

# History of deculturalization and america history essay



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There are many methods of deculturalization, such as segregation, isolation, and forced change of language. When the content of curriculum reflects culture of dominant group, it is deculturalization. Also, dominated groups are not allowed to express their culture and religion, which is deculturalization. Use of teachers from the dominant group to teach those that are dominated is another form of deculturalization (Spring 49).

“ The problem was the assumption that U. S. institutions, customs, and beliefs were the best in the world and they should be imposed” (Spring 42).

Throughout much of the past century, the United States sought to stamp its cultural ideal upon almost all peoples who existed within its realm of influence. It is only through the relatively modern ideology of multiculturalism and the celebration of diversity that the United States has begun to make amends for the injustices it has committed on other cultures. Today, with multiculturalism entering into the classrooms and other realms, different cultures are finally getting the attention they deserve.

The American idea of cultural and racial superiority began in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with the colonization of northeast America by predominantly Anglo Saxon colonists. Ironically, the colonists came to America to escape persecution for their religious beliefs. The Anglo Saxon attitude of cultural superiority was a largely Protestant value that remained prevalent for much of the twentieth century (Spring 2-4).

The educational impact of this elitist attitude was far-reaching. The most immediate effects were seen in the destruction of Native American culture and peoples. Efforts to ‘ civilize’ the Native Americans through the use of

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schooling began in 1819 and continued until the late 1920's. The first schools were the result of Christian missionaries' efforts to gain converts. English was the only language spoken in these schools, and the Native American culture was looked upon poorly. Some earlier efforts were made to adapt to Native American culture, including the development of a written Cherokee language. This knowledge, however, was used to impart Anglo-Protestant values and religion (Spring 18-21).

Out of almost all of the other cultures, Native Americans are the most exploited. Not only was their culture subverted and their people forced to move, but also the Native Americans still today are trying to regain their cultural identity. It was only during the late 20's that the effects of this cultural genocide became apparent. With the Meriam Report, published in 1928, the inhumane treatment of Native Americans was brought to the public eye, and this made way for the establishment of progressive day schools where Native Americans could integrate their culture. Ever since, Native Americans have struggled to regain an identity of their culture.

Along with Native Americans, some of the same injustices were inflicted upon Puerto Rico where the same rules of deculturalization applied to the education systems. Puerto Rico became a colony of the United States in the 1890's as a result of the Spanish-American War. The apparent Americanization of Puerto Rico centered in the schools where patriotic exercises emphasized American allegiance. English became the official language of the schools, and English proficiency became a qualification to obtain a Puerto Rican teaching license.

The Puerto Ricans resisted this deculturalization, causing strong tension in the 1920's, while they struggled to declare independence. Eventually, attempts at deculturalization fell beneath global civil rights movements in the 1950's and 1960's. Despite this, the educational system of Puerto Rico was severely limited for many years.

During the same time that the Puerto Ricans were struggling to regain their national culture and heritage, African Americans were struggling to overcome centuries of racial discrimination. Early in the 20th century, most African Americans seemed helplessly mired in a class system that sought to keep them poorly educated to provide a supply of cheap labor.

W. E. B. DuBois, founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, wanted to provide a different type of education for African Americans that would focus on encouraging leadership and protection of the legal and social rights of their communities. These schools would also create a constant awareness of their position within the white majority. DuBois saw great potential in the education of teachers because, once educated, they could impart their learning to countless others (Spring 67).

DuBois' dream seemed to be achieved in the 1930's when common schools for African American children were finally erected. Although a large part of the funding was donated, black parents contributed the majority of the funds. While this was a great step forward for African American children, these schools later provided the rationale for segregation outside of the often better-funded white schools.

Asian Americans were the largest group affected by the Naturalization Act of 1790, where non-white immigrants were excluded from American citizenship. A 'white person' was an immigrant from Western Europe; no other groups were considered 'white.' With the Anglo-Americans feeling threatened by the Chinese Americans, they sought to limit immigration through legislation. Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, prohibiting Chinese immigration. The Chinese Americans were sent to segregated schools because they were not classified as a 'white' person. This policy of segregation broke down by the early 1900's, when the board of education had to let Chinese youths attend the regular city high school.

After the United States conquest of Mexico, the attitude of racial, religious, and cultural superiority was reflected on both the treatment of Mexicans who remained in America after the conquest and later Mexican immigrants. Segregated schools, housing, and discrimination in employment became the Mexican American heritage. President James Polk sent an army to protect the Texas border, causing a military reaction by Mexico which resulted in the U. S. declaring war on Mexico. The war allowed former Mexican citizens to obtain U. S. citizenship, but did nothing to resolve problems of the Anglo Americans feelings of superiority. One of the important consequences of this negative action against Mexicans was to make it easier for American settlers to gain land in the area. Racism served as a justification for economic exploitation. These racist attitudes permeated the life of the cattle ranches established in southern Texas during what is referred to as the "cowboy era" (Spring 80). This deculturalization of the Mexican Americans is yet another example of the ethnocentrism that engulfed Anglo Americans.

Deculturalization has been a very sad occurrence since the beginning of America, and only recently has this problem started to be alleviated. The impacts of deculturalization have been very negative on society, but mostly on the education system. Today, teacher education revolves around multiculturalism and valuing the differences in cultures. Until this idea reaches all realms of society, however, the United States will not be completely free from the negative aspects of deculturalization, which swept through the country for many years. Knowledge is half the battle, though, and the more people are educated on other cultures, the more people will begin to appreciate other cultures.