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California Three Rs

Rights, Responsibility, and Respect

*A Project of the California County Superintendents Educational
Services Association and The First Amendment Center*

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March 2008

From Diversity to Pluralism Getting to “We” in Public Schools

By Margaret Hill, CA 3Rs Project Director

At our most recent session of the Religion in American History Institute, Dr. Bruce Grelle, Director of the Religion and Public Education Resource Center at Chico State University, shared with us a very thought provoking way to think about the issue of religious differences in our public schools. He was interpreting some of the amazing work of Diane Eck at the Pluralism Project at Harvard University. He emphasized how essential it is to apply the Three Rs principles of rights, responsibility and respect in order to create students and schools that will flourish in today’s religiously, culturally, and ethnically diverse democratic society.

No one can deny the religious diversity of today’s schools or the challenges it brings to developing educational policies, calendars, and curriculum. How educational stakeholders create a system that will support both individual students and the society as a whole depends on how they respond to these deep differences. As we were learning in our institute, the reaction to religious and cultural diversity has always produced fault lines that widen the divisions and threaten the ability of America to function as a united society politically and socially. The meaning of the “We” in “We the people of the United States of America” has been defined and redefined as people continue to struggle to create a unified society in America’s religiously and culturally shifting landscape.

Some people historically and today have tried to deal with the growing diversity and the tumult it creates by closing the door to new immigrants, especially of those who are too “different,” thus creating unity by limiting the accepted cultural variations within society. Diane Eck calls these people “exclusionists.” She identifies other people as “assimilationists,” who accept immigrants but want them to participate in an American “melting pot” by quickly shedding their differences and aligning with mainline Anglo, and until recently Anglo-Protestant culture. Eck’s third group, the “pluralists,” welcome the newcomer of whatever culture and religion, respecting their differences, as long as they pledge to take part in the common civic demands of American citizenship.

All three types of response to diversity exist in today’s society, but the critical issue for schools is to choose the one that promises to foster the civil dialogue necessary for democracy to thrive. In the face of wide diversity this civil exchange in search of common ground is not a given. It is an achievement. It requires a strong commitment by our society-building public institutions, especially our schools, to create this E Pluribus Unum, “out of many one,” democracy that America has set as its goal. Getting to “we” requires that civil dialogue occur to develop the civic responses to the challenges facing all of us. This requires that people understand the need to

engage the whole “pluribus,” to invite everyone into the dialogue, to disagree civilly, but to keep trying until a compromise is reached that is acceptable to all the participants with a stake in the outcome.

Sometimes schools think they are fostering this pluralistic common society through efforts at building tolerance or celebrating differences. Though laudable at a basic level, this approach has the limitation that it does not necessarily lead to active engagement because religious and ethnic groups often remain isolated and ghettoized. Pluralism demands more than tolerance of differences, which often glosses over the ignorance that leads to stereotypes or half-truths that people believe about each other. Pluralism requires knowledge about each other and deep, respectful engagement in common issues.

A major reason that educators and the public have steered away from pluralism is fear of cultural relativism. Pluralism does not mean ignoring real differences in beliefs and values but makes room for them in the civic dialogue. Pluralism does not require individuals to relinquish their own faith traditions, but invites people of all religious and secular beliefs to the table to seek common ground on public policies and solutions to common problems. This common ground is not based on common religious beliefs but on common civic beliefs that the ideas of freedom or “rights” embedded in our shared constitutional heritage belong to us all. The “unum” of our society is based on the responsibility each of us takes individually and collectively to support the rights of others to claim the rights we want for ourselves.

The process of creating the “unum” through civic dialogue is what counts in creating the common good. For dialogue to be open, it must be respectful, the third “R” in the Three Rs. The continuous process of disagreement, struggle, and compromise for the common good must be nurtured by creating open and respectful forums within the classroom, the school, the district, and the community. This is not done through the processes of ridicule and shouting others down that are often heard on TV or talk radio. Instead, it is achieved by determining a common goal, such as creating a safe learning environment for all students, or ending a conflict that is tearing a community or school apart, finding the window of agreement, and working from there.

This type of dialogue is emerging in many places. Schools and colleges are forming “Finding Common Ground” task forces of parents, community, and educators to decide upon and implement ways to deal with contentious issues such as religious holidays, student dress codes, religious expression, school prayer, and sexual orientation. Planning commissions, city governments, and interfaith councils are seeking ways to resolve issues of zoning for religious meeting places, of how to meet our human responsibility to help people in need, and of how to bring understanding of the social and political system to our new Americans. In our local communities where there is a Hindu Mandir is on one corner, a Ukrainian Orthodox Christian Church on another, a mosque down the street from a synagogue, and Baptist and Catholic Churches next to one another, the meaning of “we” has changed from the days of John Winthrop’s Puritan Massachusetts. Now the “we” refers to a people who are committed to protecting the civic processes through which we work together to create the common civil society that is our vision of America, still so greatly admired by many around the world.

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Learn more about the California Three Rs Project and the academic study of religion by participating in Religion in **American History: What to Teach and How to Teach It - Part I** at the Orange County Department of Education in Costa Mesa July 14-20, 2008 or **Religion in American History: What to Teach and How to Teach It - Part II** at the San Joaquin County Office of Education in Stockton June 16-20, 2008.

Constitution Day Conference

Freedom of Conscience – Cornerstone of America’s Constitutional Liberties featuring keynotes by Erwin Chemerinsky, Dean UC Irvine College of Law and Charles Haynes, Senior Scholar Freedom forum First Amendment Center, at UC Irvine September 13, 2008. Open to all K-12 teachers and curriculum leaders.

For information on programs & institutes, contact: Margaret Hill, (909) 537-5459, mhill@csusb.edu



California Three Rs Project, CSU San Bernardino, San Joaquin COE,
Orange County DOE, and San Bernardino CSS

invite

Grade 4-12 teachers, administrators, and curriculum specialists to a
Teaching American History Institute



WILLIAM M. HABERMEHL
County Superintendent of Schools



Religion in American History: What to Teach and How to Teach It

Part I: July 14-18, 2008

LOCATION: Orange County Department of Education

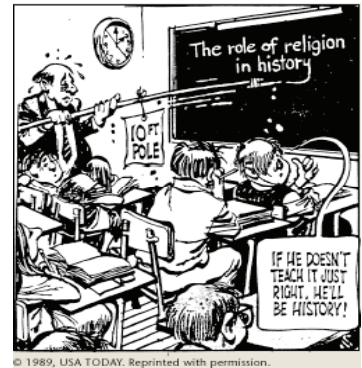
Bldg. D, Room 1002
200 Kalmus Drive
Costa Mesa, CA 92628

TIME: 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

STIPEND: \$500 after summer session;
additional \$250 after follow-up meetings and assessments

BONUS: \$300 in materials for school that provides a control group
evaluation

FOLLOW-UP: 2 days TBA, sub costs paid (Housing available for teachers traveling more than 1 hour)



TOPICS

Why the Study of Religious Influences on American History is so Important; Early Foundations and Gradual Development of the Concept of Religious Liberty; Pre-Contact Native American Religious and Spiritual Life; Influence of Religion on Euro-American and Native American Interactions; Religious Reformations in Europe and Their Impact on America; Religion in the Early Colonies and Two Lasting Visions of America that Emerged; Catholic and Protestant Influences in Early America; Declaration of Independence; Great Awakening and the American Revolution; Religion and Slavery

CONTACT: Margaret Hill (909) 537-5459 drpeghill@verizon.net

----- Religion in American History Institute July 14-18, 2008 -----

Name: _____ Grade levels: _____

School Name & Mailing Address: _____

City: _____ Zip: _____ Phone:() _____ Fax:() _____

Home Mailing Address: _____

City: _____ Zip _____ Phone:() _____ Fax:() _____

Email (required) _____

Mail completed registration coupon to:

CSU San Bernardino, Ed Leadership and Curriculum, College of Education FO#115
Attention - Margaret Hill, Director CA 3Rs Project and Religion in American History Institute,
5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino, CA 92407-2397 Fax (909) 537-7173

DEADLINE: June 29, 2008

Common Ground Resources:

Finding Common Ground: A Guide to Religious Liberty in Public Schools by Charles C. Haynes and Oliver Thomas. First Amendment Center, 2007.

This book has guidelines on how to handle a wide range of issues related to religious liberty and public schools.

First Amendment Center: Religious Liberty http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/rel_liberty/index.aspx

This is an up-to-the-minute resource with current issues and court cases. A PDF version of *Finding Common Ground* is available here.

For California Three Rs program information, contact...

Dr. Margaret Hill, California 3Rs Project Lead, California State University San Bernardino, 5500 University Pkwy., FO 115, San Bernardino, CA 92407, (909) 537-5459, mhill@csusb.edu

For First Amendment religious liberty information, contact...

Dr. Charles C. Haynes, Senior Scholar, Freedom Forum First Amendment Center, 1101 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, VA 22209 Tel: 703/528-0800 Fax: 703/284-3519
chaynes@freedomforum.org

For information on teaching about world religions, contact...

Dr. Bruce Grelle, Director, Religion and Public Education Resource Center, Department of Religious Studies, California State University, Chico, 400 West First Street, Chico, CA 95929-0740, (530) 898-4739, bgrelle@csuchico.edu

Sign up to receive the **Three Rs Bulletin** and program announcements electronically at mhill@csusb.edu.