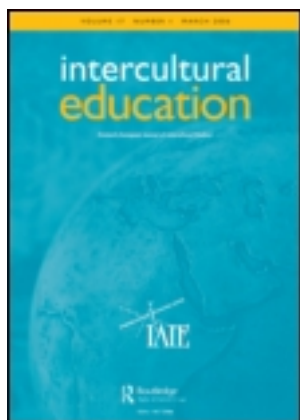


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## Toward a ‘*paideia* of the soul’: education to enrich America’s multicultural democracy

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What role might education play in the reinvigoration of a robust American democracy? We argue that common understandings of democracy, citizenship, and democratic education are too anemic to right the political inequalities and stagnancies that have deadened American democracy. Instead, we look to notions of *paideia* and an educated, enlightened citizenry to shape a multicultural democratic education. Multicultural democratic education cultivates the full and flourishing lives and minds of *all* citizens in American democracy rather than focusing on narrow preparation for voting. It does this through the practice of critical and authentic caring, the cultivation of community across difference, the connection to a global context, and the opportunity for social action. Most importantly, multicultural democratic education takes as its starting point equity and justice in a pluralistic society by committing to the cultivation of the minds and intellects of all students – in stark contrast to the unequal and mind-numbing education that most marginalized and minority students receive.

**Keywords:** *paidea*; democracy; multicultural democratic education; *bildung*; social action

### Introduction

We have frequently printed the word Democracy, yet I cannot too often repeat that it is a word the real gist of which still sleeps, quite unawakened, notwithstanding the resonance and the many angry tempests out of which its syllables have come, from pen or tongue. It is a great word, whose history, I suppose, remains unwritten, because that history has yet to be enacted. (Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas*, 1888)

Democracy awoke from its long slumber for us in the winter of 2011. From the snow-filled streets of February through the spring thaw, our Wisconsin capitol was alive again with the sounds, sights, and smells of an active citizenry. For months, rallies, sit-ins, and sleep-ins – and counterprotests and counterrallies – filled the Capitol’s lawns and halls, with weekends bringing thousands of marchers to speak out about the dismantling of public sector unions. We actively participated – Melissa, five months pregnant, marched for miles each weekend and even slept overnight on the Capitol floor while Carl spent time at the Capitol with colleagues and students.

This was an invigorating time for us (and not just because of the blustery winds!). Wisconsin citizens seemed to have come alive, awakened and aroused in ways they had not been since the Vietnam War. As our elected officials maneuvered

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inside their chambers, citizens gathered, debated, and protested. We commiserated with allies, argued with friends, educated onlookers, and sought compromise with opponents. Across the state, citizens debated the role of voters after an election, wrote letters to editors, and argued in public spaces. While exchanges were not always civil, it was heartening that they were happening at all. As we marched and camped and chanted, making our collective voice as loud as it could be, we got goose bumps every time we heard the protests' rallying cry: 'This is what democracy looks like!'

Of course, not all agreed. At the same time that the American media was lauding the Arab Spring, many were decrying the protests in Wisconsin as the whining of sore losers. Scott Walker had won the gubernatorial election, after all; the work of the voters was done, opponents argued, and he should now be allowed to do the job he was elected to do. For us, this opposition to the Wisconsin Uprising was an anemic understanding of democracy, where the act of voting was a citizen's only right and duty. It ignored the long history of active democracy in the USA, where speaking out about ideas and policies was one of the essential responsibilities of the citizenry. Unfortunately, it also rang true to the state of democracy to which Americans had grown accustomed, where pundits did the thinking and speaking for us. While democracy fluttered its eyelids for us during those months of protest in Wisconsin, in the end, it remained 'a word the real gist of which still sleeps.'

How has it come to be that our enactment of democracy in the USA has become so one-dimensional? While there are many possible explanations, we cannot help but look to the growing inequality in the USA, particularly growing *political* inequality. We see this inequality in voter turnout rates for racial and ethnic groups and income brackets (File 2008; File and Crissey 2010), in the prevalence of special interest dollars in the political process (Farnam and Eggen 2010), and in voter disenfranchisement (Alexander 2010). We even see it in widespread withdrawal from public life (Putnam 2000). It is no coincidence that this withdrawal from democratic life coincides with a narrowed vision of the citizen as consumer. When citizens become only what they buy, how they vote, and what demographic they occupy – and when patriotism gets expressed as 'going shopping more' (Bush 2006, para. 17) – democracy is in jeopardy.

Education has long been held up as a prerequisite for a flourishing citizenry and robust democracy (Cremin 1957; Dewey 2009; Gutmann 1987). Yet schools themselves have contributed to narrow conceptions of citizenship by succumbing to rhetoric that frames the purpose of education only in terms of economic competition (e.g. National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983; Obama 2009). Moreover, the mind-numbing and mindless education that many students receive (McNeil 2000; Oakes 2005; Valli et al. 2008) perpetuates inequality by neglecting students' flourishing minds and lives. While education may be theorized as the backbone of a democracy, in practice, it seems to be contributing to democracy's demise.

If the reinvigoration of democracy depends on the cultivation of citizens' flourishing and critical minds – a proposition that has long been at the heart of democratic theory and philosophy (see Kazamias 2010) – what alternative role might education play in revitalizing a robust, multicultural democracy? We argue that enriching our understanding of democracy and reframing democratic education as a pedagogy committed to cultivating diverse students' full, flourishing lives – rather than merely training in the 'skills' of citizenship – are essential for schools to nourish democracy.

### Toward an enriched understanding of democracy

Political philosopher Sandel (1996) points to two anxieties at the heart of ‘democracy’s discontent’ in the USA:

One is the fear that, individually and collectively, we are losing control of the forces that govern our lives. The other is the sense that, from family to neighborhood to nation, the moral fabric of community is unraveling around us. (3)

‘Democracy’s discontent’ is readily apparent in the unequal political participation of US citizens (e.g. Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry 1996; Verba 2003). Despite a long history of active civic engagement (e.g. de Tocqueville [1835] 1956), American civic life is now quite listless, arguably made more so by the characteristics of contemporary life (see Putnam 2000). Unequal democratic participation is linked to circumstances such as growing economic inequality, unequal distribution of political resources, and nonnegotiable time and work demands (Dahl 2006). Some also link ‘democracy’s discontent’ to the individualism at the very heart of American political philosophy: ‘Self-sufficiency and thinking for yourself have become self-alienation and existing by yourself. The self-interested individual becomes the self-serving individual and then the self-consuming individual’ (Barber 1998, 52–3).

Not only has political inequality grown, but democratic participation itself has become limited to two tasks: voting and shopping (voting with your wallet). This stands in contrast to historical ideas of democratic participation. Perhaps the starkest contrast comes from ancient Athens, where the *polis* required ‘living with beauty, living with wisdom, and loving the common good’ (Castoriadis 1991, 123). In other words, the *polis* depended on citizens’ rich and flourishing lives. Yet in contemporary American democracy, there is nothing akin to this. By narrowing the whole person to voting and buying, we ignore the richness and complexity of a flourishing life, we denigrate individuals and communities, and we undermine democracy.

The democratic *ideal* has long required enlightened citizens with rich and flourishing lives. Democratic enlightenment is more than factual knowledge; it involves a sense of community and justice and a fundamental grappling with what it means to be human (Kazamias 2010). In fact, West (2004) argues that democracy is not so much a form of government as a state of being, a way of making sense of the world. It is embodied by commitments to Socratic questioning (critical questioning and debate), prophetic justice (the abiding faith that greater justice for all awaits and that it is our moral duty to work for that justice), and tragicomic hope (the ability to look tragedy in the eye while still persevering). This democratic orientation is embodied in and kept alive by, not the actions of government, but by the ‘love of democracy being pushed forward by artists and public intellectuals’ (15).

Because we write from an American perspective and thus a liberal democratic perspective, we understand democracy at its most basic as self-government. Liberal democracy ascribes freedom and rights to individuals, with

a very wide freedom of choice in terms of how [individuals] lead their lives. It allows people to choose a conception of the good life, and then allows them to reconsider that decision, and adopt a new and hopefully better plan of life. (Kymlicka 1995, 80)

While we begin from these principles, we move beyond them. Democracy is a form of government, but it is as significantly a way of life committed to

nondiscrimination and antibias. Moving beyond democratic forbears is necessary for enriching democracy given our multicultural society. Therefore, when we speak of democracy, we speak of a multicultural society where all citizens – regardless of race, ethnicity, language, class, gender, sexuality, or (dis)ability – are equal citizens and are allowed to develop rich and flourishing lives made up not only of employment but of whatever intellectual, artistic, altruistic, creative, athletic, spiritual, or community engagement makes them full. Where *all* citizens are trusted with the world of ideas, where diversity of opinions is *valued*, and where citizens share a commitment to justice and equity. This vision of a multicultural democracy is a natural extension of liberal principles: *All* citizens are endowed with the right to choose their vision of a good life, so long as it is compatible with the fundamental principles of democracy (Kymlicka 1995).

### **Toward an enriched understanding of democratic education**

Often, ‘democratic education’ conjures up ideas of citizenship courses where students learn about democratic rights and responsibilities or of a social studies curriculum that instructs students on the history of democracy. Certainly, these are important *components*, but alone they are not enough. Citizenship education that is too frequently marked by a lack of meaningful content, an irrelevance to students’ lives, a reliance on passive learning, an avoidance of controversy, and a lack of attention to global issues, among others, cannot actually enrich democracy (Banks 2008; Edelsky 1994; Ladson-Billings 2005).

Many visions of democratic education go farther. Gutmann (1987), for example, focuses on cultivating the habits and norms of deliberation, nonrepression, and nondiscrimination. Approaches such as this significantly broaden our understanding of democracy as well as education’s role in buttressing it, but they still are not enough to counteract antidemocratic forces. It is not enough to educate about the principles of citizenship and the history of democracy, nor is it enough to cultivate deliberation as a virtue unto itself. These are important components, but without an even broader democratic pedagogy, they still have the potential to neglect students’ flourishing lives and minds. Nor do they necessarily address the antidemocratic forces – xenophobia, racism, income inequality, and consumerism – at work in contemporary democracy. What, then, does *multicultural* democratic education add?

To start, we must flip democratic education on its head. Instead of seeing it as the *preparation for* democracy, we must see it as the *creation of* democracy, the ‘formative project’ (Sandel 1996, 328). This is what the Greeks referred to as *paideia*, or ‘the critical cultivation of an active citizenry’ (West 2004, 39). This was not only education of facts or skills; rather, it was the cultivation of citizens living with ‘beauty, wisdom, and the common good’ (Castoriadis 1991, 123) and with the habits of mind and dispositions to self govern (Kazamias 2010). *Paideia* emphasizes wisdom, critical thinking, self-examination, and questioning. It cultivates curiosity and a love of thinking. According to Castoriadis (1991, 113),

This *paideia* is not primarily a matter of books and academic credits. First and foremost, it involves becoming conscious that the *polis* is also oneself and that its fate also depends upon one’s mind, behavior, and decisions; in other words, it is participation in public life.

This vision of *paideia* is also deeply connected to the notion of *Bildung*, which has been concerned not necessarily with the acquisition of a particular set of knowledge and skills but with the cultivation of the humanity of students. It is a process of self-edification. As educational philosopher Gert Biesta (2006) explains, *Bildung* is not understood ‘in terms of discipline or socialization, that is, in terms of an adaptation to an existing external order. *Bildung* rather referred to the cultivation of the inner life, the cultivation of the human mind and human soul’ (101). The task of *Bildung*, Biesta argues, is an answer to a political question about the type of person needed to cultivate an enlightened society – such as Kant’s ([1784] 1992) notion of educating rational, autonomous beings. Like *paideia*, it is an approach to education concerned less with rote facts and skills than it is with cultivating the lives and minds of students and citizens.

How different this is than what is often passed off as ‘democratic’ or ‘citizenship’ education, and how different it is than educational reforms conducted in the name of democracy today! Rather than cultivating citizens who participate actively in the public sphere, who see themselves as integral to the democratic state, who are committed to self-questioning and wisdom, and who delight in the connections between culture, politics, and the self, we instead have cultivated a citizenry that is ‘sleepwalking from womb to tomb’ (West 2004, 27).

### ***A paideia of the soul: enacting a multicultural democratic education***

While multicultural democratic education builds on existing practices of democratic education – such as a focus on deliberation, community involvement in school decision-making, instruction on citizenship responsibilities and roles, and a human rights orientation – it also builds from the notion of *paideia* and even *Bildung*, the critical cultivation of thinking, curious, complex citizens who (re)create democracy. In doing so, a multicultural democratic education puts the cultivation of and attention to students’ flourishing and whole lives front and center. Doing so requires that educators work from a place of authentic, critical caring; that high-quality learning experiences are prioritized; that authentic, cooperative communities are built in classrooms; that lives and communities are connected to a broader context; and that students connect school learning to social action and citizenship. Together, these orientations and emphases encourage students to grapple with ‘what it means to be human’ (West 2004, 217), to understand democracy not only in terms of government action but in terms of an orientation to the world and a commitment to equity (Parker 2003). A multicultural democratic education develops citizens committed to the (re)creation of a robust, pluralistic democracy – a citizenry committed to working for a better world.

### ***Why multicultural democratic education?***

It is no longer news that the quality and content of education differs substantively across race, class, and ethnic lines. While privileged American students may receive an education designed to ignite their imaginations, interests, and moral and intellectual engagement with the world (Adler 1981; Cookson and Persell 1985; Dwyer 2011), for children of color, from low-income families, and/or whose first language is not English, education is decidedly *not* about developing a flourishing life. Instead, these students experience an education increasingly obsessed with basic

skills and standardized test performance, emphasizing rote memorization, formulaic thinking, and behavioral compliance over critical thinking, creativity, and engagement (McNeil 2000; Oakes 2005; Valli et al. 2008).

A multicultural democratic education takes an explicit stand for students who are usually subjected to an *antidemocratic* education. We propose proactively bringing students from marginalized backgrounds into the very fabric of a pluralistic democracy. To do this requires more than improving test scores, it requires more than recreating (or even romanticizing) historical notions of education, and it requires more than simply extending a traditional liberal arts education to all students. After all, the kind of liberal arts education that privileged students have received has too often been a tool of cultural hegemony and exclusion, used to replicate dominance and power (Cookson and Persell 1985; Trace 1959). While we call attention to the ways in which more privileged American students are allowed to flourish as a foil to the education offered to students from marginalized ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic groups, we are not calling for the replication of elite education. Instead, we are calling for a *reimagining* of education that not only cultivates students' flourishing lives and minds but also does so in culturally relevant, politically engaged, and multicultural ways. A *multicultural* democratic education makes explicit its commitment to diverse students, their cultures, and their life experiences – particularly students who are typically and traditionally marginalized by schools.

A multicultural democratic education is important for all democratic citizens. The 'paideia of the soul' we lay out here certainly invites more individuals into thriving democratic participation, which in and of itself is important for reinvigorating our anemic democracy. But a *multicultural* education is essential to democratic education. Kymlicka (1995) argues that 'Cultures are valuable, not in and of themselves, but because it is only through having access to a societal culture that people have access to a range of meaningful options' (83).

### *The flourishing life*

At the heart of a multicultural democratic education is an ethical commitment to the cultivation of students' complex, flourishing lives. Such a commitment recognizes that, as democratic citizens and as *humans*, students are more than their test scores, their skill mastery, or their future employment. The commitment is to the 'full development of the human personality' (United Nations 1948, Article 26.2). It is a commitment that allows and encourages *all* students – regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language, religion, or gender – to imagine and experience flourishing lives and to discover and cultivate individual talents, interests, and aptitudes (Dewey 2009). To fulfill this commitment, teachers must actively work against the limiting of life chances that traditionally occurs in schools serving marginalized students by becoming, as Los Angeles public school teacher Hutchinson (2009) describes – and quoting Morrison (1987) – a 'friend of their minds.'

After all, a commitment to students' flourishing lives is a commitment to their flourishing *minds*. It is in direct opposition to what students of color, low-income students, and English language learners usually experience. Teachers who are 'a friend of their [students'] minds' strive – as a teacher in a wealthy Connecticut suburb explained – to teach their students 'to be open to ideas, be inspired learners, see and appreciate all the different ways of conveying knowledge ... to see how

fascinating it is out there' (Eaton 2007, 239). In multicultural democratic education, the life of the mind is privileged – not only because of its role in (re)creating democracy but also because students from marginalized communities are too often educated in ways that deaden their intellect.

A commitment to students' flourishing lives also recognizes that there are a variety of good lives and that not all of these are focused on the accumulation of wealth and status. While it must begin with a commitment to students' flourishing intellects, it must do more than this. It must allow students to explore multiple activities and venues for finding joy and fulfillment, and it must allow students to mingle the life of the mind with whatever lives are led in their home communities. In practice, such a pedagogical commitment might look like bringing together school and community knowledge through a funds of knowledge approach (Moll et al. 1992), applying problem solving based on 'school' skills to real-world issues faced by students' communities, exploring the world of ideas (e.g. literature, philosophy, and science) through multiple modalities (e.g. art, dance, theater, debate, and crafts), or making both local and global current events a regular part of the classroom curriculum.

Recognizing the diversity of talents and interests and the diversity of good lives available to students must not be reduced to mere vocational training or the 'dumbing down' of curriculum, nor must it become a moral and ethical relativism. In a multicultural democracy, while there are multiple good lives to be led, citizens must live those lives in a way that is compatible with political equality, pluralism, antiracism, antidiscrimination, and thoughtful self-governance (Banks 2008; Gay 1997; Torres 1998). This last point, in particular, requires a dual commitment to students' diversity *and* their intellect in order to help them become 'mature seekers of the tougher, deeper truths that sustain democratic individuals, democratic communities, and democratic societies' (West 2004, 213). This approach has the potential to transform all citizens into thinkers. Journalist Moyers (2007) describes just such a moment when he quotes a letter received from listeners of his PBS (Public Broadcasting Systems) program:

We never knew a world of ideas existed. The study of ideas has completely turned around our impression of education ... We may be plumbers during the day, but at lunchtime and at night and on weekend [sic], we are Philosophers at Large.

A multicultural, democratic education strives for all citizens – whether plumbers, journalists, or any other profession – to be Philosophers at Large.

### ***Critical, authentic caring***

Such work to cultivate students' flourishing requires authentic care. Critical authentic caring is about building relationships across lines of difference (Gay, 2010; Noddings 2001). It requires that educators work from a place of socio-political consciousness, that they see their work with historically marginalized students as work for justice, and that they commit themselves to nurturing the minds, lives, and dreams of diverse students. It also requires that educators be willing to examine their own complicity, however unintentional, in perpetuating inequality (Bartolome 2004; Haberman 1995; King 1991).

Building relationships of care with students who have been marginalized requires that teachers examine how their caring is received (Noddings 2001).



Valenzuela (1999) shows, for example, how unexamined power can distort so-called caring relationships between teachers and students. Caring for students marginalized by dominant society requires that educators acknowledge the material conditions of their students' worlds as well as their students' potential outrage, and it must also provide avenues for fighting injustice (Duncan-Andrade 2009; Stovall 2005). Caring requires an adamant rejection of 'damage-centered' views of students (Tuck 2009). This can take many forms – from the 'warm demanding' of African-American teachers (Irvine and Fraser 1998) and the politically informed cultivation of students' bicultural competencies (Ladson-Billings 1994) to joining in activism with students (Ginwright 2009).

By caring authentically for students, educators model what it means to be an engaged citizen. A multicultural democracy requires the building of relationships – this is what allows us to move forward from disagreement and difference in a pluralistic society (Eck 1993) – and relationships are founded on care for one another. This is akin to the Zulu idea of *ubuntu* – roughly translated as 'I exist because you exist' – a community of interdependent caring.

### *Community*

To teach students to care for one another and the world – to teach students that their happiness depends on the happiness of others – requires emphasis on the development of interdependent school and classroom communities. Community is not a random group of people; rather, it is a group of people sharing relationships, committed to working together, and enjoying common pursuits and causes. A functioning, pluralistic, democratic community flies in the face of most educational trends, which tend to emphasize competitive individuality. For students to (re)create democracy, they not only have to cultivate their own flourishing lives, but they have to see the connections between their individual lives and the broader community, and they have to practice negotiating and melding those diverse flourishing lives into a democratic community (Ladson-Billings 2005). This is how democracy is (re)created.

### *The global context*

It has become a truism that we live in a globalized or 'flat' world (Friedman 2006). In the popular media, globalization is characterized largely by the expansion of free trade, the spread of capitalist economies, and the growth of technology (Grant and Grant 2007; Sleeter 2003). Given that many democratic struggles are taking place on both the local and global stages, it is important to understand the connections between flourishing lives, local community, and the rest of the world. Yet common understandings of global citizenship are built on an uncritical narrative that ignores the darker side of globalization, characterized by the reframing of 'all social relations, all forms of knowledge and culture in terms of the market,' and by '[a]ll human production and all sites of social intercourse, all services that a society establishes for the common good ... [becoming] potential targets for investment and profit making' (Lipman 2000). In our globalized world that values 'property rights over human rights' (Sleeter 2008, 144), we see increasing inequality and competition (Bauman 2004; Giroux 2006).

This focus on competition and capital is antithetical to the cultivation of flourishing lives. To ignore this darker side of globalization depoliticizes the forces of globalization. If we are cultivating global democratic citizens, then we must teach students not only about the possibilities of global interconnectedness but also about its perils (Khan 2003; Sachs 2008). If global democratic citizens are ‘committed to eliminating poverty, creating sustainable lifestyles, making well-informed choices, and maintaining an ecology of interdependence,’ and if ‘[s]uch positions require not a value-neutral look at globalization but one that centralizes issues of justice and caring’ (Noddings 2005, 175), then students must think critically about injustice.

### ***Social action***

A multicultural, democratic education is as committed to social action – service learning, philanthropy, protest, community organizing, and advocacy – as it is to classroom learning (e.g. Boyle-Baise 2002). In marginalized communities, connecting education and social action can cultivate a sense of agency and hope, helping students to see themselves as citizen–thinker–activists (Duncan-Andrade 2009). In communities of privilege, connecting education and social action helps students to see that democracy, social justice, and equity are also for them; with privilege comes responsibility. Ideally, ‘to be a democratic individual is to speak out on uncomfortable truths’ (West 2004, 74). A multicultural democracy needs its citizens to speak out against inequality and injustice, however much individuals may benefit from those inequalities and injustices.

### **Beyond neutrality: multicultural democratic education as political work**

These are not new ideas. What is new and radically democratic here is our insistence that all students – including those from historically marginalized communities – deserve a high-quality education that is a ‘friend of their minds’ and that this education proactively attends to diversity. Otherwise, rather than cultivating political equality, education serves as yet one more incarnation of inequality. Thus, a multicultural democratic education takes seriously its *multicultural* elements, understanding that inequality, prejudice, racism, sexism, and bias have always been democracy’s greatest threats. Multicultural democratic education differs from other theories of democratic education, which often insist on ideological neutrality and apolitical education. Multicultural democratic education, however, is not neutral. Rather, it is a clear political endeavor that, in its insistence on flourishing lives for all students, stands up for justice and declares the equal worth of all citizens. It stands up *for* equity, justice, human rights, and fairness, and it fights *against* racism, discrimination, imperialism, and authoritarianism. It recognizes that certain ideological stands are incompatible with democracy, and it refuses to take a neutral stand on these.

### **Conclusion**

Too often today, democracy is defined in terms of voting, employability, global competition, and consumerism. None of these, however, is enough to fight the forces of social and democratic decay. Navigating the democratic crossroads of the twenty-first century – where political inequality, predatory consumerism, global imperialism, domestic authoritarianism, and intellectual paralysis run rampant – requires that we

dignify every citizen and ‘release the energies of every human being.’ We must reclaim a broader, more flourishing understanding and practice of democracy.

We believe that multicultural democratic education holds great promise – as a means of promoting social justice and human rights, cultivating a pluralistic civic life, pushing back against globalization, and developing the flourishing lives of all citizens. In fact, reinvigorating our flourishing lives in all their complexities becomes the primary force for resisting antidemocratic forces. Political equality – and thus democracy – cannot be realized without the full participation of all citizen-thinkers. By attending to the richness, complexity, and gifts of all citizens and all communities, multicultural democratic education can fight those forces that narrowly define democracy. To realize a robust, pluralistic democracy – to develop our flourishing lives, minds, and society – we need a multicultural democratic education.

### Notes on contributors

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