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Lecture Dedication

THIS LECTURE is dedicated to my family . . . immediate and extended . . . for they represent, individually and collectively, the "circle of life."

We Are Family:
A Celebration of Diversity

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Delivered to a Community Audience in The James R. Garvin Memorial Theatre

Lecture Perspective

As we approach the new millennium, we must recognize that America is a multicultural society. The United States, California and Santa Barbara have a variety of peoples of different ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds. All these together make up the American mosaic. New groups arrive daily from Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. At the same time, older ethnic and racial groups continue to struggle for their place in American society. The dreams of these older groups and the aspirations of the new ones occasionally create tensions. I believe that, more than ever, it is vital to have an understanding of this multicultural America.

I believe that the study of the diverse groups that comprise our society should not be a passing phenomenon, but an ongoing experience. I further believe that, through an examination of the

heritage of others, we can appreciate our own heritage.

We should not fear the diversity among us. We should embrace it. We should celebrate it. *FOR WE ARE FAMILY!*

Musical Selections

Arranged & Performed by
David N. Lawyer, Sr.

My Lord, What a Morning
Kumbayah
Michael Rowed the Boat Ashore
Native American Chant
Chinese Chant
Poor Butterfly
Un Bel Di (One Fine Day)
I Am the Monarch of the Sea
Carefully on Tiptoe Stealing
God Bless America
Battle Hymn of the Republic
Guantanamera
Day-O
Mahtilda
I Want to Be in America
America, America
Circle of Life
Take My Hand, O Precious Lord
Little David Play on Your Harp
Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing
We Shall Overcome

The Meaning of Diversity

WE LIVE IN a multicultural society. As W. Goodenough noted: "All human beings live in what for them is a multicultural world, in which they are aware of different sets of others to whom different cultural attributions must be made, and of different contexts in which the different cultures of which they are aware are expected to operate."[1]

In the context of this discussion, culture is defined as knowledge, as the shared and learned patterns

of information a group uses to generate meaning among its members. Every culture creates a system of shared knowledge necessary for surviving as a group and facilitating communication among its members. These shared patterns of information are both explicit and implicit. They are the products of ecological, historical and contemporary adaptive needs. They encompass subjective dimensions (beliefs, attitudes, values), interactive dimensions (verbal and non-verbal language) and material dimensions (artifacts). Individuals within each culture share these patterns of information to some significant extent, which allows for communication and a relatively high degree of coherent functioning within the group.

Cultural conflict occurs when the interpretation of these cultural patterns of information are not shared with others. It is reflected in the personal and societal tensions that arise when different systems of knowledge confront one another.

But these systems of knowledge, or cultural realities, are not derived merely from macrocultural and historical variables, such as ethnicity or nationality. They arise as well from microcultural aspects of human existence-family, religion, occupation, age, sex, avocational interests. A classroom, an office, a social agency, or a family may be described as a microculture in which the members or participants share a belief in certain rules, roles, behaviors and values which provide a functional ethos and a medium of communication.

When these microcultures, or identity groups, are combined with the vast array of national, ethnic and racial groups with which the world is filled, it becomes clear that multiculturalism is not an isolated phenomenon, but pervades human society. Indeed, we live in a multicultural world.

Our macro- and microcultural experiences shape our world view and influence our interaction with others. In effect, they determine our reality.

Cultural conflict takes place when differing realities clash. Communication breaks down when different perceptions of reality come into contact and reinforce cultural isolation, prejudice and mistrust.

If we accept the premise that every human being is continuously exposed to different cultural realities, we must also assume that cultural conflict is an inevitable human condition. One of the roles of multiculturalism is to ameliorate that conflict, while at the same time accepting its inevitability and recognizing it as a positive element in the process of learning. Cross-cultural conflict provides a medium for cultural learning, including the development of cross-cultural self-understanding and awareness, the expansion of knowledge of other cultural realities, and the improvement of cross-cultural communication skills. Denying the existence of conflict perpetuates it and blocks communication, while accepting conflict allows it to be reduced by being incorporated into the multicultural education process.

Multicultural education is often defined in oversimplified terms: the teaching of cultural differences or, even more simply, historical and geographical facts, or the examination of art and artifacts from different countries, and the experiencing of culinary diversity. While these activities can be useful, their scope narrows the educational potential which diversity offers and runs the risk of perpetuating separateness and reinforcing negative cultural stereotypes.

I propose a more comprehensive definition, one that sees multicultural education not only as an instructional product, but as a continuous process involving: (1) reflection, learning and the development of cultural self-awareness; (2) the acceptance of conflict for its educational potential; (3) the willingness to learn about one's own cultural reality from interaction with others; (4) the improvement of communication with people from

other cultures; and (5) the recognition of the universality of multiculturalism.

Culture is not static. If it is a form of knowledge, then it is intrinsically dynamic and developmental. It changes, expands and adapts to new circumstances. Multiculturalism is likewise developmental, expanding cultural vision to provide us with the ability to become multicultural individuals in a multicultural world.

Parable of the Prince & the Magician

To illustrate the basic points that I have attempted to make, I would like to share with you a story: "The Parable of the Prince and the Magician."

Once upon a time there was a young prince who believed in all things but three. He did not believe in princesses, he did not believe in islands, and he did not believe in God.

His father, the king, told him that such things did not exist. As there were no princesses or islands in his father's domain, and no sign of God, the prince believed his father.

But then one day the prince ran away from his palace and came to the next land. There, to his amazement, from every coast he saw islands, and on these islands were strange creatures whom he dared not name. As he was searching for a boat, a man in full evening dress approached him along the shore.

"Are those real islands?" asked the young prince.

"Of course they are," said the man in evening dress.

"And those strange creatures?"

"They are all genuine and authentic princesses."

"Then God must also exist!" cried the prince.

"I am God, " replied the man in evening dress, with a bow.

The young prince returned home as quickly as he could.

"So, you are back," said his father, the king.

"I have seen islands, I have seen princesses, I have seen God," said the young prince reproachfully.

The king was unmoved. "Neither real islands, nor real princesses, nor a real God exists."

"I saw them!" cried the prince.

"Tell me how God was dressed."

"God was in full evening dress."

"Were the sleeves of his coat rolled back?"

The prince remembered that they had been.

The king smiled. "That is the uniform of a magician. You have been deceived."

At this, the prince returned to the next land and went to the same shore, where once again he came upon the man in full evening dress.

"My father, the king, has told me who you are," said the prince indignantly. "You deceived me last time, but not again. Now I know that those are not real islands and real princesses, because you are a magician."

The man on the shore smiled. "It is you who are deceived, my boy. In your father's kingdom, there are many islands and many princesses. But you are under your father's spell, so you cannot see them."

The prince pensively returned home. When he saw his father he looked him in the eye. "Father,

is it true that you are not a real king, but only a magician."

The king smiled and rolled back his sleeves, "Yes, son, I am only a magician."

"Then the man on the other shore was God."

"The man on the other shore was another magician."

"I must know the truth-the truth beyond magic."

"There is no truth beyond magic," said the king.

The prince was full of sadness. He said, "I will kill myself."

The king, by magic, caused Death to appear. Death stood in the door and beckoned to the prince. The prince shuddered. He remembered the beautiful but unreal islands and the unreal but beautiful princesses. "Very well," he said, "I can bear it."

"You see, my son," said the king, "you, too, now begin to be a magician."[2]

Everyone is a prince, and everyone has a father king. The voice of the father king is gentle, yet a strong guiding force. His reality is protective. He selectively provides us with the coherence and direction we need in order not to be overwhelmed by the world around us. The father king's reality is our comfortable reality until experience painfully forces us to question it.

Culture is a father king. It subtly, purposefully and without our conscious awareness, creates for us notions of reality which ultimately give a shared meaning to our interactions with others. It supplies the familiar, allowing us to understand our environment, but it also defends us against the unfamiliar. The powerful spell of culture will not let us easily accept the existence or validity of other cultural perspectives. We will hold to our own as

long as we can, for there is a painful loss in admitting the relativity of our reality and the validity of others.

Yet, when the spell of culture is broken and after the grieving is over, the prince in all of us should recognize that we have become richer. We have learned about ourselves, about our capacity for magic. We have expanded our cultural vision.

The most positive lesson learned from the clashing of cultural realities is that it teaches us about our own cultural conceptions. When the prince's image of the father king was transformed by his encounter with the "man in full evening dress," he discovered a new way of relating to his father and a new way of seeing himself. Just as the conflict in the story helped the prince to understand and expand his cultural and conceptual preconditioning, so it can free us both to accept other cultural conceptions and to examine our own culture with constructive and critical eyes.

Perhaps the most uncomfortable lesson in the story is about the feeble nature of knowledge. If reality is "magically" conceived, the notion that knowledge is absolute is challenged. Multiculturalism is the opposite of dogmatism, for it teaches us to accept the inevitable contradictions embedded in everything we learn. Thus, a multicultural perspective impels us toward learning about ourselves as we attempt to comprehend the realities of others.

Criticisms of Multiculturalism

In recent years, the implications of multiculturalism for American society have been the subject of much debate. To some, the term has come to denote the fragmentation of tradition and the coherent values that derive from it. To others, it signals the advent of a more inclusive, tolerant and genuinely democratic society.

The ferocity of the debates and the intensity of the convictions have captured the public's imagination with the help of recent attacks on multiculturalism in such widely read (or at least widely purchased) books as:

- Richard Bernstein's Dictatorship of Virtue: Multiculturalism and the Battle for America's Future

- Allan Bloom's The Closing of the American Mind

- Dinesh D'Souza's Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus

- Robert Kimball's Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Higher Education

- Arthur Schlesinger's The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society

The debate has been intensified by a plethora of stories and anecdotes in the popular press and impassioned articles followed by heated response in such agenda-setting magazines and periodicals as the *Atlantic Monthly, New Republic*, and *New York Review of Books*.

The criticisms of multiculturalism are many and varied; they come primarily from the Right, but occasionally one encounters objections voiced from the Left. Some critics of multiculturalism view the issue as merely inconvenient or, at worst, an irritant; others see it in apocalyptic terms, with multiculturalism ushering in the end of "civilization" as we know it.

At this point in the discussion, I would like to examine some of the criticisms of multiculturalism, first from the Right and then from the Left.

A. Multiculturalism Is Anti-Intellectual.

Arthur Schlesinger argues that multiculturalism glories in ethnic and racial myths at the expense of honest history; he further argues that separate ethnic and racial histories and literature are presented as emotional therapies-to promote

group self-esteem-rather than legitimate intellectual disciplines.[3]

Former judge and rejected Supreme Court nominee, Robert Bork, is more blunt in his attack. He says that "multiculturalism is a lie, or rather a series of lies: the lie that European American culture is uniquely oppressive; the lie that culture has been formed to preserve the dominance of heterosexual white males; and the lie that other cultures are equal to the culture of the West."[4] He continues: "What needs to be said is that no culture in the history of the world has offered the individual as much freedom, as much opportunity to advance; no other culture has permitted homosexuals, non-whites and women to play ever-increasing roles in the economy, in politics, in scholarship, in government."[5]

B. Multiculturalism Denies Individualism.

George Will writes that "multiculturalism attacks individualism by defining people as mere manifestations of groups (racial, ethnic, sexual) rather than as self-defining participants in a free society."[6] He goes on to say: ". . . one way to make racial, ethnic, or sexual identity primary is to destroy alternative sources of individuality and social cohesion, such as shared history, a common culture and unifying values."[7]

John O'Sullivan takes the argument further by suggesting that "because of the collective emphasis, we might call multiculturalism the socialist theory of American nationality."[8]

C. Multiculturalism Will Lead to a "Balkanization" of America.

Schlesinger, a self-proclaimed 1960s liberal, laments the current upsurge of multiculturalism which has, in his view, placed the idea of a common culture in jeopardy. He argues that ". . . multiculturalism glorifies ethnic and racial communities at the expense of the common culture. . . . [It] promotes fragmentation,

segregation, ghettoization-all the more dangerous at a time when ethnic conflict is tearing apart one nation after another."[9]

Richard Bernstein echoes Schlesinger's lament. Bernstein argues that a neosegregation has taken hold, noting the proliferation of racially-demarcated dorms and dining halls on campus, to, as he puts it, "the vast superstructure of government-sanctioned affirmative action schemes, set-asides and preferences that are fast overwhelming the principles of color-blindness and individual merit." He says, "We appear to be heading for a kind of self-imposed apartheid that is bound to produce tribal resentments of a sort now visible from Bosnia to Rwanda to Azerbaijan."[10]

D. Multiculturalism Is Politically Motivated.

Linda Chavez presents a slightly different criticism of multiculturalism. She asserts that "multiculturalism was created, nurtured and expanded through government policy. Without the expenditure of vast sums of public money, it would wither away and die." "The real culprits," for her, "are those who provide multiculturalists with money and the access to press their cause. Without the acquiescence of policy-makers and ordinary citizens, multiculturalism would be no threat."[11]

George Will charges that multiculturalism has become a growth industry, guaranteeing academic employment for the otherwise unemployable. He says that "multiculturalists demand more jobs, honor, attention and subsidies, all in the name of the ultimate entitlement-a 'right' to adore yourself and to make others express adoration of you."[12]

E. Multiculturalism Rejects the Value of Western Civilization.

Roger Kimball claims that the "multiculturalist imperative explicitly denies the intellectual and

moral foundations of Western culture-
preeminently its commitment to rationality and the
ideal of objectivity."[13]

Dinesh D'Souza contends that advocates of
multiculturalism even attack the very idea of truth:
"It is the pursuit of truth itself that the modern
critics spurn; more precisely by reducing all truth
to the level of opinion, they deny the legitimacy of
distinctions between truth and error."[14]

Also on this point, former Judge Bork again: ". . .
American culture is Eurocentric, and it must
remain Eurocentric or collapse into
meaninglessness. Standards of European and
American origin are the only possible standards
that can hold our society together and keep us a
competent nation. If the legitimacy of Eurocentric
standards is denied, there is nothing else."[15]

He views multiculturalism as a frontal attack on
Eurocentrism. He proclaims: "Europe made the
modern world. Europe and America made the
world that people from around the globe
desperately desire to enter . . . European-
American culture is the best the world has to offer.
It is not hard to see what makes this culture
superior. Europe was the originator of
individualism, representative democracy, free-
market capitalism, the rule of law, theoretical and
experimental science . . . The static societies of
Asia and Africa finally achieved dynamism, or
varying degrees of it, only under the influence of
European culture."[16] He ends his assault by
saying, "Multiculturalism is barbarism, and it is
bringing us to a barbarous epoch."[17]

Criticism from the Left

The dilemma with which critics on the Left are
faced is that most are committed to the notion of
multiculturalism and cultural diversity, but find
certain elements problematic. As Frances Aparicio
notes, "My intention is not to dismantle or
invalidate this movement but to help it grow from
within through a heightened awareness of the

inequities, conflicts, and neocolonial structures and behaviors that need to be recognized and addressed."[18] She worries that "our emphasis on multiculturalism, when defined merely as diversity or as tolerance for difference, bypasses the differentials of power among groups that in fact keep some in dominant positions and others in subordinate roles."[19]

She concludes by saying: "Those definitions of multiculturalism and processes of implementation that do not probe into unearned advantages based on skin color, socioeconomic class and sexual orientation, among other variables of power, are destined to leave intact the very inequities protected and perpetuated by social institutions and structures."[20]

Lorna Peterson points out: "The well-intentioned multi-culturalists seem to have forgotten that the voices of 'difference' have their roots in political liberalism and the African-American civil rights movement. 'Difference' is a justice, dignity and equity issue, not a descriptive issue-a point too many multiculturalists fail to make."[21] She goes on to say: "As the multiculturalists continue to jumble any and all differences together in the great celebration of diversity, issues of injustice, discrimination and oppression become trivialized, or worse, forgotten."[22]

Justice forgotten, racism obscured, equity overshadowed are recurrent themes in the criticisms of multiculturalism by people of color. African-American scholars complain that a discussion of multiculturalism should not ignore the salience of race and how this concept evolved. Race has been a device for assignment of polarities of superior/ inferior, intelligent/dumb, beautiful/ugly, civilized/barbaric. Difference has traditionally meant racial difference in America. It is a deep wound in the American consciousness. It has meant belief in white superiority and black inferiority, and has brought about the

marginalization of African-Americans, along with the belief that it is deserved.

The frustration that some feel is that the relativism and neutrality of the movement to celebrate multicultural differences, by concentrating on exotica, obscures the equity issue articulated by the group most visibly victimized by difference. "America's belief system," it is argued, "is rooted in racial difference as proof of hierarchical racial superiority, and not the appreciation of a mosaic, as the multiculturalists would have us believe."[23]

And finally, some critics on the Left assert that the discussion of multiculturalism simplifies the complexities of social dominance and resource distribution. The achievement of equity is the fundamental goal of multiculturalism, but it is currently being overshadowed by a "feel-good" definition of difference. By diluting the message of political liberalism, multiculturalists leave discussions of eradicating oppression and prejudice vulnerable to accusations of "political correctness," thereby censoring dialog and hindering action for human rights.

Response to Criticism

Multiculturalism seems such an engaging idea and yet, somehow, threatening to certain individuals. How do we explain this phenomenon? How do we explain the intensity and ferocity of the debate?

The explanation may not be so hard to find: the term "multiculturalism" is ambiguous. Sometimes it is used to refer to the kinds of society where people from different cultural backgrounds live together, to characteristic problems that arise in such circumstances, and to the idea that the dominant culture should not impose unnecessarily on the sensibilities of minority cultures.

Sometimes "multiculturalism" is used to refer to the idea that it is desirable for students to know about cultures other than their own.

Sometimes, again, "multiculturalism" is used to refer to the idea that students (especially students from minority groups in multicultural societies) should be educated in their own culture.

And sometimes "multiculturalism" is used to refer to the idea that the dominant culture is not, or should not be, "privileged." In the contemporary American context, this is often expressed as the claim that "Western culture" should not be privileged over the "cultures" of what are taken to be oppressed, marginalized, disadvantaged classes-classes identified in terms of race, gender and sexual orientation.

This ambiguity allows critics to pick and choose a particular conception of multiculturalism that best serves their argument. Most of the critics operate from the last definition in their assault: they see multiculturalism as an attack, or worse, a rejection of Western culture, and they often view themselves as the guardians of Western civilization.

Many of the critics rely on horror stories or extreme cases to make their point. These stories are variations on a formula. It is like going to one of those horror movies, like Halloween XVII. Each time an advocate of multiculturalism in an ideological ski mask jumps out of the corner wielding the rhetorical equivalent of a chainsaw, and each time the innocent baby-sitter is hacked to shreds, the audience is chilled and horrified.

I do not want to succumb to the current level of the debate, whereby the arguments raised are simply an expression of particular ideological, ethnocentric, or egocentric orientations, whereby the important topic of multiculturalism is merely the backdrop in which neoconservatives attack liberals, fascists attack Marxists, homophobics attack homosexuals, male chauvinists attack

feminists, victimizers attack victims, or black postmodernists of the Hoover Institute attack black neoliberals at Harvard. My lecture is not an answer to the debate, but a preliminary attempt to raise some of the salient questions, and identify the paradigms within which these questions will be analyzed. Let this lecture serve as a springboard for future discussions-in classrooms, in symposia, in churches, in corporate boardrooms (but particularly in academia).

Value of Multiculturalism

I would like to come back to a point with which I began: We live in a multicultural society. We, as educators, as parents, as citizens, face a critical challenge: the task of educating our young people to appreciate and respect diversity. What children learn about the wide variety of people in the world around them will significantly influence the way they grow and what kind of adults they will become. It will determine whether they develop into confident, secure members of society who respect and appreciate diversity, or into adults who view others with hostility and fear because of ignorance.

Understanding is the key to our acceptance of diversity. As has been noted, the United States is made up of hundreds of different cultures, each with different customs of speech, dress, food and behavior. Historically, this diversity has been a strength. We must teach children about the benefits of diversity.

People fear what they do not understand, and this fear is often manifested as hostility. Instead of focusing their concentration on learning, young people who mistrust and fear diversity often expend their energy in unproductive anger and suspicion. Such suspicion hurts all of us. Racial and cultural stereotyping turns our homes, schools, workplaces and communities into zones of misunderstanding and mistrust.

Education about our differences reduces one's fear and replaces it with curiosity and acceptance. Helping young people to explore why others look, dress, speak and act differently can help turn their mistrust into understanding and appreciation of the rich diversity that makes up our world.

We should not fear the diversity among us. We should embrace it. We should celebrate it. FOR WE ARE FAMILY!

ENDNOTES

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2. J. Fowles, The Magus (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1977), pp. 550-51
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5. Ibid.
6. George F. Will, "A Kind of Compulsory Chapel," Newsweek, 124 (November 14, 1994), p.84
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9. Schlesinger, loc. cit.
10. Richard Bernstein, Dictatorship of Virtue: Multiculturism and the Battle for America's Future (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994)
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17. Ibid.
18. Frances Aparicio, "On Multiculturalism and Privilege: a Latina Perspective," American Quarterly, 46 (December 1994), p. 576
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21. Lorna Peterson, "Multiculturalism: Affirmative or Negative Action?," Library Journal, 120 (July 1995), p. 31
22. Ibid.

23.Ibid.