

From outsiders to on- paper equals to cultural curiosities? The trajectory of diversity in the USA*

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When I first came to the USA to attend graduate school, I went to a southern university with a group of scholars from Latin America. Immediately after the plane landed, we were directed to the registration and admissions office of the university. We filled out a form and waited for our names to be called. When I finally understood that the voice in the microphone was calling me, I approached the desk anxiously. This was my first time outside of my home country and I did not speak much English. As soon as the clerk received my form, she pointed to a line on the application speaking in a loud voice that resonated throughout the entire auditorium—she had not turned off the microphone. After some repetition, I finally understood what she was saying, "where are you from"? I replied, "Latin America." "Why then did you identify yourself as white?" Looking at my white arm I mumbled words without making any sense. Finally, I asked, "What is then my race?" "B R O W N," she emphasized with a bit of incredulity. I looked around confused noticing that my colleagues were correcting their forms. I felt embarrassed. That moment marked the beginning of my racial transformation.

Our understanding of diversity determines the ways in which we go about mapping and measuring it. Such understanding includes the reconstruction of the process that led to this or that particular historical version of it. Because a human being is only identical to him/herself, I argue that diversity is at the root of being human. Thus, there is an objective foundation to diversity. Still, the ways in which we cut it, the variables we use to define and measure it, and the connotations involved in the determination of diversity are specific to each society. Understanding diversity may be a merely descriptive exercise representing and sanctioning the existing status quo or a transformative engagement in a critical deconstruction/construction towards the type of diversity we wish.

To comprehend the construct of diversity in the USA we need to survey the process that led to the classification of groups into races and the attributes assigned to each race. At its core is the ascription of differential statuses to labor recruits/immigrants on the basis of their assumed place of origin and local interests. Such statuses were first developed in the convergent

practices of colonization and therefore representation of the non-European “other.” Over time, US labor practices and societal imaginaries established a dominant black-white bipolarity that became the basis for representing individuals and groups, for distributing rights and opportunities, and for organizing social relations. In spite of some advances, in the USA *whiteness* is still a source of privilege and *color* one of disadvantage. Changing this order may require undoing the essence and identity of US society as a whole. Indeed, today’s “concession” to diversity may be a strategy of obfuscation and diversion rather than one of recognition and change. This situation calls for unconstrained openness in the analysis of US reality if we are to construct a new paradigm and practice of “diversity.”

This paper engages in a cursory overview of the trajectory of diversification in the USA and its implications for measuring and mapping it. It examines the potential lessons of the US experience for the European Union.

The historical trajectory

In Sweden, I have to assert myself each and every day as a Swedish. Here in the USA, I am treated as a black person. (Statement of a highly educated Swedish citizen interning in the USA).

I start with a brief account of how today’s racial classifications became part of the USA and follow with a cursory summary of the characteristics of each of them.

For the most part, the presence of Europeans in USA was the direct result of imperial expansion and colonization. Although class and national differences played a role in the distribution of opportunities and power, for the most part, European settlers represented colonial powers. Initially segmented, after independence all Europeans became full US citizens and all others subjected peoples. Over time nationalistic skirmishes diminished among them as they made themselves the dominant “white race.” In contrast, the four major non-European “racial” groupings of the USA today initially became part of the country through forceful colonization or their importation from their native countries to perform specific duties under European/white submission. They were constructed into an amalgam of lesser races as part of the colonizing and nation-building enterprise—and the associated European colonization of their places of origin.

American Indians preceded European occupation. Europeans entitled themselves to Indian land and estates pushing survivors of the associated massacres and diseases into reservations (Mann and Zatz 2002). Next, European/white occupation and eventual appropriation and annexation of half of the territory of Mexico turned its native residents into a second-class, conquered population under the aegis and arbitrariness of European colonizers who established an occupational and social divide resembling the system of castes.¹ De facto or de jure, Mexican laborers were chronically limited in their rights and possibilities. Similarly, the USA took Puerto Rico away from Spain in the so-called *Spanish-American* war of 1898 and

¹ This spirit was maintained through the years as a factor in determining the immigration of Mexicans. The *bracero* program temporarily importing Mexican labor for work in the USA (1942-1964) explicitly limited these recruits to occupations for which there were no US workers available. Such criteria were included in all other guest worker programs negotiated with Latin America and even in immigrant categories based on occupations in shortage as determined by the US Department of Labor.

subjected the island to colonization. Although progressively granted concessions, Puerto Ricans still bear a colonial condition; their calls for independence quelled; and the status of the island remains largely in limbo.

Meanwhile, Blacks were brought into the USA as slaves, remained as such for centuries, were granted few rights at various junctures, and gained – largely on paper – the full citizenship and rights of whites only in the 1950s and 1960s. Lastly, the Chinese and Japanese were first recruited for indentured labor in the railroads. For a long time, they maintained the status and image of their ancestors. Limited initially to certain occupations or industries, they developed economic niches known as Chinatowns and eventually moved into other occupations and industries eventually closing the gap with whites at higher rates than the other non-white groups. Much of this, as explained below, has to do with development in Asia and the selective immigration of highly educated people from India, Japan, and the developing countries of the Pacific Rim.

As a result of their respective forms of incorporation into the US labor market and society, American Indians, Latinos, African Americans and Asians became subordinate and marginal labor, each with different, limited or non-existent political rights. The price of their immigration was chronic marginalization and overexploitation. Such conditions prevented these groups from “adopting the cultural traits dominant in the United States” (Rose and Rose 1948) and from availing themselves of the opportunities for advancement monopolized by whites in power. Over the years, people from their homelands joined in inheriting the ascriptions of earlier immigrants from their homelands. Although, their struggles opened up choices or mitigated their conditions, new entrants continue filling these “boxes.” Once boxed into a racial category and labor market, group members got occupationally limited; were ascribed ceilings and wage ranges; inherited stereotypes; accumulated adverse conditions, structural limitations, and negative identities; and were trapped in hierarchical and less flexible social relations. Such race-based ascriptions reproduced the standing and conditions of each group, initially through legally sanctioned differential statuses and, over time, through structural arrangements and inherited practices.

Traditionally, the USA census classified people as either black or white while also keeping records of nationality.² In 1977, the Census Bureau, through Directive 15 of the Office of Management and Budget, divided the population into five races (sanctioning the constructs described here), namely American Indian or Alaskan Native; Asian; Black or African American; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; and White. This directive also created the category *Hispanic*, specifying that this was not a race but an ethnicity. The US imaginary and practice, however, eventually racialized them, coloring them “brown.” Many countered with the term *Latino* to oppose the determination of their identity by their former colonial condition—(“Hispania” was the Latin name of the European Peninsula that included Spain and Portugal).

Although this classification helped measure the progress of non-whites vis-à-vis whites—using indicators such as education, employment and income, its

² In the USA tradition, one single drop of black blood makes a person black. Given the sociopolitical nature of race, the perception was that if people were not white, they were black—or proxies of them. Eventually the struggles of other political (racialized) communities challenged this bipolarity making room for additional racial formations.

implication was the sanctioning of race as the defining characteristic and identity in the USA. Controlled by whites, racialization ascribed identity and condition on the basis of origin—amalgamating different cultures, ethnicities and nationalities into single (continental) racial categories. This construct reflected the historical European process of construction of themselves and “the other” that was part and parcel of colonization. It also functioned as a self-fulfilling prophecy to the extent that the race ascription largely determined the possibilities and conditions of each group. The boxes below provide a cursory description of the major five *racial* groups in the USA and their comparative condition—as determined through this process.

INDIAN OR NATIVE AMERICANS were the inhabitants of the territories occupied today by the USA—before colonization. They were and are divided into different tribes/nations scattered throughout North America or contained in reservations. Although the first contacts were positive as natives gave the British a helping hand, they were soon followed by a bloody process of conquest leading to the establishment of a British colony and a westward expansion that would only end in the Pacific ocean. It included the extermination of American Indians by violent death or contagion of European diseases and their confinement in reservations. Although the British, the French and the Spaniards managed to turn some natives into cheap labor or slaves, others escaped into other territories. Over time, many American Indians ended up in reservations while others urbanized under meager conditions becoming largely invisible, highly dependent pools of downgraded labor or the unemployed and downtrodden. Eventually, since the civil rights movement, the USA classified them into a “minority”. In spite of these conditions, a number of them achieved an education or a decent economic status and managed to advance or lead the American Indian cause.

BLACKS OR AFRICAN AMERICANS were brought in for slave labor—especially especially for work in plantations. After centuries of resistance and struggle, they gained freedom from slavery late in the 18th century but had limited rights and opportunities – remaining an overexploited labor market segment, segregated by pay, occupation, and residence, and with barely any political participation/representation at all. Although the civil rights movement won African Americans equality in the eyes of the law, in practice the structural matrix of class, nationality oppression and racism was never removed and, hence, they remained politically and economically in the bipolar opposite position of most whites. The insufficiencies/deficiencies accumulated over centuries of subjugation became a pervasive and permanent condition of disadvantage and marginalization (i.e., economic dominance, institutional segregation, self-fulfilling stereotypes, and the associated economic, cultural, political and social ills characterizing the group). Today, they bear a disproportionate share of the problems of US society. African Americans have been assigned various derisive names at different times of their development. A sector of the community countered by advancing the identity of African American – from black – that is part and parcel of their struggle for recognition as a group with a home and a nation). Reflecting the ideology or, more broadly, the residues of cultural dominance, the Webster dictionary defines black through terms such as “darkness,” “absence of light,” “soiled,” “dirty”, “wicked,” “evil,” “cheerless and depressing,” “marked by anger or sullenness,” “calamitous,” and “deserving of, indicating or incurring censure or dishonor.” As a group, blacks are the third largest population in the USA after whites and Latinos.

HISPANIC OR LATINO refers to immigrants from South of the US border. The group includes a diverse population by nationality, ethnicity, culture, and practically any other category. Mexicans constitute the largest subgroup, followed by Puerto Ricans and Cubans. Latinos were first incorporated as conquered people after the US invasion and forceful annexation of Mexican territory. Despite the Guadalupe treaty allowing them to cross the border freely and granting residents of the colonized territories full rights of citizenship, *de facto*, they became servant labor. Although many Mexicans lived in the US Southwest and in fact possessed and cultivated those lands, they became conquered and dispossessed in their own land. Over time, Mexico became the main provider of flexible and exploitable workforce with limited rights, *de facto* second class citizens. An undocumented status has turned many of them into an unprotected labor pool undergoing the most extreme levels of exploitation and disconnection. Although exhibiting the highest levels of labor participation, they share many of the conditions of African Americans or are at a disadvantage due to their immigrant status and lower political representation.

Puerto Ricans became part of the USA through conquest and colonization as a result of the so-called *Spanish-American war*. Although the USA made them citizens in 1919, they are also part of the low-end labor pool suffering from the deprivations listed for blacks. Despite the *de facto* annexation to the USA, Puerto Rico remains underdeveloped and constitutes a reservoir of cheap labor both in the island and in continental USA (Puerto Ricans are almost equally divided between the island and the continent). This division entails deep differences in language, identity, standing, and status. Puerto Rico is the poorest of all of the US territories.

The Monroe doctrine claiming the nations of the Americas as “area of influence” of the USA has turned Latin America into an “American backyard” as the USA assigned itself the right to intervene whenever it feels its interests are threatened. *De facto*, this doctrine made Latin America a US colony and its citizens colonial people. US presence and intervention in the region continues producing huge population dislocations; many of the dislocated come to the USA as refugees of these relations. Authors such as Acuña (1984) and Barrera (1979) characterize the condition of Latin America vis-à-vis the USA and the condition of Latinos as a continuum of “race”-based domination and disadvantage. Latinos were also classified as minorities after the Civil Rights movement.

The category **ASIAN** refers to people from the Asian continent living in the USA. Workers from China and Japan were recruited by the USA in the second half of the 19th century as indentured labor for construction of the railroads. Although—as is the case for people from the third world recruited for work in the USA—the idea was that they would return home after their job assignments, many of them, however, moved from the railroads to agriculture with so much success that states like California enacted laws to prevent them from competing with whites. Finally, Chinese immigration was banned in 1882 and Japanese in 1909. Immigration of other Asian nationals took place at different times in the 20th century. Some of them came as refugees of communist takeovers. Others came as specialized, cheaper labor. Chain migration followed. Asians were also classified as racial minorities after the civil rights movement. Given the high levels of development in some Asian countries today, the view of Asians has improved and their immigration increasingly includes highly skilled

personnel. Although many Asians--especially refugees and descendants of earlier immigrants from china--have suffered through conditions that are similar to those of other minorities, highly skilled Asian immigrants and their descendents have been very successful in the USA earning them the designation of "model minority" for others to follow.

WHITE is the term used for European immigrants to the USA. They constitute the majority in US society. Although each European nationality was challenged by other immigrant European nationals, eventually they all "melted" into what we know today as whites or the white race. As members of the colonizing group or Europeans, they placed themselves at the top, controlled economic and politics in the USA, and entitled themselves to all kinds of advantages and privileges denied to other groups. The white race is socially associated with all that is good. European domination of the world and the way in which Europeans see themselves are reflected in the ways the term is defined in the Webster dictionary, namely as "the antagonist of black," "unsullied," "pure," "incandescent," or "impassioned." Notice that whites from Latin America, although preferred over other races in that region for immigration purposes, are not considered whites in this analysis. Instead, they are classified as Latinos.³

As briefly outlined here, the historical construction of diversity in the USA is generally synonymous with the differentiation of people by *race* that was part of the European colonization of the world and, more specifically with the statuses ascribed to US labor recruits from different regions of the world. The rationale justifying this classification is the self-assigned superiority of Europeans and the associated "manifest destiny" to spread civilization to the rest of the world and its peoples. By definition, the USA is a nation of white Europeans. No matter how much they prove themselves, members of other races are excluded from the entitlements of white privilege. They are considered "the other"—no matter what generation they belong to or how much they have assimilated into so-called white culture and values.

Evolving patterns in US racial relations and identity construction

The problem of this university is that it has too many minorities. It looks very much like an urban ghetto. (Attributed to person in a high administrative position at a large US University)

This section examines the more specific dynamics associated with the construction of racial difference/diversity in the USA. Expanding on previous considerations, it shows how race has become the main identifier and mechanism of distribution in the USA. In particular it points to the deep inequalities associated with "diversity" in US society.

The matrix of assimilation

Assimilation has been at the heart of the construction of US (white) society and identity. European immigrants adopted a white US identity leaving behind their former national languages and ethnicities. Over time, second and third generations assumed a dominant single *American* identity, and nationality became a secondary if recognized identifier. The metaphor most

³ Again, although the US Census bureau explicitly recognizes the diversity of races among Latinos, for all practical matters, Latino has become also a race. Hence, I chose to define as whites only those with a *direct* European ascendancy.

commonly used for this transformation was that of a “melting pot.” It implied that an American identity was the synthesis of the different (European) immigrants. *De facto*, the primary matrix is British. Whereas Western and Nordic Europeans considered themselves higher stock and Southern and Eastern Europeans lesser stock, over time, “construction” of “the other” brought European nationals together around a single identity based on their collective claim of racial superiority over the rest. The self-assigned construct of *Manifest Destiny* unified them into the superior white race charged with civilizing all others. Articulated to reflect the experience of European immigrants, this construct became the founding myth of the US identity.

At the roots of this matrix is a bipolar process of differentiation between *us* and *them* that reflects European domination of the world. According to Rose and Rose (1948) “the exploitation of inferior peoples was interpreted as a right or a duty of superior peoples.” Although generally applicable to the entire world and reflected in international relations between Europe and the underdeveloped world—or between the USA and the latter for that matter—in the USA, the matrix assumed the dominant bipolar *black-white* form examined below. The process worked through self-construction of (white) Americans as holding all the desirable characteristics and construction of the Third World as representing the opposite, undesirable traits in various degrees. Expressions of this polarity include pairs such as civilized-uncivilized, rational-irrational, lascivious-virtuous, primitive-modern, moral-immoral that are the basis for European/white rule and redemptory action.

Although this too became the rationale to demand the assimilation of non-whites, the matrix froze the hierarchy by branding *the other* inassimilable. Redemption is not possible when the polarity is reproduced to justify continued white advantage or when the chronic lagging of others is dressed in such terms. Although contested or denied by many, this assumption underlies the claim that the condition of racial minorities is their fault.

The black-white polarity

The USA was, thus, condensed/reduced to a white-black bipolarity reflecting the two original relations/statuses (slave or downgraded labor versus master or free men and women). From practically any perspective, they were discursively and materially constructed as the opposite of each other. For Rose and Rose (1948: 24), white identity is based on the “downing of the other” and racism is an integral part—I would say the crux—of the construction of nationhood in the USA. Similarly, Winant (1994: 43) describes the “construction of whiteness as anti-blackness.”

Although allegedly the end of slavery and the Civil Rights movement changed the slave-master dialectics into dialectics of racial domination first and next into racial hegemony (Winant 1994) assigning blacks equal status in the eyes of the law, the bipolarity still stands for the extremes mentioned or for mitigated versions of them. Along these lines, whites have made themselves synonymous with civilization and non-whites with barbarism. In the daily discourse, the condition of blacks has been described as “the black problem” or the “white man’s burden” thus detracting from the ultimate source of the black condition—slavery and racism.

Racialization/construction of other non-black-non-white groups and the racial hierarchy

For a long time, the white-black dichotomy suppressed, overshadowed or ignored non-whites-non-blacks in the USA. According to Winant (1994), attention to non-black-non-white groups is recent and related to their racialization since the 1960s.⁴ Authors attribute this racialization to the growth of non-whites-non-blacks, the black power movement which broke blacks off from the civil rights compact, the initiative of non-blacks-non-whites to conform into separate political communities, the emergence of a scholarship contesting the black-white divide, and the search for inclusion in affirmative action programs and slots. I add white self-affirmation and demonization of the other. Encouraged by the Civil Rights movement and directly opposing white domination, other groups reaffirmed their nationalities, cultures, and other forms of self-affirmation. They reacted against the amorphous and disparate conglomerate of non-whites by differentiating themselves as political communities of resistance and opposition to the common destiny white rule imposed on them.

Still operating within a dominant racial matrix, these grouping organized around race—rather than say ethnicity or nationality—turning negative ascriptions on their head to fight off their shared alienation. Initially, the crude homogenization of *racial* groupings provided the numbers. In the end, however, once the initial and most flagrant battles had been won, national, cultural and ethnic differences resurfaced revealing newer forms of diversity and identity. Today, groups go back and forth between their ascribed identities and other subgroup or national formations (e.g. ethnicity, nationality, and condition). Still, in the US consciousness, black and white remains the central divide. The case of blacks has been unique in that their identity was abstracted from their continent, ethnicity or country of origin turning them into a homeless race primarily characterized as the antithesis of white. At the same time, though, racialization extended to non-blacks-non-whites the antagonistic and negative (black) side of the matrix—with a provision for nationality or homeland.

The racial hierarchy

The late process of racialization established a gamut of races. Although self-organized around common ascription, non-white races were still the product of white hegemony. Whereas whites maintained their position vis-à-vis the rest, non-whites found themselves in the awkward position of having to compete against each other for white favor. The result was the establishment of a racial hierarchy between the extremes of white (top) and black (bottom). Fitzpatrick (1978) and Massey (2000) argue that the lighter the color of a person, the higher the standing and thus the degree of discrimination s/he is subjected to. To the extent that racial groups embrace this war of position, the competition gets legitimized and the issue of race-based ascriptions is put to the side. The media has been particularly active

⁴ This may be true to the extent that such groups achieved national recognition as separate *racial* formations around this time. It also speaks to their emergence in the national scene as fully constituted political communities. However, their objective conditions and identities were clearly distinct from the beginning. They did not coincide with the US Census Bureau simplified classification. For instance, national has often prevailed over continental identity for Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans and other Latinos. American Indians did not view themselves as part of a single nation... As Professor Samuel J. Holmes echoed in 1926, "Mexicans are a race almost as distinct as the Nigger, especially the Indians who form a very large component of this race. We are inviting another race problem for solution.)"

in stirring racial feelings through discussions over which group is better than which, which group can be blamed for the condition of the other, or which one is closer to whites. Here, whites are the race to imitate: the more people take distance from their own and look and act white the better and vice versa (the closer to blacks the worst). In practice, such a game has pit races against each other in a struggle for white recognition. It has turned whites into the referees deciding on the worth of the rest.⁵ Within racial groups, the hierarchy is determined in terms of range of color and proximity to whites (e.g. interracial marriages). This competition is self-defeating as it detracts from the issue of race-based advantage or disadvantage; it encourages mutual racial hostility, legitimizes the status quo, pushes intra-community relations into a competition for whiteness/white favor, and reassures white control of racial relations thus perpetuating their advantage.

The majority-minority divide

An outcome of the Civil Rights movement was the establishment of programs allegedly established to close the gap between whites and non-whites. To qualify, people had to be members of a designated racial minority. Soon after, other groups fighting against discrimination (e.g. females and people with disabilities) gained the minority designation and, suddenly, a numerical majority of the US population qualified as a minority (non-whites + females + people with disabilities and so forth). Although affirmative action programs became a basis for the growth of middle class racial minorities (often tied to government jobs), however, the main beneficiaries were well-connected white women. Lastly, the establishment of these programs of redress implied public recognition of racism along with acceptance that only through such interventions could mobility take place among racial minorities. In fact, when affirmative action was challenged in the courts on claims of reverse discrimination, Justice Harry Blackman wrote, "In order to get beyond racism, we must first take account of race. There is no other way. And in order to treat some persons equally, we must treat them differently. We cannot—dare not—let the equal protection clause perpetuate racial supremacy." (Cited in Frederickson 2002: 143). Even Thomas Jefferson, a slave owner, recognized that "There is nothing more unequal than equal treatment of unequal people."

As much as affirmative action and similar efforts tried to address the problem of racism, in practice, they carried the divide to a new level. Controlled by whites, these programs became mechanisms of patronage and promotion of those minorities they wanted to assist. The Democratic Party used them to capture the black vote (Barbaro 1977). By focusing on blacks, not only did they help break up the Civil Rights compact but promoted inter-racial rivalry. For Barbaro (1977), this initiative caused groups to "move inwards" rather than work together in a common struggle against racism. Along the way, it reinforced white supremacy and control.

Although the term minority can refer to the proportion of a group in the general population, it also speaks to the condition of *minor* (under tutelage, underdeveloped, lacking in personhood, or unable to respond for him/herself). As a result, minority often stands for a dependent condition of non-whites on whites. Since the 1970s, in fact, the term has assumed a

⁵ For a discussion and illustration of this issue, see Dzidzienyo and Oboler, Eds. (2005).

derogatory twist suggesting that minority condition, not merit, explain the middle class position of many blacks and Latinos in the USA.⁶

The denial of racism

The access to power of the Christian Right and its fundamentalist discourse recently has been accompanied by the re-emergence of white supremacist groups, denial of racism, and the attribution of the disadvantaged condition of non-whites to cultural traits, values and behaviors. Analyses emphasizing the declining significance of race and the ascending significance of class have contributed to efforts to bury the issue of racism. Along with them came the replacement of languages of under representation, racial discrimination, segregation and alike for others of individual responsibility, social mixing and, lastly, diversity. As a result, not only has the mainstream denied any responsibility for the condition of racial minorities but it has voted against programs of redress. In fact, the welfare program was largely defeated on grounds that it supported/promoted black dependency.

Standing, identity, and race in the USA

To sum up, race has been the major force in determining the distribution of class, opportunities, access and power in the USA. A person's standing depends largely on position vis-à-vis whites. Although initially European nationals despised the next to come (Eastern and Southern Europeans in particular), eventually all of them merged into the white category. Along these lines, there was a tendency to categorize all non-Europeans as blacks. Various factors, however, prevented this. First was the differential status assigned to different Third World nationals according to their origin—from slave to indentured servant to conquered and undocumented labor. Second was a general tendency to view non-whites-non-blacks as temporary labor—return to their homelands was a clause in their labor contracts, most recently exemplified by the *bracero* and guest workers programs. Third, ascription of the most blatant and institutionalized forms of racism united blacks under a single condition and struggle—differentiating them from groups with less harsh ascriptions. Fourth, initiatives such as Democratic Party's focus on blacks and the Black Power movement excluded other groups from the black-white bipolarity, hence promoting their separate racialization.

Initially, the bipolar white-black divide overshadowed all other categories. Blacks became the model for racialization of other non-whites. Lastly, with racialization of other groups, whites established a racial hierarchy forcing others to compete with each other for their favor and likeness. Race thus became the name for European domination of others in the USA—indeed a continuation of European colonial domination of the Third World. At its roots, racial diversity stood for race-based inequality.

Diversity: A new term, a new reality or an old tale in new clothes?

At a visioning meeting at one of the units of our university, a Latino member of the visioning team asked about the level of diversity in that particular unit. A participant responded: that we have people from many nationalities; in fact, we have faculty from practically all the continents. About half of our student body is female. Other non-racial "diversities" were also mentioned. Only when the Latino member asked

⁶ When I first became tenure track faculty in the USA, one of my colleagues told me in a meeting, "you have to realize that you do not pair up to the rest of us; if you are here is because you are a minority and that was who we were recruiting; in an open field, I am sure, you would not have been selected."

more specifically for racial diversity did the audience include race in the mix.

Diversity may have as many definitions as users of the term. In the USA, some have used it to advocate equal opportunity for all and others to subsume all sources of difference under the same umbrella. Highly opposed for centuries by the white majority in power and resisted through tactics that included the call for “equal but separate,” the term diversity can be another oxymoron. Groupings claiming discrimination of one sort or the other or the right to difference, particularly since the Civil Rights movement, have countered the call for assimilation and homogeneity advancing instead the cause of difference and diversity. But in the USA race is still as dominant as pervasive in the distribution of opportunities, power and resources. Whereas some see it as intractable, others view it as resolved. Often competing against each other for attention and redress, minorities of all sorts coincide around the common cause of equal opportunity.

The term diversity has gained currency in the last decades. It is less charged than the terms race and racism. Unfortunately, in the USA, some forces have appropriated the term to redirect the conversation away from inequality – in the same way freedom fighters were renamed *terrorists*, war opponents *anti-patriots*, or affirmative action *reverse racism*. Changing the conversation of racism for one of difference can shift the agenda from redress to racial blame—arguing that racial/cultural traits and behaviors cause the inferior condition of non-whites and, hence, that racial minorities should relinquish their race-based struggles and engage instead in bootstrapping. Behind well-intentioned proposals such as residential income mixing (often a code for race-mixing) can prosper the assumption that the presence of middle-income families (often a code for white) will have a positive impact on low-income (non-white) families. This can be easily read to mean that if non-whites are exposed to the good habits, work ethics and values of whites, they will succeed. All along, the claim can be that the issue is not one of race but class—a coded rebirth of Manifest Destiny and White Supremacy.

Although accepting the idea of a positive diversity, racial minorities in the USA are ambiguous about the replacement of race for diversity often preferring to focus on underrepresentation to emphasize their race-based condition over the presumption that “one size fits all” and that a commitment to diversity addresses all inequalities. As current population forecasts suggest that whites will be in the minority in the USA by the year 2050, conservatives watch with preoccupation “the brownization of America.” They have responded with proposals for tough immigration laws, criminalization and deportation of undocumented workers, closing off of the borders and denial of citizenship to the sons and daughters of (Third World) immigrants. Vigilante initiatives such as watching of the border (Minute Men), reporting of undocumented immigrants to the authorities, and harassing of Mexican workers augment by the day. In this context, diversity can be satisfied in ways other than through racial equality. Some institutions would prefer to define diversity in terms of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or nationality (as in Eastern European) to water down the issue of racism—that diversity redefines as one among many other (equal) sources of difference.

Defining, measuring and mapping diversity

Measurements and maps are not neutral. They have the mark of the inspiring definitions and expectations. In measuring diversity we can uncritically depart from the already given and constructed or, alternatively,

construct our own concepts or our path to desired forms of diversity. I offer here critical elements for consideration in the definition, construction and measurement of diversity.

First of all it is important to qualify the term *diversity* properly. Given the dominant nature of race for the determination of social, economic and political standing in the USA, the unqualified use of the term diversity may actually remove race from the social agenda. Are we talking about racial, nationality or gender diversity, all of the above, or else? How much of each should go into the mix? Does any combination fulfill the criteria for diversity? To the extent that a hierarchy continues distributing opportunity, we cannot subsume that race is an equal among others—less a component in an ideal rainbow. In this sense, we may be measuring inequality as constructed rather than diversity as purported.

Secondly, we need to determine the purpose for measuring diversity or set the proper foundations for construction of a desired diversity. Do we want to measure the status quo? Do we want to measure progress toward a desirable form of diversity? In the USA, measurements are used to establish levels of inequality. Absent a pre-established path to equality, measuring and mapping may only produce pictures of a self-justifying status quo. Little has been done to produce indicators measuring the ways in which inequality is reproduced, opportunity distributed, or access limited. Today racial minorities are blamed for producing their own inferior condition. Under the circumstances, a circular argument of justification can discourage change.

Thirdly, as the previous analyses suggest, racial minorities in the US have had limited or no agency in the determination of their identity and destiny. Race is a white construct, one indeed built on the European “downing of the other” (Rose and Rose 1948: 24); it is anti-blackness (Winant 1994: 43) or the subjugation or demonization of all others. At its root are elements of racial supremacy, justification of oppression, white controlled determination of worth, establishment of so-called racial traits, and so forth. It is important to deconstruct race to understand which realities, assumptions, interests and prejudices have gone into its construction. What is considered acceptable or non-acceptable in diversity? I have argued elsewhere (Betancur 2005) that whites in power not only have and continue controlling the racial discourse but they also control relations between racialized groups. What kind of racial diversity can we have when the components of that diversity lack the necessary agency or standing to construct their own identity and difference? Are they cultures as understood by whites or as lived and perceived by those cultures themselves? How much of their former cultures or identities can survive domination of non-white immigrants?

Fourth, to the extent that racialized groups did not have a choice in determining their identity, eventually, they had to work around imposed racial designations to fit in or to gain access to the options established for them. Not only were they constructed into the opposite of Europeans but were assigned the task of imitating them—even though by definition they cannot ever be “white.” As a result, racialized groups eventually assumed the imposed racial identity turning it into the basis for their struggle for equal opportunity and the right to be selves. Eventually, this racialization was the basis for the formation of political communities. In this way, our understanding of diversity requires examining this transformation and the corresponding struggle for agency and self-determination.

What does this analysis suggest for the general cause of diversity and for its construction and measuring in the European Union?

Generally speaking in the USA diversity constitutes a new effort, at least nominally, to recognize difference—as opposed to blatant ethnocentrism and the associated call for acculturation and assimilation on the white man's terms. At the same time that it justified the imposition of white rule over peoples from colonial territories, racial ascription constructed “others” as the opposites of whites. It constructed a society in which rights and roles largely corresponded with racial hierarchy as determined by white power.

The resulting difference was one of inequality in social relations. United by their respective ascriptions and common condition, groups fought for equal rights and equal dignity. In this struggle, they turned race ascription on its head organizing into political communities of contestation. The struggle continues today—although confused or weakened by internal racial differentiation among minorities (e.g. emergence of middle and upper class segments), formal equality in the eyes of the law, structural racism, emergence of non-racial minorities, or ideological constructs such as the culture of poverty. In this way, diversity is as much the right to difference as it is the struggle for equal dignity and equal opportunity. Hence, the construction of diversity is a political endeavor, a contested one indeed, rather than a technical exercise. Moreover, it is no longer the exclusive white construction of the other but a struggle on the part of traditionally oppressed groups to shake off race-based domination and engage in self-determination. As more and more groups organize to demand their place in society, the struggle for diversity assumes additional complexities and often leads to competition.

Obviously, European societies have their own versions and dynamics of diversity. Although non-European groups have been part of Europe for some time now, the issue has come to the fore as a result of a dramatic and growing presence of immigrants from the Third World and Eastern Europe recently. Confronted by this reality from the beginning of its colonization and since independence, the USA has a long experience in the construction and management of (unequal) racial diversity. European nations have the opportunity to learn from this experience and engage in the construction of a different form of diversity. In fact, the recent riots in France and the traditional uneasiness of groups of non-European nationals in different European countries suggest a similar though less visible and perhaps non-legislated form of inequality by race, ethnicity or nationality. The riots may be the first spontaneous steps toward the organization of Third World immigrants into political communities of struggle. The testimonies of leaders and members of the rioting community featured by CNN in the week of January 23, 2006 resembled many of the limitations of racial minorities in the USA. They spoke about isolation and segregation of ethnic/national groups in areas that bear the characteristics of historical black public housing in Chicago, about the lack of opportunities for (ethnic) youth, police harassment and ethnic profiling, the suppression of cultural expressions and similar forms of rejection and stereotyping by nationality for non-French groups in Paris. Such factors would follow on the footsteps of the US experience.

Racial advantage in the USA may be impossible to eradicate as long as the majority profits from it. Concessions in the 1960s were the combined effect of struggle and an expanding economy with room to accommodate a limited

racial minority middle and upper class. Prohibition of racism cannot generate a level playing field so long as racism remains deeply embedded in institutions, practices, and discourses. Thus, US society has become a living contradiction between claims and practices. A similar fate may expect Europe should it not engage in the radical efforts necessary to incorporate immigrants properly and to construct the type of diversity it wishes.

By many indications, diversity in Europe is assuming the same features of race-based inequality in the USA; it is unequal diversity. Although discussed in terms of nationality and culture, differences in socio-economic conditions seem to be often associated with ethnicity and immigrant status but, especially, with their condition as peoples from the Third World. In the USA many people realize the implications of this type of diversity not only in terms of the associated conflicts but also in terms of the costs of permanent marginalization of groups by ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, or disability. As the numbers of non-whites increase along with the decrease of whites, underdevelopment of a growing number of (non-white) citizens compromises the future of the entire society. Should we then accept diversity as inequality and go about social control and management of such difference or should we seek to incorporate them quickly and effectively turning diversity into an asset as cultures and peoples from throughout the world become our bridges to their nations of origin while contributing to the development of their homelands? Mapping and measuring diversity is, thus, as much about identifying the status quo as about changing it.

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