

# THINGS IN MOTION...

*All things are in motion and nothing is at rest ... you cannot go into the same (river) twice. —Heraclitus (540?-480?) B.C.*

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## EARLY AMERICA IN JEOPARDY?

**T**HOSE OF US who learned in school about the giants of our culture during the nineteenth century--such people as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Emily Dickenson, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow among others, can expect many of today's students to respond to an inquiry about these famous Americans with a puzzled expression and a verbal "WHO?" They are also abysmally ignorant about Washington Irving, though most can tell you that Nathan Hale was hung for being a spy and Benedict Arnold was a traitor. It seems obvious to the older generation that our young people are being cheated out of knowledge and appreciation for the rich and varied cultural heritage that is their right to enjoy.

As a high school student, I listened to my teacher describe in detail the homes of Emerson and Longfellow and the cabin of Thoreau; how it felt to sit at a table in the Wayside Inn and to peek inside the little schoolhouse where Mary's lamb had followed her. Fifty-three years later, I experienced those things firsthand—and the thrill of doing so was indescribable. How sad it is to realize that perhaps most of our youngsters will never know such feelings—nor even know what they have missed by not knowing. Can a visit to Cape Canaveral offer the same pride in our nation as a visit to Concord, MA? Sadly, the answer to that is YES! Technology now is the vehicle that moves the nation and the finer values inherent in gentler pursuits have become fodder for archival warehousing; the musings

of ancient, unemployed fanatics out of touch with reality. Is this how the concrete values of a nation become weathered and worn away?

I am as proud of the military accomplishments of this nation as anyone else. I am also proud of our industrial and agricultural achievements; our concerns for civil rights and equality for all citizens, yet I cringe at the thought of how much of our present population knows nothing about our early culture—and has no curiosity to spur a search for such knowledge. Using our shameful treatment of America's native inhabitants as an example, can the average citizen give even a shallow explanation of the culture of any American Indian tribe? No. Does the average citizen have even the slightest curiosity about such cultures? No.

I am convinced that because of the emphasis in our schools on technology at the expense of our nation's literature and history, plus the influx of enormous numbers of aliens who bring their own culture with them, we are now travelers on the same highway as those who were here before us. What do we do?

Put American culture back in the classrooms; add historic places such as Concord, MA to class trips; make our students aware of the accomplishments of our literary as well as our military leaders. Teach the processes that made this country the world leader that it is. Honor the scientists whose discoveries made much of the world a better place. It is unlikely that first generation immigrants will forsake their homeland's culture, but our educational system can insure that their future generations know how America came to be and those who contributed to its growth and success as a democracy.

Make our historic sites, monuments, parks, as well as museums, schools, and places of special significance known to our citizens--and what makes these places important to our country. We are Americans, although our ancestors may have roots in many foreign places. We forged our own unique culture from a large variety of sources. What makes this country great should never be ignored or belittled—we can respect and even admire various ways of life, but only being an American guarantees our right to do so. #

--Hugh Singleton