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The Fiction of “Diversity without Oppression”

Race, Ethnicity, Identity, and Power

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INTRODUCTION

That the United States is a diverse nation—populated with an increasing proportion of groups from various racial and ethnic backgrounds—has become almost common sense. Whereas the study of race was not long ago almost exclusively the study of Black-White relations, now such an orientation has been recognized as a particular paradigm, one that, regardless of its contributions, is limited in interpreting the full range of racial-ethnic experiences. What is at issue is not so much whether the United States is a diverse society, but how to think about diversity and, fundamentally, how to conceptualize the different group experiences that comprise contemporary society. Is the analysis of diversity a matter of race, of ethnicity, or of both?

These questions have been played out in discussions of the year 2000 census, where questions about how to categorize and count people have emerged as public, political issues. Are Hispanics a racial group, or is Hispanic a label encompassing different ethnic groups united by a common culture? Or, are “Hispanics” distinct groups only bound together by their being labeled in a single category? Are Hispanics Black or White? Likewise, is being Asian American a racial or an ethnic experience? Either

way, how do we distinguish third-generation Chinese Americans from recent Southeast Asian immigrants from Vietnam or Thailand? At the heart of these questions are not just issues about enumerating the population but also questions about how to fairly represent groups for purposes of political inclusion and the disbursement of state resources. Therein also lie contested issues about group identity, the right to self-determination, and political rights. In an age when "identity politics" has generated new social movements and framed contemporary political discourses, questions about naming and categorizing run deep in the construction of national identity. Being "American" has long been linked to a history of racial privilege, and, as Manning Marable has pointed out, "To be an 'all-American' is, by definition, not to be an Asian American, Pacific American, American Indian, Latino, Arab American, or African American" (1993, 113). As diverse groups vie for affirmation of their identity and as we come to recognize that America is a mosaic of different groups, questions about group identity become central to defining what "America" is.

In this context, questions about conceptualizing race and ethnicity are not just academic debates. Answers to such questions implicitly inform contemporary political discourse—a discourse that, even beyond the academic arena, makes questions of multiculturalism and diversity central to American politics. Thus, how we think about race and ethnicity is a critical matter for social policy. I argue here that allowing the concept of ethnicity to overshadow issues of race in social policy shifts public attention from "uncomfortable" topics regarding racism to topics of cultural difference and ethnic identity. While cultural differences and ethnic identity are critical issues, they should not blind us to the persistent realities of race and racism. Losing this focus is something I call "diversity without oppression."

SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON RACE AND ETHNICITY

Sociologists have long distinguished the concepts of race and ethnicity, treating race as a socially constructed label derived from physical differences between groups that are perceived by the powerful to be the basis for group inferiority and superiority. Racial groups are defined as those that have been categorized and singled out on the basis of presumed physical or cultural characteristics and that are therefore subject to group subordination and domination. People's assignment to a race is not based on logic or fact but on the social significance attached to presumed racial differences.

In contrast, an ethnic group is defined by its commonly shared cultural heritage. An ethnic group is one whose members share a subjective belief

in their common origins because of similarities in physical type or culture (or both) and because of common experiences of colonization, oppression, and migration. In sociological theory, ethnic groups are seen as sharing a consciousness of kind. Although they need not actually share common ancestry, those within the group perceive themselves as having a common experience (Alba 1990). This conceptualization of ethnicity underscores the significance of shared cultural characteristics and a common group identity. Furthermore, ethnicity can be either internally or externally imposed (or both) on the group. In defining ethnicity in this way, sociologists have distinguished ethnicity from race, primarily by making ethnicity a matter of culture and race a matter of systems of White supremacy.

At the same time, sociologists see both race and ethnicity as socially constructed, meaning that their significance comes from the social and historical experiences that groups have. Neither ethnicity nor race is a fixed category, nor should either be seen just as an individual attribute; rather, each represents social processes and experiences that evolve and change over time and in different social-historical contexts.

Although these definitions may seem straightforward in the context of contemporary racial-ethnic politics, the meaning of each is far from obvious. Public reaction to Herrnstein and Murray's *The Bell Curve* (1994) tells us that racial thinking is alive and well in the sense that many in the public see race as biologically fixed. Despite the public tendency to essentialize race—to treat it as if it were internal, immutable, and individually rooted—it is a social construction. Social scientists differ in the extent to which they see race as having any biological significance; regardless, they agree that the most consequential aspect of race is its social manifestations. As Rubén Rumbaut states, race is a "pigment of the imagination" (1996, xvi), a phrase meant to underscore the idea that racial categories emerge from ideological foundations, not just physiological differences.

Race and ethnicity are part of the broader fabric of society, social categories that emerge through social-historical processes involving power, conflict, and group inequality. As Stanley Eitzen and Maxine Baca Zinn (1998) state, ethnicity and race are principles of social organization and part of the social structural hierarchy; both can be the basis for social allocation and social solidarity. Moreover, social understandings of race and ethnicity are contested and, thus, can only be understood in the context of political and social action.

Ethnicity, like race, is a social construction, formed in interaction between individual characteristics and social-historical context. States can create ethnic groups by acting in ways (through state policies, war, systems of enslavement, and genocide) that define certain groups as aggregates, as if their internal similarities and differences from the dominant

group are significant. Their commonality, however, may emerge from their treatment, not necessarily from the historical relations among and between internal groups, such as in the case of Chinese and Japanese Americans (Portes and Rumbaut 1996). The process of ethnic formation is both an ideological process and one involving power relations between subordinate and dominant group. Moreover, whether a group is defined as an ethnic group, a racial group, or neither is highly contextual. Thus, Catholics in Ireland can be defined as an ethnic group, one to be suppressed and exploited, while ethnicity for Irish Catholics in the United States is seen as only a matter of cultural preference, with little cost to the group. Likewise, groups can be defined as an ethnic group in one place and a race in another. Thus, the Irish in the United States were historically defined as a racial group and were stereotyped as holding the presumably negative characteristics typically associated with presumed racial inferiority (Ignatiev 1996).

Now, new paradigms for thinking about race and ethnicity are emerging as social scientists become more attuned to what Michael Omi and Howard Winant have identified as the process of racial formation. Racial formation refers to the "sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (Omi and Winant 1994, 55). Omi and Winant link patterns of racial stratification to ideologies that create and sustain racial categories, thereby linking people's beliefs to the ongoing institutional practices that have differentiated racial experience in the United States. Building on the distinction that had been established in the 1970s between prejudice and racism, this framework emphasizes the institutional basis of racial thinking and suggests that racial thinking has its origins in the institutional practices that differentiate groups. This approach emphasizes race as a social construction—an idea with a long history in sociology, and one that is critical to understanding how groups become "racialized" (that is, defined as both different from and inferior to dominant groups who are likewise then seen as "raceless"). This "racelessness" establishes the norm by which other groups are compared and judged. Thus, being "White" is not defined as holding racial or ethnic status (Frankenberg 1993; McIntosh 1998). Racial formation is an ideological process, legitimized by the state, supported by economic exploitation, and sustained through group social psychology.

Omi and Winant argue that the social meaning of race has varied enormously over time. It is a social historical concept given meaning and concrete expression in specific social relations and embedded in specific historical contexts. Race is defined through social, political, and economic processes and institutions. Omi and Winant define racial formation as "the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (1994, 55). They see race as a central

axis of social relations that cannot be subsumed under broader social categories.

Conclusions like these indicate that racism is not just a matter of individual beliefs but stems fundamentally from the differential systems of privilege and disadvantage that historically accumulate in different group experiences. The rooting of racism in institutional practices is the major contribution of racial formation theory. In this context, understanding the differential systems of advantage and disadvantage—and how they are structured—is critical to any analysis of contemporary race relations.

Currently, the understanding of ethnicity is also changing. Ethnicity is increasingly coming to include groups who historically may not have been perceived as "races." New understandings of ethnicity first surfaced in the aftermath of the Black Power movement of the 1970s. The emergence of Black nationalism in the United States during this period also inspired other similar movements, such as *La Raza* and the mobilization of Asian American movements with a focus on pan-Asian identity (Espiritu 1992). At the same time, there was a resurgence of ethnicity among White European-American groups. White ethnic groups began to vie for a sense of place, which they did by making strong claims to ethnic group status.

Prior to these developments, the assimilation model of race and ethnic relations dominated social science thinking on questions of race and ethnicity. The general presumption was that the significance of ethnicity in society would diminish over time. The belief was that, as White ethnic groups moved further into the mainstream of society, ethnicity would become less salient both as a matter of individual and group identity. The resurgence of ethnicity among White European ethnic groups in the 1970s challenged this long-standing assumption. Note, however, that these are groups who, at least in the late twentieth century, were not experiencing the systematic oppression that characterized the experiences of African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans. Claims to place could be accomplished through the negotiation of a new ethnic identity, but without cost to the groups claiming this new status (Alba 1990; Gans 1979; Waters 1996). In fact, claiming an ethnic identity could be seen as a means of reasserting group power, even though, since most groups doing so were predominantly working class, this also represents a form of false consciousness. That is, White working-class ethnic groups often share common class interests with racial minorities, but in asserting a unique ethnic identity may be implicitly denying these class connections. One could argue that the same is true of middle-class ethnic groups, although given historically small Black middle-class communities this is not as significant as false consciousness, compared to the working class.

As long as ethnicity connoted European American and race was about everyone else, claiming an ethnic identity was a safe place to be.

Hispanics and Asian Americans have now become new ethnic minorities in the United States because they have each been defined as single entities, despite internal differentiation. Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and Cubans are counted together by the census and by affirmative action policies as Hispanics. The same is true for Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, Indians, and Koreans who have been categorized as Asian Americans. As a result Hispanics have come to see themselves as united by commonality, as have Asian Americans. Yet internal differences within these groups are strong. Hispanic politics in Miami are very different from what they are in Wilmington, Delaware, just as the Chinese American experience in California may be quite different from the experience of Vietnamese Americans on the Gulf Coast of Florida. To explain further, the class structure of Hispanics in Miami, encompassing Cubans, Central American immigrants, Puerto Ricans, and others, is more internally differentiated than in those cities where Hispanics are clustered in a single occupation of industry. The advantage of a term like "ethnicity" is that it disaggregates, to some extent, the varied experiences of diverse groups; yet, even then, it lumps together those who may come from a common culture, but whose experiences are vastly different. One example would be Asian Americans who work in low-status jobs and those who immigrate with professional degrees.

Thus, being "ethnic" now includes a wide range of group experiences—people with European ancestry, those who are foreign born, some who are first generation millionaires, others who are sweatshop workers (Rubén Rumbaut 1996, R. G. 1996). Some of these groups choose ethnicity; others have it imposed upon them. Ethnic distinctions based on European ancestry are losing their prominence, while new ethnic distinctions (Mexican American, Filipino American, Chinese American, etc.) are becoming more sharply defined (Alba 1990). In this new context, as Mary Waters (1996) points out, choosing ethnicity is an option for White, European ethnics because discrimination on the basis of White ethnicity has diminished over time. This is not true for the so-called new ethnic groups—Latinos, Asian Americans, Native Americans—that are also racially identified as "people of color."

Whereas the traditional model of ethnicity gives a central role to the past in constructing ethnicity, newer conceptual frameworks emphasize the shifting and fluid context (including contemporary social systems) that shape ethnicity. Ethnicity is not simply a remnant of the past; it is an emergent social construction.

THE OCCLUSION OF RACE BY ETHNICITY

The resurgence of "ethnicity" to describe diverse group experiences has emerged as identity politics have moved to the forefront of racial-ethnic politics in the United States. While racial-ethnic groups have mobilized under the label "people of color" to emphasize their commonality, the pluralism of identity politics has at the same time emphasized the unique cultures, histories, and social status of different groups. Objecting to the homogenization that the process of racialization produces, Latinos, for example, have articulated both their unique experiences as Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, or Mexican Americans and their common experience of oppression as a U.S. minority group, bound together by prejudice, discrimination, and institutional racism. Identity politics, although some say it balkanizes groups, reaffirms group identity and creates social solidarity within and across groups (Yuen 1997).

With the development of identity politics, some use ethnicity as a concept inclusive of race, thereby suggesting that all groups formerly racialized should be considered ethnic groups and that the term "race," with its ideological baggage, should be dropped (Patterson 1997). This argument stems from the recognition that diverse groups have diverse cultures and that the racialization of America silences experiences other than the dominant group norm. As a result, groups and the people within them become defined as other, never quite perceived as fully present. As Arturo Madrid writes,

Being the other means . . . being outside the game, outside the circle, outside the set. It means being on the edges, on the margins, on the periphery. Otherness means feeling excluded, closed out, precluded, even disdained and scorned. . . . The presence of the other, particularly minorities, in institutions and in institutional life, is, as we say in Spanish, a *flor de tierra*: spare plants whose roots do not go deep, a surface phenomenon, vulnerable to inclemencies of an economic, political, or social nature. (Madrid 1988, 56-58)

As Omi and Winant (1994) point out, the process of racial formation has reduced many so-called others to one undifferentiated social status. Ethnicity unpacks this, allowing a broader range of affiliation of group membership (Eitzen and Baca Zinn 1998) and presenting racial-ethnic cultures as distinct from the dominant culture. Eitzen and Baca Zinn conclude that the term "racial-ethnic" is then more definitive, providing a broad label meant to encompass the diverse groups who, because of race and ethnicity, are socially subordinated and remain culturally distinct within U.S. society (Eitzen and Baca Zinn 1998, 298).

But, what happens if the concept of ethnicity is left to stand on its own or if it is used to include race, becoming the all-inclusive concept meant to represent the diverse experiences of different groups in society? I argue that such an approach incorrectly reduces questions of group difference primarily to culture and identity when far more is at stake. Using ethnicity alone tends to ignore questions of class and economic status as well as differences in group power, critical realities when analyzing contemporary race and ethnic relations.

Identity politics frame race and ethnicity as issues of group identity, but they are more than this. Although group identity is an important part of the dynamics of racial-ethnic relations, focusing on this alone misreads the continuing social structural basis for racial and ethnic relations. Power and domination are central to understanding race and ethnic relations; any analysis that ignores this, as the ethnic framework alone is prone to do, runs the risk of eclipsing the ongoing power differences that define groups' experiences in the United States. Although in an international context the concept of ethnicity is more visibly linked to issues of conflict and power than it is in the United States, the particular history of race in the United States compels us to think beyond ethnicity in analyzing contemporary social structure.

To eliminate the concept of race would thus be a theoretical and political error because, unlike ethnicity, it makes the analysis of power central to our thinking. This process of racial formation does essentialize and homogenize groups that are internally diverse, but this need not mean we should abandon the concept of race altogether. To do so leaves the analysis of race and ethnicity only at the level of culture and encourages "color-blind" analyses that ignore the continuing structural bases for racial inequality (such as those that have dominated conservative thinking in the 1990s; I return to this point later in this chapter).

Whatever the conceptual flaws in the term "race," race remains a major part of the structural apparatus of society. Ethnicity speaks to group formation and the development of a sense of common social location; race, on the other hand, points directly to the power relations that form racial experiences in the United States. As Patricia Hill Collins writes,

It is a common location within hierarchical power relations that creates groups, not the results of collective decision making of the individuals within groups. Race, class, social class, ethnicity, age, and sexuality are not descriptive categories of identity applied to individuals. Instead, these elements of social structure emerge as fundamental devices that foster inequality results in groups. (Collins 1997, 376)

The influence of postmodernist theory has helped us see the sometimes elusive, shifting, fluctuating nature of race, along with class and gender,

but recognizing this shifting character should not cause us to lose sight of the reality of social structure. If race is eclipsed by a focus on ethnicity, we run the risk of seeing ethnicity only in terms of culture, what I call "diversity without oppression."

To illustrate this, think of the "diversity" programs that seek to recognize and affirm group differences in cultural heritage and identity. Such "diversity awareness" programs have become commonplace in corporations and universities across the nation. In and of themselves, though, they do not alter the persistent race and gender inequality and segregation that persist in these organizations, as the public scandal at Texaco well illustrated.

It is striking that in many discussions of multiculturalism, power is significantly absent from the conversation. I have seen this most recently in reviews of an introductory sociology textbook I am writing that defines diversity as the continuing influence of race, class, and gender in all social relations and social institutions and makes these concepts central throughout the book (Andersen and Taylor, forthcoming). Early reviews of the book by sociologists—faculty who teach large numbers of students—while claiming to endorse a "diversity approach" in teaching introductory sociology, frequently expressed an underlying suspicion toward diversity. For example, one reviewer stated, "I do not want . . . various groups in our society setting themselves apart from one another and jealously insisting on their 'rights,' 'respect,' etc. with consequences to follow if those are violated." Such a comment implies that diversity is simply a matter of equally situated groups vying for resources, with each equipped with the presumed power base to force "consequences" if their demands are not met. This perspective ignores the real differences in groups' abilities to assert their rights that come from race, class, and gender stratification. Likewise, this comment implies that oppressed groups themselves produce racism by insisting on their own group identity. This is further reflected in another reviewer's comment: "[Regarding the] focus on diversity: for some it is an excuse for non-performance and for a racist/sexist agenda of their own." In other comments, reviewers also blamed the victims of oppression by arguing that emphasizing diversity polarizes groups, thereby leading to, in the reviewer's terms, "racial and ethnic cleansing." The reviewer writes: "I do not want the U.S. to become balkanized with different groups creating barriers to one another that lead to justifications for hostility, racial and ethnic cleansing." In each of these comments there is an implicit assumption, first, that talking about diversity is only a matter of group identity, but, even more fundamentally, that emphasizing diversity itself produces the inequities that race, class, and gender oppression have created. It seems that these faculty would prefer teaching a view of the world where everyone is successful,

content, and gets along with each other. As another reviewer said: "[There is] too much emphasis on people who didn't make it."

Comments like these ignore the consequences of unique lived experiences of groups in a racially stratified society. They also deny the continuing consequences of racial inequality—consequences that, no matter how much we dislike them, are real.

Furthermore, denying the continuing significance of race leaves us confused about race and racism. As an illustration, consider the argument of Noel Ignatiev, who in his otherwise extremely insightful book, *How the Irish Became White*, analyzes the racial formation process in the experience of Irish Americans, but concludes that the term "racism" is useless. He writes, "The sooner the term is retired, the better it will be for clear thinking all around" (1996, 178). He argues that the term "racism" has been devalued to mean simply the preference for one complexion over another, but this greatly oversimplifies the complexity of contemporary racial politics. I would say we should not abandon the concept of race at all, but rather expand our notion of how race is constructed and experienced and develop a concept of ethnicity as also socially constructed. As Ignatiev himself demonstrates, institutional practices, not just cultural differences or identities, construct race and produce structured inequality between groups. In the absence of an analysis of structured inequality, discussions of ethnicity ring hollow and seem only to call for recognition of the presence of minority groups.

Losing a focus on racial inequality may be especially likely in institutional settings where there is some inclusion of diverse groups, but where the institutions remain structured on the needs and experiences of dominant groups. In education, for example, there are diverse groups present, but so-called minorities are neither represented fully in the institutional leadership nor in the curriculum. In such a context, claiming ethnicity can be a search for self and affirmation of group life and group culture, which, in turn, can be the basis for an incipient political consciousness. Groups may vie for inclusion, such as in calling for comparative studies, studies where all groups become part of a cultural smorgasbord. But without a concomitant analysis of power and inequality, comparative studies do little to uncover the intersections between the experiences of various groups. Comparative studies are valuable in that they can point to structural intersections between group experiences, but not if their sole purpose is just revealing ethnicity (i.e., celebrating culture, discovering the past, noting ethnic heroes and heroines, or making an object of the "exotic other"). The limitation of such an approach to analyzing ethnicity is in assuming that society and social structures are simply the sum of individual group experiences, rather than the result of power struggles and the economic subordination of racial-ethnic groups.

DIVERSITY, IDENTITY POLITICS, AND THE FRAMEWORK OF MULTICULTURALISM

The occlusion of race by ethnicity not only runs the risk of ignoring the study of power but also leaves us analyzing racial-ethnic experience only at the level of culture. Although it may not be the intent of those who want to use the term "ethnicity" inclusively, ethnicity in the United States connotes "White." Furthermore, as Gans (1979) has argued, ethnicity may be seen as something one can claim without cost, since it is perceived as primarily a matter of cultural identity. The freedom to choose ethnicity is also only afforded to those who have not been labeled a race. Thus, as Mary Waters suggests, "All ethnicities are not equal, all are not symbolic, costless, and voluntary" (1996, 450). If we restrict our thinking to ethnicity as a manifestation of multiculturalism (or diversity), then understanding racial and ethnic relations becomes solely a matter of appreciating differences among groups and learning about the "other" (and oneself). Thus, it does not make questions of group power, equity, and access central to a social and political agenda.

This is most problematic in discussions about multiculturalism, a growing movement and widely used language. I am committed to this movement and to multicultural change and inclusion, but there are multiple problems with the term "multicultural." Multiculturalism has been most associated with the movement in higher education to be more inclusive in teaching about diverse group experiences. Multiculturalism gives attention to the historical exclusion of groups from the educational curriculum. It is a movement for institutional inclusion. The language of multiculturalism and diversity emphasizes difference and appreciation, and it has come to be expressed as including a range of "voices." Indeed, "giving voice" has become a new phrase, intended, however grammatically awkward, to represent a process by which previously silenced groups can be heard.

But true inclusion is more than "voice"—it is access, rights, influence, power, and money—just to name a few. Like most euphemisms, terms such as "multiculturalism" and "diversity" have begun to blunt the imagination, since when they are associated only with culture, they ignore issues of justice, power, and equity. Multiculturalism can polarize people into their own camps, working against an understanding of the very systems it was originally meant to illuminate: race, class, and gender inequality. People can now conceptualize diversity as an individual group experience, wherein knowing all groups is an endless list of prefixes, histories, and conditions.

I saw this while working on a new edition of *Race, Class, and Gender* (1998), an anthology edited with Patricia Hill Collins, intended to analyze

the intersecting social structural bases of race, class, and gender relations and widely used in multicultural courses around the nation. We wrote this book to reveal the social structural axes of race, class, and gender inequality by placing the experiences of diverse groups at the center of sociological analysis. The book is inclusive in that we try to represent the many diverse groups that populate U.S. society, but each time the book is reviewed for a new edition, we are asked to include everyone's group. We are asked to add, for example, a White, heterosexual conservative man; a Cambodian American working-class heterosexual woman, a gay, disabled African American man, or "whatever!" Ultimately, this is an impossible task (even if our publisher were to give us unlimited pages). The point of an inclusive structural analysis is not to "count" every ethnic, racial, sexual, gender, abled, class group, but to dissect the institutional arrangements by which systems of group privilege and disadvantage are created and sustained through group oppression. If diversity is just differentiation, it is culturally neutral, and it is not a matter of equality, justice, and power.

Thus, university multicultural requirements confuse cultural pluralism with the analysis of racism and can lead people to conclude that they "understand diversity" if they study a culture other than their own. By this logic (an argument I have heard made), we should each become an expert in another's culture, and only White students should count African American studies as a multicultural requirement while Black students should have to study some foreign culture to satisfy their multicultural requirement. Seen in this light, diversity is something nice to know, but not essential to understanding of society and history (Higginbotham 1990). Furthermore, diversity taken this way means people continue to be defined as other, rather than seeing race, class, and gender as central to the fabric of U.S. society. Little wonder, then, that campus politics about multiculturalism can pit groups against one another, instead of helping students see the unifying components of social structural organization.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF "COLOR-BLIND" THINKING

Multicultural thinking is even further clouded by the fact that the dominant discourse on race is now being articulated by conservative thinkers who frame their perspective on the assumption that race is not—or at least should not—be significant in the organization of American life (Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997). But it is significant. To deny that race matters, as replacing it with ethnicity suggests, is only to ignore the continuing realities of racial and ethnic inequality. This has consequences for how we think about critical matters of the day. The current generation of

students did not grow up in a historical period emphasizing empathy, care, and positive interracial relationships—values of the civil rights movement that, however naive, at least appealed to people working across groups. Now, the dominant assumption, one that my students hold, is that to be antiracist means to be “color-blind.” Frequently, White students and faculty are even afraid to acknowledge the presence of African American, Latino, or Asian students in the classroom, as if we were all the same. Thus to even speak about race, or to acknowledge the unique experiences of racial-ethnic groups, is perceived to be racist. This is supported by public opinion research that shows that group self-interest is strongly related to public support (or lack thereof) for race-based public policies. In general, White Americans do not support race-based policies if these policies are seen as benefiting only other groups and being to the detriment of Whites. The public does support programs that provide opportunities to diverse groups, but not if they perceive these programs as guaranteeing equality of outcome (Bobo and Baker 1993; Schumann et al. 1997). The public belief that race should not matter leads people to avoid discussion and recognition of race altogether. But, if we do not speak about, write about, think about race, we cannot understand race and racism.

This is ultimately the trap created by liberal thinking, the irony being that liberalism has been appropriated by conservatives, giving liberals little ground to stand on in their own “color-blind” analyses of race and ethnicity. A “color-blind” approach lies at the heart of contemporary assaults on affirmative action and minority admissions. Popular culture perpetuates this, as in the commercial for the internet that extols a world with no race, age, or gender differences, or in the popular song lyrics, “It don’t matter if you’re Black or White” (Michael Jackson, “Black and White,” *Dangerous* 1991, New York: Epic Records). The ideological framework not to be conscious of race makes people actually unconscious of race, thereby encouraging a *laissez-faire* attitude toward existing institutional arrangements. Thus, people can simultaneously recognize diversity, but not oppression; deny difference and appreciate diversity; be conscious of racial differences, but nonconscious of continuing racial injustice.

I have never seen such a great necessity for understanding how race and gender shape our history, our current social problems, our relationships, and our understandings of the world we are living in. We need a new way of thinking inclusively—recognizing the continuing significance of race and ethnicity, shifting our focus from the perspective of dominant groups, and recognizing the multiplicity of experiences of us all while placing this in the context of an analysis of privilege and power. Thinking inclusively requires new ways of conceptualizing race, class, and gender,

seeing them as interlocking categories of experience that affect all aspects of human life and asking how race, class, and gender shape the experiences of all people in the United States. We should conceptualize them as interactive systems, not just as separate features of experience or variables in sociological equations. Race and ethnicity, along with class and gender, are part of the whole fabric of experience; they are experienced simultaneously, not as discrete or separable aspects of one's life. Moreover, this is true for all groups, not just people of color (Andersen and Collins 1998).

Thinking inclusively is not just a matter of "appreciating cultural diversity," although that is a first step. But we should not think in terms of culture alone, as the focus on multiculturalism suggests. Neither racism nor ethnicity is solely located at the cultural level; they are deeply embedded in economic, political, and social structure of the United States. Seeing either only in terms of culture and group identity ignores the material and institutional base of both race and ethnicity and ignores real differences in power and privilege held by dominant groups.

CONCLUSION

In sum, if race comes to be eclipsed by focus on ethnicity, we run the risk of seeing ethnicity only in terms of culture; i.e., diversity without oppression. In the context of the societal restructuring under way and the continuing process of racialization, we cannot afford to lose perspective on structured inequality. People are trying to live in a system where economic restructuring, poverty, and, often, violence, shape their everyday lives; these are not people who are just exotic cultural figures or disembodied voices speaking in the drama of diversity politics. The different groups represented by "diversity politics" are groups working to make their way in a social and economic system still structured by race, class, and gender stratification.

We are caught in a contradiction: living in a society that values "color-blindness," a value stemming from core values of American liberalism, but at the same time living in a society still structured on institutional practices that perpetuate racial inequality. Thus, policies perceived as favoring racial groups are believed to be discriminatory, even when in the absence of such policies real racial inequality results, as current student enrollment data following the anti-affirmative action movement in California clearly illustrate. Likewise, people can deny the significance of race, while at the same time engaging in practices that perpetuate racial privilege, even if unintentionally. What we need is a framework for mobilizing support for racial justice that appeals to the public's underlying sense of fairness and human value, but that also addresses the continuing

inequities in group opportunities. Diversity without oppression may be a vision for a utopian society, but it is only that, a dream or figment of the imagination, not an empirically based portrait of racial and ethnic inequality.

NOTES

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