Woke Art Museums & Growing Dominance of English in Business and Science
What Happens Next – Sunday, March 6th, 2022

Larry Bernstein:
Welcome to What Happens Next. My name is Larry Bernstein.

What Happens Next is a podcast where the speaker gets to present his argument in just Six Minutes and that is followed by a question-and-answer period for deeper engagement.

Today's discussion will be on two topics: increasing wokeness at art museums and the increasing dominance of English in the world of business and science.

Our first speaker will be Heather Mac Donald who is the Thomas Smith Fellow at the Manhattan Institute. She has written about what is happening at American art museums. She will discuss the Art Institute of Chicago's decision to terminate the volunteer docent program because the female staff was predominantly white. We will also cover the politically charged text used to describe the art work, and the curator's decision to choose artists based on race and gender instead of based on its merits.

Our second speaker will be Rosemary Salomone who will discuss her new book entitled The Rise of English: Global Politics and the Power of Language. Rosemary will explain how English has come to dominate the world of global business and science. Starting decades ago, Nordic and Eastern European countries went all-in teaching their students English as a second language and their populations are now conversant in English. And English is now becoming the preferred second language in France, Italy and Spain. The fight over English in Europe appears to be over, despite Brexit. English's use in Africa and Asia is still being decided and its competition will be French and Mandarin.

Americans and Brits having won the war over English are now deemphasizing the role of foreign languages in elementary and secondary schools, and we will debate whether that is a good idea.
Each month since the beginning of COVID, I have commented on the monthly employment statistics because they are the most important economic data available on the global economy.

This Friday's labor market release was another big surprise. Here are the key takeaways.

The headline number from the Establishment report was 678,000 plus an additional 92,000 for revisions for the previous 2 months. In aggregate this is 300,000 more than street expectations.
Job growth is surging and increasingly so. There are still 2.1mm jobs less than pre-COVID but we are just a few months away from cleaning that up.

75% of the jobs lost in the past two years were in hospitality and leisure. We should expect hiring in these sectors to accelerate as people go on vacations, visit conventions, and business travel picks up.
In the past month, there was a 20% cut in the numbers of workers who were teleworking as workers headed back to the office as Omicron cases exponentially declined.

The biggest surprise is the slow growth in wages. Wages are up 5.1% in the past 12 months but were unchanged for in February. This change in wages was unexpected and frankly stunning. Given the strength of the labor market how could this possibly be. It was could be an error in the data.
Alternatively, and I am struggling here, maybe employers front loaded their wage increases at year-end.

Interest rates fell by 10 bps today because of the restrained wage growth and growing fears of escalating violence in the Ukraine.

In summary, the labor market is on fire and should remain so for the foreseeable future.
You can find transcripts for this program and all of our previous episodes on our website whathappensnextin6minutes.com, and you can listen on Podbean, Apple Podcasts and Spotify.

Let's begin with our first speaker Heather Mac Donald.

Heather Mac Donald:
In September 2021, The Art Institute of Chicago told its volunteer museum educators, known as docents, that they would no longer serve in a volunteer capacity. Had the docents been delivering subpar performances? No. They were overwhelmingly white. And that, in 2021, constituted a sin almost beyond redemption. The racialist wave that swept the United States following the arrest related death of George Floyd has taken down scientists, artists, and journalists. Entire traditions, whether in the humanities, music, or scientific discovery, have been reduced to one fatal characteristic, whiteness.

And now, the anti-white crusade is targeting a key feature of American exceptionalism, the spirit of philanthropy and volunteerism. The Art Institute of Chicago is a case study in what happens when cultural organizations declare their mission to be anti-racism. The final result if unchecked will be the cancellation of a civilization. Museum directors have embraced the idea that museums are primarily a tool of exclusion, not inclusion. Art Institute leaders complain that the institute's founders did not consider "Gender, ethnic, and racial equity." But no museum founder in the late 19th century was considering gender, ethnic, and racial equity beyond a generalized aim to make beauty widely available.

The artists names carved across the exterior of the Art Institute's original building are an especially fertile source of self-flagellation. The 35 names are a who's who of Western art and architecture, starting with Praxiteles and Phineas from classical Greek times, proceeding through the early and high Renaissance, including Fra Angelico, Brunelleschi, Ghiberti, da Vinci, Michelangelo, and into the Baroque, Rubens, van Dyck, Velazquez, and Rembrandt. The roll call extends into the 18th century and ends with early 19th century romanticism. No such list can be exhaustive and one can always quibble with the choice. These 35 creators are nevertheless justifiably presented as paragons of human achievement.

Yet if landmark preservation laws allowed, the institute would've sandblasted its entablature away by now. The frieze is a quote, "Unsustainable formulation," Director James Rondeau said in 2019. The museum's equity statement complains about the quote, "Omission of artists of color, especially Black artists, as well as female, indigenous, and non-Western artists." Only an intellectual adolescent would reduce such diverse artists as say Giotto, Durer, and Murillo, also members of the frieze, to the common denominator of whiteness and maleness. The absence of any historical awareness on the part of frieze critics is striking, especially coming from an art museum. There were no known indigenous artists that the institute's founder should have memorialized. American Indian art was anonymous, produced within a collective craft tradition.

As for Black and female artists, whom do the institute's equity enforcers think that the 1893 frieze should have included? There were few pre-20th century Black artists and architects, and none possessed the influence of Botticelli, or Titian, also commemorated on the frieze. There were more female artists and much effort has gone into elevating them to the creative pantheon. The Baroque painter Artemisia

Gentileschi is a particular target for promotion. However, accomplished her work, only gender equity could justify inducting her into the highest ranks. It would be enough to lovingly preserve history's treasures and to teach visitors to understand those treasures place in the evolution of human expression. A museum's comparative advantage lies in its art historical expertise, not in any supposed capacity for racial justice work.

But cultural authority today comes from one of two sources, the assertion of victimhood or the acknowledgement that one is itself a victimizer. It is not open to the institute as a collective body to take the first course, given the race and sex of its founders. That leaves the vigorous assertion of racial guilt as the second best means of retaining cultural capital. The docents were sacked to atone for that presumptive racial guilt. The art institute's chairman, Robert Levy, wrote in an op-ed that the docents constituted a, quote, "Barrier to engagement." The institute was chosen to, quote, "Center our students across Chicago as we take this unexpected moment to rethink, redraw, and iterate." Centering Chicago's students means not subjecting them to the trauma of learning about art from white females volunteering their time and energy.

The overt white culling that doomed the docents is becoming frequent. In November 2021, the Crocker Art Museum in Sacramento, California bragged about its own, quote, "Progress," in culling its docent cores, which was down from 85% white in 2017 to 75% white in 2019. Given the quote, "Inarguable truth that museums are the legacy of Western colonialism serving as the product of straight, able-bodied, white male privilege," the museum explained. Reducing the number of white docents was essential to ensure that Crocker could serve as a quote, "Safe space to talk about systemic inequality and inequity." The persistent denigration of our cultural institutions and their supporters as bearers of oppressive white privilege is taking its toll.

During an equity and inclusion session for the board of the Whitney Museum of Art, in October 2021, one wealthy donor observed that it was, quote, "A tough time to be a not-for-profit leader. People are tip-toeing around every issue, afraid of every word coming out of their mouth being sliced and diced. It may be difficult to get the next generation of leaders," this donor added. There is no counterpart to American philanthropy, not even in other Western nations. Now the anti-racism crusade erodes that tradition by the day. Good luck finding volunteers and donors if they are told that their whiteness brands them as pariahs.

Western civilization is not about whiteness, it is universal legacy. But those who should be guardians of that civilization by portraying it as antithetical to racial justice by dint of demographic characteristics are impoverishing the world and stunting the human imagination.

Larry Bernstein:
Do we need docents?

Heather Mac Donald:
Of course, there should be docents. It's a fantastic reservoir of unpaid expertise that museums have long counted on. The training program at The Art Institute which began in 1961 was the equivalent of an MFA in art history. It was rigorous, disciplined, students had to do homework and they have to do constant training. Volunteerism is one of the bedrocks of civil society and people who want to donate their time is something to be celebrated, not castigated.

Larry Bernstein:
Jay Greene, currently at the Heritage Foundation, did a study on the educational benefits of art museum tours for students. And what he found through a randomized study is that students that visited an art museum learned more than they did in a classroom. And kids wanted to go back to the museums with their friends and parents. How do you think about the role of the art museum in teaching art and culture?

Heather Mac Donald:
There's no substitute for being in the presence of great works. Art illustrations can never capture the immediacy of an artwork, the brushwork, the color, the scale, the light. Coming into a museum is an essential first step. But obviously, our K through 12 system is a vacuum when it comes to solid training in Western civilization and the evolution of literary style, of the visual arts, of architecture.
Going to art museums should be essential in any student's education, certainly by the time he's in college.

Larry Bernstein:
Do you understand the argument that white women should not be docents?

Heather Mac Donald:
No. It is an unbelievably facile argument. It only works one way. Nobody objects to Blacks teaching whites. Reverse it and that is somehow oppressive. The early 20th century in this country managed to assimilate waves of immigrants from impoverished, rural, European cultures by largely female white teachers who established high standards, expected conformity to essential middle-class norms of behavior and were colorblind. They made no exceptions, they didn't engage in the current excuse that expecting promptness or accuracy, or cleanliness, or respect for authority was just a white norm that was oppressive to the traditional Anglo-American culture.

That argument is a recipe for racial resentment. It gives students an excuse not to put in any effort to look at education through the absolute trivialities of race and gender, rather than plunging headlong into the mystery of the past, into the greatness of creation. And to lose their own petty, narrow selves in something far greater and more sublime than they could yet imagine.

Larry Bernstein:
Was there any evidence of discrimination in the selection of the docent volunteers?

Heather Mac Donald:
Zero. Anybody who wanted to sign up and was willing to put in the hours that it took to be adequately versed in the history of art. Now, what has been proposed for The Art Institute is foregoing a hundred highly trained volunteers who were willing to work for hours a week inculcating students into how to see art. The alternative now is six part-time paid volunteers.

They will no way be able to cover the tours that the docents were giving. This racial line drawing that presumes that we are unable to speak across color lines is just extraordinarily destructive and will narrow our social and creative possibilities.

Larry Bernstein:
Does it matter that the docents were volunteers? You sometimes hear that unpaid internship are unfair because of the inherent inequity for those students that lack resources and need to find paid work. Do you think anything about the docent firing relates to the voluntary aspect of the position?
Heather Mac Donald:

I get that idea of unpaid internships being a luxury that students with more affluent parents can afford. But the people serving as docents are not using their docentships as legs up into the employment world. It's a gift, that's all it is. I'm not convinced that there are people from the favored demographic groups who have been prevented from serving because of the volunteer nature of this. If there are that doesn't require sacking the people who have trained out of love, wanting to share their passion for art with as many people as possible.

As a matter of public policy, this should be denounced.

The anti-White bias that we saw in the Art Institute is now the modus operandi in practically every mainstream institution, certainly in the academy where White males are at the bottom of the heap, been getting academic jobs that includes in STEM which is discarded a meritocracy and an emphasis on scientific knowledge in favor of the trivialities of gonads and melanin.

Larry Bernstein:
In one of your recent articles this month in the City Journal magazine, you mention that the art curators are adding text on the wall next to the art work that is politically charged and not relevant to the art.

Heather Mac Donald:
Well, yeah, it's hilarious. I wrote about the Metropolitan Museum of Art contrasting two simultaneous exhibits that are up right now, and their attitude towards what art should be presenting. They have a small show of the Dutch masters from the Baroque period. The most well-known names are Rembrandt Halls and Vermeer, and the wall text accompanying the Met's own holdings, complained about the fact that these Dutch Baroque painters didn't spend enough time painting scenes of slavery and colonialism and the oppression of the Dutch Republic.

And it even berates some of its gorgeous still lifes, these marvelous composition of luminescent silverware, glassware, peeled lemons, oysters, extraordinarily creamy fabrics, faults them for also not portraying slavery and anti-colonialism. Well, this is particularly stupid because a still life by definition does not have human subjects, it's objects. A still life that portrays slavery is somewhat of a mystery. The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam that has rewritten 80 of its wall labels from its Dutch masterpiece collection to complain about the lack of attention to slavery and colonialism.

It has the audacity to attack the greatest masterpiece by Rembrandt and its greatest holding of the Night Watch, which shows the civil guard of Amsterdam and the Rijksmuseum complains that there's no Blacks in the picture. Well, Amsterdam's Black population was below 1% at that time.

Larry Bernstein:
Most people do not read the wall text, does it matter if occasionally it is drivel?

Heather Mac Donald:
I don't think a wall text is drivel. I read them. I think they can provide valuable historical context. They can lead the viewer to see how a composition works. It's a valid addition to an art museum that viewers can choose to read.

A museum's role is not just a slap a bunch of paintings on a wall.

Larry Bernstein:
Given the current polarization, should we insist that museums textual analysis avoid political topics and stick to the facts: the name of the artist and the work, what school of art, the name of the benefactor, and the year it was produced?

Heather Mac Donald:
I want to congratulate you for adding an aspect of wall text, which is the provenance, who the donor was and when. I find it very interesting in exhibits that are collected from different museums to read where they're actually housed. It's a fascinating map of our cultural world to know that this painting is in Fort Worth. The migration of these great works throughout the world.

Would I ban the information in wall texts to include just the bare minimum of facts? No, I'd rather reform them. I would rather put pressure on museums to discard their virtue signaling role as proponents of racial justice. I would just put pressure on those institutions to discard this specious, social justice agenda and get back to their core competence.

Larry Bernstein:
Let’s turn to the choice of which artists to have major exhibits. There seems to be resistance to doing shows for dead white men. Yet, today the Phillips Gallery in DC is showing Picasso’s Blue Period paintings. Should Picasso get a national tour or has the time for dead white male artists passed.

Heather Mac Donald:
A former trustee told me that the Whitney Museum of Art curators proposed a retrospective of a major American artist, and was just told outright, "Can't do it. Wrong race, wrong gender." That is going on across the board now.

Larry Bernstein:
In Chicago, there is a privately run, for-profit Van Gogh Exhibit that uses large scale moving images of his paintings in an event space. The exhibits are packed, day and night. The crowd is young and hip and much more crowded than your typical museum that is usually nearly empty. Even more surprising is the expressions on the audience’s faces. They are riveted and seem to be really enjoying the show. Whatever happened for the imperative to put asses in the seats.

Going back to my example of the Picasso Blue Period show, if museums will not exhibit this content, should for-profits produce these blockbusters? How about a market solution?

Heather Mac Donald:
That's a good question. There is something to being in the presence of these works. And a video or a photographic reproduction simply cannot convey the immediacy of this canvas. That said, cameras can do things that the human eye cannot do, as far as closeups that can be illuminating. The-for-profit world

can provide a supplement. But there is nothing that is an adequate substitute for these collections that were donated by people who wanted to share the beauty of art.

Larry Bernstein:
I was 11 years old when King Tut came to Chicago. This was my first blockbuster show. And the blockbuster show has become a phenomenon. It is a major fundraising source for art museums. But if the art museums will not show blockbusters, somebody will.

Heather Mac Donald:
It's an interesting good question. These institutions are going to be torn. Because, one thing driving this rapid race towards social justice, virtue signaling, and it is undeniably true that foundation funders, Mellon Foundation, Ford Foundation, are absolutely explicit that they are only going to give money to the fine arts, whether it's to a museum or to a classical music organization, if that organization is changing its staff demographics based on race, and is programming based on oppression themes. So, the museums will want to please their foundation donors.

Darren Walker, the head of the Ford Foundation, wrote an absolutely appalling op-ed in the New York Times in 2018, complaining that museum boards were white, male, and privileged. Well, talk about biting the hand that feeds you. Those are the people that are paying millions of dollars to keep these institutions running. Get rid of them and good luck keeping it going. Darren Walker is one of the most pernicious influences in the museum world.

Larry Bernstein:
If museums put the great dead white artists paintings in the basement, should we encourage that these art works be lent or sold to other institutions so that the public can enjoy them elsewhere?

Heather Mac Donald:
That's a good point. Absolutely. In my City Journal Art Institute of Chicago article, I quote James Rondeau from a speech in 2019. He recounts a conversation he had with Alice Walton, the heiresses of Walmart. She created the Crystal Bridges Museum in Bentonville, Arkansas. She asked Rondeau could she have access to some of the Art Institute's mothballed collections in the basement, because the Art Institute possesses more works that have been donated than it has wall space for a touring exhibit to rural America. And Rondeau had this unbelievably condescending response, "Well, Alice, I'm not sure that rural America needs to see Toulouse-Lautrec. And this idea of you should eat your art because it's good for you, that doesn't really apply to rural America, but by the way Alice, could you please fund under resourced Black and Hispanic museums in Chicago?" And this was the only thing that Rondeau said in a lecture in Iowa in 2019 that was filled with contempt for the white board of the Art Institute, because the white board of the Art Institute was not sufficiently enthusiastic about Rondeau's social racial justice crusade, but Rondeau's explicit contempt for rural white America was the only thing that got Ken Griffin, one of the board members, exercised, and he took Rondeau to task for this.

Otherwise, the board was utterly supine, to hear itself denigrated as just a bunch of wealthy white males. Yes, it would be a good thing to show their holdings in other venues.

Larry Bernstein:
The Art Institute of Chicago mentions in its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion discussion that the museum is on the site of land originally owned and lived on by various Indian tribes. I heard similar rhetoric at the

Stratford Festival in Ontario Canada before a theater production. Could you explain this virtue seeking related to land use and cultural institutions?

Heather Mac Donald:
Well, Larry, you have been paying attention. You're absolutely right, these land acknowledgments are now ubiquitous. Even university lectures are giving land acknowledgements, and it is happening across cultural institutions, and I bet you it will start happening in corporations as well. There's nothing bad in the academy that will not migrate into a corporation at a rapidly accelerating pace.

The Art Institute had nothing to do with their disappearance from the area around Lake Michigan. Is the American extermination of the Indians deplorable? Yes. These arts institutions have nothing to do with it. The near hysterical neurotic obsession of mainstream white individuals and white institutions, which is the Lady Macbethian washing of hands, the apology for real or imagined racial guilt that no other civilization is engaged.

Have we engaged in colonialism and slavery? Yes. Name me a civilization that hasn't. This fanatical self-denigration is a perversity, and it is going to cancel an entire civilization.

Larry Bernstein:
Currently on exhibit at Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum is a show on Indonesia's uprising against the Dutch colonizers that included various photographs, posters, and textiles. What do you think of politically charged exhibits?

Heather Mac Donald:
I'm not against history, I'm not against cultural context, there's a demystifying impulse that sees art simply as a means of perpetuating power structure, and does not want to think of it as something that the individual artist is creating sometimes to achieve beauty, but sometimes of course with a political agenda. There has been nationalist art, art that is driven to excite people to inflame patriotic passions or revolutionary passions, and that absolutely should be acknowledged, and there's art that has also tried to awaken people to injustice whether it's Hogarth, Zola, or Goya that should be recognized.

But, what should not be done is the deconstructive gesture of reading what is not there. We look for the absences, we look for the silenced voices, that generally, I'm really generalizing here greatly, but that is often just an excuse to not look at what is in a work of art, and to politicize it.

Larry Bernstein:
Do you see any signs for optimism?

Heather Mac Donald:
(laughs) The optimistic sign will come only if people that have been given the vast privilege of curating the world's great treasures find the courage to speak out against these insane adolescents know nothing assaults. If more people do so, we will win, but if people remain silent, it is all going down.

Larry Bernstein:
Thank you, Heather, let's go to our next speaker Rosemary Salomone who will discuss the growing dominance of English.

Rosemary Salomone:
English has become the dominant lingua franca in the world. It's an official language of the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the International Criminal Court and NATO. Across the globe, there are more non-native speakers of English than native speakers. English accounts for 60% of internet content. English both fuels the global economy and rides on it.

English has divided the world into haves and have nots, and it's done it in two ways. The first is between those who have English and those who don't. The second is between those who have only English and those who are multilingual. So rather than summarily conclude that English is good, bad, or neutral, I set out in my book to explore the nuanced effects of English and its global dominance. I decided to look through the lens of education, where the rise of English has been most vigorously debated.

My initial plan was to write a book on the value of language in the global economy, examining winners, losers and resisters on both sides of the Atlantic, but the deeper I dug into the research, the connections to the post-colonial world began to take shape. So, did the forces of globalization, internationalization, and neo-liberalism. I also came to understand that languages are highly valued commodities on the global market. And so, the book evolved into three interrelated parts, looking at Europe, colonial countries, and the US.

In Europe, the debate over English has to do with the growing use of English in European universities and institutions -- the rising number of English taught courses in European universities. The burdens on students and faculty who don't speak English well and the preservation of national languages and identity all come into play.

One of the most striking aspects of this trend is the dominance of English in the physical and life sciences. By 1990, upwards of 90% of international publications in some fields were in English. Meanwhile for Anglophones to assume that they can access research in other languages through language translation like Google Translate is simply unrealistic.

In post-colonial countries, a key point in the debate over English is the importance of teaching children, at least initially, in a language that they understand. Yet parents from the rich to the poor go to extreme lengths to educate their children in English. Here we see overlapping justifications for adopting English in the schools, from economic mobility in India and Morocco to the added push toward redress in transformation in post-Apartheid South Africa and in Rwanda that's still trying to overcome the genocide.

On the other side of the English divide are Anglophones, who believe that there's no need to learn other languages. The overall number of students studying world languages in the US has plummeted, and yet we know the value of language skills in the global economy. Only a quarter of the world is even minimally competent in English. That means that monolingual English speakers cannot tap into a large body of knowledge, or take advantage of many career and business opportunities. Even worse, they risk the world talking over their heads while they become politically and culturally isolated. Reading or listening to world events in different language media gives you a much bigger picture than limiting yourself to English speaking outlets. It also gives you a sense of how other people are processing your politics. All that said, there's a slowly growing movement in the US to promote multilingualism as the norm.

In the book, I look at three settings where dual language immersion programs have taken off, in California, Utah, and New York City, and each provides a very interesting perspective on this growth. There's a significant body of research on the market value of both English and other languages in terms of employment and higher earnings. The need for language skills goes beyond multinational businesses. In areas with large pockets of immigrants, social service agencies, including housing, education, domestic violence, unemployment and immigration, all demand multilingual workers.

Can English do it all? No. If anything, the pandemic has taught us that the world is interconnected and that we need to increase our ability to speak to each other as part of a global community. Well, is English the last lingua franca? It's not unreasonable to think of another one coming along and pushing English aside some day though not in the near future. France will likely only make headway in the former French colonies. China's policies in terms of human rights are dimming the appeal of Mandarin Chinese among many young people.

Larry Bernstein:
Why did English become the world's dominant language?

Rosemary Salomone:
It started with the British Empire. The British Empire covered about a quarter of the globe. And just as that empire was unraveling, the United States became a world leader, and the United States was able to use its economic and political power and its cultural influence to spread English. It also came from international organizations like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the British Council that all promoted a pro-English agenda in many of these post-colonial countries.

Larry Bernstein:
How important is American culture like film, TV, and sports to the spread of English?

Rosemary Salomone:
Certainly, Hollywood has been a very powerful force. Young people around the world absorb anything English because it sounds cool to them. American culture spread through social media has had a profound influence on young people around the globe. English to young people represents cosmopolitanism.

Larry Bernstein:
If TV and film are critical, do you think the success of Bollywood means that Hindi could become more prevalent in use outside of India and the Indian diaspora?

Rosemary Salomone:
The influence of India is growing throughout Asia, but I don't think Hindi is going to overcome English. Chinese has a more powerful influence than Hindi does in the East. The current government in India is very pro-nationalist and very pro-Hindi, and has really tried to impose Hindi on the country. In the south of the country, there's been a lot of resistance to it, and they see English as the bulwark against Hindi. I don't think it's going to take off as a regional lingua franca.

Larry Bernstein:
I think what is fascinating is that the choice of a second language is an individual or a parental decision based on a forecast of future use. These language learning decisions are made every day by millions of

people. And for the most part, the choice is English. What do you make of this decentralized decision making?

Rosemary Salomone:
In some of these post-colonial countries, very poor parents are going to extremes, selling family property to raise the funds to send their children to an English language school. Parents are very eager to have their children learn English to give them a leg up in the global economy. We've seen some pushback, in some of the Nordic countries and even in Netherlands. And those are countries with very high proficiency in English.

Perhaps it's had somewhat of a negative effect on the national language and perhaps on national identity. Universities have progressively moved toward English-taught courses and programs in the name of internationalization, but part of that is to recruit students from other countries. It raises revenue, their international rankings, and their reputation.

Larry Bernstein:
Recently, Italy's top technical school announced that it planned to use English exclusively in its graduate school. This English-only requirement resulted in litigation. What happened?

Rosemary Salomone:
In 2013, the Polytechnic Institute in Milan, which is the equivalent of our MIT, very prestigious. And they decided to transfer all their graduate programs into English within two years.

Upwards of 100 faculty members opposed the plan. They ultimately took the institute to court. In the end, the Constitutional Court held that Italian is the national language of the country, and students have the right to learn and professors have the right to teach in their national language.

The institute could not change 100% of their graduate courses into English, but if you go on their website now, you will still find that by far the majority of their courses are taught in English, it's just not 100%. The power of English for the students is just amazing.
I remember sitting in one class where there were a number of students from other countries, some were Chinese, some were from Eastern Europe. Their English was halting. It wasn't very strong, but they couldn't speak Italian either.

I had to wonder what in the world were these students doing and how much knowledge were they really absorbing? Was it only a small fraction of what they could learn in their native language?

Larry Bernstein:
Many American and foreign students attend overseas educational programs each year. I think the purpose is to learn a new culture, expand your horizons, have a lot of fun, and maybe learn something. I guess your point is that when a course isn't taught in your native tongue it won't be that productive.

Rosemary Salomone:
Some of these students were coming into a program where they were getting less than they bargained for in terms of the quality of the education, given their limited language skills.

Larry Bernstein:
The Nordic countries and Eastern Europe seem to have gone all-in with English, but Italy, France and Spain are going at a slower pace with English as a second language.

Rosemary Salomone:
Italy, France and Spain were somewhat slow in jumping onto the English bandwagon. They have stepped up their programs in more recent years, but the politics behind it are very different. You started off in terms of Eastern Europe. Those countries, after the fall of the Soviet Union, did not necessarily have French in their skillset as other educated individuals from Western Europe, and so they chose English as their second language.

The Nordic countries knew they had to adopt a global language to function. France has resisted English historically. France was the language of diplomacy and literacy and high culture for many years. The French language is so tied to French national identity, and that's what has made it so difficult for France to accept English as the global lingua franca. But they're getting a lot of pushback from young people and from parents.

Italians don't have a strong attachment to the Italian language as the French do because Italy unified quite late. Italy was speaking a variety of vernaculars until the mid-1800s and compulsory education was very slow taking off in Italy as well. Italians don't have this passion for Italian as representing the nation as the French do. In the past 10 years, all children from the lower elementary grades on up are required to learn English.

Larry Bernstein:
In your book, you mention that most French Speakers live in Africa in the former French Colonies. I suspect that these individuals do not associate themselves with classic French culture and literature. I wonder what the clash will be like for the post-colonial francophones with the French. I suspect that France really wanted other Europeans to speak French and are less interested in the Africans. Will that change?

Rosemary Salomone:
That's a real conflict for the French. Emmanuel Macron, the president, has tried to reset the colonial narrative in Africa because he understands that there's a huge population of young people in Africa. 60% of the population in Africa is under the age of 25.

Most French speakers are going to be living outside of France at some point and largely in Africa. France is still using its language to maintain a foothold on the continent. When you look at a country like Morocco, there's been a lot of tension there because not only do you have French and English, French being the colonial language and many Moroccans feeling ambivalent about it because of that history, but then you have English coming in. You also have the Arabization of Morocco, while the language that's spoken by most Moroccans is Tamazight. The linguistic terrain in Morocco is very complicated. The French would like to maintain influence there, and it's being swamped by all these other forces.

Larry Bernstein:
How are the Chinese trying to increase the use of Mandarin outside of China especially in Africa?

Rosemary Salomone:
We should be mindful of the way China is using language and what we call knowledge diplomacy in Africa. China's very mindful of bringing students from Africa to China to attend universities. 81,000 African students are studying in China. Within 15 years, it grew from 1800 to 81,000, so it's a huge explosion. There also are Confucius Institutes. There are 60 of them in Africa. And those are joint programs between the Chinese government and African universities.

Larry Bernstein:
Carol Spahn runs the Peace Corps and she spoke on What Happens Next to discuss how this government agency helps poor people in Africa with education and technical support. Do you think our government's engagement with Africa is successful?

Rosemary Salomone:
China is very aggressively using language and education, influencing the values of young African people. I'm concerned that the United States is not mindful of that. We see the political and economic importance of maintaining a foothold in Africa, but we're not understanding how important it is in terms of developing these young people, where China is very actively going down that road. I think it's a real blind spot in American diplomacy.

Larry Bernstein:
In your opening remarks you encouraged Americans to learn a foreign language for economic reasons. I struggled learning French. In my finance career I worked in my company's Emerging Markets department making investments in Russia, Argentina, Brazil, and Indonesia. In my work, I conversed in English with my local trading partners. Later, when I was responsible for managing the proprietary trading department at Salomon Brothers in Tokyo, I spoke English with all of my colleagues. When I met with the older senior finance professionals at various Japanese banks, they often did not speak English so I used a translator. But the communication seemed good enough. I think it would have been a mistake to spend a decade learning the language only to speak pidgin Japanese in these business meetings.

Rosemary Salomone:
I'll put the question to you, okay? (laughs) Do you feel that you were able to communicate as effectively as you could have if you had spoken Japanese? By working through an interpreter? Sometimes, words cannot be translated accurately from one language to another, so you lose certain idioms, you lose nuance, you lose humor, and that could be very effective in a business environment. You lose the give and take of ordinary conversation. While it may have been somewhat effective, you were able to get business done, it could've been a smoother experience for everybody if you were communicating in a common language.

Upwards of 23 million jobs in the US are tied to international trade in goods and services. You have languages that are spoken in these emerging economies, China and a number of Latin American countries. They become a significant part of the corporate skillset. Business is conducted in many languages. Not everyone out there does speak English, and by speaking a common language, you communicate in a much more effective way.

Larry Bernstein:

In America, most students are taught 4 to 10 years of foreign language and have nothing to show for it. This seems like a waste of time and money that could be better spent learning another subject with higher economic returns.

Rosemary Salomone:
Americans really believe that we lack the DNA to learn languages. It's the failure of the education system, where we don't teach children to learn another language from day one.
For you as an adult to try to learn Japanese, you would have to go into one of these immersion programs for maybe two months or so, go to Middlebury College over the summer. I've seen it happen. I've seen adults do it. But it's extraordinarily time consuming. What we should be doing is teaching children from preschool a second language, perhaps in dual immersion programs. They're very effective.

You're putting it into this cost/benefit analysis here. (laughs) It's purely economic. But there are many benefits to speaking another language beyond just the value in the marketplace, okay? When you think of human flourishing. When you think of the experience of reading poetry or a novel in the original language, it's very different from a translation. In my youth, I read Dante's Divine Comedy in the Tuscan vernacular. In later years, I went back to it, reading parts of it in English. It totally lost all the beautiful rhythm and rhyme of Dante. It was just a pale shadow of the original.

Larry Bernstein:
I think it is wonderful that you read Dante in the Tuscan vernacular and that you found it meaningful, but I am not sure that justifies spending 20% of every child's school day learning a foreign language that most of us will likely not learn well, forget immediately, or not apply productively.

Rosemary Salomone:
There is something about just the human spirit in being able to access another language. And you cannot put a price tag on that. I believe that some people are more talented at learning languages than others and some people are more talented at learning math than others. And I really do believe that learning how to read English is certainly important for students, but I don't think it has to be an either/or, and public schools should give at least some time to teaching world languages to all children.

Larry Bernstein:
You mentioned that in foreign countries, not everybody learns English and this creates inequities. What is going on?

Rosemary Salomone:
I discuss in the book the inequities of English, and the inequities of foreign languages in this country. In Europe, for example, it's largely more privileged students who are taking English language courses in the universities. And they're students who attended well-resourced schools. Many parents now, around the globe, are providing tutors for their children to learn English. There are these inequities as to who gets English and who doesn't.

English is very valuable in the global marketplace. In the United States, disadvantaged students so often receive a steady diet of math and English. And that's important. But very often they're denied what we call enrichment subjects, foreign languages historically. Those students, are being denied career opportunities that other students from more privileged schools are getting.

Larry Bernstein:

Who should decide whether students allocate 20% of their education to a foreign language or alternatively use that time to learn another subject like computer science, additional math, science, history, business, whatever?

Rosemary Salomone:
World languages, whether it's English abroad or another language here, I do believe that is a skillset that students should have when they finish compulsory schooling. It's what we really value as a society. As much as I support parental decision making and parental choice, I do believe there's an importance for the state to come in and say, "Well, these are the skills that students need to function in our society." And I believe foreign languages are one of those skills.

Larry Bernstein:
Rosemary, I end each session on a note of optimism.

Rosemary Salomone:
I'm optimistic. First of all, in the United States, dual-immersion programs have served as a blueprint for the country moving forward in promoting multilingualism as the norm. There has been both a national and grassroots push for promoting multilingualism.

I'm also optimistic about English abroad. It's also important for students abroad to balance the teaching of English with the preservation of national languages.

Larry Bernstein:
Thanks to Heather and Rosemary for joining us today.
That ends today's session. I want to make a plug for next week's show.
Our first speaker will be Hal Brands is the Henry Kissenger Professor of Global Affairs at John Hopkins SAIS. He is also the author of the new book entitled The Twilight Struggle: What the Cold War Teaches Us about Great-Power Rivalry Today.

I want to speak to Hal about these topics: How will the Ukraine war play out, how will it impact the great power rivalries going forward, and what does this mean for the relationship between the US and Europe and Russia and China? Can we split Russia and China? And what are the consequences of not doing so?

Our second speaker is Rory MacFarquar who is a dear friend of mine. Rory worked in the Obama White House where he helped craft the sanctions against Russia. I want to hear about why this time it appears that the sanctions against Putin and the oligarchs are so much more successful.

If you are interested in listening to a replay of today's What Happens Next program or any of our previous episodes or if you wish to read a transcript, you can find them on our website Whathappensnextin6minutes.com. Replays are also available on Apple Podcasts, Podbean and Spotify. Thanks to our audience for your continued engagement with these important issues, good-bye.