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During the last ten years or so, in such journals as *The American Scholar* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education,* we have seen a multiplicity of articles on diversity, multiculturalism, campus racial relations, and the teaching of race and ethnicity. Correspondingly, many scholarly conferences on these topics—or sessions in conferences focusing on the liberal arts, Western civilization, and the canon—have been taking place all over the country. At such conferences, after an anthropologist has presented research data and theoretical conclusions, another is likely to take the floor and assert that just the contrary is the case in "Bongo-Bongo." Are there any respects in which all human beings share unifying bonds, despite differences? I argue that there are, and, in doing so, I separate myself from those who fear multiculturalism as divisive or disunifying or who believe that it must lead to ethnocentrism.

What's important is how we react to the diversity of cultural systems, and here we must distinguish between ethnocentrism and cultural commitment. Cultural commitment is an adherence to or a preference for a world view, an aggregation of distinctions and standards that allow a person to make sense of the world he or she is a member of, but, at the same time, to respect the validity of other world views and systems. Ethnocentrism is not merely a preference but a prejudice that holds one's own culture not merely to be different from but superior to other cultures. Cultural commitment, moreover, recognizes moral principles that define how people ought, minimally, to treat each other, what basic obligations of respect and decency they owe each other, and what basic rights they ought to be able to enjoy. (Hatch, 135)

Cultural groups are usually characterized by their oral and material arts, philosophies, technical adaptations to the ecosystem, and psycho-social adaptations to historical occurrences; but the most important aspect of a culture is its symbolic system. Indeed, culture is a symbolic system—not in the sense derived from the classical culture theories of Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, but rather, as Clifford Geertz has explained in his *Interpretation of Culture* (1973), it is a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms through which people can "communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life." (14). Furthermore,

> As interworked systems of constructable signs, that is symbols, culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be casually attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly—that is thickly—described (14).

We need to remind ourselves that even in societies which are racially and socially homogeneous, there is still diversity in the shared symbols that supposedly unify the lives of those in the group. The appearance of similarity and the sharing of common symbols—such as language, dress, behavior—may lead us to assume erroneously that the meanings which people hold for symbols are identical. Apparent similarity in behavior or in cultural patterns does not necessarily mean unity in culture. For those who do not participate in that cultural system, the shared meanings exchanged in discourse sufficiently structure the symbols held in common to make the discourse mutually intelligible, despite the idiosyncratic interpretive differences of the participants. Anthony P. Cohen cautions us about equating shared symbolic forms (objects) with identically shared meanings (content):

> Symbols are effective because they are imprecise. Though obviously not content-less, part of their meaning is 'subjective.' They are, therefore, ideal media through which people can speak a 'common' language, behave in apparently similar ways, participate in the 'same' rituals, pray to the 'same' gods, wear similar clothes, and so forth, without subordinating themselves to a tyranny of orthodoxy. Individuality and commonality are thus reconcilable. (21).

Thus, in our study of culture, we must acknowledge the similarity and the unity, but when we see differences (e.g., in language, dress, behavior, skin color), we must not dismiss them: color blindness is not a virtue. In our attention to the symbolic aspects of culture, we can come to appreciate the strange within the familiar, and, conversely, the familiar within the strange.

Each of the respective cultures within a multicultural society must also be seen to be diverse in both shared and unshared cultural content; we must attend to sameness as well as difference in meanings and in perspectives both within each social group and between groups. However, multiculturalism, in its universal sense, or "pluralism," emphasizes the notion of community of interest that unites distinct social groups even while it recognizes their distinctions in non-shared cultural content.

Why focus on multiculturalism in education? The knowledge and experience of other cultures widen our choices for action and decision making, as well as broaden our sense of reality, meaning, and feeling by integrating the array of values, perspectives, and beliefs offered to us. As Peter L. Berger puts it, multiculturalism results in a cosmopolitan consciousness (52-3), something which education ought to enhance. David Hollinger identifies cosmopolitanism as a moment in multiculturalism which wills "to engage human diversity," and is thus distinguished from the universalist urge to attend only to the samenesses in human experience in the "will to find a common ground."

> . . . cosmopolitans look beyond a province or nation to the larger sphere of humankind . . . . Cosmopolitanism shares with all varieties of universalism a

profound suspicion of enclosures, but cosmopolitanism is defined by an additional element not essential to universalism itself: recognition, acceptance, and eager exploration of diversity. Cosmopolitanism urges each individual and collective unit to absorb as much varied experience as it can while retaining its capacity to advance its aims effectively. For cosmopolitans, the diversity of humankind is fact; for universalists, it is a potential problem (84).

Some fear that a focus on multiculturalism decenters traditional beliefs based on Graeco-Roman-European-Christian civilization and values and is thus disorienting. However, through multicultural education, we will be exposed to each other's samenesses and differences. Our task is to collect the cultural differences surrounding but separating us and aggregate them into a new unity, creating a cultural form that can be shared. This new form would not mean that all aspects of our common culture would be shared; rather that the aggregate of our samenesses and our differences would constitute our unity. Yet, in forming this new unity, we must guard against treating culture as unified, uncomplicated, and harmonious and also against treating cultural differences as wholly accessible and comprehensible. We must understand that each cultural group will to some degree be impenetrable and incommensurable, that there will always remain between both groups and individuals, some unshared meaning.

So, of what does our unity consist? The distinguishing character of the United States is our diversity, yet we are united in our belief that despite our national, religious, and ethnic differences, we can pledge our allegiance to the political ideals in our Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights. Because we share allegiance to these democratic principles, we can communicate with each other, seek to influence each other, and thereby come to some consensus. To be a citizen of the United States is to be someone whose existence is circumscribed by differences between people that are mediated through dialogue in democratic contexts. We learn from each other; our differences enrich us.

Diversity enriches our campuses, not only in their student and faculty bodies, but in their curricula. Diversity challenges cultural hegemony: for instance, Anglo-conformity or Eurocentricity. Linda Carpenter, in a fall, 1991, newsletter from the University of Wisconsin system, states that the purpose of diversification is to "help students support, respect, appreciate, nurture and work productively with differences." Moreover, she claims that diversity is consistent with a faculty's professional obligation, because the word "implies a potentially positive modification of student values, assumptions, attitudes and behaviors . . . . [it] requires raising controversial cross-cultural questions and re-examining assumptions as well as facilitating critical thinking."

Current projections indicate that, by the year 2000, perhaps as many as one-third of our population will be people of color, and that, in some states, they will be the new majority. We must learn how to live together under changed conditions. What do people need to know and to value so that they may live in relative peace and cooperate to advance their common welfare? How are we to come to terms with

inequality and lack of opportunity for both minority and majority? How are we to encourage empowerment and inclusion in education? How are we to avoid the pitfall of ethnocentrism, or closed-minded orthodoxy?

In education, multiculturalism has been perceived as a challenge to the canon, which has come to objectify the European legacy as the universal standard of cultural achievement, even though Western arts and sciences have been influenced by other civilizations from antiquity to the present. Some revisionists are largely concerned with correcting historical inaccuracies and including omissions from non-European legacies. Pluralists, on the other hand, see no need for inclusion; they see as many canons as there are world views, so that instead of a universal or master canon, there can be an African-American or Afro-centric canon, a Latino canon, a feminist canon, and so on. The danger in the pluralist approach is the privileging of group particularness, the exclusivist absorption of protecting and perpetuating particular, existing cultures. (Hollinger, 85)

While avoiding the pitfalls of both universalism and pluralism, it is possible to integrate a multicultural perspective into existing liberal arts curricula, as Linda Carpenter notes. One can use the "unit approach," in which the curriculum can be supplemented with several units. Another is the "course approach," in which a single course can be offered to address issues pertaining to race, class, gender, and ethnicity. In the "pyramid approach" an integrated series of specialized courses can provide an in-depth study of multicultural issues. The best way, the "infusion approach," integrates multicultural perspectives throughout each course. This approach "places heavy demands on all faculty members, since all must know pertinent information and have pertinent resources to blend multicultural with monocultural perspectives" (3). For it to work, the faculty must become conversant with minority, women's, and international scholarship that relates to one's discipline and take that scholarship into account as we revise our existing curricula.

Mary Louise Pratt describes how Stanford University dealt with the issue of multiculturalism and the canon. The following four objectives were imperative in revamping the curriculum:

1. increasing understanding of cultural diversity and interaction within the United States and elsewhere;
2. engaging students with works that have intellectual importance by virtue of the ideas they express, their mode of expression, or their influence;
3. developing critical thinking; and
4. increasing skills in reading, reasoning, arguing, and analyzing texts.

Within these objectives, Pratt states,

social, geographical, and historical diversity would mean courses designed to confront issues relating to class, ethnicity, race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation; to include the study of works by women, minorities, and persons of color; to study works from at least one European and at least one non-

European culture in their own historical and cultural context; and to involve at least six to eight centuries of historical depth.(17)

Multicultural education ought not be limited to dispensing information about other societies or sub-societies, nor should it be limited to issues of cultural differences or unique experiences and contributions. Through multiculturalism we ought to be able to achieve a greater cultural understanding of and respect for others as well as enhanced critical perspectives of ourselves and of those we study. That is, we ought to be able to develop a cosmopolitan consciousness.

The effort we make to prepare ourselves and our students for participation in the global village must go hand in hand with our efforts to understand and cope with difference at the local level. Nationalism, race, ethnicity, gender, class and social inequality remain as central issues in our social relationships, wherever our village, whatever its size. I applaud the efforts of my colleagues to introduce cultural diversity into their courses, to question their received knowledge, their positioned certainties, as I struggle to question my own. I wish, through this essay, to enter into dialogue with all of you on the issue of multiculturalism. If what I learn through these dialogues causes me discomfort, all the better, for I am not sure of my own "correctness" in the politics or the pedagogy which I espouse. Something may be on the verge of discovery in "Bongo Bongo" which will cause me to adjust my views.

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