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## Taking Steps to Build Support for Change

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#### LYNNE V. CHENEY

Multiculturalism
Done Right
TAKING STEPS
TO BUILD
SUPPORT FOR
CHANGE

Jan./Feb. 1993

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ulticulturalism is one of the most provocative words around today. On some campuses, it has become a fighting word. But we, more than any other country, are a nation made up of many people from many nations and cultures. Multiculturalism is part of the American identity, and so it should be part of what is taught in our schools, colleges, and universities. I'd like to put forward three principles that should underlie all our efforts.

The first principle is to tell the truth. Nothing so energizes the opponents of multiculturalism — as well it should — as myths, half-truths, and even untruths being brought into the curriculum. Truth has to be the lodestar of education. Indeed, it is the force of truth that has made us move toward multicultural curricula in the first place. Education is about learning to seek evidence, to evaluate information, to weigh conflicting opinions. It is about seeking the truth — and there is nothing more important to keep in mind if we want to do multiculturalism right.

A second principle: multicultural education has to be about more rather than less, more for everyone rather than less for anyone. Students can't be expected to understand other cultures if they are ignorant about the one in which they spend their lives. And they will not understand the culture in which they live unless they study it in a rigorous and coherent fashion. Multicultural education ought also to entail foreign language study, if the goal is to encourage understanding of how other people view the world.

A third, and last, principle for doing multicultural education right: it must be about what we share as well as about what sets us apart. There is no incompatibility between recognizing the contributions that men and women of diverse backgrounds have made to this country and seeking a truth we can all share. Our common story is, in fact, a multicultural one. Our common truth is about people from Africa, Asia, Europe, and every part of the globe being joined together by belief in equality and freedom.

It is important that our children learn to understand the various cultures that make up this country and the world, but it is also important that they learn to regard themselves and others as individuals — unique individuals — neither defined by nor judged according to the groups to which they belong, but blessed with the capacity and freedom to define themselves and to be judged, as Martin Luther King, Jr., dreamed his children would be judged, by the content of their characters, not the color of their skin.

Lynne V. Cheney is former chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Abstracted from a speech given at the Vail Valley Institute in June 1992.

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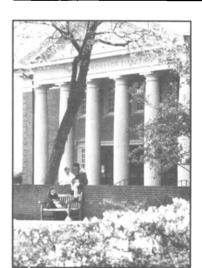
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