



On Hispanic Education:

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U.S. Not a Melting Pot

The United States of America never has been, currently is not, and never will be a cultural, ethnic, or racial melting pot—for this Hispanics can be eternally grateful. The concept of the melting pot as it was intended to apply to the U.S. meant that all races, ethnic groups, languages, and heritages of all peoples in the U.S. would, like various metals and elements, be put into a crucible and melted down into a fusion of all races to create a homogeneous super-human. The melting pot concept dominated American education for a major part of this century, and if we are to prepare our Hispanic children for the next century (just thirteen years away), we must educate them about the dangers of the melting pot concept.

To understand the concept of the melting pot it is useful to quote from the play entitled **The Melting Pot** written by Israel Zangwill in 1909, as one of the chief characters describes his definition and hopes for America. He says, "America is God's Crucible, the great Melting Pot where all races of Europe (and other continents) are melting and reforming! Here you stand in your fifty groups with your fifty languages and histories . . . but you won't be long like that, brothers, for these are the fires of God . . . Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians—into the Crucible with you all! God is making the American . . . The real American has not yet arrived. He is only in the Crucible, I tell you—he will be the fusion of all races, the coming superman." (Parentheses mine).

When the melting pot concept was applied to our society there were some problems. Many Euro-Americans who came to the U.S. were able to racially blend into a predominantly white society and once they lost or stopped speaking their non-English native tongue, they could not be told apart from Anglo-Americans. Some racial and ethnic groups, however, could not do that so easily, either because they were darker skinned or because they were racially different. Such peoples could not "melt" no matter how much they might have tried or might have wanted. Such U.S. citizens became "visible" minorities whereas other ethnic minorities became invisible, or "melted."

When applied to education, the melting pot philosophy provides a rationalization and justification to use the public education system to establish a unicultural, unilingual and unicultural nation. As attested to by English-Only advocates, there are still many people in the U.S. who buy into the melting pot concept and think that it is the role of the public schools to assimilate children who are ethnically and linguistically different into one language and, therefore, one culture. Since the melting pot concept encourages education for homogeneity, not heterogeneity, the educational system has been more successful with those children who could melt than with those children who could not melt. This stands to reason, because children who cannot melt will be alienated and discour-

aged by a school system that denies their identity and therefore their pride and self-respect.

Our Hispanic children, therefore, must be taught early in life that they will not trade in their brownness for whiteness just because some may think that brown-colored children are not as good as white-colored children. Our Hispanic children should also learn to keep and maintain their Spanish language even if they must also master English because it is the dominant language of the U.S. Our children should also learn never to feel inferior or deficient just because they refuse to melt into a white Anglo-Saxon pot in order to be considered "American." Most of all, our Hispanic children must learn the real meaning of America—that you can be culturally, racially, linguistically, or ethnically different and still be one hundred percent grade-A "all-American."

It is important, therefore that our Hispanic children be educated according to the philosophical tenets which can counter the view of America as a melting pot. These tenets have been outlined and described in a previous article in *El Renacimiento* entitled "Tenets to Follow in Educating Hispanics" (April 28/May 25, 1986). These tenets are: a) Gaining positive self-identity and self-acceptance for oneself and one's culture; b) Accepting and fostering cultural pluralism; c) Developing greater understanding, respect, and acceptance of cultural differences in individuals and groups; d) Developing positive and productive interaction among and with people of diverse cultural groups; and e) Promoting equity among the culturally different groups that compose our community, state, and nation.

The greatest threat in viewing America as a melting pot, however, is in the misunderstanding of what America is all about. The melting pot concept fails to take into consideration the ideology of America as a land for people of all ethnicities no matter whether they can or cannot melt. John Dewey summed it up when he addressed the National Education Association in 1916 with these words: ". . . the American Nation is itself complex and compound. Strictly speaking, it is interracial and international in its make-up. It is composed of a multitude of peoples speaking different tongues, inheriting diverse traditions, cherishing varying ideals of life . . . No matter how loudly any one proclaim his Americanism, if he assumes that any one racial strain, any one component culture, no matter how early settled it was in our territory, or how effective it has proved in its own land, is to furnish a pattern to which all other strains and cultures are to conform, he is a traitor to an American nationalism."

When our children learn to be patriotic Americans, ready to die for this country if need be, they should understand that they are defending this nation for the freedom to be ethnically different as well as for our other freedoms. Instead of thinking of the U.S. as a melting pot, our Hispanic children should see America as a beautiful mosaic of many colors, races, and ethnicities.