

REFLECTIONS ON RACE, DIVERSITY, AND THE CROSSROADS OF MULTICULTURALISM

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This article draws upon recent research on race and diversity, much of it conducted by the author and his collaborators on the American Mosaic Project at the University of Minnesota, to provide a critical-theoretical perspective on multiculturalism in contemporary American culture. It is based upon three main empirical findings. The first is that Americans are, on initial inspection, generally quite open to and optimistic about diversity. Further analysis and deeper probing, however, reveals a second, cross-cutting discovery: that thought and talk about diversity is marked by a series of underlying tensions and misgivings. The third and perhaps most important finding is that the discourse about diversity is deeply informed and determined—over-determined perhaps—by race in the United States. Taken together, it is argued that the contradictory, race-based attitudes Americans exhibit toward diversity reflect and reproduce many of the key, animating ambivalences of multiculturalism in both theory and practice: for example, the tensions between individuals and groups and between abstract ideals and empirical realities. The article concludes by suggesting that multiculturalism is not only *at* a crossroads in the United States but *is* a crossroads where many conflicting impulses and ideals about solidarity, belonging, and equality come together in the same cultural space.

INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism is not a simple, straightforward concept to define. Its meanings and implications are diffuse, amorphous, and multifaceted as well as highly contested and controversial (Bryson 2005). Embraced by some and chastised by others, it means different things in different contexts. It can be both an analytic, social scientific category as well as an object of public discourse and political debate. In some contexts, it is about the politics and processes of incorporation; in others, multiculturalism speaks to the boundaries and cultural core of national identity, solidarity, and belonging. Though it is often thought to privilege or protect the status of various groups and affiliations in contemporary societies (Taylor 1992), it also has its more liberal-individual variations and defenders (Kymlicka 1995). Some more critically engaged scholars and practitioners go even further to put much more of an emphasis on the problems of inequity and injustice, trying to reorient the term to be about the distribution of resources, opportunities, and rights in contemporary, neoliberal societies (Anderson 1999; Young 2000).

I will not try to address, much less resolve all of these tensions and complexities in this article. On the contrary, I think it can be useful to embrace them. I will do this

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somewhat indirectly by discussing the relations between and among the discourses of race, diversity, and multiculturalism in contemporary American culture. More specifically, I will review some of the ways in which studies of diversity, mostly in the United States and much of it my own work with various collaborators and coauthors, can help us understand the puzzle and challenge of multiculturalism in contemporary American culture.

This discussion will be based on several specific empirical findings about the diversity discourse in the United States today, but two overarching points will be central. The first is that although much thought and talk about diversity and difference in contemporary culture is ostensibly optimistic and uplifting, American discourse about diversity is actually marked and structured by a series of tensions and ambiguities, cultural ambivalences that run deep in and cut across much social solidarity, collective identity, and belonging in a liberal democratic context. The second is that the discourse on diversity in the contemporary United States is thoroughly informed and dominated by racial images, ideologies, and ideals. Taken together, these two dimensions of the diversity discourse illustrate many of the key tensions and ambivalences about multicultural theory and practice in the post-Civil Rights, postcolonial world. Ultimately, in fact, I suggest that it is useful to think of multiculturalism not so much as being *at* a crossroads at this particular historical moment—the impasse suggested by the title of this special issue—as it *is* a crossroads, a place where so many of our of conflicting, ambivalent ideas and ideals, both societal and social theoretical, about solidarity, incorporation, and belonging come together in the same cultural space.

MULTICULTURALISM: A WORKING DEFINITION AND ANALYTIC FRAME

Although my goal is to work through some recent research on race and diversity in order to generate various reflections and insights on multiculturalism, it is probably helpful and perhaps necessary to begin with at least a working conception of multiculturalism itself. I will use the definition that Peter Kivisto, the editor of this special symposium, offered in the pages of this journal not so long ago:

Multiculturalism can be construed as a project—a moral project—with the goal being to learn to live with diversity in ways that promote equality, justice, and expanded levels of social solidarity predicated on mutual recognition and respect, intercultural dialogue and exchange, and a fair distribution of resources. (Kivisto 2012:4)

Kivisto's formulation is a unique, useful, and thoroughly sociological starting point. It defines multiculturalism not as a demographic phenomenon or arrangement of people or social groups (those would be the "diversity" Kivisto says we are "learning to live with"), but rather as the cultural-political process of figuring out how to understand, engage, and address the emerging demographic realities of extensive and/or increasingly high levels of social and cultural difference in modern nation-states

(Vertovec 2007). This is akin, in my reading, to what democracy was (in relation to equality) for Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America*: the political project of dealing with the power and pervasive social facts of equality as an ideal and condition in the modern world. This is not to deny multiculturalism itself is a social fact—Kivisto clearly and correctly believes it to be an empirical reality of its own—but rather to suggest that the kind of fact or reality that it is, is more of a cultural nature than a demographic or material one, the project or movement of dealing with and incorporating the multifaceted social differences that we see in modern nations.

A second dimension of Kivisto's definition that jumps off the page is its normative character, his moralistic framing of multiculturalism. With terms like "equality," "justice," and "expanded levels of solidarity," as well as "mutual recognition and respect," "intercultural dialogue and exchange," and a "fair distribution of resources," this emphasis is pervasive. However, it is not particularly precise. After all, these are all quite different standards or criteria against which one would either analyze diversity, promote it, or attempt to actually deal with the problems or challenges associated with it in the actual, empirical world. This is not accidental. Unlike critical theorists or multicultural activists of various stripes, Kivisto's goal is not to defend or advocate for a particular definition, vision, or objective; nor is it to identify the specific social groups or categories that should be prioritized for analysis and action. Rather, the objective is to generate a conceptual frame, a sociological framework, for understanding and assessing all the various movements and initiatives, aspirations, and interests that can and/or should be considered under the "multicultural umbrella." Operating between normative theory and the grounded realities of social actors and action, Kivisto's intent is to produce "not multicultural theory" but "a sociological account [or theory] of multiculturalism." Indeed, the first part of Kivisto's essay identifies and elaborates upon the different types of "claims" that fall under this umbrella.

Much of Kivisto's emphasis in the article as a whole is on social collectivities or communities that are somehow marginalized, disadvantaged, or excluded in the mainstream, dominant culture. True to sociology's roots, the material conditions of engagement and inclusion—signaled by the terms "equality" and "justice" and "the fair distribution of resources"—are part of the puzzle of solidarity and belonging, but more cultural or ideological components also receive pride of place in Kivisto's framework. The primary thrust of the second half of Kivisto's essay—and perhaps its most generative and original contribution—is to use Erving Goffman's famous analysis of stigma to suggest the specific ways in which various communities outside of the typical, normative bounds of solidarity be addressed and incorporated into the whole. Framed as such, Kivisto is also problematizing the very visions of unity, solidarity, and belonging believed necessary to organize and define any larger social unit. As the phrase "expanded levels of solidarity" suggests, dealing with difference in this framework is not just a one-way street, a unidirectional process where those who are somehow different or outside the margins of the mainstream are changed to become like everyone else. Instead, the project of multiculturalism is better understood as an iterative or dialogical process where newcomers may adapt and change to a certain

degree, but the core culture or social system itself also adapts and changes in ways that accommodate it to these new practices and traditions. If multiculturalism is conceived of in terms of incorporation, what we would have here would be “a new, more responsive multicultural mode of incorporation” (Alexander 2001), wherein distinctive group histories, collective identities, and cultural practices are not sacrificed or subsumed in the name of some larger unity, but in fact retain some semblance of their distinctiveness and thus contribute key aspects of an emergent, more expansive vision of solidarity and belonging.

Again, Kivisto’s overarching point is not to take a stand on multiculturalism *per se*, but to frame and better sociologically theorize the different ways in which the whole range of projects, initiatives, and movements dealing with difference can be approached, both analytically and in terms of practical politics. This project of identifying and elaborating the different conceptual challenges of multiculturalism sociologically is one to which I am quite sympathetic. Indeed, in a theoretical paper I wrote with Joe Gerteis (Hartmann and Gerteis 2005), we distinguished different modes of “dealing with difference,” based upon two key dimensions: (1) their particular prioritization of individuals or groups as units of action and attention, and (2) their normative foundations—specifically their reliance on abstract procedural principles as versus more substantive cultural commitments. This yielded three types of “incorporation”—cosmopolitanism, segmented pluralism, and interactive multiculturalism—that stood in contrast to traditional assimilationist approaches. But this work is far from finished. The ongoing challenges of this big-picture, sociological framing of multiculturalism can be illustrated, and understandings further developed, I believe, in the context of the challenges of diversity and race as they are understood and experienced in the contemporary United States. I will now explore this idea in the context of research on these topics that I have been conducting with collaborators on the American Mosaic Project at the University of Minnesota.

THE DISCOURSE ABOUT DIVERSITY: FINDINGS FROM THE AMERICAN MOSAIC PROJECT

The American Mosaic Project (<https://www.soc.umn.edu/research/amp.html>) is an ongoing, multimethod study of race, religion, diversity, and collective identity in the contemporary United States. With my colleagues Joseph Gerteis and Penny Edgell, I helped to launch the project a little over a decade ago with a national telephone survey of American attitudes, identities, and experiences on these topics. That survey was followed up the next year with ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviewing in four major metropolitan areas (Atlanta, Boston, Los Angeles, and the Twin Cities of Minnesota). A series of papers based upon these data has been published in the years since including analyses of anti-atheist sentiment, racial attitudes and identities, understandings of the role of religion in public life, anti-Semitism, and cultural conceptions of difference and diversity. This past year, a new, nationally representative Internet survey (Boundaries in the American Mosaic, 2014) was fielded in order to replicate,

update, reevaluate, and extend findings from the original rounds of data collection and analysis.

My goal here is to provide an overview of the work related to the diversity discourse and ideas about race developed primarily out of the earlier rounds of data collection and analysis. This includes empirical papers on attitudes about diversity and social solidarity broadly conceived (Bell and Hartmann 2007; Edgell and Tranby 2010; Hartmann et al. 2011; Gerteis, Hartmann, and Edgell n.d.), analyses of both whiteness (Croll 2007; Hartmann, Gerteis, and Croll 2009) and color blindness (Manning, Hartmann, and Gerteis n.d.), as well as some theoretical work on diversity and race (Hartmann and Bell 2011) and multiculturalism (Hartmann and Gerteis 2005).

Kivisto points out that Vertovec and Wessendorf (2010) suggest the word “diversity” now does much of the work that “multicultural” used to do, and notes that Thomas Faist (2009) goes even further to argue that diversity itself should be seen as “a new mode of incorporation, similar to but distinct from multiculturalism” (see also Ahmed 2007). Even further, David Embrick (2011) recently identified the phenomenon of “diversity ideology” as a driving, if problematic force in corporate America. The focus of the Mosaic research and analysis I am highlighting here is a bit different. It looks at diversity not as an alternative discourse for, or approach to, talking about multiculturalism (though it may be that), but instead as talk and thought about the societal realities of diversity itself (see also Vertovec 2007). I will review and reconstruct this work in order to suggest the implications that the term and our analysis of it have for Kivisto’s project of producing a distinctive sociological understanding of multiculturalism.

Upbeat, Open, and Optimistic

The first and most basic empirical result from these various studies is that Americans are generally quite open and upbeat about the term diversity. In the initial Mosaic telephone survey of a representative sample of some 2,000 Americans, for example, nearly half of all respondents agreed with the statement “Diversity is mostly a strength for the country.” While some respondents were not quite so unequivocal (just over half characterized diversity as “both a weakness and a strength”), less than 5 percent of those surveyed saw diversity strictly as a weakness. Americans also saw the benefits of diversity in their own lives. Sixty-four percent of respondents strongly agreed that diversity was valuable in their cities and towns; 71 percent strongly valued having diverse friends. When we added in those who “somewhat agreed,” diversity was valued by over 90 percent of respondents in both locales and friendship networks. What stands out about these findings is not only that Americans acknowledge and accept diversity (are “learning to live with it,” in Kivisto’s terms), but that they are upbeat and optimistic about it. Diversity, in other words, was a phenomenon to be embraced, celebrated. This basic response pattern held, with only minor variations and exceptions, across the usual social cleavages of race, religion, political ideology, region, and education.

Our understanding of the basic, upbeat, and optimistic view of diversity was deepened and developed in follow-up interviewing. The starting point of our first major paper on diversity, which appeared in the *American Sociological Review* (Bell and Hartmann 2007), was a simple, straightforward question posed to interviewees: “What does diversity mean to you?” Responses to this open-ended question were, as we reported, “evenly divided into two types.” On one hand, about half of our interviewees gave basic, general definitions of the term, “listing a large, often seemingly all-encompassing list of social differences that they believed fell under the general rubric of cultural diversity—gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, ability, etc.” On the other hand, the other half of the sample described diversity as more of “a social project or initiative,” a moral imperative along the lines that Kivisto defined multiculturalism. Even here, however, our respondents were all generally upbeat and optimistic about the term itself—seeing diversity as an arena of opportunity, growth, and strength for the country, communities, and organizations.

Our most recent analysis, while still preliminary, has essentially confirmed these initial results and claims. In spring 2014, about 53 percent of a representative sample of Americans identified diversity in the United States as “mostly a strength,” and over three-quarters (77 percent) saw the concept of diversity as applying to “social differences of all types including race, religion, gender, and sexuality.” Other new survey items provided even stronger evidence that Americans feel good about diversity and dealing with diversity. For example, about 85 percent of respondents somewhat or strongly agreed that they value having people who are different from them in their communities and rate their experiences with different people positively, and 71 percent say that Americans can have different values and traditions, as long as they all follow the same rules and laws. Returning again to our general, basic question, we find that support for diversity as a source of strength holds across racial lines: 51 percent of whites, 51 percent of African Americans, and 57 percent of Hispanics. (Interestingly, those who claimed some other nonwhite identity or more than one racial affiliation were the outlier groups, at 64 percent and 67 percent, respectively.)

Conflicted and Fraught with Ambiguity

Why are Americans so open to and upbeat about diversity? What is it about diversity that appeals to Americans? Answering these questions is where things quickly began to get more complicated, and led us into the second two empirical themes that have become the cornerstones of my understanding of American conception of diversity and its implications for multiculturalism. One of these comes out of the challenges Americans have in providing a consistent, well-supported explanation of the perceived value and benefits of diversity.

In spite of their initial, generally open, and upbeat responses to questions about diversity, we discovered that respondents often found it difficult in actual, face-to-face interviews to explain what it is about “diversity” that they believed to be positive and beneficial. Most could offer only general platitudes or partisan tautologies (statements such as “diversity is good because we are a diverse society”), or reiterate the long list of

social differences they said diversity included. There was some talk of expanded food choices and other cultural variety, but when pushed to talk about diversity more extensively or give examples of their own experiences with difference, our respondents were just as likely to talk about the problems, conflicts, and challenges posed by difference in social life as to support their initial, generally positive responses.

This uneven or conflicted orientation to diversity was most obvious and easy to document in our interviews; however, the responses to open-ended questions on our survey also exhibited this pattern. Asked to expand upon both the benefits and drawbacks of diversity by phone interviewers, our respondents had more—not a lot, but more—to say about the problems posed by difference, and even respondents who saw diversity as an unqualified “good,” were more than able to talk about the challenges they believed diversity presented in social life. Three basic concerns about diversity emerged in this context. Cultural disunity and fragmentation was the most common issue, expressed by about a third of respondents. About a quarter of respondents said that their primary concerns about diversity were those having to do with misunderstanding and intolerance, while just under 15 percent were worried about issues of equality, equal opportunity, and fairness. In short, although the vast majority of respondents initially described diversity as an unqualified strength or something of a mix of positive and problematic elements, respondents were more likely to have more and more specific things to say about the drawbacks than the benefits.

The more general point, then, is that positive attitudes about diversity run relatively thin and are fraught with cross-cutting questions and concerns. Much of our subsequent analytic work on the project has been to unpack the various tensions that can be detected in this discourse, each of which begins to anticipate and set up my present argument about multiculturalism. For example, one common tension in diversity talk was between understanding difference as an individual attribute or characteristic, as opposed to some kind of more categorical, group-based distinctions. Extending from this, Americans appeared quite comfortable and indeed supportive of seeing each individual person’s right to individuality as understood and expressed through a range of differentiating background characteristics and affiliations. At the same time, they have difficulty defending and affirming group-level obligations and commitments on their own terms as well as in terms of their relation to broader cultural unity and solidarity. When it comes to the nation as a whole, in fact, group-based differences are often seen to be destabilizing, fragmenting, divisive, while for individuals they can be distinctive and empowering.

Another ambiguity that appeared in the way Americans talked and thought about diversity was between a description of social conditions as they actually are as contrasted with the ideals or aspirations of how they should be. This is the well-known is/ought distinction where the “ought” calls attention to the ideals we are striving for or aspiring to. One is descriptive, the other prescriptive. In the context of talking about diversity, the two often got conflated into a single-muddled mess.

Yet, another complication we found in our interviews had to do with inequality and its relation to difference. The concepts of equity, access, opportunity, and justice

have been a major point of interest for the Mosaic Project given our sense that many of the social problems associated with diversity in the United States result from disparities, inequalities, and injustices that are historically and currently associated with social difference in this country. One of the tragedies of American pluralism, as Steven Steinberg (2001) has argued, is that it has come primarily at the cost of tremendous social inequities. Yet, when we posed questions about how inequality and injustice should be understood in relation to diversity to our respondents, many of whom were otherwise articulate and well informed, we found that the interviews quickly bogged down. In fact, some of our interviewees got so confused, agitated, or angry that we had to shift the topic of conversation completely. In the context of thinking about diversity, it appears very difficult to talk about inequality; far easier, it would seem, to focus on culture, identity, and ideals (see also Michaels 2006).

In another, still unpublished content analysis of the open-ended diversity questions on our national telephone survey (Gerteis, Hartmann, and Edgell n.d.), we found that three main conceptual frames structure the ways in which Americans talk about diversity: for some, diversity is a project; for others (or in other contexts), diversity is a phenomena that problematizes issues of order and solidarity; and, it can also serve as a concept that signals issues relating to individual opportunities (or lack thereof), personal growth, cultural changes, and merit in American culture. The interesting point in this analysis is that the different frames for talking about diversity held across both the “strength” and “problem” responses. When diversity was understood to revolve around issues of solidarity and order, this could come from folks who thought unity was compromised in some way by diversity or expanded and strengthened; similarly, when it came to individualism, diversity could be seen either as an enhancement of or detriment to individual merit and opportunity. But what stood out overall—and again this seemed once again to hold across the usual cleavages of race, religion, ideology, and political affiliation—is that Americans had deeply conflicted views about difference—and that these ambiguities and ambivalences seem to be structured by tensions inherent in standard liberal democratic social theory itself.

Deeply Informed and Structured by Race

The tensions between individuals and groups as well as between moral aspirations and uncomfortable empirical realities run deep in liberal democratic thought and practice. This is, of course, a key point for me in this particular article. But before I go on to make clear the implications for theorizing multiculturalism, let me point out the other essential dimension of the discourse about diversity that emerged in our studies: that American responses to questions about difference and diversity were overwhelmingly about race and/or filtered through a racial lens.

The claim about the racialized nature of the discourse on diversity in the United States is actually a bit less of a straightforward, empirical finding than the previous two points. In all of our various research formats, most Americans have been either unwilling or unable to define diversity in explicitly racial terms. In our most recent Mosaic surveys, for example, only 12 percent of respondents associated diversity explicitly and

exclusively with race, while almost 80 percent of respondents (76 percent) said that for them, the term refers to “social differences of all types” (almost one-tenth were not sure). However, what became obvious in our in-depth interviews and fieldwork is that when Americans were asked about diversity, they were either directly talking about race, or their ideas were informed by racialized experiences and assumptions. To wit: as we pushed our respondents to provide anecdotes and examples that captured their own understandings of and experiences with difference, most of the stories they told were about race. When talking about those who were somehow “different,” it was almost always racial or ethnic “others” who were referenced. In addition, even those respondents who explicitly denied that they believed diversity was about race allowed that “other” people they knew use diversity as a euphemism or “buzzword” for talking about race. In other words, the discourse about diversity is deeply structured and informed, at least in the United States, by the language of and experiences with race.

Realizing the entangled, deeply intertwined relationship between thinking about race and talking about diversity is not, in and of itself, a particularly striking or surprising discovery. In recent years, scholars both in the United States and elsewhere have not only made similar observations but have based entire studies and books on the point—in higher education (Berrey 2011; Warikoo and de Novais 2015), corporate America (Embrick 2011; Berrey 2015), public policy (Moore and Bell 2011), and contexts of neighborhood associations and community organizing (Burke 2012). Some—including myself (Hartmann and Bell 2011)—have argued that diversity is the new language for talking about race, or even that race is a dominant discourse for talking about all forms of difference in the contemporary, postcolonial world (cf. Memmi 1982/2000). And such arguments—especially in concert with late-twentieth century migration patterns—have certainly exploded traditional black-white binaries for thinking about race itself. Extending from these interpretations, I want to suggest that this thoroughly conflicted, deeply racialized discourse about diversity shapes and complicates public understandings of the many different sources of difference and distinction in contemporary American society and, ultimately, of multiculturalism itself. This insight can help us understand why Americans—both scholars and regular folks alike—are so deeply conflicted and ambivalent about multiculturalism in both theory and practice.

IMPLICATIONS AND REVELATIONS

A large part of what makes multiculturalism so challenging, at least in the Western world, is the way it is based upon and brings together some of the most fundamental tensions and complexities of social thought and action in liberal, democratic contexts: the tensions between individuals and groups, between minorities and the majority, between ideals and actualities, between unity and inequality. For example, liberal democratic theory puts a tremendous amount of energy and attention on the status and role of individuals in social life, but much less on the groups and subnational identities and affiliations that are so important in social life and the lives of individual

citizens. Indeed, in many traditional racial theory and legal contexts, group-based identities and affiliations are less something to be recognized and protected than they are social phenomena that are to be minimized, set aside, or overcome. Conventional standards of justice are supposed to be agnostic or even blind to the affiliations that mark and define us as different. These points capture the essence of color blindness as a racial ideology, as well as anticipate the essence of sociological critique of the concept (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Obasogie 2013). Perhaps another way to put this is to consider the classic tripartite principles or ideals of the French revolution: *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*. Clearly, while Americans typically prioritize liberty, and talk a good deal about equality (especially insofar as it is balanced with or against the former), the category of fraternity—the category that alerts us to the importance of groups and social connections—gets far less attention or interest, often left instead to the ostensibly private realm of voluntary associations and civic culture. (Ironically, on this front, the French—even French intellectuals with Leftist credentials—seem to have had a more difficult time coming to terms with diversity than others [see, for example, Wieviorka 2014].)

This brings me to my first and most basic contention: that the deeply embedded tensions and ambivalences revealed in the discourse about diversity structure and dictate the ways in which multiculturalism is understood and experienced in the United States today. Dealing with diversity forces conversations and thinking at the very core of the deepest tensions and questions built into liberal democratic thought. It doesn't solve them, or even take a stand on them—at least not necessarily or automatically; rather, it simply animates and embodies them. These tensions are what the projects and challenges of multiculturalism are all about.

My second, more ambitious claim, then, is that the way in which the entire discourse about diversity is so deeply informed and structured by American understandings of and experiences with race serves to deepen and intensify the complexity of these challenges and the difficulty of resolving them easily or smoothly. The intensification of the tensions and ambivalences of the discourse about difference, distinction, and diversity under the pressures of race happens in some specific ways. For one, as Nina Eliasoph (1999) has argued, Americans have a basic, fundamental difficulty even just talking about race in general, especially in our politicized culture in particular. Thus, certain conversations—for example, those dealing with uncomfortable issues associated with diversity and especially those involving political considerations—are avoided, muted, or even silenced altogether (see also Pollock 2004; Embrick 2005). Ideologies of color blindness can be considered another variation on this theme. But avoidance is only part of the problem. The fact that race is associated with so many of the worst biggest historical indignities and embarrassments in the United States—slavery, lynching, Jim Crow, redlining—as well as our most entrenched, persistent injustices and inequities—segregation, poverty, inferior health care and schooling, excessive punishment and policing, or simply racism itself—makes it more, rather than less difficult to recognize and grapple with the general realities and problems of difference in contemporary society. In other words, the racialization of the diversity

discourse makes it seem like difference is always a problem, and a big one at that, something to be overcome or dispensed with, rather than embraced and engaged. With racial inequity, injustice, and racism itself as a backdrop, it is little wonder that the diversity discourse seems to perpetually mystify and obfuscate rather than illuminate issues of multicultural inclusion, claims to equity, and notions of solidarity and belonging.

In a more general way, I might say that all of the debates, contradictions, and confusions that mark and define American thinking about race (see Bobo and Charles 2009) get projected onto all of the differences associated with multiculturalism. This is where race comes to be about so much more than race. It is, in other words, not only about *what makes race* as it is about *what race makes*. Indeed, one of the great disappointments of much standard sociological research and thinking on race is that it is overly focused on the making of racial groups and boundaries and is only beginning to see the larger impacts and tentacles of race in so many aspects of American life, for so many different communities, organizations, institutions, and social practices.

Becoming aware of the deep, structuring significance of race in diversity discourse both in general and as it applies to multiculturalism more specifically also provides a direct connection to race-based critiques of contemporary society and culture in the United States. This is an important and somewhat different point. In the 2007 *ASR* paper, Joyce Bell and I drew upon race-based critical concepts of color blindness and white normativity to develop a race-critical analysis of the diversity discourse that I believe can be usefully extended and extrapolated to multiculturalism itself.

Informed by critiques of color blindness (Bonilla-Silva 2010; see also Carr 1997; Crenshaw 1997), for example, we argued that the complicated and conflicted ways in which Americans think and talk about diversity reflect the dynamics of color-blind ideology more generally. On the one hand, it hides and obscures the social problems associated with difference; on the other hand, it understands diversity more generally only to the extent that difference is an element of individuals' identities that should be tolerated, perhaps even celebrated, but not as the basis for complaints about inequality or group-based interests. We also argued that the diversity discourse rests on a white cultural perspective—a taken-for-granted, typically white center or core that masks both privilege and social inequality through the existence of taken-for-granted cultural norms and assumptions often expressed through expectations for cultural assimilation, accommodation, and change on behalf of those who are believed to be different.

During our analysis, Bell and I (2007) noted that when talking about diversity, people often used the language of “welcoming people from different backgrounds” or “respecting people who are different” and we were forced to ask “different from what?” What was left unspoken is who was doing the welcoming; who is doing the respecting and who is being welcomed. This language, in our view, gave agency—the ability to welcome or respect or tolerate—to an undefined, but implied, “we.” We made the case that when diversity is understood not in an abstract sense, but in its actual context—referring to the racial reality of society structured by white supremacy—it becomes much clearer that this way of doing race affirms the centrality of whiteness and its

ability to obscure racial inequality. We argued that ideas about “different” cultures, languages, and values simply could not be separated from a societal context in which a white majority occupies a place of higher power, prestige, and social esteem.

I am suggesting that the phenomena of cultural blindness and normativity, made manifest in a race-specific analysis, too often hold for multiculturalism itself. They apply, in short, to all forms of social and cultural difference, not just race. This is not my argument or insight alone. Such analyses and interpretations are beginning to take hold in the literature. For example, Meghan Burke’s (2012) in-depth interviews and fieldwork with residents active in three racially diverse Chicago neighborhoods show how the abstract racial discourse of white residents who genuinely wish to celebrate diversity still struggle to escape the dominant ideology of color blindness in communities where whites hold disproportionate decision-making power and influence. Burke argues that this kind of race talk unintentionally recreates a white habitus, preserving the comforts and privileges attached to whiteness despite their pro-diversity stance. Moreover, she uses the notion of cultural ambivalence to capture a deep commitment to racial diversity in the abstract, but reliance on color-blind ideologies to inform specific patterns of action. Burke’s research demonstrates how the tensions between color blindness and ideals of diversity in awkward combination with the realities of privilege and inequality actually complicate the quest for equality and social justice—and, I might add in the context of this article, multiculturalism itself—in America today.

A related, race-based critique of multiculturalism comes from Alana Lentin and Gavan Titley (2011). Based upon European examples and evidence, they argue that multiculturalism has actually “become a central site for coded debates about belonging, race, legitimacy, and social futures in a globalized, neoliberal era” (Lentin and Titley 2011: 4) Lentin and Titley explain, as I summarized in a recent review, how in a supposedly postracial, color-blind era, much public talk about difference and multiculturalism reduces problems of migrant incorporation and mobility (or lack thereof) to questions of immigrant “culture” that both minimize the challenges of maintaining a truly multicultural society and reduce its inherent problems to the agency and choice of otherwise marginalized, disempowered groups. In other words, it blames migrants themselves for whatever difficulties and shortcomings they experience in their new countries and cultures. Lentin and Titley also criticize the conventional attack on multiculturalism for its misplaced emphasis on tolerance and excessive catering to group separatism, which, among other things, misses the conditions of social and economic inequality that should accompany concerns about solidarity. They also suggest that distinctions between “good diversity” and “bad diversity” actually serve to produce and reinforce subtler, new commonsense distinctions and hierarchies.

An even more sustained, empirically grounded critique comes from Ellen Berrey’s (2015) research on diversity programs and policies that were operationalized in different institutional domains and social settings—namely, the Rogers Park neighborhood in Chicago, the University of Michigan, and a Fortune 500 company. Berrey demonstrates that we are in the middle of a new, post-Civil Rights era where old discourses and frames about inequality, fairness, and rights (not to mention discrimination and

equal protection) are giving way to new, more multicultural approaches that privilege identity, difference, and diversity. Berrey's principal contribution is to show that while these new discourses and programs are quite popular and appear progressive, this multicultural frame has often done more to muddle or confuse social issues and policy approaches to social inequality, especially regarding those that involve race. Even worse, they often get co-opted, or as Omi and Winant (2015) might put it, "rearticulated" by interests or groups far more reformist or even reactionary than we might have imagined or hoped.

These race-based critiques provide a very important, alternative perspective on the positive and often unqualified idealization of diversity that typically dominates the cultural discourse and political practice of contemporary multiculturalism. And yet, for all of the power of these critiques, race critical research and theory (and I include myself here) has not always fully grasped what I think is the other aspect of the challenge of race, or any form of social difference or cultural diversity for that matter, in a multiculturalist frame: the embrace of difference, the celebration of diversity, and the prime defense of identity and culture for aggrieved populations and communities. Indeed, if there is one social fact that stands out about race (and ethnicity) in the post-Civil Rights period, it is that even members of variously disadvantaged and aggrieved populations see value, meaning, and identity—in a word, authenticity—in the groups and categories that have often also been the source of their marginalization and stigmatization (Taylor 1992).

The embrace of racial pluralism obviously requires a far more complicated discussion and analysis than I can formulate here. For example, it can be a political strategy as much as an end in itself, and the language of ethnicity might serve better for some of these claims (for a discussion, see Cornell and Hartmann 2007). However, I believe the existence of such claims and aspirations provides an important context for some of the other, more cross-cutting findings about race that have also emerged in our American Mosaic research.

For example, in a recent analysis (Manning, Hartmann, and Gerteis n.d.), we have explored the multifaceted and uneven beliefs and commitments that compose color blindness as an ideology and frame. On the one hand, many of the conflicted, contradictory elements and effects detailed above have appeared: how color-blind ideals can mask the realities of racial inequality, minimize racism, and misunderstand the mechanisms of reproduction. On the other hand, we also found that color-blind ideals and commitments are held not just by privileged, white Americans but also by one of the groups often thought to be compromised and oppressed by these notions: African Americans. Moreover, we also discovered that this ideology is, for both Anglo and African Americans, composed of elements that also speak to the hopes, aspirations, and expectations of Americans for a better, more equitable racial order, one where racial differences (if not ethnic ones) are truly set aside and overcome.

Similarly, in an article published in *TSQ* comparing American attitudes about race and religion (Hartmann et al. 2011), our analysis of Mosaic survey data revealed far

more parallels and overlaps in how Americans saw both the challenges and benefits of these two, seemingly different and distinct forms of social difference than conventional accounts would predict. Essentially, it appears Americans believe that race brings (or has the potential to bring) the civic benefits often associated with religious pluralism, while religious differences are understood to pose many of the social challenges typically connected with race. Framed in this way, understandings of racial difference and diversity would seem to have much in common with the discourse of religious identity and pluralism that is the focus of other contributions to this special symposium (see also Edgell and Tranby 2010).

All of this is to suggest, once again, that what is revealed in the conflicted and deeply racialized discourse about diversity in the United States is both the promise and peril of multicultural movements and projects. Multiculturalism embodies our highest ideals and our biggest problems, our most embedded challenges, and our most persistent and unresolved cultural commitments, tensions, and ambivalences.

CONCLUSION: ON CONDITIONS, AMBIVALENCE, AND AMBIGUITY

A full analysis of all the historical forces and cultural conditions that mark and define multiculturalism as a movement and project for thinking about diversity in contemporary societies as distinct from other, earlier modes of understanding and dealing with difference is a massive and still far-from-finished project. The minority rights revolution (Skrentny 2002); the evolution of racial politics and attitudes in the post-Civil Rights era (Bobo and Charles 2009; Omi and Winant 2015); the proliferation of migration, internationalization, and globalization (Kymlicka 2007); the emergence of neoliberalism (Harvey 2005; Goldberg 2009); the continued persistence and even, in some respects, accentuation, of social and racial inequities and injustices (Carter and Reardon 2014): these are all key historical precursors to and current conditions of the social phenomena we associate with multiculturalism. Yet, my claim and intended contribution in this article has been somewhat more basic or fundamental. It is that in many ways multiculturalism is not that new. In fact, it may be viewed as just the most recent manifestation of cultural pluralism identified by Horace Kallen (1924) at the beginning of the previous century. Our challenge, then, is to grasp the underlying tensions and complexities of liberal democratic thought and practice as they are played out in these new conditions. These tensions and ambiguities are deeply structured in the culture, and intensified, in the United States at least, because of the pervasive power and peculiarity of race.

Discussing deeply contested issues in American political discourse such as affirmative action a little over two decades ago, William Gamson (1992) suggested that it was not so much that individuals from different backgrounds are divided against each other in the United States (though there was and is much of that), but rather that Americans are all somewhat torn and divided within themselves. In short, American ideas and ideals are conflicted, our discourse itself somewhat divided. A similar

argument can be made about multiculturalism as embodied in talk and thought about diversity in the United States.

The American Mosaic studies I have highlighted here reveal, I think, deep ambivalence, tension, and ambiguity in American understandings of difference and diversity. These complications are more than a matter of personal choice or individual agency. They are built into the structure of the discourse itself, into the ways Americans recognize both the strengths and complications, the costs and benefits in social difference. Multiculturalism seems conflicted and profoundly ambivalent—both upbeat and concerned, cosmopolitan and assimilationist, individualist and collectivist—precisely because it is composed of complexities and trade-offs, ambitions and ideals, more so than many critics have allowed. And the way in which race shapes and determines so much of this—overdetermines it, in many ways—serves to further expose and indeed heighten these ambivalences and contradictions.

It is in this sense that I have tried—following Peter Kivisto's lead—to suggest that multiculturalism is not only *at* a crossroads in the United States, but is itself a crossroads, a cultural space where, in the current historical moment, so many of our conflicting impulses and ideals about solidarity, belonging, and equality come together in such crosscutting, complicated ways. Grasping this cultural fact solves none of the actual, practical problems posed by diversity, any more than it makes good on the promise and potential of a new, more pluralist, differentiated, and expanded vision of social solidarity. However, it is an important first step in learning what it means to really deal with diversity and live with one another in the contemporary, interconnected world.

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