tried to do what Asante says we "can't" do — because we've tried to force people into a monocultural straitjacket — we've drained our citizens of much of their cultural identity. And it's our whole society's loss, says Rodolfo Acuña, founder of the largest Chicano Studies department in the country (at Cal. State University-Northridge) and author of *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (1981).

"I was brought up in old Los Angeles,"

Acuña told us. "The [ethnic] groups all fought each other. Somebody may have called me a 'spic,' and I may have called somebody a name, you know. But still, there was a *flavor* here.

"Once you got beyond the group level, you'd get to know people. So you went down to the Rossi's house and you saw the way the grandmother made homemade noodles, you know; or the way they made the wine. The Jews at that time were different Jews. They spoke Yiddish, you know; their houses smelled like garlic, like my house.

"I mean, there was a *flavor*, a strong flavor, and I think we're losing that. And I think we're not the better for it."

### Too big a price

Our whole society may have paid the price for "monoculturalism," but minorities and immigrants have been paying it most directly. And they do so every day.

"Most Americans wear or watch or do something 'foreign' in origin every day," says James Zogby, director of the Arab-American Institute and executive board member of the National Rainbow Coalition. "The problem is we deny it. And in the process of denying it we create psychological hurt for those who are denied.

"I mean, my bread — the bread that my forefathers invented, right? — is eaten every day. But no one will call it Arabic bread. It's got some diluted name — 'pocket bread,' or 'pita bread.' . . .

"I think all of us remember the pain of being 'foreign'. I never quite understood how it was that Italian kids made me feel like I wasn't quite American, when they'd just barely gotten off the boats themselves.

"You know, there's a sense that we projected that people caught on with right quick, of who was in and who was out — and what it *meant* to be in and out. And it's the source, it's the continuing source, of a whole lot of tension. In Detroit now you've got Polish and Italian autoworkers beating up on Koreans for being 'foreigners.' . . .

"On one level we've done well at integrating [everybody]. But each group had to pay too much of a price. And we are exacting too big a price from the new groups."

Sarah Pirtle, the children's author, makes an even larger point when she says, "I find there's a real strong pressure for conformity today, [thanks to] the media and economic pressure.

"Instead of approaching maturation by asking what are their unique gifts, our young people feel they'd better figure out what's expected of them and try to fit in. It takes a tremendous toll. Young people who are gay or lesbian, or young people of color, are par-

ticularly high-risk for death by suicide or violence.

"The society tells them, 'You're not okay. You're targeted because of who you are.' I think that's the underlying violence that perpetuates monoculturalism."

### The bell tolls for thee

Ironically, it's possible that monoculturalism has harmed straight, middle-class, white people most of all.

"The white heterosexual middle-class model is so huge that how can you find yourself in it, really?" asks Judy Grahn, well-known poet and author of a popular history of gay people, *Another Mother Tongue* (1984). "What you find is your ambitions. And that's not enough — this career-oriented, spiritless wandering that happens in the model. . . ."

"I think the emptiness of white culture is very painful to people," says Shea Howell, Detroit activist and co-author of a widely-read pamphlet, *The Subjective Side of Politics* (1989). "And as a result, they try to find ways to answer that spiritual emptiness. One [glaring] example is the people who go wholesale to Native American practices. [Often] they just sort of take the practices that are comfortable, as a way of filling that void. . . ."

"In the U.S. we don't see people as having a [living] ethnic identity, or being connected to a particular [geographic] place, or existing in relation to [various social and political] struggles. We don't have any real sense of *who a person is*. In the U.S. we never use the word character, we always use the word personality, because what we judge people by is their personality. Our basis for judging one another [is just] very superficial."

## Visions of multiculturalism

As a welcome alternative to monoculturalism, many innovative thinkers have begun to promote what they call multiculturalism. For better or worse, there are almost as many multiculturalisms as there are multiculturalists. But nearly all multiculturalists seem to agree on three things.

First, multiculturalism would be characterized by a tremendous cultural diversity. Second, it would — must — include a commitment to economic justice. And, third, it would encourage white people to define themselves as something other than just "white."

### Embrace diversity

"I think we should embrace the [partially hidden] diversity of this culture, and see that diversity as a tremendous natural resource,"

says Scott Walker, co-editor of the first book about multiculturalism in America, *Multi-Cultural Literacy* (1988).

"I would like a world that offers an opportunity for balance between the public and the private, the rational and the intuitive, economics and values," says Magaly Rodriguez Mossman, Cuban-American "diversity consultant" to the Du Pont corporation. "And if we were to honor and pay attention to other cultures, we'd get this kind of diversity, this kind of richness."

"My vision," says the Equity Institute's Joan Lester, "is of a world and a society in which there will be more variation than there is now.

"Standards of scholarship, for example, have basically been 'normed' on one population, primarily white middle-class to upper-class males. And, you know, that's a nice, very interesting, reasonable method of scholarship. *And* there's just so many other ways out there of thinking about things that have been excluded from the academy and its derivatives!

"I foresee that in a really multicultural world there will be many modes of scholarship, many modes of writing papers that are not what we consider now to be standard. [Some] might include a lot more personal references and allusions; [others] might include fabric sewn onto them. . . .

"Additionally, the real diversity that exists *in individuals* will be more accessible to all of us. The creativity that we may be inhibited from expressing because it's not 'suitable' to our class, or gender, [or whatever], I think would be more available."

### The justice connection

For many multicultural advocates, cultural diversity and economic justice are inseparable. In a multicultural society, "human beings would be committed to each other's well-be-

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## Groups

ing in a very strong way," says Cherie Brown, director of the National Coalition Building Institute (which does training in "prejudice reduction" in schools, churches, corporations and even police departments).

"You can't separate multiculturalism from class and economic issues. There's a parallel between how things are going economically and group [antagonisms].

"I think it's real important that we're not just talking about a society where everybody kind of likes each other and the real injustices don't change."

### "White" is not enough

Probably a majority of multicultural advocates would agree with Detroit's Shea Howell when she says, "We must rid ourselves of 'white' identity and embrace our true cultural identities. For many of us, this will be an opportunity to come to terms with the fact that we are the children of many different and distinct cultures — Irish, Jewish, Spanish, Armenian, Syrian, Hungarian. . . .

"The only way we are able to maintain a majority status in this country is by calling ourselves 'white.' The South Africans [use 'white' as an umbrella word] too, which should give us pause."

Suppose we just *can't identify* with our ethnic ancestors? According to Howell, we might take a page from Jesse Jackson's book and identify with a social struggle that touches our lives: "In all his speeches, Jackson appeals to people [as] workers, women, poor, dispossessed. He uses those categories for giving us a sense of *who we are*."

But we shouldn't be too quick to dismiss our ethnic identities. Grace Lee Boggs, 74-year-old Asian-American activist and co-author of *Conversations in Maine: Exploring Our Nation's Future* (1978), speaks movingly of a "meeting recently where at the closing workshop we decided we would go around the room, and each person would speak, just for a minute or two, about her or his own ethnic identity.

"It was just absolutely amazing how the atmosphere in the room changed, as people acknowledged their identities, and were acknowledged for being who they are."

## But what about our central culture?

If we really do begin to value diversity more than uniformity, and even the notion of "white people" begins to fall apart, what will happen to our central culture? Will we still have one?

Multicultural theorists have come up with

basically four views on this.

One view is that our common culture will remain predominantly Anglo. Another view is that it will become an exciting new mix of all the cultures.

A third view is that it will become not so much a mix as a mosaic, with soft boundaries. A fourth view is that it will become a mosaic with hard boundaries.

### Anglos still on top

"The American culture does dominate," says historian Rodolfo Acuña. "There's always going to be [that] central culture.

"You go back to de Tocqueville, you realize this is a nation without traditions. And that's why they're so f—in' insecure about their culture. It'll exist irregardless. . . . Those English Only [groups] running around, they're a bunch of kooks."

Other spokespeople think the Anglo culture will remain dominant, but over an ever shrinking terrain. "There is a kind of two-tiered culture in America," says Mark Thompson, senior editor of *The Advocate*, the biggest gay periodical in the U.S. "There's the official culture, and then there's the culture that's developing. . . . But I don't know how many other people we can wean from the TV sets and movies and all of that."

### The coming synthesis

Many observers think we're on the verge of merging all our cultures — and look forward to that with an almost missionary enthusiasm.

We're in the process of adopting a "different approach to life," says Senator Art Torres of the California Assembly (who's often touted as a future governor or U.S. Senator). "The best way to look at that is through food. [Even] Dodger Stadium food has become multi-ethnic! . . .

"Food [begins the interactive process] among cultures. The next step — which is also occurring — is the intermarriage of cultures literally, to form new families."

Sylvia Wynter, director of Afro-American Studies at Stanford University, is a critic of (some kinds of) multiculturalism. But she is no defender of what she calls "Allan Bloom's high culture," either. She is as wary of the notion that white, Western culture is "best" as she is of what she calls "multicultural bantustans."

What she insists upon is the honest recognition that we are *currently* "integrated in the nation-states of the Americas on the basis of a single culture. That culture is the culture of Western Europe — the Judeo-Christian cultural model. . . . Whether we like it or not, there was a dominant civilization! That is the way history happened!"

What she wants to see now is what she calls a "vernacular synthesis" of all the major cultures of the Americas. In fact, she thinks it's happening already.

"The vernacular culture of the Americas is now emerging," she claims, "after having absorbed everything that it needed from the high culture, the European culture. It is carrying [the high culture] over — not negating it — into a new synthesis" made up of European and African and Latino and Native American elements.

"The different cultural traditions of the Americas . . . have entered into an 'Americanizing' process to constitute something [genuinely] new."

Thomas Bender, University Professor of the Humanities at New York University and author of *Community and Social Change in America* (1978), shares Wynter's belief that our central culture should remain dominant — and her faith that it is changing.

"The dominant culture is not fixed," Bender says. "It is historically constructed. . . . The culture keeps remaking itself, historically, as time goes on.

"There's a public culture made in America. And that public culture is not, as some people on both the left and the right are saying now, a WASP culture or an Anglo-Saxon culture. It has been in the making since the beginning of the 17th century. A person of Anglo-American descent would today have to establish *their relationship* to this public culture, [just like anyone else].

"Our public culture is the result of an ever more inclusive conversation about what American society is. I recognize that in the past it has not [included] everyone. But I also have a very strong feeling that in the last 15 or 20 years we've been opening it up progressively."

### The coming mosaic

Probably more multicultural thinkers would like to see a *mosaic* than a synthesis.

"[I don't want to be] forced to become part of some mush that is 'everybody's' culture," says Arab-American Institute's James Zogby. "Instead, [we should all be able to] look at the American mosaic and recognize the chip we place. And recognize the marvelous contribution that everyone's made to it."

"What I advocate is pluralism without hierarchy," says Temple University's Molefi Asante. "Pluralism without hierarchy means the appreciation of individual cultures in terms of their legacies and their contributions to American society without having some notion of dominance on the part of any particular cultural group.

"[For example], my idea of Afrocentrism [does not assume] that that worldview is uni-

versal, but that it is the expression of a *particular* heritage. Eurocentrism has often assumed that the European experience was universal and, as they would say, 'classical.' That of course is where the problem lies."

Most advocates of a mosaic want the boundaries of the mosaic to be soft, permeable. "Each person has to own and control their culture, and be able to define it the way they want," says Ethelbert Miller, director of the Afro-American Resource Center at Howard University. "[But they shouldn't be] limited to their one square. They must see the whole picture. If you just see that little square, then you're not going to go anywhere, see; that's the whole thing where racism starts breeding in that little square. . . ."

Gay and lesbian cultural historian Judy Grahn has developed an idea called "commonality" that beautifully illustrates one way the mosaic might work.

"Commonality is a series of concentric circles that overlap," she says. "This is how I can live as a primarily gay and lesbian person in a primarily heterosexual world. . . ."

"With commonality you can use separatism creatively. To separate from other groups means being able to find your *home base* — commonality based on likeness."

But finding home base, or even many home bases, is not enough. "Because if all you do is stand there, I believe after a while you'll become lost. Because our country is huge and contemporary and has all kinds of people in it.

"So commonality enables me to sometimes be separatist (in one of my various groupings or another), and all the rest of the time to be integrationist, and go from my various home bases out into the world and engage with people who also come from home base.

"I think any time we try to live as if there's one unified way of being, and everyone must fit into that, then *none* of us has home base!"

### **Mosaic with walls**

Some multicultural advocates don't think the "soft" mosaic goes far enough.

Harry Hay, a founder of the Mattachine Society (the first gay political group) and, much later, of the Radical Faeries, thinks that multiculturalism today would be premature. "The important first step between [what we have] now and the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-sexual community [of the future should be] a *plural community*. . . ."

"We're beginning to see it here [in L.A.]. We have Koreatown, we have Japantown, we have the Mexican barrios, we have the Black community, and we're going to be having the gay community. All of these are separate communities.

"They live side-by-side. And they have to

learn to work together and with each other. But for the moment [it's right that they] remain separate societies. First of all we have to be self-respecting, plural people.

"A plural society may need a century at minimum before it is ready to entertain visions of multiple integrations."

Mike Myers, a Seneca Indian, is program director of the Seventh Generation Fund, which assists Native American self-help projects. His preferred vision of the U.S. includes "whole areas of cities where English is not heard," and full recognition of Native Americans' "rights to land, and our ways of life, [and] our ability to govern ourselves."

He has no desire for a common culture. "It's impossible! The Communists tried to blend everything together [in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union], and as soon as the iron hand that held it all together relaxed its grip, nationalism sprang back up — you know, the demands of people for their cultural rights, their linguistic rights, etc.

"When you see anyplace that does have a common culture, it's forced, and it's very heavily controlled. You look at Japan. Japan really demands that everybody who goes there act like a Japanese. It's very strictly [enforced]."

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## You know it won't come easy

No one we spoke with believes that multiculturalism (whether as synthesis or mosaic) will come to the U.S. without a lot of hard work.

Some think taking personal responsibility should be the focal point of that work. Other suggestions for focal points include: conducting workshops, improving the schools, redirecting the media, rousing the government, reforming the economy, and choosing a new set of "founding parents" for the U.S.

### **Take personal responsibility**

There are many things we can do on our own.

"I think the first step is to feel the loss when people of many ethnicities are missing in your life," says children's author Sarah Pirtle. "Just look in your own close circle of friends and notice who's missing."

"Take an interest in what's going on in the black community, [and in other ethnic communities]," says Asian-American activist Grace Lee Boggs.

"Begin to recognize all the areas in our lives which are 'normed' by one or two dominant groups," says Equity Institute's Joan Lester. "Constantly question the ways we do

business. Constantly question why we live in the neighborhoods we do, why we send our children to the schools we do, why we ask certain questions in research."

"Interrupt the kind of oppression that comes up in jokes and everyday comments," says Pirtle. "Just really say, That's not all right with me!

"And start talking more about *why* you want to be multicultural — to friends, and in work situations.

"And accept that you're going to make mistakes. You [ve got to] want to learn. [Ask minority people to] tell you if you're unconsciously being offensive and oppressive."

### **Conduct workshops**

Several multicultural advocates feel that formal workshops and trainings are a crucial ingredient.

"Personal empowerment work is key," says National Coalition Building Institute's Cherie Brown. "We believe the thing that's missing right now is leaders that are trained in prejudice-reduction work; in handling very tough intergroup conflicts; and in building effective coalitions. We train leaders everywhere we can in those skills."

"One of the effects of the programs that Equity Institute operates," says Joan Lester, "is to help people in organizations look at their environments with a new eye. [Then we help them] develop strategies for doing things differently . . . with follow-up meetings built in."

### **Improve the schools**

"I think the educational system is probably where it has to start," says cultural historian Thomas Bender. "The schools are going to have to [develop] a practice of viewing the complexity of our culture in a way that finds it enriching."

Calif. State Senator Art Torres agrees: "I think the first step is to require children graduating from high school to be fluent in a foreign language other than English. I think that can begin the process of bridging cultural awareness."

### **Redirect the media**

Probably most multicultural advocates would start with the media. "The media is mainly what determines how the rest of us think," says Texas-based gay writer Toby Johnson, author of the just-published *Secret Matter* (a socially conscious gay romance).

"I think it's quite fascinating the extent to which the media has adopted for itself a moral agenda," says the Arab-American Institute's James Zogby. "Watch 'Family Ties' and those kinds of shows and there's a lot of posi-

*Continued on page seven, column one . . .*

# The Ear . . .

## Thanx a million

Thanks for your kind review of my book *Building a Peace System* (NEW OPTIONS #65). Your charge that the book shows "wishful thinking" and is "cloyingly optimistic" should not, however, go without reply.

I warn repeatedly in the book against assuming we'll succeed and against "shallow hopes," both in my words and in quotes from writers as varied as Gabriel Kolko, Elise Boulding, Randy Kehler, Noam Chomsky, Michael Marien — even Mark Satin!

Some might even conclude I'm a closet pessimist, noticing that in the section on "prospects for building a peace system" I never assert that success in building a peace system is even *probable*, let alone certain.

Anyway, thanks.

— Bob Irwin

Belmont MA, Lower New England Bior'n

## Quite an achievement

Your tax proposal is interesting ("It's Overdue! — An Income Tax That's Simple and Fair," #66). The flat rate, which turns out to have progressive implications after all; the first \$15,000 tax-free for each adult; the complete absence of loopholes and exemptions — all sounds fine.

So I applied it to my own situation. If the social security tax is ended, then there can be no more social security payments to people, yes? Well, that means a reduction of some 17-18% of my gross income!

Then, when I apply your tax proposal to what is left, I find my taxes will be 14% *higher* than they were last year. That means you have figured out how to reduce my real income by almost 20%!

I don't think my devotion to tax reform in the name of community goes that far.

— Laurence G. Wolf

Cincinnati OH, Cumberland Bioregion

## Failure of nerve

I think you missed the central question in any argument about taxes — namely, the context within which tax systems exist.

In our world of limited and declining "gifts of the earth," what compelling purposes are served by the current colossal scale of social and economic inequality (which could not better be served in other ways)?

There may be such purposes. But until

they are clearly articulated and proven, all three of your "voices" — free market, New Deal, and flat-tax-with-a-\$15,000-deduction — are, by their silence, stalking horses and apologists for a status quo of starvation, suffering, oppression and environmental degradation on a scale previously unknown in human history.

Sorry, on this one I think your "post-liberal" perspective merely reflects a failure of nerve — a refusal to grapple with the reality of the power relationships that our taxing structures reinforce.

— David H. Albert

New Society Publishers

Santa Cruz CA, "Monterey Bay Bior'n"

## Think! Dream!

By supporting a nice little tax reform, you're not demanding the total revisioning of the tax system that Greens around the world have been calling for.

Suppose the year were 1850. Could we expect to see a well-intentioned article in NEW OPTIONS calling for "slave simplification," prettier chains, and better working conditions so as to minimize runaways? Such reforms would only serve to desensitize the public to the shocking immorality of the whole slave system.

Publicly-created land values would more than suffice for the operation of our government, if the government would simply collect these values instead of allowing them to be scooped up into the groaning coffers of private landlords. See the platform of the Green party of Great Britain. Re-read NEW OPTIONS #56!

— Hanno T. Beck

Common Ground USA

Columbia MD, Potomac Valley Bioregion

Your program of tax reform presumes a continuation of the present socio-political realities of statism and coercion. The entire matter of "public revenue" needs to be reexamined starting with its philosophical and moral basis.

If community is to mean anything at all, it must be based on voluntary participation and the freedom of the individual to choose. Surely, the experience of our brothers and sisters in Eastern Europe has taught us that.

The idea of a "voluntary" tax may seem utopian, and indeed it is if one presumes that everything else will remain as it is. But in practice, few things will.

I venture to say that very few would volunteer to continue support of the bloated bureaucracies and fiefdoms of privilege which feed at the public trough. On the other hand, the people *will* support those things which they see as valuable and necessary. Farm Aid

and Hurricane Hugo are but two examples of the people's willingness to help each other in time of need.

— Thomas H. Greco, Jr.

Tucson AZ, Sonora Bioregion

## Better options

Your argument for the flat income tax was well stated, but it only amounts to fine tuning a fundamentally flawed system. The basic problem with the concept of an income tax is that it taxes what is put into the economy (labor and savings), and not what is taken out.

Replacing the income tax with a value added tax on new raw materials (excluding food), new construction and new manufactured goods at wholesale would manage to:

- reduce the wasteful paperwork nightmare of the income tax;
- encourage maintenance, repairs, reusing and recycling;
- shift the tax burden to those who consume beyond their basic needs; and
- restore a market economy responsive to supply and demand.

Naturally, this one change will not solve all our economic problems. But it is so fundamental that it must be given a high priority among our new options.

— Dick Wingerson

Crested Butte CO, Rocky Mtn Bioregion

Your tax reform issue was good, but your assertion that this is about "something genuinely new under the sun" is just another way of saying Mark Satin never heard of it before.

I enclose a copy of the relevant sections of the New World Alliance's *Transformation Platform* (1981). Add to this my Institute's booklet "Retirement Security Reform" (1976) and my article "Tax Attack on the Urge to Merge" (*Business and Society Review*, 1978), and you have everything except:

- sumptuary tax — invented in Nurmberg in the 14th century;
- pollution tax — advocated in 1970 by [Senator] Bill Proxmire and others and trashed by the high priests of ecology (because it admitted that sinful pollution would be continued);
- drug tax — dependent on legalization, but Illinois already requires tax stamps on pot;
- severance tax — in wide use for years at the state level.

If you really wanted to launch a regrettably neglected idea, you could have described David Bradford's "cash flow tax," described in the Treasury Department's *Blueprint for Basic Tax Reform* (January 1977). In effect, you are taxed on what you spend over and above a subsistence allowance, and wealth creating

investment is deductible from the base.

This ought to excite New Age types because it penalizes lavish consumption. On the other hand, it is also a terrific investment generator, which might horrify New Agers because it would result in the creation of more THINGS.

— **John McClaughry**  
*Institute for Liberty and Community  
 Concord VT, Highlands Bioregion*

## Friendly amendments

I think your version of a simple and fair income tax is excellent. My only suggestion is to float, rather than fix, the personal deduction. \$15,000 may be adequate for basic needs today but, due to inflation or recession, may be inadequate tomorrow.

Rather than set a dollar amount, why don't you make the personal deduction a fixed percentage of the median personal income (say, 50%)? This would automatically adjust for changing economic conditions.

— **Gene Tinelli, M.D.**  
*Syracuse NY, Allegheny Bioregion*

Your flat tax proposal is excellent, and like so much else in NEW OPTIONS, is sure to surface somewhere in the political downstream. However, your piece endorses a rather shortsighted argument by Lester Thurow to the effect that corporate taxes are, in the end, sales taxes and therefore regressive.

Perhaps Mr. Thurow doesn't have the time to actually make useful things with his hands. I did appreciate his work for the Democratic party in '88, but maybe a bit less writing and some time working in a garden, or in the kitchen, or in a workshop or studio might give him the insight to appreciate the difference between the world of corporate America (which of course has its place in the scheme of things) and the world of our own making — that which is homemade.

If we desire a culture in which things are invested with personal meaning — if we desire true artistry — then there is reason to keep corporate taxes.

— **Jared Scarborough**  
*Payson IL, Heartland Bioregion*

## Sophisticated pusher

I was very troubled by your article "Drugs Are Not the Enemy" (#62). Of course I agree that drugs are not the enemy and you certainly can't "kill them with a gun." But when you say that "Getting high, getting intoxicated, changing one's consciousness, is a universal human need," I have a stop (as we Quakers say).

I think drugs prevent us from the kinds of consciousness change we need. I stopped any smoking and alcohol drinking years ago, because I found when I used either, I wasn't a clear channel for my inner voice, or whatever you choose to call "wisdom." I even discovered that sugar rushes distorted my perceptions.

It seems to me the messages I need come through clearly only when I "center down" to listen for them.

— **Gene Knudsen-Hoffman**  
*Listening and Reconciliation Project  
 Santa Barbara CA, Pacific Rim Bior'n*

No serious change is going to be led by people involved with drugs. Get real!

— **Lowell Rheinheimer**  
*Sanbornton NH, Lower New Engl. Bior'n*

"Drugs Are Not the Enemy" was one of the most challenging articles I have read in NEW OPTIONS. I am more open now to the idea of decriminalizing drugs. However, I can hardly believe that the word "pain" does not appear once in the article.

Our culture devalues feelings and creates very painful ways of life requiring heavy repression that leaves us feeling grey and dead. So we need drugs to revive us and give us the meaning we lost when we lost our feelings.

As long as people are experiencing a lot of pain or a lot of deadness, there will be a demand for drugs. Let's face it, we need drugs as painkillers.

— **Lucy Marton**  
*San Francisco CA, Shasta Bioregion*

## "Ethics" or apologetics?

I think the magazine you praise in #62, *Business Ethics*, sees what it wants to see.

This does not mean that there aren't moral and caring companies out there. I know there are. But they are not the large multinationals involved in the various sectors like energy production, mining, paper/pulp production, chemical production and the like.

I know because my own magazine, *Catalyst: Economics for the Living Earth*, is conducting a massive corporate research campaign focusing on these industry sectors. Even if these companies are "doing good" (or better) here at home, they aren't great citizens of the Earth in other countries.

I don't mean to put editor Marjorie Kelly down. But I really have problems with her ability to make it look like "it's going to get better and corporations will help us get there." If they are any "help" at all it will be because they are forced into it.

— **Susan Meeker-Lowry**  
*Montpelier VT, "Winooski Bioregion"*

## Advisors' corner

# Gorbachev is one of us

By Fritjof Capra

During the past two years, the global movement for sustainable values, for a "new paradigm," has found an ally in a totally unexpected quarter.

Of all the nations in the world, one would have thought the Soviet Union would be among the last to embrace the new paradigm. And yet, in Mikhail Gorbachev we now have a world leader who has clearly recognized the paradigm shift and is trying to implement it both nationally and internationally.

Let me quote just a few passages from his speech to the U.N.: "Life is making us abandon outdated worldviews. . . . [We are witnessing] the emergence of a mutually interrelated and integral world. . . . We must build a new world — and we must do it together."

The similarities between Gorbachev's "new thinking" and our Western notion of the new paradigm are not accidental. On my trip to the Soviet Union this January I was able to discover some very interesting connections.

The global awareness and systemic approach, which are so characteristic of Gorbachev's "new thinking," were already developed during the 1970s. During that entire decade, a thorough re-examination of the Russian philosophical tradition took place at the intellectual fringe. Some of the intellectuals who took part in this re-examination were tolerated; others were persecuted.

A central figure in this movement was the philosopher Ivan Frolov. He edited a journal in which he published articles that represent the roots of the "new thinking." These were influenced by, among many other things, the intellectual and cultural currents of the 60s and 70s in the West; in other words, by the emergence of *our* new paradigm.

During the 70s, when Raisa Gorbachev studied for her Ph.D., she knew Frolov well and had access to his small circle; and it was through her that Mikhail Gorbachev became familiar with new-paradigm thinking.

Frolov became a close advisor to Gorbachev, and is now the editor of *Pravda*.

I am convinced that Gorbachev's "new thinking" does not just sound like our new paradigm. It is part of the *same movement* — of the same shift of perceptions and values.

NEW OPTIONS Advisor Fritjof Capra is founder of the Elmwood Institute (#18) and author of *The Turning Point* (1982).

Continued from page four:

tive themes that come through.

"But what they are devoid of is the diverse cultures of the American people. Those are nowhere to be reflected at all. Everybody's white people. Even the black people are white people. . . .

"Okay, Fonz is an Italian kid on 'Happy Days.' But there isn't enough of it. And even though he was Italian, and known to be Fonzairelli — I grew up in those neighborhoods, you know. And you *talked about* being Italian. You weren't just incidentally Italian. It was a real part of daily life. You knew who the Italian kids were, you knew who the Greek kids were, you knew who the Arab kids were. . . . Somehow we have to project that more."

## Rouse the government

"I think the way we have to proceed is . . . for, quote, political leaders to find issues that transcend race [and] affectional preference," says Calif. State Senator Torres. "And I think many of those issues are starting to emerge, finally. For example, what are our local governments doing to improve communities or neighborhoods?"

Zogby is impressed by the fact that Canada has a national multicultural ministry: "It has programs throughout the provinces. And it funds activities everywhere, for all the ethnic groups."

Mike Myers, the Seneca Indian, has hopes for *international redress* of Native American grievances. Through the U.N., he explains, people are "working on a Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. . . . They hope to have it ratified by 1992."

## Reform the economy

"I don't think you can deal with the question of culture until you deal with the economic inequities in our society," says Chicano historian Rodolfo Acuña. He is characteristically blunt when he adds, "First of all, from the perspective of the Mexican or Latino, I think they have to give us what is ours."

Howard University's Ethelbert Miller speaks hopefully of a "Marshall Plan" for urban neighborhoods: "There never has been any sort of full-scale investment . . . in the cities. What had always happened is that the money was always going out. [Now it's time to] say, okay, here is the money to restore the schools, you know, here is the money to build on community pride."

## Find a common history

For Denver-based historian Vincent Harding, author of the much-acclaimed *There Is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (1981), one multicultural priority is

developing "some common vision, some common goals — if at all possible, some common sense of history.

"And for me right now, one of the great possibilities for common ground is the story, the mythos, the history, of the Afro-American freedom movement of this generation. I am especially interested in looking at the way we can take something like the movement for the expansion of American democracy [for that is what it was], and, in a sense, claim that as our own *joint* history.

"Just as people who came here for generations were asked to adopt Abraham Lincoln and Benjamin Franklin and George Washington as their own founding fathers, as it were, so I'd say now that we have a new generation of 'founding parents.' Like Martin King. Like Dorothy Day. Like Diane Nash. Like Bob Moses. Like lots of folks, living and dead, who clearly gave us a tremendous grounding for the creation of a new and democratic and multiracial and multicultural society.

"And if we can in some way see these folks, and their action and their life and their sacrifices, as our *ancestors* — perhaps that will be one way of joining ourselves together as one new people."

## What they have that we need

So — how would multiculturalism make us whole?

I asked many of my so-called minority-group interviewees to try to say what it is, exactly, that heterosexual, white, middle-class Americans have to gain by opening up their hearts to people from their group. What is the special "chord" that your group strikes, I asked, that we need to hear for our own happiness and well-being?

It was an awkward question, awkwardly asked, and was met with some hesitation.

"Well, Mark, I don't think that the issue is what black people *can* offer," said historian Vincent Harding. "The issue is the recognition of what black people *have* offered."

Nevertheless, nearly everyone I talked with went on to answer that question. They knew their answers mattered.

## The gay chord

"I think we can give an enormous sense of fun and joy back to [heterosexual people]," says *Advocate* editor Mark Thompson. "I mean, I think we live in a fairly joyless culture. Don't you? [laughs]. There's a sense of joy and a sense of celebration [in gay culture], even in the little things of daily life."

"By my clothes and bearing I model a cer-

tain freedom for women," says lesbian poet Judy Grahn. "By parenting a child [my lover and I] present an obvious example of alternate family structure. All of this puts ideas into people's minds."

"We live in an extremely sex-phobic, or I guess I should say erotophobic, culture," says Thompson. "And I think one of the primary reasons gay people seem to threaten people is that we seem so in tune with our sexuality. I'm not talking about the promiscuity of the 70s, but just that we seem more at ease, more with a sense of fun and creativity about our sexuality."

"The first thing [we have to teach] is that sex doesn't have to be about reproduction," says gay writer Toby Johnson. "One of the reasons we're having all the problems in the world today [is overpopulation. And] the example of gay people makes it very clear that one can live a very fulfilled life without having children or focusing one's life on children."

Radical Faerie founder Harry Hay claims that gays are "a people who have carried within us the potential of a new type of consciousness, which the world now needs. We have the capacity to think in terms of subject-subject rather than subject-object.

"What heterosexuals do to each other is very different from what we feel about ourselves. For us, the great ideal is another human *subject* who will see eye to eye with us, who will celebrate with us, who will give us constant human feedback. This is the way we've always wanted to relate to that other, that dream guy who was in my mind since I was 11."

## The Latino chord

"What Hispanic people contribute to a full life is passion, spice, imagination, dreaming," says Du Pont's Magaly Rodriguez Mossman.

"A Hispanic bureaucrat [recently received a memo from a woman requisitioning supplies. His response]: Ay, madre, your letter, it has no soul. Give me some flowers, madre. Give me some poetry, a little bit of life. . . . So she re-wrote the letter and got everything she asked for.

"The point is that, for him, life is not this curt, to-the-point thing. It *needs* flowers. And I think Hispanic people bring that kind of spice, a little mischievousness, a spark."

Hispanics also bring "very basic values," says Senator Torres. "Values about [the importance of work and family. Our] immigrant families are bringing the Protestant work ethic back to America."

## The Native American chord

"One of the things that disturbs us the most," says Seventh Generation's Mike Myers, "is the *lack of roots* that non-Native peo-

ples have to a specific [geographic] area, a specific bioregion.

"They're not anchored. They can pick up and, you know, just wander wherever they want. They can mess up one place and move on. And leave their mess behind them.

"Some people are beginning to talk about the feelings they have for the places they've chosen to live in. I think that needs to get more rooted in the American psyche. Because then you will have a certain attitude and spirit and soul to what is called the environmental movement, that'll move it to the next level.

"People will really want to fight for their place [if] they have a really solid commitment to it, and can really see their future generations growing up there and being a part of it."

### The Black chord

"The African-American culture certainly doesn't take itself so seriously as I think the European culture does," says Temple University's Molefi Asante. "And that will probably help us in terms of just learning to relax."

"I think Black culture in America has within it the groundwork and possibility for true maturity," adds historian Vincent Harding.

"From my perspective, true maturity comes only through the process of loss and suffering and difficulty and up-against-the-wall-ness and knowing what it is to be refused the things that one feels she or he needs desperately. And only as people go through that kind of experience can they come to any true maturity.

"My sense is that that has been the experience of the African-American people of this society from the beginning.

"And coming out of that [experience], I think in a sense, when we are at our best, we are able to offer a grounding that is much more in keeping with human reality. A grounding that is not a, quote, success story, but a story of people enduring, of people's willingness to continue suffering, of a people's ability to overcome fantastic odds.

"That kind of history being built into the ground of our nation's history is, I think, of great importance. Not only does it provide us the kind of maturity that a very powerful society needs to balance its power. It provides us with a hook into the experience of the majority of the world."

## The next great social movement?

I believe that the multicultural vision is such an attractive one that, sooner rather than later, multiculturalism will follow envi-

ronmentalism as our next great social movement. More than any large idea I know now, multiculturalism has the capacity to inspire vision and idealism.

### The vision

Sarah Pirtle sees multiculturalism as a kind of restoration.

"I think people are born curious about differences," she says. "And they unabashedly ask questions about the people that they meet. But what happens is that this unbridled curiosity begins to be stopped — people find that the doors start closing for them as children, or they get a message that you 'should' stick to people like yourself.

"So when I think of a multicultural society, I think of restoring that basic sense of interconnection between all people."

Joan Lester sees it as the logical next stage for the civil rights movement. "It's amazing to remember that we had legal segregation until 1964," she says "So we're only one generation removed from that.

"But now that we've had those barriers removed for a generation, we're seeing that there are other barriers. Those other barriers are our monocultural norms, and they're going to have to be removed in order to have full participation by everyone."

Toby Johnson sees it as a way to build a certain modesty into our national psyche. "There's a way in which all sides are right," he says. "No side has got the corner on the Truth. We need to understand that [to practice] multiculturalism."

Thomas Bender sees it as a chance for us to model the first world civilization. "Henry James thought there was a chance of a kind of 'world culture' being born in the U.S.," he says. "And I think that's still true. The U.S. has already gone through a lot of the steps the whole world is going to have to learn to

go through.

"The notion of national and cultural purities is being annihilated! And I, at least, find the possibility of much more complicated conversations about our national culture more interesting rather than less."

Vincent Harding sees it as an opportunity for national rebirth. "For me," he says, "what we're saying essentially is that we are now a nation that is coming into being again.

"We are saying that we are now people who have come from many directions, many cultures, many backgrounds. Some of us have occupied this land for a long, long time; some for a shorter but still long time; and some only very recently. But all of us are now together, trying to understand how you create a nation out of such tremendous diversity.

"It's a marvelous opportunity for going far, far beyond any of the old definitions of what America is and who Americans are."

Count on it happening. Already, in the summer of 1990, it seems vaguely un-American that I grew up in white America.

*Groups and pamphlets mentioned in the text:*

*Afro-American Resource Center, P.O. Box 441, Howard University, Washington DC 20059;*

*Arab-American Institute, 918 16th St. N.W., #601, DC 20006;*

*Equity Institute, 48 No. Pleasant St., Amherst MA 01002;*

*National Coalition Building Institute, 172 Brattle St., Arlington MA 02174;*

*Radical Faeries, 5343 La Cresta Ct, Los Angeles CA 90038;*

*Seventh Generation Fund, P.O. Box 10, Forestville CA 95436;*

*"The Subjective Side of Politics," \$5 from Tools for Change, P.O. Box 14141, San Francisco CA 94114.*

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