

Difference multiculturalism: diversified, not unified

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Multiculturalism connotes diversity in culture and society. In realization of the diversity in American culture, multiculturalism has its roots in the things that separate people from each other. Varieties of multiculturalism go in different directions; but whether radical or liberal, whether emphasizing power or weakness and the distinct contributions of each ethnic group, multiculturalism keeps coming back to its roots in the word "difference".

The ideal of diversity, the mixing of things up, spreading the wealth, creating a new concept of "us", never quite ensued rapidly. In relating to racial, ethnic and sexual identity, multiculturalism carved out discrete areas of high visibility but kept those areas self-contained.

Since the middle of the 1990's, dissatisfaction with this situation has been widespread, especially as the very concept of race has been forcefully called into question. Black may have been beautiful in the 1960's, and powerful in the 1970's, but it has also become increasingly viewed by cultural historians as a social construct, one fixed in place only by racism itself (Cotter, 2001).

In fostering positive relationships across the "difference multiculturalism" reveal a classic problem of traditional American individualism. This means people come without a strong bond to the community the individual can pursue his or her own ideas and values without check by the views of other people. A multiculturalism rooted in difference exaggerates the individualist's tendency to let one's personal feeling become the norm for judging the rest of the world. Most people assume the correctness of their own views, and they find confirmation in their own experience. This is a

universal human tendency, but one that needs to be somewhat reigned in for a society to survive.

As it magnifies ethnocentricity, Charles Taylor criticized “ difference multiculturalism” as he proposed a resolution of the conflict between the politics of universal dignity and the ethnocentric type of multiculturalist politics of difference. Parens (1994) believed that it is less a compromise than an attempt to compel ethnocentrists to achieve universal dignity.

Rather than bestowing all cultures equal respect, “ difference multiculturalism” risks essentializing the idea of culture as the property of an ethnic group or race; it risks reifying cultures as separate entities by overemphasizing the internal homogeneity of cultures in terms that potentially legitimize repressive demands for communal conformity

As Henry Louis Gates has written, “ mixing and hybridity are the rule, not the exception.” This way of understanding “ difference multiculturalism” obscures the concept of hybridization by magnifying on differences, which clearly raises the same problems associated with the melting pot.

Multiculturalism... is a theory (albeit vague) about the foundations of a culture rather than a practice which subsumes cultural ideas (Harrison, 1984).

As a widely-scoped concept, the term is often used to describe societies (especially nations) which have many distinct cultural groups, usually as a result of immigration. This can lead to anxiety about the stability of national

identity, yet can also lead to cultural exchanges that benefit the cultural groups.

By including all differences, one cannot help but exclude those who do not respect the difference of others. Apart from its original concept, even multiculturalism must exclude. By acquiring the universal culture of willing universal laws, all human beings were to become included in the humanfamily. Thus, cultural practices that emanate from some source other than our own; it has perhaps made us forgetful of the ineradicable character of exclusion and attachment to " one's own" in politics.

In his analysis, Terence Turner (1993) cites the explicit use of culture in politics, he advocates " critical multiculturalism" instead as a means to avoid essentialist notions of culture embedded within " difference multiculturalism". In this, Turner approvingly quotes Stam and Shohat (n. d.): critical multiculturalism, they say, " rejects a unified, essentialist concept of identity . . . Rather, it sees the self as polycentric, multiple, unstable, historically situated, the product of ongoing differentiation and polymorphous identifications" (Turner 1993, p. 418).

Thus, as " difference multiculturalism" magnifies differences through identity politics, " critical multiculturalism" seems to be a better alternative as it pluralizes groups and cuts across them, thereby encouraging diverse voices to participate in democratic debate.

Works Cited

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