

## **Multiculturalism and Diversity: Same Origins, Different Ends**

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Thank you very much for that warm welcome. I'm very happy to be here at Emory in Atlanta. I think it's perhaps not as much a sacrifice as Professor Dowell suggests, that he's here and not at the Braves' game. After all, how much more help can you give the Atlanta Braves than to take away one of the most avid Dodger fans?

I am so delighted to see many friends here and to have the opportunity to discuss with you a question that I regard as having enormous significance for those of us in the academy and, as well, for the United States itself.

My topic is "Racism on campus." Particularly, I'm going to talk about "Multi-Culturalism and Diversity: Same Origins, Different Ends," that is my working title. The reason for that is I think I shall show you by the conclusion of these remarks the problem with racism is nothing other than an expression of our struggle with the questions of multiculturalism and diversity.

I want to open this conversation with some remarks that set the stage with things you are probably familiar with, things you probably know already, but which we probably can not be too often reminded of in order to reflect seriously on these important issues. I must say at the outset, two things by way of warning.

First, I'm certain there's no chance whatever throughout my life that I shall ever be nominated to serve on the Supreme Court of the United States, therefore you may trust everything I say tonight.

Secondly, regarding racism on campus, I want you to know, I'm agin' it. Not in this or that way, not qualified, not partially, but altogether, I'm agin' it, and I hope by the conclusion of these remarks that I've made clear to you a principled foundation for my opposition. I don't know if there's someone here who's in favor of it—there may be—we will have a question period. I invite you to express yourself if there is, and I promise to retain an open mind, despite my prior commitment in opposition to racism on campus.

Let's talk about it, let's try to fathom what we mean and what we might rightly fear by giving too free rein to these dispositions of human nature.

I'm going to start at the beginning: the most obvious sense in which we talk about racism on campus. I think this constitutes effectively the various stories we have heard in recent years about attempts to restrain speech and conduct with respect to questions of race or ethnic or gender sensitivity. We've all been put upon by the demands for action, and positions, which in some respects, let us say, is at best, infelicitous, and at worst, downright obnoxious.

Let's think our way through these questions, by trying to clarify the foundations of these questions. Before I come to terms, let me tell you that the foundations have to do with what we call multicult-

turalism and diversity. Multiculturalism originally; diversity is a latecomer as I suppose most of you know. It has emerged in the most recent times in strong alliance with an academic movement called deconstruction and takes, as its central objective, to provide an advantaged position for peoples previously identified as marginalized in society—on campus, and beyond. That is the diversity movement, but the diversity movement did not begin in a vacuum. It has a long pedigree, leaning so powerfully as it does on the movement of multiculturalism.

I'm going to suggest, by the end of my remarks, that the movement of diversity—as a development of the movement of multiculturalism—expresses, ultimately, an abandonment: of confidence in American liberty—a search for alternatives to American liberty; a belief that American liberty is mired in racism; a belief that, in this particular dispute, what is at stake is a question of justice and that justice can not be guaranteed on the grounds of American liberty. We further argue that the notion of diversity, as a development of the original impulse toward multiculturalism as positively elaborated, defended as an accommodation to what we might call an underlying humanity, intending from the outset to abstract from differences among human beings and to the extent, to that degree, it also begins as an attack on ethnocentrism, but ends by heightening ethnocentrism.

These are the questions that we ultimately want to consider because we can all recognize well enough the original, humane notion of multiculturalism, the notion that there is an underlying humanity on the strength of which peoples of differing backgrounds can nevertheless establish some degree of fellowship. That notion is at risk today. That notion stands to be lost amidst the debate in which there surges to the forefront understandings that there are, in fact, no common measures of human identity that translate from one cultural perspective to another. But, it's a long story how we get there. Before I begin the details of that story let me remind you of the particulars of our current debate about racism on campus.

Take the argument presented by Thomas Gray, Professor of Law, Stanford University. He is a particularly worthy authority for us because he is the author of new regulations at Stanford which are designed to control incidents of harassment on that university campus, and the kinds of incidents are very instructive with regard to what we mean today by racism on campus. At the outset, Professor Gray recognizes, in a recently published essay, an essay which appears in a volume from Basil Blackwell, and published by the Social Philosophy and Policy Center in Bowling Green (his essay is called "Civil Rights vs. Civil Liberties;" the volume is called *Reassessing Civil Rights*; it only appeared in the last month if you wish to look for it). But in an earlier version this is what Professor Gray has to say:

The critics of liberal democracy (that means of America, American liberty), seem to me partially right. The verbal harassment question does help bring to light a practical and conceptual division that runs quite deep in the fabric of liberal thought and practice.

The point, to be quite certain, is that we're struggling with an issue that goes beyond the feelings of individuals or groups, according to Professor Gray. We are struggling with an issue that lies full at the heart of those constitutional and social principles, which define the people of the United States as such. He goes on to observe that

there has been recently, an upsurge in the number and intensity of incidents of racist, homophobic, and sexist abuse in American universities. An extreme example would be an incident reported at the University of Wisconsin, in which white students followed a black woman student across campus, shouting, "We've never tried a nigger." More ambiguous was the following exchange at Stanford University; after a dormitory argument in which a black student had claimed that Ludwig von Beethoven was a mulatto, two white students defaced a picture of the composer into a black-face caricature and placed it near the black student's room.

The question, Professor Gray says, is what disciplinary action, if any, is appropriate in such cases? I don't think I need to be extensive in pointing out to you there is an extraordinary distance between the two cases. Between the case of direct, intimidating, verbal expression directed to an individual in the middle of campus in full public view and at least a pseudo- or quasi-intellectual exchange on the other hand, between black students and white students about the genetic heritage of Ludwig von Beethoven. And yet, these two dissimilar incidents are assimilated in a single question—what disciplinary action, if any, is appropriate in such cases?

It becomes very important for us, in raising Professor Gray's question, to ask ourselves what on earth we're supposed to rely upon in order to determine that any disciplinary action is appropriate in either case and by what measure do we assimilate these examples to one another.

Professor Gray goes on in his essay, which is in fact a defense of the Stanford regulations, to describe the problem. He begins his description by noting the first important case tried judicially, which arose at the University of Michigan; he says this about that case:

Viewed through a First Amendment lens, a Michigan regulation now seen as a 'hate speech' or 'group defamation' rule rather than a harassment prohibition, was a dramatically over broad incursion into core areas of protected speech.

This appears from considering just *one* example of the kind of speech prohibited by the regulation taken from the guidelines the University distributed to students to explain the new policy. This provision follows: A male student makes remarks in class like, 'Women just aren't as good in this field as men,' thus creating a hostile learning atmosphere for female classmates.

From this, Professor Gray goes on to say, one can readily extrapolate through other statements that would violate the standard, whether made in the classroom or dorm hallway, saying for example, that low black IQ scores are genetically based, or that homosexuality is unnatural, or a disease, or that women are naturally less creative than men.

The expression of these opinions is certainly experienced (the subjective reality, in other words) as 'stigmatizing' and 'demeaning' by many, probably most, students belonging to the protected groups. When cumulated to create a climate of opinion they might well foreseeably 'interfere with the academic efforts' of the students whose basic humanity, or equal mental capacity, they deny.

So let us stop there with Professor Gray and observe that what he's talking about is an infringement upon the sense of common humanity that these students may have—not reflecting upon their particular, or idiosyncratic views of themselves, but of their sense of belonging to common humanity. That observation goes back to Professor Gray's first observation, namely, that there is a tension in liberal democracy in which we seek to defend the individual, individual claims of rights against unjust incursions, but, then at the same time we give appropriate recognition to group distinctions. That is, we see as an ultimate expression of individual rights the freedom to form group identifications.

The question—can a liberal democracy defend the group identification without imposing upon the individual right of expression? Well, we know Professor Gray's response to the question because, as I indicated, he went on to author at Stanford University rules that have since been implemented and which he here defends quite eloquently. I strongly urge you to read his defense of these rules.

But, nevertheless, these are rules in which the fundamental distinction that is made, is a distinc-

tion between what he has defined as protected groups, and all others. In terms of those rules, there are forms of ordinary speech, including not only the immediately intimidating and demeaning speech of students at the University of Wisconsin, but also the students at Stanford University for whom the rules were created in the first place, who placed the poster near the dormitory room of the black student.

These rules say that these students are protected from such harassment, that it creates a demeaning and intimidating atmosphere, which undermines their claim to humanity, and the appropriate punishment extends all the way up to expulsion from the university for all the examples that I have suggested to you.

Professor Gray is a law professor, a man of considerable intelligence, and he is aware that there are difficulties. He acknowledges that he has people who are otherwise friends and ideological soul-mates who think this is inappropriate. He mentions the ACLU in particular. But, nevertheless, he goes on to say, the rules, as written, prohibiting speech demeaning the protected groups can not be applied inversely. From protected groups to unprotected groups; if you were a black student and were to pursue a white female student across the campus at Stanford, and you were to say, "I've never tried a honkey," you would be guilty of harassment because of the gender provision of these rules. But if your sexual orientation were homosexual, and it were a white male, you would not be guilty of harassment for saying, "I've never tried a honkey."

The rules can't apply to people who aren't expected to have the sensitivities that make the relevance of demeaning speech an urgent issue on our university campuses.

It is very important for us to see that when we speak about racism on campus today, we're not talking about the lingering battle to desegregate American higher education. We aren't even talking about the very important question of whether we can permit black campuses still to exist, historically black colleges and universities. Those are ongoing disputes in American law, but they no longer pose interesting questions.

The interesting questions today are, can we pay due heed, due regard, to people's differences—racially or otherwise—in such a way as to convey desirable protection to those whom we have identified as protected groups, while nevertheless excluding those protections from those not so identified? One of the difficulties is immediately evident. If you say, "Well, I can solve this problem, I will simply write the rules and say anybody who says anything nasty about anybody gets kicked out of school." Well, the difficulty with that, of course, is precisely that you now tread so broadly upon the First Amendment principles, that there is simply no way to escape the iron grip of the First Amendment to the Constitution. Not only the Michigan judge, but every judge will throw you out of court.

You need a very special exception to write race-regarding, gender-regarding, and sexual-orientation-regarding rules, and that exception is a legal atmosphere created by the history of adjudication of the Fourteenth Amendment through which it has come to be seen that there are protected groups in society—not, I want you to be clear, protected individuals, but protected groups. And one earns title to these protections only to the degree that one creeps within the shadow of the protected group.

This is where the question of the loss of confidence in American liberty arises, for American liberty is predicated upon assuring protection to individuals. The original, multicultural impulse was designed to say that we could, on the strength of protecting individual liberty, bring to the fore a flourishing of various cultures in the United States. Nathan Glazer recently wrote in *The New Republic* an essay on multiculturalism—a defense of multiculturalism harkening back to this older view—in which he points out, "Surely there is no objection to broadening the horizon of our academic curricula. That, in addition to all things else, would include material representative of African and, indeed, of the experience of Ameri-

can blacks; that would add material indicative of the experience of women; that would add material indicative of the experience of hispanics; that would add material indicative of the experiences even of homosexuals—if one wants to insist upon segregating homosexuals as a group.”

No objection to that. This is regarded as wholly compatible with the idea of a university education. But, of course, Nathan Glazer himself, responding to an attack on a recent curricular reform in the state of New York goes somewhat beyond that critical verb we have used repeatedly, add. For now the prevailing wisdom is: substitute, not add. The thought is that there has been previously a predominant white, European, male-oriented view of the world, which is, in its principles, an act of oppression on people whose backgrounds and origins are not white, European, and male. And how does it improve the white, European male’s point of view by adding to it? One can only improve it by replacing it.

The reason one can only improve it by replacing it is rather straightforwardly to be articulated: namely, cultural views are mutually exclusive. Cultural backgrounds are mutually exclusive. Ethnic heritages are mutually exclusive. There is not, as the leading thinkers in the movement of deconstruction argued, a notion of common humanity. In fact, the very notion of humanity itself is an instrument of oppression which has been used to marginalize those who are not defined or described as fitting the stereotypical characteristics of what is called humanity. The only way to overcome the marginalizing impact of reason, the reason in accordance with which the notion came to prevail in the western world, is to displace it altogether. So, now we talk of various, centric curricula: Euro-centric, Afro-centric, hispano-centric, etc.—all mutually exclusive.

This question was posed to us in an interesting way only a very few years ago by Allan Bloom, who wrote a book called *The Closing of the American Mind*. Bloom’s book was the first open challenge to what to date has come to be called political correctness. What Bloom’s book did was to suggest that these notions, these criteria of relevance, were themselves incompatible with the function of the university. That they sought to replace the objective of the university, which he described as “openness,” with an objective of indoctrination. Bloom went on to suggest that political correctness, understood as cultural relativism, had prevailed in the United States and largely throughout the world. What I mean by prevailed is very simply this: he’s saying the understanding of the world, the understanding of humanity, that characterized the academic experience of those on campuses in the United States in the 1980s was an understanding that accepted the premise that cultural backgrounds were mutually exclusive and not intersubjectively transmissible, intersubjectively communicable.

That was Bloom’s thesis in *The Closing of the American Mind*, and that raises an interesting question—why, given the success of the book, did Bloom fail; that is, why do we not automatically see today that political correctness founded on these notions of the mutual exclusivity of cultural heritages is simply wrong; and why is it that the debate over political correctness, blooms only afterwards, rather than at the time of Bloom’s book?

I think this has something to do with Allan Bloom’s notion of the university as dedicated to openness. He describes it in his book and I can’t read you all the passages I have brought along with me to make this very clear to you, but I want to assure you that when he says, “The purpose of the university is to cultivate a genuine openness,” meaning of course, a liberation of each individual from his narrow cultural perspective, he wasn’t saying something that was idiosyncratic. He was saying something that has been generally and normally understood to be the work of the university.

We appeal to young minds to escape the prisons of their narrow child rearing. In other words, that means to rise above their ethnic heritage, to rise above their cultural background—and in pursuit of what? Does Bloom tell us in pursuit of what? Here lies precisely the reason for Bloom’s failure. For Bloom, in raising the promises of reason, the idea of truth, nevertheless delivers us into nothing more certain than

the prospect of nihilism by the end of this book. He defends the university's openness, but he ends without suggesting to any degree whatever how that openness might lead to a conception of humanity. The reason he doesn't do so, apparently, is that Allan Bloom, too, believes the notion of humanity has been shot down, once and for all, by the modern assault on reason.

It is therefore, not impossible to explain why Bloom failed and political correctness blossomed. Multiculturalism merged with deconstruction to produce diversity, largely in the aftermath of Bloom's book, because most diversity built on the strength of the argument that reason was incapable of leading to any objective standards, and Bloom ended precisely where diversity began—precisely where deconstruction began.

We struggle today with this political correctness movement, then, in large measure because a subtle transition has occurred in the academy of the United States. Namely, there's been a transition from emphasizing cultural plurality, in which we honestly believed it was possible for us mutually to share one another's backgrounds, mutually to be enriched by various heritages, mutually advanced, therefore, toward a conception of common humanity—that is what we thought. But we made a transition from that to emphasizing, instead, not common humanity, but cultural marginality. At every penstroke, work devoted to proving the argument of cultural marginality, drives a wedge into the argument in favor of plurality. The one argument is the enemy of the other. Ultimately, the diversity which has succeeded multiculturalism is the destroyer of multiculturalism.

To state it in political terms, which I'm permitted to do as a public policy individual as well, the argument in favor of diversity is the enemy of the notion of a common heritage in the United States as well as among all citizens of the United States.

This shows up in an interesting way and I shall close very briefly, but this shows up very interestingly in a passage in Bloom's book, in the French edition, the title of which is *L'Âme Désarmée*, as opposed to *The Closing of the American Mind*. It's a passage which, in the English version was written as a question, but in the French version was written as a declarative sentence, and this is what he said in the text—I will translate it:

The social compact is impossible there, precisely where there is no longer any common good or vision of a public good.

Social compact is impossible where there is no longer any possibility of a common good. Social compact means social organization, a view of the society as a whole. In the English, I say, he made it a question, he said, "Is it the case that," but when he wrote for the French, he became more bold. When we declare that there is no longer an American common good, there is no longer a ground of common identity on the strength of which Americans of various cultural backgrounds can claim to be one.

This observation by Allan Bloom, I believe, accurately describes the progress of the movement called diversity in recent years, which has succeeded to the movement of multiculturalism. It explains why, therefore, multiculturalism and diversity have had divergent goals—the one, aiming at assimilation to a common standard, while the other seeks to eliminate every standard whatever, insisting there is no standard of comparison between, say, American blacks and American whites. You've heard the expression, "It's a black thang, you won't understand."

This is a new era. When, therefore, we speak of racism on campus, I suggest we learn to speak correctly. What we're really talking about is the reemergence of ethnocentrism as a moral horizon with a vengeance and as the only legitimate reference to humanity. We no longer admit references to common humanity as prevailing moral authority.

The various regulations and provisions, therefore, which seek to punish people for infelicitous comments are based on that insight. It is not whether people know that they do harm or not, it is whether what they do knowingly or no, causes harm to an alien universe, an alien perspective; that is the concern of this movement. As long as universities are in the grips—I could quote a passage from Professor Genovese's essay, "Heresy Yes, Sensitivity No," but I'm going to paraphrase it rather than quoting him, because he's sitting among you, I see:

As long as universities are in the grips of administrators, faculty, and others who make decisions on the basis of absolute oppositions of culture, absolute differences, and not on the basis of common humanity, racism on campus will grow.