

Struggle over American Values : The Multiculturalism Debate in the U. S.

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The New Republic, a prominent mainstream opinion weekly in the U.S., devoted an issue early in 1991 to the topic of "Race on Campus." The editorial opening the issue decried a crisis gripping American universities, which, rather than transcending the problems of the greater society, merely reflected its "bitterest social divisions." Blame for this state of affairs was meted out to "one of the most destructive and demeaning orthodoxies of our time," a movement obsessed with the imposition of "political correctness" and the subversion of free academic inquiry. This monstrous orthodoxy was identified as "multiculturalism."¹

"Multiculturalism" is the concept at the center of a heated debate that has been featured in both the intellectual and popular press in the U.S. since 1990. This debate was initially spearheaded by neoconservative commentators who have since been joined by some liberal academics and journalists in an aggressive joint defense of Western cultural values as the defining ethic of American society. The focus of their attack is a diffuse social and academic movement, particularly prominent on the university campus, called multiculturalism. In simplest terms, multiculturalism represents an attempt to recognize the diversity of cultures in the U. S. and include them as part of an "American heritage" that has traditionally been defined as Western or European derived.² The defenders of Western values insist on the universality and superiority of Western concepts such as freedom, equality, democracy, and the primacy of the individual, while multiculturalists point to the hegemonic role of Western culture in the past two centuries and equate Western civilization with imperialism overseas and marginalization and oppression of racial

and ethnic minorities within the U.S.

The university has become the favored site for attacks on the multiculturalist vision. This is partly due to the fact that the university is one of the few places where any rigorous examination of other cultures has been encouraged. It is also one of the few places where progressive and alternative voices can still be heard. The term "political correctness" is drawn from this milieu, where it has been used primarily in a sarcastic or humorous reference to someone who strictly adheres to a certain politically acceptable line. The defenders of the Western civilization orthodoxy have appropriated this term as an epithet directed against all those identified with multiculturalism. Thus, "P.C." has become shorthand for the twin threats they identify in this trend—a subversion of liberal tolerance and protection of free speech and an attempt to impose an ideological agenda on U.S. education.

The entire debate is striking for its shrill tone and emotionalism, as can be seen in the editorial extensively quoted in the introductory paragraph above. The critics of multiculturalism perceive themselves as under attack and mere calls for inclusion of previously ignored perspectives are treated as all-out assaults on the entire tradition of teaching Western civilization. There is also a tendency to identify all proponents of some form of multiculturalism as leftists with political motives in mind, and individuals are frequently singled out for attack.³ In order to assess the content of this debate over multiculturalism, it is helpful to look at its historical context. This article will examine the background to the debate, attempt a critique of the arguments on both sides, and suggest the importance of the debate in the contemporary U.S.

The beginnings of multiculturalism can be found in the 1960s, an era that spawned a variety of social movements: civil rights, Black Power, women's liberation, gay rights, etc. African-Americans, Hispanics,

women, and other groups began to demand inclusion in (or overthrow of) a power structure or "Establishment" they saw dominated by wealthy, white males of European extraction. They spoke of how those outside the dominant tradition had been excluded from history as written and taught in the U.S. and marginalized and kept powerless in civic society. Along with the powerful protest against the government-military-corporate nexus embodied in the anti-Vietnam War movement, these trends spoke of a powerful challenge to the status quo.

During the 1970s and 1980s, one legacy of the 1960s movements appeared; this was the diffuse movement that only later came to be called multiculturalism. As part of this trend a new literature for children developed featuring books by and about ethnic and racial minorities. The roster of recipients of major literary prizes began to reflect the presence of non-white and female writers. In elementary and secondary education, many states pushed for revisions in the traditional approach to U.S. history and social studies courses. In 1987, for example, California revised its curriculum guidelines to put greater emphasis on cultures outside the European tradition and the "multiracial character of American society, now and in the past."⁴ This trend has accelerated recently. Typical in this regard are the recent recommendations made by a panel of educators in New York state. The panel endorsed changes to replace what was termed a Eurocentric, white male view of history with a broader vision in which the contributions and perspectives of women and minorities would be included. This was identified as an effort to remove "hidden assumptions of white supremacy."⁵ The state's Commissioner of Education pronounced the demise of the idea of the "melting pot" (which assumed the assimilation of all new immigrants to the dominant European derived culture) as the dominant ethic in U.S. society in speaking approvingly of the panel's recommendations. The panel co-chairperson celebrated the diversity of the U.S. as the source of its richness.

Multiculturalism - seen as a trend toward recognition of the diversity of experience in the U.S. in all its forms (not just as related to race, ethnicity and gender but also to class, sexual orientation, age, physical capability, etc.) - has had perhaps the most impact in the universities. Many of the students who came of age during the 1960s have moved into academic positions and have brought new methodologies and new perspectives legitimacy on campus. The past two decades have seen the rise, for example, of the "new history," which has offered a fresh look at America's past by taking up the study of previously ignored groups - labor, women, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, etc. In the process of increasing the knowledge of these groups' experiences and their influence on the wider society, the "new history" has also altered traditional definitions of the discipline.⁶ There have also been several new approaches to analysis in the humanities, such as deconstruction in literary analysis, which has radically altered traditional understanding of literary works, or "texts."

During these years, many campuses opened new departments in Afro-American or Black Studies, women's studies, and other new fields. Also, as part of an effort to further awareness of and combat racism, sexism, and homophobia, there have been many universities that have adopted speech or conduct codes, minority faculty hiring programs, affirmative action in student admissions to increase diversity in the student body (particularly racial diversity), training seminars to further awareness of social problems, offices for cultural diversity, etc. as part of their educational mission. These programs, along with the ideas represented in the new academic approaches mentioned above, have all become the targets of those who seek to combat "political correctness" and multiculturalism on behalf of Western values.

The debate over multiculturalism really gained prominence in 1990 with the publication of an article in the *New York Times* criticising an academic conference that examined the issue of political correctness.⁷

Soon after this, preliminary results of the 1990 U.S. census confirmed trends that had been obvious for some time - the growing size and diversity of non-European groups in the U.S. accompanied by projections showing the gradual erosion of the white majority in the decades ahead. Coming to terms with the changing nature of the U.S. population and its new immigrant groups (especially those from Asia and South and Central America) is clearly an issue that has brought the debate over multiculturalism into prominence outside academia and the elite journals where much of the debate had been going on.

With the shift into the popular press, discussion of multiculturalism became somewhat more general and began to address non-academic concerns such as the integration of new immigrant groups. The commentators, however, were still easily divided into two opposing groups. One way to describe the two sides of this controversy over multiculturalism is to relate them to the positions within the continuing debate in U.S. academic circles over universalism and cultural relativism in the humanities and social sciences.⁸ Critics of multiculturalism tend to line up with the universalists, who hold that certain values are transcendent and therefore applicable to any culture over time and space. This universalism, because of its intimate relationship to the colonial enterprise of the West over the past several hundred years (when "superior" Western values were used to justify imperialism in the non-Western world) has had diminished appeal among many scholars in the past few decades.⁹ Universalism still has its defenders, however. They attempt to separate its historic identification with Western values in the service of colonial power relations from its potential uses for increased understanding of the human condition or for human liberation. This is done through an argument in favor of the cross-cultural applicability of various social science methodologies or through a claim for some transcendent morality based on human rights.

Those who favor some form of multiculturalism can usefully be

situated on the cultural relativism side of the academic debate. This model, especially prominent in anthropological theory, holds that there are no absolutes, that norms and values cannot be separated from their cultural context. Thus, no cultural construct is inherently superior to that of another culture.¹⁰ This thesis has been useful in the articulation of so-called "identity politics" in the U. S., in which various groups-identified on the basis of sharing a particular ethnic or racial background, for example-assert their claims to authenticity vis a vis the dominant cultural tradition, which they oppose as Eurocentric and hegemonic.

Ultimately, those who are now vehemently defending the United States' European heritage as a set of values that should be applied universally (in U.S. society at any rate) and those who are attempting to redefine the American heritage to reflect a multitude of cultural influences and values, fall heir to the criticisms made over the years by scholars debating the merits of universalism and relativism. And, their arguments expose some of the dangers implicit in both of these models. This will be shown by looking at some of the opinions held on both sides of the multiculturalism controversy.

The Defense of Western Values

Defenders of Western cultural values stress the importance of European-derived ideas in the formation of American political culture. These values-freedom, democracy, civil liberties, individualism, etc.-are identified as the cultural glue that has held together successive generations of immigrants from disparate racial and ethnic backgrounds. Multiculturalists are accused of trying to subvert this heritage by attacking it as a cover for elite privilege and control, by suggesting that traditional standards for judgement of artistic or academic merit may be biased, or by suggesting that the heritage of non-European groups has just as much right to be in the American classroom. The defenders of Western values dispute these claims, arguing that without a

continuing allegiance to these ideals, the U.S. will be heading toward increasing fragmentation, conflict, and even the possibility of collapse.

One of the biggest threats-if not *the* threat-to cohesion in U.S. society is usually identified as ethnicity and the presumed tendency for "minority" group members to see themselves primarily as members of this group rather than as Americans. This is the view advanced by influential historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., who has coined the phrase "cult of ethnicity" to condemn the claims of various ethnic groups, claims he thinks have been pushed too far by "romantic ideologues" and "unscrupulous con men."¹¹ While Schlesinger carefully adheres to his category of "ethnicity," he seems to be primarily talking about race. Other commentators are more direct; some are even explicitly racist,¹² but all share the tendency to posit a mainstream America in opposition to isolated minority groups making extravagant claims based on their racial or ethnic identity. Few, on the other hand, are willing to address the long, undistinguished history of white suprematism in the U. S. nor its current manifestations.¹³ Race or ethnicity become divisive and threatening only in the hands of non-whites.

By focusing on racial identity as the primary threat to U. S. society, Schlesinger and others obscure the potential for division due to class differences. While claiming to speak for certain values that can and should be applied to all Americans, they continue a long-standing tradition of denying the validity of class as a category for analysis. The Americans involved in the spring, 1992 riots in Los Angeles, for example, were not those of the professional and upper classes but the "underclass" of the ghettos. And the looting was not an exclusively African-American affair-it appears to have had multiracial participation, with poor Hispanics, Asian-Americans, and whites joining in. While class, as a one-dimensional tool of analysis, is not sufficient to explain the dynamics of something as complex as the L.A. riots, any analysis of U.S. society that casts blame only on a "cult of ethnicity" for social tension fails

to be very convincing.

Those who hold up the ideals of Western civilization share another common blind spot. This is a reluctance to look at how these concepts were used historically. Ideas of freedom and equality may have been liberating for the whites in post-revolutionary America but these same concepts were often used to justify and, indeed, celebrate slavery and colonialism. The rights of the individual have been used to defend gross economic exploitation and "American values" have often become justification for racism, the oppression of women, and the violent suppression of labor. Flaunting of Western cultural values, divorced from an historical perspective, does much to subvert the claims of those who stress their universality and confirms the suspicions of those who see these values embedded in a system of power relations.

The celebration of the Western cultural heritage also leads to the denial that its values are used for ideological control. In order to be elevated for universal application, these values must be rendered bias free and then divorced from issues of power, thus closing off any discussion of which elements in this heritage might be worthy of continued allegiance and which must be reconsidered. Any highly differentiated society relies on ideological constructs to organize a coherent social and political order but none can be seen as without deficiencies. The charge that Western cultural values might be instruments of social control does not necessarily discredit them and should not be so threatening but has engendered a very defensive reaction.

The fiercest reaction to these charges has come from part of academe, where defending the Western tradition from charges of ideological bias involves an offensive against the presumed ideological agenda of the multiculturalists. They are accused of using the classroom to further a leftwing political program.¹⁴ It therefore becomes political and an abuse of academic freedom to discuss issues of power, cultural nationalism, racism, or other factors that might have played a part in shaping the

U.S. cultural heritage while strict adherence to the traditional canon of works and traditional approaches to that heritage somehow does not involve any political choice. Those who question this assumption are accused of indoctrinating students and trampling academic values. In fact, universities are part and parcel of a hierarchical society, permeated with corporate and military influence, in which individual competition is promoted and valorized. That the university still maintains some breathing room within the larger society - a space that allows for heterodox views and challenges to this order (such as the challenge inherent in multiculturalism) - seems to indicate that the civil liberties that the defenders of Western culture so cherish retain some force in the U.S. An organization called Teachers for a Democratic Culture (formed to combat the anti-multiculturalist agenda), for example, has stated that culture should be viewed as "disputed rather than given" and be subject to democratic processes in which all voices can be heard.¹⁵ Critics of multiculturalism would seem to be denying democracy - one of the values they hold aloft - in their assault on heterodox opinion as "ideological."

Critics of the multiculturalists fall into another trap when they criticize any suggestion that the individual be considered as part of a group. Thus, attempts to analyze society on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, or class are rejected as assaults on the individualist ethic and freedom itself. Syndicated columnist George Will, for example, in a piece praising the work of historian Gertrude Himmelfarb, takes up her attack on the "new history," which attempts to analyze social forces and groups to provide a less elitist, "Great Man" view of history. Will criticizes the "mentality of historians mesmerized by race, gender and class, today's trinity of obsessions that supposedly explain human behavior and history's past."¹⁶ Elsewhere, he deplores the vision of an America "of prickly groups irritably asserting their inviolable identities. Instead of a nation of individuals exercising free choices, it is to be a nation of indelible group identities."¹⁷ Not giving proper due to individual greatness is identified

by Will as demoralizing for nations, debilitating to those who attempt to lead, and, ultimately, threatening to real democracy.

Will's argument is that any emphasis on class, gender, or race discourages individuals from trying to rise above the circumstances in which they were born or even exercising their right to participate in the political process. This explanation fails to recognize that the context for individual struggles can be critically shaped by just the determinants he despises; some can transcend the difficulties, others may find them insurmountable. In Will's view, the latter become simply cases of individual failure. Such a focus on the individual also fails to explain why, for example, the U.S. Senate is comprised almost exclusively of wealthy, white males or why poverty afflicts proportionately more African-Americans and Hispanics than it does whites. It also does not address how group identity has often motivated individuals to overcome apathy and participate in the political process, rather than giving up entirely on the possibility for self-government as Will suggests is the likely outcome.

Will's championing of the individual is a theme replayed throughout the writings of the multiculturalist critics. The writers equate individualism with fairness, equality, or freedom and thus it must be defended along with the rest of the Western cultural values they wish to protect. Focus on the individual, however, serves to undercut the very foundation of their claims for the universal standing of Western values. Individualism is certainly intimately bound up with the liberal notions of civil liberties as embodied, for example, in the U.S. Bill of Rights. This formulation of rights is very limited by comparison with a document such as the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees socio-economic rights, as well, thus implicitly suggesting the need for redistribution between groups in society (i. e. rich and poor). That defense of the individual might simply be the defense of privilege for certain groups in U.S. society is the stronger inference in the passages referred to above.

In summary, two distinct trends can be discerned in the writings of the critics of multiculturalism. One is the tendency to divorce their defense of the Western cultural heritage from issues of power and maintenance of the status quo. Thus, Western values are reified: as David Auster bluntly states, "As Americans we believe in our cultural heritage, not just because it is "ours," but because it is good."¹⁸ This tradition becomes superior, the ideal that all American citizens must aim for. That American values derived from non-Western cultures might have validity or that the defenders of the dominant culture might not be disinterested parties, are ideas not considered. That the power and cultural autonomy of those seeking to go beyond the Western civilization paradigm is the real threat becomes a clear possibility. Thus, the multiculturalist critics can be criticized on the same basis as those who have espoused universalist assumptions in the past.

The other tendency in the writings of the critics is to end up focusing the discussion on issues of race. Some of the commentators are more explicitly racist. However, even when the topic is the less specific "ethnicity" or simply "groups," race is often lurking in the background. Much of the debate seems to reflect and reinforce the emphasis seen in the past several U.S. presidential campaigns (and in politics in the intervening years), an emphasis particularly potent for the Republican Party, which promoted racial tension and racial fears to cement an electoral majority. Even as they base their arguments on the need for social harmony, the focus on race would seem to help keep open divisions they deplore.

The Multiculturalist Side of the Debate

If critics of multiculturalism wish to see Western values as having universal applicability, defenders of a multiculturalist vision tend to be relativistic, arguing in favor of the equal validity of cultural styles and standards outside the Western tradition. They identify Western values as

a weapon that has kept them powerless and stigmatized in U.S. society. The response has been to celebrate difference, to affirm the role of non-Western cultures in the U.S. by recovering their history and making clear their contribution. This is part of an effort to allow those outside the dominant tradition a positive self-image and an equal role in all social and political processes. Rather than an egocentric and negative attempt to deny all validity to the Western cultural heritage, it has tended to be a positive call for expansion and recognition - the inclusion (or "infusion") of the diverse cultures represented in the U.S. population into the American heritage and acknowledgement of how these cultures have been dealt with historically. In academics, this approach entails expansion of the traditional canon of Western works studied and the inclusion of other perspectives. Further, it can also include the rethinking of traditional disciplines and teaching methods in order to eliminate bias.

In this process, the politics of identity (as a woman, an African-American, a Mexican-American, a "person of color," etc.) have been promoted in order to assert the equal validity of all cultures (as a cultural relativist would argue). In part, this is an effort to understand how the parameters of race, ethnicity or gender can influence an individual's or group's interaction with the larger society and the power structures of that society. At the same time that such "identity politics" has been used for positive discoveries and affirmation, however, it has also shown some of the limitations and dangers inherent in the relativist approach.

Some of the limitations relate to the problem of overemphasizing cultural identity, especially in the U.S. context. For example, knowledge of a cultural tradition does not necessarily correlate with actual cultural background. African-Americans may be accomplished pianists, well versed in the European classics, or have doctorates in Greek philosophy - with little or no ability to transmit their great-great grandparents experience in Africa. A white American of German extraction may have profounder

insights into Japanese culture or the historic experience of Japanese-Americans in the U.S. than a third generation Japanese-American who has never stepped foot in the land of his or her grandparents. Thus, the idea that only people from the groups in question are inherently capable of fair and adequate representation of "their" cultural tradition essentializes race or ethnicity as the attributes necessary for any understanding of that culture and also for the ability to transmit it. So, for example, two advocates of a multicultural approach in the university, Ted Gordon and Wahneema Lubiano, professors at the University of Texas and Princeton University, respectively, ask, "If American literature, for example, is to be enlarged so as to include representative texts from "minority" groups, how do these groups' perspectives get into the course if the person teaching American literature is a "non-minority" person?"¹⁹ Not only does this approach make race or ethnicity a qualification for teaching certain types of material or, at the very least, being able to "contest unfair and inadequate representations," it also insults the authors of the very texts in question, who might otherwise be assumed capable of writing works powerful enough to appeal to students and directly transmit the perspective these professors want to police so carefully.

Such an emphasis on membership in a racial or ethnic group also leads to the assumption of difference - that by virtue of this membership, the person's experience is fundamentally different from those within the dominant tradition. This ignores factors such as class or community or gender, factors that may be primary all the time or on a situational basis. Identity politics - the tendency to identify with one cultural tradition - tends toward the one dimensional, seeing a person as a member of only one group rather than examining the complexity of an individual's numerous identities, reducing the possibility for a more nuanced understanding.²⁰ This problem has been well documented for

women in certain racial or ethnic groups, who are pressured to put up with sexism from men within the group in the name of racial or ethnic solidarity.

In its worst instances, the tendency to see membership in a culture or subculture as the fundamental determinant of behavior and thought denies the possibility of any dialog at all between groups, encouraging separatism. This danger can be seen in the controversy over Afrocentricity, the move in U.S. education to create a curriculum and teaching method that allows African-American children to be presented as the "subjects" rather than the "objects" of their studies. This is the description of one advocate of Afrocentrism, Molefi Kete Asante, Chairman of the African-American Studies department at Temple University, who goes on to counter the arguments of critics by stating, "There is space for Eurocentrism in a multicultural enterprise so long as it does not parade as universal. No one wants to banish the Eurocentric view. It is a valid view of reality where it does not force its way. Afrocentricity does not seek to replace Eurocentricity in its arrogant disregard for other cultures."²¹ Asante can be faulted for not recognizing the hybridity of African culture (just as Eurocentrists can be faulted for not recognizing outside influences in the European tradition) but he and other advocates are careful to emphasize Afrocentricity as a model for the multicultural education of all American children. The concept, however, has been used in another way - to develop exclusive programs for the education of African-American children in which African culture informs the entire curriculum and pedagogy.²² Reacting to the Eurocentric focus of the traditional curriculum by attempting to elevate another tradition or using evidence of oppression and denigration at the hands of those in the dominant culture to sanitize another society and its culture are the traps involved here.

Leonard Jeffries, former chairman of the Black Studies Department at City College of New York, is one advocate of Afrocentrism who falls

into these traps. He has authored a theory that black people are warm, cooperative and communal - "sun people," while whites are cold, territorial, and aggressive - "ice people."²³ He thus essentializes racial categories with biological determinism and tries to counter the superior claims for the Western tradition with his claims for the culture of blacks.

Groups who deplore their exclusion from the American heritage, like Afrocentrists, criticize their objectification and marginalization by the dominant culture. Alone, or in alliance with other non-dominant groups, they define themselves in opposition to the dominant culture. This focus on the Western cultural tradition, however, serves to perpetuate the situation they oppose, reinforcing their position vis a vis the more powerful center.²⁴ Defenders of multiculturalism speak sensitively about "difference" and the "Other," the need to "focus on providing support for those who are different (as) we simultaneously educate everyone for living in multicultural society."²⁵ These concepts (of otherness, difference) have been celebrated as a means to oppose hegemony but they ultimately represent not a challenge but an acceptance of the assumption underlying existing power relations - that the Western tradition is primary, the standard against which all others must be compared.

In summary, the defenders of multiculturalism base their claims on cultural relativist ground. In some cases, as with the tendency to emphasize the difference of non-Western groups, they do not go far enough in appropriating this argument, ending up in the self-defeating position of reinforcing the primacy of European-derived culture. In other cases, their uses of this logic shows up the limitations of the approach, especially its lack of fit in the context of American society - how to deal with simultaneous participation in and identification with several cultures, how to avoid the separatist tendencies inherent when the possibility of communication is denied, how to separate the issues of cultural identity and cultural knowledge. The multicultural defenders also tend to line up with their critics by letting the debate come down to the

issue of race. Racial identity politics allows the issue of race to dominate discussions of U.S. society and its problems, limiting the possibilities for finding common ground.²⁶

Conclusion

Both sides in the debate over multiculturalism have contributed to a parochial emphasis on Western culture: the defenders through celebration of its universalistic values and the critics by focusing on its hegemonic position in the world and in U.S. society for the past several centuries. Although this is beginning to change,²⁷ the debate has, for the most part, been limited to a focus on U.S. history and society, and the universalist and cultural relativist positions have been staked out on this terrain. Partly because of this parochialism, the issue of multiculturalism was, from the start, entwined with contemporary American politics, and this fostered the rapid polarization of opinion.

The heated debate that has ensued suggests that the participants feel that something fundamental is at stake. For the defenders of Western cultural values, the "American way of life" with its liberal tradition is threatened. They argue that certain European-derived ideas should be universally applicable to all within the United States. Implicitly, these values are also desirable for adoption, by virtue of their presumed superiority, to the cultures from which America's non-European immigrants originated. (The assumption is that these ideals are foreign to groups outside the Western tradition; although most agree that these ideals can be assimilated). The dismissive attitude displayed toward other cultures and the self-righteousness with which Western values are defended make it difficult to identify the defenders of the orthodoxy with scholarly attempts to retrieve universalist ideals from their identification with imperialism. Rather, the arguments of those defending Western cultural values betray affinity with this now discredited tradition, in which values were utilized to ensure the continued dominance of certain

groups by others.

On the other hand, the aggressive promotion of such a universalism has only stimulated a hardening of position in the cultural relativist camp. This makes it difficult to acknowledge the cross-cultural influences that have determined all of the traditions under discussion, to positively assert the possibility for some kind of universal approach. If Ho Chi Minh could borrow from the Declaration of Independence to announce Vietnamese opposition to French colonial rule, it is difficult to deny the resonance that certain values have across cultures. It also may be important to recognize the need to define those values that are perhaps worthy of joint defense instead of using cultural relativism as an excuse to avoid any moral culpability. The condemnation of cultural practices that use violence to subjugate women (mutilation through foot binding in ancient China or the clitorodectomy practiced in various African and Arab cultures) is something that cannot be justified in relativistic terms. Another danger in this approach is the ease with which cultural objectivity can segue into support for nation-state ideology.²⁸

With opponents of multiculturalism seizing the high ground of universalism to defend the status quo, this position has become untenable for many who are in favor of cultural diversity. Holding the line with cultural relativism, however, reveals a fundamental pessimism about the possibility of ever ameliorating the undeniable tensions confronted by U.S. society today. Increasingly, American cultural values are becoming a partisan weapon and the bailiwick of right-wing ideologues and racists. In the process, the possibility that a "whisper of the universal" might be heard within cross-cultural dialogue is ignored.²⁹ And, the project of finding some common ground within U.S. society becomes all the more difficult.³⁰

1. "The Derisory Tower," *New Republic*, February 18, 1991, pp.5-6.
2. Multiculturalism, in a broad sense, includes not only the national or regional cultures of American immigrants but also the "cultures" of women, gays, the handicapped, and other non-mainstream groups.
3. Naming names is especially prominent in the works of Dinesh D'Souza, who has become a de facto spokesperson for those critical of multiculturalism. See, for example, his article "Illiberal Education," *The Atlantic*. (March 1991): 51-79. He has also authored a book expanding on the same themes, *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus*.
4. Gray, Paul, "Whose America?: A growing emphasis on the nation's 'multicultural' heritage exalts racial and ethnic pride at the expense of social cohesion," *Time*, July 8, 1991, pp.13-17.
5. "New York may rewrite its school history texts to highlight minorities," *Japan Times*, June 26, 1991, p.13.
6. Foner, Eric, ed., *The New American History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990) includes a description of the approaches and impact of the new history.
7. Bernstein, Richard, "Ideas & Trends: The Rising Hegemony of the Politically Correct," *New York Times*, October 28, 1990, section 4, p. 1.
8. For example, a prominent academic journal in the U. S. recently featured several articles addressing this theme. The introductory essay provides a useful overview of the debate: Buck, David D., "Forum on Universalism and Relativism in Asian Studies," *Journal of Asian Studies* 50: 1 (February 1991): 29-34.
9. One of the more influential critiques documenting how Western values (in this case, that of "objective" scholarship) were used to further the imperialist project is: Said, Edward, *Orientalism* (New York : Random House, 1979).
10. Anthropologists, in order to limit ethnocentrism, came to consider any culture a "successful" one as long as it continued to survive.
11. Schlesinger, Arthur, Jr., "The Cult of Ethnicity, Good and Bad," *Time*, July 8, 1991, p.21. These themes are repeated in his book. *The Disuniting of America* (Whittle Direct Books, 1991).
12. One of these is Lawrence Auster in "The evils of multiculturalism," *Japan Times*, May 19, 1991, p.19.
13. For example, the increased popularity of white supremacist groups such as Posse Comitatus and Aryan Nation or the recent successes of erstwhile presidential contender David Duke.
14. This theme is especially prominent in the piece by Dinesh D'Souza, *Ibid*. See also Searle, John, "The Storm Over the University," *New York Review of Books*, December 6, 1990, pp. 34-42.

15. For the TDC statement see "University professors unite against anti-PC onslaught," *In These Times*, October 9-15, 1991, p.17.
16. Will, George, "Keep the politics in history," *Japan Times*, May 19, 1991, p.19.
17. *Ibid.*, "Preachy revisionists use history like a weapon," *Japan Times*, July 21, 1991, p.21.
18. *Ibid.* It should be noted that Auster is one of the explicitly racist commentators in the debate and takes pains to distinguish between "our" culture - that of whites - and those of the new immigrant groups, which are threatening America's very "soul."
19. Gordon, Ted and Wahneema Lubiano, "The Statement of the Black Faculty Caucus," in Berman, Paul, ed. *Debating P.C. : The Controversy over Political Correctness on College Campuses* (New York: Laurel/Dell, 1992), pp.249-257.
20. For a thorough look at this issue see Epstein, Barbara, "Political Correctness and Identity Politics," *In These Times*, February 26-March 10, 1992, pp.16-17.
21. Asante, Molefi Kete, "Multiculturalism: an Exchange," in Berman, Paul, ed., *Ibid.*, pp.299-311.
22. Kantrowitz, Barbara, et.al., "A is for Ashanti, B is for Black...And C is for curriculum which is starting to change," *Newsweek*, September 23, 1991, pp. 45-48.
23. Quoted in Muwakkil, Salim, "Dissecting Afrocentrism and its growing discontents," *In These Times*, May 22-28, 1991, pp.12-13, 22.
24. This issue is explored in Chicago Cultural Studies Group, "Critical Multiculturalism," *Critical Inquiry* (Spring 1992): 530-555.
25. Smith, Daryl G., "Embracing Diversity as a Central Campus Goal," *Academe : Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors*, November-December, 1990, pp. 29-33.
26. More and more intellectuals in the U.S. today are beginning to argue that the emphasis on race and race-based solutions to the problems of racial groups are self-defeating. While not denying the importance of race as an element in their analysis, they argue that the traditional civil rights approach has not been successful and that African-American and other groups must develop a common agenda with whites. This has been termed the "synthesis school" of race relations. See Brownstein, Ronald, "A schism over strategy for the '90s," *Japan Times*, October 16, 1991, p.18.
27. The following articles address how the multiculturalism debate or some of the issues involved look from a more international perspective: Chicago Cultural Studies Group. *Ibid.*; Hammond, Ellen and Laura E.

Hein, "Multiculturalism in Japanese Perspective," *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 1 : 2 (Summer 1992): 145-169; Oder, Norman, "Tenets of democracy and guaranteed rights," *In These Times*, March 25-31, 1992, p.17.

28. Chicago Cultural Studies Group. *Ibid.*
29. Hassan, Ihab, quoted in Buck, David D.. ed., *Ibid.*
30. Other sources referred to for opinion on both sides of the debate include : Iannone, Carol, "Literature by Quota," *Commentary* (March 1991): 50-53; Miles, Jack, "Literary imagination yields paranoid ravings," *Japan Times*, July 13, 1991, p.21; Woodward, C. Vann, "Freedom & the Universities," *New York Review of Books*, July 18, 1991, pp.32-37. The Berman book cited above is a useful anthology of writings from most of the prominent commentators in the debate.

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