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Sexism, Racism, and the Recommended Readings for Paideia Seminars

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The current criticism by college students and faculties of the sexism and racism they find manifest in the failure to include authors who are not male, not white, and not European in the required courses in the history of Western civilization or, for that matter, in the study of contemporary world civilization, is thoroughly justified. But we do not think the criticism applies to the readings recommended by Paideia for discussion in the seminars conducted in the 12 years of basic schooling.

In the first place, it should be pointed out that these seminars are not intended to serve the purpose of surveying the history of Western civilization or the study of world civilization. Instead, their aim is to help students learn how to read and discuss books that deal with basic ideas and issues and, therefore, to cultivate the intellectual skills involved in critical thinking and reflective thought.

In the second place, the long list of recommended authors and books appended to *The Paideia Program* (pp. 188-238) includes books written by women and by blacks, and by Americans as well as by Europeans. Furthermore, the books listed are only suggested for consideration. Schools are encouraged to look for and select additional readings. If, in view of its student population, a school wishes to include books drawn from Latin America, or the Far

East, or Africa, Paideia welcomes such additions, and this Bulletin will publicize them after they have been tried out and found to support good seminar discussions.

On only one account do the exponents of Paideia take issue with the critics of the readings required in certain college courses. We do not think it is justifiable to exclude books written before the 19th century *simply* because they were written by white, male Europeans. To do so smacks of an ideological extremism that, in our view, is almost as bad as sexism and racism itself.

If, because of the racism and sexism that prevailed in the earlier centuries in which those books were written, they are blemished here and there by fundamentally wrong views, we think it is profitable for students to confront, consider, and discuss the distortions they contain or their inadequacy. 

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