Paradigms of Exclusion and the 'Integration' of Multiculturalism

by Joy James

Monocultural in a Multicultural World

Jon Michael Spencer notes one "trend of opposition to multiculturalism" as the spectre of White "victimization," citing such representations within "mainstream" media.[1] (European American claims of being victimized by multicultural studies bring a whole new set of meanings to the term "victim studies.") In the Eurocentric[2] backlash against decolonization, critiques of domination have been labeled "assaults." This makes the chastisement of critical thinkers compulsory — only uncivil wo/men point out that the empress/emperor has no clothes. The political consequences of allowing the most privileged to make their discomfort the central issue, and so the maintainance of their comfort the primary goal is that the construction of cultural "victims" rationalizes opposition to democratic reforms.

Oppositional strategies[3] to multiculturalism continue to redirect attention from political and cultural critiques to the personal grievances of the powerful who confront political change they cannot fully control. Shifting focus and commitments from structural oppression leads to a preoccupation with the (real and feigned) personal and collective insecurities of the institutionally empowered. These calls of "reverse victimization" are made by: the affluent against the poor; heterosexuals with "straight pride" against gays, lesbians and bi-sexuals; White reactionaries' NeoNazi, National Association for the Advancement of White People (NAAWP).

The claim that multiculturalism oppresses members of the dominant culture coexists with another oppositional trend — the claim that multiculturalism is irrelevant. Spencer's "Trends of Opposition to Multiculturalism" focuses his critique on the writings of African and African American academics who argue the irrelevance of "race" in contemporary society. For Spencer, if we acquiesce to "the

postmodern conspiracy to explode racial identity . . . when the quest for racial equity is a central motivating factor in multiculturalism . . . [we] undermine this historical movement."[4] Those who seek to "explode" racial identity neutralize it to erase its real and morbid scenarios in political, economic and cultural policies. For the opponents of multiculturalism to project identity and a society "beyond" race, suggests that they have somehow managed, in a racialized society, to stand outside of race as a social construction, that is, to stand outside of society — an accomplishment of mythical proportions.

Projecting transcendent racial identity, as a political reality (distinct from a personal spiritual-religious advocacy) combines the ideologies of individualism and romanticism. Both obscure the real failures to "transcend" race in a racialized, sexualized and class-stratified world. Transgressing historical and social racist taboos in one's personal life crosses the cultural limitations of racial constructions. This is of course not social or political transcendence. Transgressing race, like transgender practices, brings the possibility of appearing in drag where one inverts rather than subverts old paradigms of oppression. The anachronistic nostalgia for the "good old days of (academic) excellence" is strangely compatible with the jetset futurology of deracinated academic-writers. Both transport us beyond contemporary, oppressive realities and material struggles, in increasingly polarized and impoverished societies, to posit a brave (old) new world which is beyond race. Both ignore that a social order free of hierarchies shaped by "mythologies and mystifications regarding race and [its] essential blessings"[5] occurs with successful, non-mystified, political movements against racial supremacy.

In the trends of opposition that claim reverse victimization or the irrelevance of race, paradigms of exclusion are put forward.

These paradigms ignore the social and political realities of our lives and the ways in which our intellectual responses to these givens are political choices. Political ideology and alliances shape how we approach the issue of multiculturalism and our various strategies for countering, expanding and promoting it: "How one interprets the basis of social inequality informs one's interpretation of multicultural education, and what one chooses to attend to, remember, perceive as important, and attempt to use."[6]

Integrating Multiculturalism: Gender, Sexuality, Class in Race Culture

The paradigms of exclusion opposing multiculturalism reappear in the exclusive practices within multicultural studies (and ethnic and women's studies). The omissions in Spencer's contribution to multiculturalism advocacy raises the question how inclusive is the nature of "multiculturalism." Defending multiculturalism, one may fail to include the important work of women, working/poorer classes and people of different sexual orientations in challenging erasure, marginalization and the distancing of academic discourse from social struggles. Including these voices for a more balanced representation of multiculturalism, will itself, raise questions about relationships of autonomy and dependency among mutliculturalism's advocates: Africana/Black studies and Women's studies; multicultural and cultural studies; academics and ideologies/practices compatible with programs for social justice. (Un)Critical thinking on behalf of multicultural studies can reproduce patterns of dominance. For example, bell hooks argues that without critical self-examination "White scholars can write about black culture or black people ... [to] re-inscribe white supremacy."[7] One trend to counter paradigms of exclusion within multiculturalism is to integrate or synthesize, without appropriation, emancipatory theories on gender, sexuality and class in relation to race.

Gender and Sexuality

Challenging paradigms of intellectual and academic exclusion, Gloria Hull and Barbara Smith, in 1979, advocated Black Women's Studies programs and departments independent from the racism of White women and sexism of African American men.[8] More recently Black feminist E. Francis White has challenged paradigms of exclusion to emphasize "multi" rather than bi-cultural relations and to critique frameworks that seek to create Black unity through homophobia, sexism, and the exclusion of other disenfranchized ethnic groups. Exploring the meanings of expansive frameworks for cultural studies, includes examining the myopic paradigms inherent in concepts of the "family." According to White, problematizing the African American (heterosexual) family is a discourse shared by Black nationalist, Afrocentric, and White supremacist writings:

> You can read anyone from Ron Karenga to Patrick Moynihan, from Haki Madhubuti to Bill Moyers, and you will find that the problem with the Black community is that we have weak heterosexual bonds. Thus, the building blocks for a strong community don't include welfare dependent families, single-parent female-headed households, and especially they don't include gay, lesbian and bisexual family members.[9]

White, along with other lesbian and gay African American writers and theorists, such as Audre Lorde, James Baldwin, Essex Hemphill, Marlon Riggs, Barbara Smith, deconstruct the intersections of racism and homophobia and the mystification of culture and power in society expanding the scope of multicultural studies.

Inquiring into "the place of lesbian and gay literature" in debates about multiculturalism. In "Multi/Queer/Culture," Phillip Harper identifies the use of the term "multiculturalism" to designate: (1) a remedy for the "cultural myopia" that obscures and invalidates the cultures of other societies; (2) the demystifation of an official, mainstream culture through acknowledging the contributions of African, Native, Asian, Latin Americans to what passes for (Whitened) U.S. culture. Harper defines the second term and practice as more "radical", given that the remedies for occlusion largely focus on "cultural tourism" that commodifies "Third World" cultures as exotic.

Harper applies this dual model of multiculturalism in gay and lesbian studies as two trends of advocacy: (1) lesbian and gay culture alongside other "minority" cultures in the formation of mainstream culture; (2) the

acknowlegment of the multiplicity of lesbian and gay culture itself. According to Harper, since "most of what is currently promoted as gay (male, in particular) literature," erases ethnic and racial realities, the second trend is more radical.[10] The use of the term "radical" needs to be examined. What constitutes a radical approach to multiculturalism? and how is that radicalism shaped by a discourse reproducing exclusion? "Multi/Queer/Culture" ignores class as a category, much as Spencer's advocacy for multiculturalism was silent about gender and sexuality. The absence of a class analysis exists among not only intellectuals indifferent or opposed to multiculturalism but also among those who advocate it.

Class

Radical approaches to muticulturalism go beyond struggles for recognition of contributions and diversity, and the de-mystification of a monocultural society to include strategies for dismantling racism and other forms of oppression. The "radical" nature of our approaches are inevitably shaped by (self)critical awareness of our economic positions. The positions of a number of academics as middle-upper-class permits us to mystify the ways in which our economic status frames our intellectual debates. bell hooks' description of the competitive tension between Third World and African American scholars is also applicable to indigenous elites:

> Third World nationals who are, for diverse reasons, engaged in scholarship on African-American culture . . . . may be non-white, but they may not necessarily have a radical politic or be at all concerned about challenging racial hierarchies. They may choose instead to exploit the privileged location already allotted them in the existing structure.[11]

Being part of that "privileged location" may entail limiting our struggles to ones for (academic) recognition. Which can hardly be that effective if racial hiearchies are perpetuated through classism and economic exploitation. Our attempts to critique our positions as academic-intellectuals advocating progressive education are dependent in part on the legacy of the critical thought of intellectuals such as W. E. B. Du Bois, who eventually rejected his original elitist concept of the Talented Tenth:

> My faith hitherto had been in what I once denominated the talented tenth. I now realize that the ability within a people does not automatically work for its highest salvation . . . naturally, out of the mass of the working classes, who know life in its bitter struggle, will continually rise the real, unselfish and clear-sighted leadership.[12]

It is difficult to say how, in the absence of political activism outside of academic enclaves, we go beyond rhetorical radicalism in our attempts to dismantle structures of dominance. What our roles will be in constructing multiculturalism without class, gender or sexual elites will be informed by the ability of our theories to integrate the complex intersections of "race."

Conclusion

My experiences in women's studies suggest that "race" is the most heated and contested battle around multiculturalism.[13] Perhaps because, unlike "women" and "class," and "sexuality," as a category it cannot easily be projected as "White." (Given the multiplicity of ethnicities, it is increasingly constructed as non-Black/African, to include not only Indigenous, Asian, Latino and Arab but also European ethnicities.) Learning from progressive women and men, I see that "race" cannot be understood without analyzing its constituent parts, embodied in gender, class and sexuality.

The difficulty of advocating not only multicultural but antiracist studies, is that so often on the defense, amid a backlash which coopts or reconstructs critiques as assaults, we may imitate reactionaries. We do this by ignoring or dismissing our diversities as irrelevant, and by arguing that their multi-faceted aspects detract from, therefore "victimize," the critical issue, usually defined reductively. Without the neatness of abstract paradigms, we can ground our thinking and practices in the gender, sexual, and class realities that constitute and determine racial-ethnic relations and debates on multiculturalism. Consequently, we will be better equipped to critique both the mythologies of White supremacy and academic genius; and, the mystifications within the proponents of multiculturalism (and feminism

and Afrocentrism) that detract from demo-
cratic strategies for progressive movements.
For if we have no progressive, multi-faceted
analysis of "race," to quote Spencer, "when
the quest for racial equity is a central moti-
vating factor in multiculturalism . . . [we]
undermine this historical movement."

NOTES

1. Jon Michael Spencer, "Trends of Opposition to Mul-
ticulturalism" *The Black Scholar,* Volume 23, No. 2.
Spencer quotes from "White Male Paranoia: Are
They the Newest Victims — or Just Bad Sports," *News-
week,* March 29, 1993.
2. Samir Amin defines "Eurocentrism" as "anti- univer-
salist, since it is not interested in seeking possible
general laws of human evolution. But it does present
itself as universalist, for it claims that imitation of the
Western model by all peoples is the only solution to
the challenges of our time." Samir Amin, *Eurocen-
trism.* New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989, vii.
3. Margaret Cerullo, who notes the Heritage Founda-
tion's role in the conservative backlash, identifies the
rhetoric surrounding "political correctness" as the
third, and only successful, Rightwing attempt to
maintain hegemony, citing "Accuracy in Academia"
and "Tenured Radicals" as the preceding waves. See
Phillip Harper, Margaret Cerullo, E. Frances White,
"Multi/Queer/Culture," *Radical America,* Volume
24, #4. 31. (This article is an edited transcript from
a 1992 OUT/Write conference panel.)
    Sara Diamond's "Endowing the Right-wing Aca-
demic Agenda" (*Covert Action Information Bulletin,* No.
38) documents the role of corporations organizing at
universities to counter progressive studies.
4. Spencer, 5.
5. Spencer, 4.
6. Christine E. Sleeter, "Resisting Racial Awareness,"
Educational Foundations, Spring 1992. In "How White
Teachers Construct Race," *Race, Identity and Represen-
tation in Education,* Cameron McCarthy and Warren
Crichlow, editors (New York: Routledge, 1993).
7. hooks notes the problem of exclusion extends to cul-
tural studies and its "contemporary radical 'chic'"
dominated by European American male administra-
tors and given the recognition and "legitimacy long
denied African-American and Third World Studies,"
cultural studies often "re-inscribes patterns of colo-
nial domination . . ." bell hooks, "Culture to Culture:
ethnography and cultural studies as critical interven-
tion," *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics.*
Boston: South End Press, 1990, 123-125.
8. Hull and Smith write: "even when they have consid-
ered Black women, white women usually have not
had the capacity to analyze racial politics and Black
culture, and Black men have remained blind or resi-
stant to the implications of sexual politics in Black
women's lives." The writers link African American
feminist perspectives to a political, Black feminist
movement in the development and funding of Black
Women's Studies. Gloria Hull and Barbara Smith,
"The Politics of Black Women's Studies," in *All the
Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us
Are Brave: Black Women's Studies,* Gloria Hull, Patricia
Bell Scott, Barbara Smith, editors. New York: Femi-
nist Press, 1979, xxi.
9. According to White, "students who are militant
about being queer *and* people of color" rejected that
discourse via a performance piece by Sister Souljah
at Hampshire College. "Multi/Queer/Culture," 36.
10. Harper, "Multi/Queer/Culture," 29.
11. hooks, 131.
12. W. E. B. Du Bois, *In Battle for Peace,* 1952.
13. Margaret Cerullo, Hampshire professor, who states
that she does not share Harper's optimism also notes
the centrality of "race."

Gene-Soaked Joints & Other Rum(i)nations

by Lemuel A. Johnson

This attempt by THE**BLACK**SCHOLAR to
sha(r)pe(n) the axis along which Jon
Michael Spencer (Houston Baker, et al.) con-
tra Kwame Anthony Appiah (Crouch, Schles-
inger, et al.) are oppositionally engaged cer-
tainly casts down the bucket where we are.
These are, after all, quite the days for fishing
out the quick and the dead in matters of "ra-
cial" talk and "multicultural" consequence.
Given the varying play of metaphor and
praxis, of the force of circumstance *and* the
texture of discourse, I propose to explore my
reaction within a vector of other voices. They
are culled from directories and sub-directo-
ries of strangers and of friends; and will be
organized along a root of concerns that now
impinge upon, now glance off, now constitute
sub/versions of the ways in which coalescing
and opposing trends are played out along
those Spencer-Appiah axes. Briefly summed
up: the nagging/tag-along issue will be, how
and when does either axis mean for, or to, me
and my voices? (Besides which, there will be
the occasional suggestion that we may need
to retrieve data from, or at least echo, folk
who, present video cameras or not, live out