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# CHANGING MULTICULTURALISM

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## INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS MULTICULTURALISM?

Multiculturalism means everything and at the same time nothing. It has been used and misused so often and for so many conflicting reasons and agendas that no one at the end of the twentieth century can speak of multiculturalism or multicultural education without specifically delineating what he or she means or does not mean. In a book entitled *Changing Multiculturalism*, this introductory chapter attempts simply to accomplish this one objective: clarifying our meaning of multiculturalism. While we cannot be sure of what individuals are suggesting when they employ the term multiculturalism, we can reasonably guess that they are alluding to at least one of the following issues: race, socio-economic class, gender, language, culture, sexual preference or disability. While the term is used more in relation to race, it is commonly extended to other categories of diversity. In public conversation, multiculturalism is a term used as a code word for race, much in the way that 'inner-city issues' signifies that race is the topic being referenced. Among many conservatives multiculturalism is a term of derision, deployed to represent a variety of challenges to the traditional European and male orientation of the educational canon.

Used as a goal, a concept, an attitude, a strategy and a value, multiculturalism has emerged as the eye of a social storm swirling around the demographic changes that are occurring in Western societies. Western nations, including the USA, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, have experienced immigration and various movements of racial and gender awareness that have forced them to confront questions concerning the ways they define themselves and other social institutions. In the process serious questions have been raised in relation to the degree to which such nations are in reality open and democratic societies. The result of these upheavals

has been dramatic: no longer can the West speak with unexamined confidence about its cultural nature, its values and its mission. Indeed, in this new social situation Western societies have been forced to confront the cultural contradictions that refuse to be swept under the rug. In this context many Westerners are arriving at the conclusion that like it or not they live in multicultural societies. Thus, we argue, that they cannot choose to believe in or not believe in the concept of multiculturalism. From our perspective multiculturalism is not something one believes in or agrees with, it simply is. Multiculturalism is a condition of the end-of-the-century Western life we live in multicultural societies. We can respond to this reality in different ways, but the reality remains no matter how we might choose to respond to it.

Multiculturalism, as used in this book, involves the nature of this response. As we will delineate, there are numerous ways to respond to this racial, socio-economic class, gender, language, culture, sexual preference and disability-related diversity. Generally speaking, this response involves the formulation of competing definitions of the social world that correspond to particular social, political and economic interests. Thus, power relations play an important role in helping to shape the way individuals, organizations, groups and institutions react to the reality of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism education involves the nature of this response in educational contexts – in *Changing Multiculturalism* such contexts include both school and out-of-school cultural locales. Categorizing educational approaches to multiculturalism is nothing new, as scholars have developed typologies for at least twenty years. Christine Sleeter and Carl Grant (1994) have reviewed the history of such delineations and no need exists to repeat it here. Suffice it to say that as they focused on different issues, adopted competing values, operated from different social positions or employed conflicting theoretical models, analysts classified forms of multicultural education in very different ways (Carby 1992; Perry and Fraser 1993; Swartz 1993). While we recognize the radical importance of the various forms of diversity in our critical vision of multiculturalism, we delimit our focus in this book to issues of race, class and gender diversity. In no way should this be taken as a dismissal of other forms of diversity not included in this triad.

While we make no claim to offer a final and complete delineation of multicultural education – we agree with Ellen Swartz (1993) that all delineations are tentative and must be constantly reformulated and reconceptualized in light of changing conditions – this book speculates about what a democratic multiculturalism concerned with social justice and community-building might look like at the end of the twentieth century. We will be sure to provide an update on such a portrait in light of the social changes we experience in the first few years of the twenty-first century. As we understand it, the current debate about the multicultural nature of Western societies encompasses a set of identifiable positions. Influenced by Peter McLaren's (1994b)

categorization of multicultural positions, we lay out five types of multiculturalism – number five being what we describe as a critical multiculturalism. Chapters 2–9 proceed to characterize this critical category. Obviously, the categorizations we present are designed heuristically to promote understanding of the issues at hand. In the reality of the lived world such categories rarely appear in the 'purity' implied here, as they blend and blur, undermining any effort to impose theoretical order.

### Conservative multiculturalism/monoculturalism

In many ways, conservative multiculturalism or monoculturalism (the belief in the superiority of Western patriarchal culture) at the end of the twentieth century is a form of neo-colonialism – a new embrace of the colonialist tradition of white male supremacy. Though most adherents to this position attempt to protect themselves against accusations of racism, sexism or class bias, they are quick to blame those who fall outside the boundaries of the white, male, middle/upper-middle class for their own problems. Everyone, advocates of a conservative multiculturalism maintain, would be better off if they could be exposed to the glories of Western Civilization. Under this mantle, Manifest Destiny, political and economic imperialism and Christian missions to the heathen have marched. From this colonial mind-set Africans and indigenous peoples have been categorized as lower types of human beings devoid of the rights and privileges of the higher (European) types. In its new monoculturalist manifestation the neo-colonists of whiteness have attacked the liberation movements of the 1960s and their concerns with the ravages of racism, sexism and class bias. In this context monoculturalists have fought what they perceive as multiculturalist attacks on Western identity. Ignoring progressive concerns with social injustice and the suffering of marginalized groups in schools and other social institutions, conservatives have targeted multiculturalism as an enemy from within.

Individuals who accept the neo-colonial way of seeing will often view the children of the non-white and poor as deprived. A wide variety of opinions may exist as to the cause of the deprivation – is it a cultural or a genetic phenomenon? – but within monoculturalist circles most agree that non-whites and the poor are inferior to individuals from the white middle or upper-middle class. The expressions of this inferiority are rarely stated overtly in public, but surface in proclamations about family values and what constitutes excellence. In this context family values and excellence become racial and class codes for justifying the oppression of the marginalized: because they allegedly don't have family values many non-whites and poor people fail to succeed; an excellent school is one that is often predominantly white and middle class. Thus, a central feature of monoculturalism or a

conservative multiculturalism involves the effort to assimilate everyone who is capable of assimilation to a white, middle-class standard. Many colonized peoples have seen this assimilationism as a violent effort to destroy the cultures of ethnic groups and render them politically powerless. This ideology of the melting pot never operated smoothly even for non-white people who wanted to melt – no matter how much they tried to assimilate, they were still marginalized on the basis of their colour. At its best this monoculturalist assimilationist impulse has consistently worked to erase the voices of those who on the basis of their race, class, and gender are oppressed (Sleeter and Grant 1994; Taxel 1994; McLaren 1996; Giroux 1997).

In monoculturalist education's deprivation model problems are located within the student – a viewpoint that moves our awareness away from the reality of poverty, sexism and racism and their effects on the educational process. The focus of any cultural inquiry in a monoculturalist model involves exploring the problems caused by social diversity. White supremacy, patriarchy or class elitism do not exist in this construction and, as a result, no need exists for individuals from the dominant culture to examine the production of their own consciousness or the nature of their white, male or class privilege. Males, for example, do not have to consider their complicity in the patriarchal marginalization of women or examine the competitiveness, depersonalization and violence that many times accompany patriarchal domination. Since Western societies are superior to all others, the last thing needed is widespread reform. Thus, the path we need to avoid involves the nurturing of social differences connected to language, worldview, culture or customs. Such differences are divisive, monoculturalists argue, and the only way to build a functional society is through consensus. This consensus model promotes the concept of a 'common culture' that is sanctified in a way that protects it from questions about its political shortcomings and democratic failures. The consensus and harmony implied by the appeal to the common culture is a manifestation of the cultural insulation of members of the dominant culture who do not have to experience the sting of oppression as a regular part of their everyday lives.

As they promote their notion of a common culture, conservative multiculturalists typically ignore the fact that a common culture where all social groups participate equally has never existed in the West. Because race, class and gender groups who fell outside the dominant cultural norm were relegated to a culture of silence, monoculturalists have confused their silence for concurrence with the prevailing norms. Indeed, a manifestation of the monoculturalists' cultural location and access to power involves their ability to define what constitutes the so-called common culture. Who determines who falls inside and outside the boundaries of the common culture? Who delineates the correct interpretation of the history of Western civilization?

Who dictates what is included in the educational curriculum? The monoculturalists' power to provide answers to these and other questions provides insights into the larger conservative project of redefining what is meant by the terms, democracy, egalitarianism and the common good. Michael Apple (1996) heightens our awareness of the importance of what is happening in this context when he maintains that the conservatives' redefinition of political common sense is one of the largest public re-education projects of the twentieth century. The success it has achieved has been based on the ability of the monocultural advocates to peddle the common culture argument as a form of common sense that is intimately connected to the way people make meaning and live their everyday lives.

The re-education project which Apple describes is an international effort to rewrite history and re-create public memory in a manner that justifies educational, social and political policies that perpetuate the growing inequality of Western societies. Such policies are grounded on an effort to protect an uninhibited free market economics that is allowed to harm individuals – the non-white and poor in particular – in the name of economic efficiency. Economic policies emanating from the free market model deem any form of government aid to the poor as harmful to the economic health of the larger society. At the same time, however, governments advocating such regressive policies have delegated billions of dollars to the war against Iraq and more than 500 billion dollars to bail out corrupt bankers. Individuals are learning to accept the supreme importance of a market economy, the absurdity of egalitarian programmes, and the necessity of rolling back democracy in the informal curriculum (out-of-school education or cultural pedagogy) as well as the formal curriculum (in-school education) of the monoculturalists. The curriculum has helped right-wing politicians to wrestle power away from liberal and labour coalitions who were much more willing to work with liberationist movements emerging in the 1960s and 1970s. As a result of their victories, conservative multiculturalists have rejected any need to work with such organizations, effectively shutting the marginalized out of any role in the political domain of Western societies (Fiske 1993; Macedo 1994; McLaren 1994a; Sleeter and Grant 1994; Jones 1995; Yudice 1995; Giroux 1997a).

The monoculturalist view of the purpose of schooling, of course, is not new, as American schools of the nineteenth century viewed themselves as agents of the Americanization of deficient immigrant children. Monoculturalists of the late twentieth century might benefit from the understanding that the attempt to teach a monolithic Anglo worldview in the nineteenth century was unsuccessful. Alienated from their parents and uncomfortable in the public schools, immigrant children resisted the monocultural curriculum by dropping out en masse – most never completed elementary school. Erasing such knowledge from the public memory, contemporary

monoculturalists paint a portrait of depraved blacks and Latinos in need of the civilizing influence of an assimilationist education that is disturbingly similar to the nineteenth-century portrait of dangerous Irish, Jewish and Italian immigrants. Indeed, efforts such as ours to point out the limitations and problematic assumptions of monoculturalism are portrayed by conservatives as a form of racism – a new racism directed against whites and males in particular. Such an argument is possible only if structural and institutional aspects of race, class and gender oppression are ignored. Monoculturalists must dismiss power relations between different groups, their relative access to job opportunities and their relationships to socio-economic gatekeepers; for example, those who hire, promote, admit and punish individuals in workplaces and academic institutions.

In this decontextualized manner monoculturalists continue with renewed vigour their historical attempt to adjust poor and non-white students to an unjust society. Eliciting the complicity of some marginalized students, parents and community members by the argument that assimilation will open doors of economic opportunity, conservative multiculturalists offer a devil's pact where marginalized students sign over their cultural heritage for a chance at socio-economic mobility. Education in this conception has nothing to do with civic responsibility and social justice, as those who challenge unequal opportunity are labelled unpatriotic whiners and complainers. As a group that speaks often of its fear that pluralistic and critical forms of multiculturalism are divisive, are tearing apart the social fabric, it is ironic that monoculturalists employ the binary opposition of 'we' and 'they' so often. In the dualistic monocultural universe 'we' are the good citizens, the virtuous, the civic-minded, homogeneous individuals who must defend the Euro-fortress against a group of heterogeneous 'others'. 'They' are shiftless and inferior burdens to society who once may have been victims of discrimination but are no longer (Franklin and Heath 1992; McLaren 1994b; Allison 1995; Gresson 1995; Apple 1996; Giroux and Searles 1996).

The charge of divisiveness against pluralist and critical multiculturalism drew blood in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as monoculturalists such as Diane Ravitch and Arthur Schlesinger Jr implicitly accepted the deficiency model and publicly called for assimilation into the common culture. Tacit in the assimilationist argument is the tenet that before the advent of multiculturalism schools and universities were spaces where objective teachers and scholars uninterested in the political affairs of the day pursued and produced truth. These disinterested institutions, as the monoculturalists frame the story, were undermined by radical multiculturalists who in their politically correct orthodoxy attempted to destroy what Western scholars had worked so hard to build. Never mentioned in this construction is the racism, class bias, gender bias, anti-Semitism and other exclusionary

practices that marked the mythical glory days of schools and universities. Rarely referenced are the demeaning textbook portrayals of non-whites that were routinely and uncritically taught to students. Non-whites and women who reject the assimilationist, deficiency, common cultural model of the monoculturalists are portrayed as unreasonable separatists, ethnocentrics and sometimes even as the new racists.

A central feature of the monoculturalist construction of the traditional consensus in Western societies involves fanning the white fear of non-whites. As blacks learn about racism and the historical injustice perpetrated against them in divisive multiculturalist classrooms, they will become so enraged that they will begin to attack white people indiscriminately. Such an argument could gain credence and plausibility only in a society where people of African descent were viewed as naturally violent. It is in this history of fear that the charge of racial separatism gains its meaning and symbolic power in the public conversation about multiculturalism. Any programme or curriculum that induces people of African descent to group themselves together in opposition to white policies must be squashed in the name of 'our' mutual safety as white people. Such fear does not allow many whites to understand separation as a manifestation of resistance to an increasing disparity of the distribution of resources and new forms of white racism towards non-whites in the past 25 years. From our perspective the amazing aspect of racial relations in late twentieth-century Western societies is the degree to which blacks, Latinos, Asians and indigenous peoples have not chosen separatist routes. Above all, the monoculturalists refuse to acknowledge that the best way to bring about social unity (and we're not so sure such unity is always desirable) in the West is not through the squelching of minority, feminine and poor people's voices but is instead through the exposure and eradication of various forms of racism, sexism and class bias found within the culture (Frankenberg 1993; Macedo 1994; Sleeter and Grant 1994; Taxel 1994).

Thus, we argue throughout this book that the monoculturalist position can be understood in terms of power relations. Indeed, monoculturalism in the form that it has taken over the past two or three decades of the twentieth century exists as a reaction to the growing clout of non-whites and women in education and other institutions as a result of the Civil Rights movement and the women's movement. After the 1960s white patriarchal power could no longer silence those who fell outside its boundaries as effectively as it once had. Thus, the disuniting impulse so often referenced by monoculturalists is not a result of the hate-generating work of critical multiculturalists but simply an understandable emergence of previously silenced cultural voices speaking out against the exclusionary practices of the dominant culture. The critical multiculturalist objective of understanding race, class and gender power relations in the larger quest for social justice is not,

as Arthur Schlesinger Jr puts it, an activity that feeds prejudices and intensifies antagonisms. One can portray the movement for egalitarianism, a democratic notion of excellence and social justice as a form of hate mongering, only if one is attempting to protect the privilege of a powerful group. Whenever cultural hegemony is threatened, dominant groups tend to respond in highly defensive and protective ways.

In the context provided by an understanding of this defence of dominant power, it is much easier to make sense of how monoculturalists have represented the racial dynamics of Western societies. Monoculturalists have been quite successful in their efforts to portray critical multiculturalists as the bad guys – authoritarian, anti-democratic, ideologues who want to impose an extremist agenda on Western societies. Such representations show up frequently in higher education in respect of those who have championed women's and various forms of ethnic and labour studies. Advocates of black studies, for example, have for almost three decades faced charges that they are purveyors of prejudice and bigotry who want to indoctrinate students with half-truths and unadulterated lies about the history of Africa and the African diaspora. Black studies has faced charges of contaminating the scholarship of higher education, in the process destroying the standards we (whites) had worked so hard to establish. Such accusations refuse to acknowledge the high quality, innovative scholarship that has emerged in black studies, chicano studies and indigenous studies departments. In the initial pages of Allan Bloom's monoculturalist *The Closing of the American Mind*, the author describes the development of a black studies programme at Cornell as if Western civilization had just been overrun by the Vandals. His work is typical of monoculturalist mourning over the multiculturalist barbarians sacking the gates of white male canonical privilege (Baker 1993; Perry and Fraser 1993; Macedo 1994; Taxel 1994).

The power dynamic implicit in the monoculturalist attack also involves who has the clout to shape the cultural imagination of the West. Critical multiculturalism has made it clear that it wants Western people to see their culture from the perspectives of a variety of groups who live both inside and outside its traditional boundaries. What does Western culture look like from the East; from Africa; from the perspectives of peoples of African descent living inside its borders; from indigenous peoples; from the poor? Questions concerning the cultural imagination cannot be separated from the cultural signifiers that inscribe popular cultural expression. The academic tradition in which we operate, critical pedagogy, is fervently concerned with questions of cultural pedagogy. Cultural pedagogy refers to the idea that education takes place and consciousness is constructed in a variety of social sites, including but not limited to schooling. Our work as cultural and educational scholars, we believe, demands that we examine both school and the cultural pedagogy that takes place outside of school if we are to make sense of race,

class and gender and their relation to the socio-educational process at the end of the twentieth century. We will expand this discussion of cultural pedagogy in Chapter 2 as we begin a detailed analysis of critical multiculturalism.

In the context of monoculturalism it is important to note how important cultural pedagogy has become in the promotion of both conservative world views and understandings of self *vis-à-vis* other. Our delineation of a critical multiculturalism is extremely interested in uncovering the pedagogical dynamics of television shows, movies, video games, popular music etc. Not only, for example, did *Amos 'n' Andy* reflect popular views of African Americans, it also helped construct popular perspectives. Looking back we can see that in a 1950s sitcom such as *Amos 'n' Andy* or *The Jack Benny Show* the social world was depicted from a white perspective. Many white viewers experienced comforting reassurance in the reminders of black subservience and white supremacy included in the programmes. While such racial ideologies may be relatively easy to discern in popular cultural productions of a half century ago, viewers may encounter more difficulty reading the racial pedagogies in contemporary productions (Fiske 1993; Gray 1995; Grossberg 1995).

Since monoculturalists initiated their defence of Western traditions and white patriarchy, a variety of popular cultural products have appeared that implicitly or explicitly take up the cause of conservative multiculturalism. We can see this project in movies such as Jim Carrey's 1995 follow-up to his *Ace Ventura* film – *Ace Ventura: When Nature Calls*. Few observers even winced when Carrey portrayed Africans in a manner more primitive than in any 1930s Tarzan movie. *Ace Ventura's* Africans are superstitious, fat, grotesque objects of ridicule who take part in comical religious rituals. In pursuit of comedy, Carrey casually 'deflowers' the young African princess in a manner reminiscent of slavemaster forebears who had their way with their slave women. None of this seems to be problematic to American viewing audiences, who made it a giant revenue producer for Hollywood. As with *Amos 'n' Andy*, white audiences were comfortably reassured by the reminders of black subservience and white supremacy inscribed in the movie. Aaron Gresson (1996) insightfully describes such popular cultural productions as part of a larger 'call back to whiteness' or 'recovery of white supremacy'. Gresson's call back and recovery are inseparable from what we have referred to as the monoculturalist defence of Western cultures.

Using the movie *Forrest Gump* as a popular cultural manifestation of the rhetoric of the recovery of white supremacy, Gresson convincingly delineates the various racialized moments of the film, including: Gump's first human encounter taking place with a black woman wearing white shoes; the revelation that Gump is the namesake of Ku Klux Klan founder Nathan Bedford

Forrest; the depiction of Gump's black friend Bubba's female ancestors as a litany of dark-skinned Aunt Jemimas; the comedic use of Bubba's big lips, a central feature of traditional white caricatures of blacks. Under Gresson's critical eye *Forrest Gump* cannot claim to be race-free, a simple story of virtuous truths that induce individuals to aspire to greater moral heights – there is too much racial inscription to make such a claim.

The movie is also consistent with the monoculturalist effort to revise positive views of the Civil Rights, anti-war and women's movements of the 1960s and early 1970s. Forrest, the movie makes clear, may be slow but he definitely understands right and wrong. Thus, he is able to provide moral insight to the past forty years of American history as a supporter of the mainstream white male view of the 'kooky liberationist movements' that rocked the era. His true love, Jenny, takes the opposite tack, joining student protests against the war, racism, sexism and conventional middle-class behaviour. The point of the morality tale is obvious: Forrest shines as a sports star and becomes a wealthy businessman; Jenny is abused by her Berkeley protester boyfriend, becomes a prostitute and contracts AIDS. The political message is loud enough, but many fail to acknowledge its ideological dynamic even after it is spelled out for them. Cultural pedagogy accomplishes its work in complex and sometimes insidious ways. We will have more to say about monoculturalism or conservative multiculturalism throughout the book.

### Liberal multiculturalism

The liberal version of multiculturalism believes that individuals from diverse race, class and gender groups share a natural equality and a common humanity. An intellectual sameness exists that allows different people to compete equally for resources in a capitalist economy (McLaren 1994b). Liberal multiculturalists often express this concern with sameness by way of the cliché: we are 'dedicated to working toward a world where there is only one race – the human race' (Franklin and Heath 1992: 2–3). This concern with sameness has led liberal multiculturalists to embrace the axiom of colour blindness in the pursuit of their race-related educational and socio-political goals. Liberal notions of feminism maintain that a woman is equal to a man in that she can do most anything he can do. When all is washed away, they believe that people's common humanity will illustrate that men and women and various races and ethnicities share more commonalities than differences. The reason for the inequality of position that exists across these groups involves the lack of social and educational opportunities to compete equally in the economy – not differences characterized by conservatives as deficiencies.

We see liberal notions of multiculturalism in a variety of places: schools, universities, workplaces, labour unions, the political sphere and popular

culture. In the late 1950s, for example, when NBC produced *The Nat King Cole Show*, a liberal notion of multiculturalism moved this programme's presentation of blackness away from its more conservative portrayal of black subservience and comedic inferiority in *Amos 'n' Andy* and *The Jack Benny Show*. Cole was deemed to hold universal appeal as an entertainer and, as such an individual, he was racially 'sanitized' and distanced as much as possible from his own blackness. TV shows of the 1990s have for the most part remained within this liberal colour blindness/ideology of racial sameness motif. Indeed, black characters' acceptability has often been inversely related to their separation from everyday black life. Thus, in this cultural pedagogy of liberal multiculturalism, colour blindness was used to make blacks acceptable by portraying them as culturally invisible. *Amen*, *Homeroom*, *Snoops*, *Family Matters*, *True Colors* and other recent black TV shows depict safe representations of black middle-class family life in the USA, rarely presenting African American ways of seeing as different or challenging perspectives on the American social world. Characters in these shows are just regular people like all the rest of us, who rarely are affected by the fact that they are non-white. The problems they encounter are individual problems, not social or structural difficulties that involve questions of power (Gray 1995; Haymes 1995).

Such liberal ideological dynamics are grounded on an allegedly neutral and universal process of consciousness construction that is unaffected by racial, class and gender differences. These dynamics of difference are erased by the ideological appeal of consensus and similarity. Our critical critique of liberal multiculturalism is not meant to imply that we do not see connections between human beings that exist across lines of race, class, gender and other cultural features. Our worry is that an exclusive concern with similarity will undermine the democratic and justice-centred attempt to understand the ways that race, class and gender mediate and structure experiences for both the privileged and the oppressed. *The Cosby Show* offers an insightful example of a liberal cultural pedagogical repression of the ways race mediates and structures experience in pursuit of the larger goals of similarity and unity. Cosby erased the issues that concern/plague/oppress many African Americans in an effort to teach a warm and fuzzy, feel-good lesson on multicultural unity and racial accord. Even the basic idea that our racialized position shapes the way we see the world was out of bounds for *The Cosby Show* – the liberal producers were just not interested in presenting different (not to mention subjugated) ways of perceiving the culture. Thus, the unexamined sameness of liberal multiculturalism allows educators and cultural producers to speak the language of diversity but to normalize Eurocentric culture as the tacit norm everyone references. Like the conservatives, the liberal multicultural curriculum still assimilates to white male standards.

Liberal multiculturalism when all is said and done still positions multiculturalism as a problem that must be solved. Yet at the same time it has been reluctant to address racism, sexism and class bias or to engage in a critical analysis of power asymmetries. Speaking a language of democracy and ethics but failing to ground such issues on the recognition that power is distributed unequally, liberal multiculturalism often neglects to focus on forces that undermine democratic goals. In the same way, liberal social analysts and educators fail to understand that power wielders – especially from the corporate world – have gained unprecedented access to the construction of individual consciousness and identity. At the end of the twentieth century, ideological and dominant cultural discursive power holds an exaggerated impact on the production of subjectivity. By ignoring the webs of power in which race, class and gender operate, liberal multiculturalism ends up touting a human relations curriculum that conflates white racism toward blacks with black racism toward whites. Such a stance fails to account for racial power relations that make white racism far more consequential than black racism. In late twentieth-century Western societies whites control far more resources and job hiring and promoting prerogatives than blacks. It makes little difference if blacks hate whites in this context – but when whites hate blacks, they can refuse to hire them or promote them (Giroux 1988, 1997a; Carlson 1991; Gergen 1991; Perry and Fraser 1993; McLaren 1994a; Alcott 1995; Gray 1995).

Liberal political naiveté emanates from the modernist Cartesian-Newtonian belief that social and educational analysis can be abstracted from everyday power relations. For example, Daniel Liston and Kenneth Zeichner in the name of critical pedagogy argue that the distinction between the teacher as educator and the teacher as political activist must be maintained. In the classroom, they argue, the teacher is first and foremost an educator. In the everyday common-sense conversation this is a persuasive argument, implying as it does that teachers should not use the classroom to 'shove' their political opinions down their students' throats. Of course, Liston and Zeichner maintain that the world outside the classroom is the venue for political crusading. But like other liberal educators, Liston and Zeichner miss an important point: the attempt to separate education and politics is not so simple. How is a teacher to choose a textbook or how is he or she to decide what knowledge to teach? These are obvious political decisions that must be made on a daily basis in the classroom.

Liston and Zeichner call for educators to help students find their voices and identities, but voices and identities are constructed by incorporating and rejecting a multiplicity of competing ideological constructions. Which ones do teachers encourage? Which ones do they discourage? These are political decisions. Liston and Zeichner contend that teachers should enable students to acquire and critically examine moral beliefs. This must take place before

students engage in politically transformative acts. Like weathervanes, such arguments play well to the popular winds with their glorification of neutrality. Political animals who believe that presidents appoint Supreme Court justices who are neutral, who will refrain from letting their political opinions 'taint' their judicial rulings, will accept the separation of moral belief from political action. Such a separation reflects a hyper-rationalization of politics that represents the political as a very narrow terrain which never overlaps the moral and ethical (Liston and Zeichner 1988). How can the moral and the political be separated? Wasn't the moral commitment to justice the basis of the political work of a Mohandas Gandhi or a Martin Luther King Jr, or a Susan B. Anthony? moral wave political

As liberal multiculturalism engages in this pseudo-depoliticization, it allows itself to be co-opted for hegemonic objectives. The attempt of multicultural educators to understand and appreciate other societies can be used as a tool for the economic conquest of those societies. Godfrey Franklin and Inez Heath's words provide chilly insights into power's co-option of multicultural education:

Those who are resolved towards making multicultural education a political issue, are doing a great disservice to our nation in maintaining our place as a world leader. The military has led in this effort after its rude awakening during World War I. Never was this more evident than during the Vietnam War. Educators who are working in various levels and setting in public schools, realize the need for competent policy makers who have a well developed knowledge base in multiculturalism as it pertains to the schools for which the curriculum is being developed, and from which our future leaders will come.

(Franklin and Heath 1992: 3)

Such an attempt to depoliticize is obviously a smoke screen for a more acceptable political agenda – more acceptable to the powers that be. Such ideological camouflage can take place only in a social or educational venue where questions of democracy combined with race, class and gender are viewed in isolation from history. Such a decontextualized perspective insists that multicultural educators can bring about an unspecified positive change without either clarifying the nature of the change or understanding the historical, social and epistemological dimensions of all educational metamorphosis. Viewing liberal multicultural programmes and cultural production, one is struck by the fact that oppression and inequality are virtually invisible, that the assimilationist goal is unchallenged. When oppression, inequality and questions concerning assimilation present themselves, they seem to function at the level of individual circumstances – not as larger social issues. Returning briefly to *The Cosby Show* as an example of liberal multicultural cultural



pedagogy, producers were stubbornly resistant to any mention of the socioeconomic injustice faced by literally millions of African Americans.

These depoliticization/decontextualization impulses of liberal multiculturalism can be understood only when we trace the modernist umbilical cord that connects it to the European Enlightenment, the Age of Reason. Liberalism has made a fetish of proper process, thus abstracting the lived worlds of individuals and the consequences of particular results from the realm of the political. Complex relations of power and human suffering get lost amidst the celebration of individualism and citizenship. As it focuses on the abstract concept of the fairness of the rules that govern a society, it emphasizes an education for rationality removed from time, place or the experience of individuals. In other words, as liberalism hyperrationalizes process, it disregards the social traditions that individuals and groups bring to schools, community organizations or labour unions. Liberalism's modernist faith that reason and reason alone will lead to a just society, Dennis Carlson (1991) carefully argues, squashes its attempt to connect itself with particular political movements and the ways individuals have framed their personal relationships to these movements. Such relationships have relied little on abstract principles and more on our emotional loyalties. Liberals have assumed that such emotional ties, related as they are to the highly subjective nature of consciousness, are not worthy investments. Thus, to liberals, the modes of thinking that emerge from our subjective lived experience, from the perspectives we gain from one particular position in the web of reality or from the values we develop through experience are too contingent, too tainted by feeling.

The failures of liberalism in general and liberal multiculturalism in particular involve liberal analysts' inability to identify the underside of its relationship to modernist hyperrationality. Indeed, the cult of the expert has grown in a liberal soil. Social engineering finds some of its most important historical roots in university departments of sociology, with their liberal visions of the good life. In the past thirty years this liberal vision has fallen into disrepute around the world. The brief challenge to professional authority of the late 1960s was as much anti-liberal as it was anti-conservative. One of the keys to understanding the success of right-wing movements of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s was the right-wing co-option of the anti-authority rhetoric of the 1960s counterculture, translating it into the anti-government rhetoric of Reagan, Bush, Gingrich, Thatcher and Major and the anti-educational expert rhetoric of William Bennett and Keith Joseph. They were able to portray the domain of the expert as a liberal domain. If critical multiculturalism is to be successful in its effort to challenge the various manifestations of white supremacy, class elitism and patriarchy, it will have to expose liberal multiculturalism's rationalistic blindness to the plethora of ways the non-white, the poor and women are dominated in contemporary

Western culture (Bourricaud 1979; Van den Berg and Nicholson 1987; Tripp 1988; Gray 1995).

### Pluralist multiculturalism

More than any other of our forms of multiculturalism, pluralist multiculturalism has become the mainstream articulation of multiculturalism. When analysts speak of 'multiculturalism' and 'multicultural education' (with important exceptions), pluralist multiculturalism is often what they have in mind. While pluralist multiculturalism shares many features with liberal multiculturalism, the most significant difference between the two typologies involves pluralism's focus on difference as opposed to liberalism's focus on sameness. Still, however, the distinction between the two articulations is not as great as this opposition might imply; both forms still operate at times as forms of regulation, both tend to socio-cultural decontextualization of questions of race and gender, and both fail to problematize whiteness and the Eurocentric norm. Reflecting in the minds of many the evolution of multiculturalism, pluralism typically links race, gender, language, culture, disability and to a lesser degree sexual preference in the larger effort to celebrate human diversity and equal opportunity. In this context there is less emphasis on assimilation – although the relationship between pluralism and assimilation is ever fuzzy – as race and gender differences are explicitly recognized.

As race and gender differences are highlighted, pluralist multiculturalists operate on the assumption that such an emphasis does not disrupt the dominant Western narratives. In the context of the identity politics that have arisen in Western societies since the liberation movements of the 1960s, advocates of pluralism argue that democracy involves not merely the concern with the rights of all citizens but the history and culture of traditionally marginalized groups as well. Pluralism in such a construction becomes a supreme social virtue, especially in a postmodern landscape where globalization and fast and dynamically flexible (post-Fordist) capitalism are perceived as pushing the international community towards a uniform, one-world culture. Diversity becomes intrinsically valuable and is pursued for its own sake to the point that difference is exoticized and fetishized. The curriculum emerging from this position insists that in addition to teaching students that they should not hold prejudices against others, diversity education means learning about the knowledge, values, beliefs and patterns of behaviour that demarcate various groups. In the pluralist curriculum students read literature written by women, Jews, blacks, Latinos and indigenous peoples in addition to the traditional canon. Students also learn that social unfairness exists, as women, for example, who don't follow

OK, this is how, if left to my own

socially dominant sex roles are deemed to be too aggressive or man-like, or men who don't adopt macho ways of being are seen as wimps.

Pluralist multiculturalism in the name of diversity calls for students and other individuals to develop what might be called a 'multicultural literacy'. Such a literacy would allow men and women from mainstream, dominant culture the ability to operate successfully in subcultures and culturally different situations. At the same time, students from culturally different backgrounds would learn to operate in the mainstream culture – an ability, pluralist multiculturalists argue, that is essential in their effort to gain equal economic and educational opportunity. Another pluralist step in this attempt to help women and minority groups to gain equal opportunity involves building pride in one's heritage and cultural differences. Many teachers who operate in this multicultural context begin lessons with classroom discussions of where the families of students came from and which particular traditions they have maintained. In this context teachers help students to make recipe books with family dishes from different cultures or to construct coats of arms that highlight positive features about themselves and their families. Lessons are also designed around the study of particular groups – women, blacks, Latinos, indigenous peoples, Asians, etc. – and often focus on a (litany) of people from a specific group who have attained success and notoriety in one way or another. Slipping into the fallacy of socio-political decontextualization, pluralists often imply in such lessons that anyone can 'make it' by working hard. Pride in one's heritage, unfortunately, is not a panacea for the effects of years of oppression. In this way pluralist multiculturalism promises an emancipation that it can't deliver, as it confuses psychological affirmation with political empowerment (Collins and Sandell 1992; Sleeter 1993; Sleeter and Grant 1994; Gray 1995; Yudice 1995).

From a critical multicultural perspective this 'psychologization' process, this tendency for depoliticization, haunts pluralist multiculturalism. The spectre in question has absorbed such a generous dose of moral relativism that politically grounded action for social justice is subverted before it can begin. In this situation pluralist multiculturalism degenerates into an academic position that may elicit intellectual respectability but leaves the unequal status quo intact. One important dynamic at work in this process involves the position's reluctance (as is the case with liberal multiculturalism) to address socio-economic class. Indeed, pluralist multiculturalism has gained influence at the same time that poverty has been feminized, material circumstances for many blacks from the lower and lower-middle class have alarmingly deteriorated and the economic disparity between rich and poor has intensified. As these tragedies have occurred, pluralist multiculturalism has helped to generate the impression of upward mobility for women and non-whites. Inclusive representations of pluralism have increased to the

extent that many white men (as we will discuss in Chapter 8) feel that they are now the victims of racial and gender discrimination.

The pluralist valorization of difference in combination with global capitalism's commodification of multicultural exotica works to increase the visibility of non-whites. 'Be like Mike', 'Shaq-attacks', the modelling of Iman and Naomi Campbell, 'Oprah at Five', 'Wesley Snipes starring in Passenger 57', etc. have elicited unanticipated reactions from dominant cultural audiences. In this social configuration a new 'multicultural logic' is emerging where greater parity is being achieved in matters of symbolic representation while greater disparity grows in the distribution of wealth. Once again race and ethnicity are private matters with little connection to the structural dynamics of patriarchy, class elitism or white supremacy. Pluralist multicultural logic fails to see the power-grounded relationships among identity construction, cultural representations and struggles over resources. Only when this linkage is accomplished will schools and universities be able to transcend their historical role as the rationalizers for the behaviour of the privileged and the concealers of the ways hegemony operates to shape how the social order evolves (Collins and Sandell 1992; Yudice 1995).

Pluralist multiculturalism engages in its celebration of differences when the most important issues to those who fall outside the white, male and middle class norm often involve powerlessness, violence and poverty. Pluralism viewed outside of the power relations of the social structure becomes a vacuous exercise that fails to explore what difference issues of difference make in various individuals' lives. Issues of cultural diversity are reduced to points of 'cultural enrichment' that can be extolled without upsetting the power of dominant groups. TV shows such as *The Jeffersons*, *What's Happening!!*, *Sanford and Son* and *That's My Mama* embody a pluralist pedagogy in that they specifically delineate race (in these cases, blackness) as an important feature of US society. But as is typically the case in pluralist pedagogy, the social and historical contexts in which racial identity is expressed and made meaningful are avoided. More recent programmes, such as *A Different World*, have addressed important contemporary issues facing black people, but operating in a pluralist multicultural cosmos such shows failed to depict socio-economic and political inequality as anything more than a product of misunderstanding. In the case of *A Different World*, the show transcended pluralist boundaries only when it addressed gender issues such as sexual harassment, violence against women and the tragedy of AIDS.

Pluralist multicultural curricula, both institutional and cultural, have found it very difficult to escape the discursive boundaries of economic mobility, middle-class affluence, family values and, in the case of the USA, America as a nation of immigrants bound together by a common struggle of adversity and ultimate personal victory. In this pluralist racial context a neo-separate-but-equal dynamic develops that views blacks, Latinos, Asians and

other racial/ethnic groups as operating in parallel universes to white people, with Western middle-class values intact. As in liberal multiculturalism, all groups are ideologically alike, except that in pluralist multiculturalism non-whites have a few unique and exotic customs and habits developed in their separate-but-equal experiences. In this post-colonial context – the era following the revolts of the various subjugated groups – pluralist multiculturalism like its liberal cousin can be hegemonically appropriated. Without a critical foundation pluralism's desire to understand the culturally different can help Westerners stay 'on top of things' – to understand the West Africans, for example, so 'we' can open new McDonald's franchises in Gambia.

The hidden hegemonic curriculum of pluralist multiculturalism involves the promotion of a form of cultural tourism that fails to address or understand the harsh realities of race, class and gender subjugation. Having worked on Indian reservations/reserves in both the USA and Canada, we have often witnessed this way of seeing by individuals from the dominant culture. It was not uncommon for white visitors to come to the reservation excited to see authentic Native American culture. After returning from sight-seeing ventures, such visitors would be glum and disappointed, confiding that the Indian community they visited was littered with ramshackle houses and old cars on blocks in front yards. We didn't see any real Indian culture, they concluded. Such tourists, whether on the reservation or in the classroom, are unprepared to deal with contemporary problems resulting from racism, class bias and sexism. As they honour cultural difference outside of a historical, power-literate context, they trivialize the lived realities of exotic others and relegate them to a netherland of political isolation. A multiculturalism that operates within these pluralist boundaries will always serve the status quo as an unthreatening construction that consumes the cuisine, art, architecture and fashion of various subcultures. In many ways pluralist multiculturalism castrates difference, transforming it into a safe diversity.

Such a safe diversity still focuses on 'them', representing Africans, as does Disneyland's *It's a Small World After All*, in terms of loin cloths, tree swinging and wild animals. This ethnicity paradigm induces 'us' to understand how 'they' celebrate their holidays – 'Hanukkah, class, is the Jewish Christmas' – never problematizing the Eurocentric gaze. Such a multiculturalism consistently mistakes European ways of seeing for universal, neutral and objective methods of exploring reality. Such methods insidiously support the status quo, conveying in the process the deficiency of non-Western ways of producing knowledge. Make no mistake, the concept of difference is valorized in this context, but always from the position of whiteness. Whiteness as the unchallenged norm constitutes a neo-colonialism (a new improved postmodern colonialism) that constructs non-whiteness as lesser, deviant and pathological – but concurrently more interesting, more exotic, more natural and, therefore, more commodifiable than the 'white bread' norm.

These ostensibly contradictory dynamics of pluralist multiculturalism have precipitated cognitive dissonance among Westerners from various backgrounds. Yet, despite the contradictions, pluralist multiculturalism has emerged as a form of common sense that is believed to work in the best interests of the common good (Collins and Sandell 1992; Frankenberg 1993; Sleeter 1993; Gray 1995; Yudice 1995).

### Left-essentialist multiculturalism

Essentialism is a complex concept that is commonly understood as the belief that a set of unchanging properties (essences) delineates the construction of a particular category. Of course, our concern here is to analyse essentialism as it relates to the articulation of multiculturalism. While we are critical of various aspects of what we label a left-essentialist multiculturalism, our purpose is not to expose vile examples of essentialism. Rather, we are more concerned with what happens when essentialism intersects with multiculturalism, and what we might learn from analysing the interaction. Our position is that a false binarism has been constructed between essentialism and social constructivism. We argue neither that (from a radical constructivist perspective) the use of race or gender as a category violently subverts the differences within such aggregations nor that (from a rigid essentialist perspective) race and gender are unchanging hereditary and biological categories. One additional caveat before we begin our analysis of left-essentialist multiculturalism: left-essentialist multiculturalism is not the only form of essentialist cultural politics identifiable on the contemporary landscape. A far more pervasive form involves a conservative, white, fundamentalist Christian variety that has often advocated an intolerant form of monoculturalism. Our focus on the problems of left-essentialism should not obscure this understanding (Fuss 1989; di Leonardo 1994).

Left-essentialist multiculturalism often fails to appreciate the historical situatedness of cultural differences. As we examine the concept of identity in this historical context, we come to understand that while extremely important, race and gender are not necessarily the most rudimentary categories of human experiences. Different historical periods produce diverse categories around which identity may be formed. In the nineteenth century, union membership was such a category, while in the 1960s membership in the 'counterculture' was central to identity formation. The salient point made by critical multiculturalists in this context is that since identity formation is socially constructed, it is constantly shifting in relation to unstable discursive and ideological formations. It is this dynamic that essentialist multiculturalists do not recognize – the poststructuralist notion that signifiers and signs and the material circumstances they help to construct can only be temporarily established.

In this context it will come as no surprise to students of a critical multiculturalism that a racially grounded identity is a recent phenomenon, that the meaning of the concept race has profoundly changed from time to time and place to place. At the end of the twentieth century, the meaning of race remains a highly contested question, as many scholars argue that no theory of race can escape complicity with the ideological and social contexts that helped to formulate it. While critical multiculturalists definitely don't want to relinquish the category of race, they do want to explore the 'border' concept that rejects some simple and static notion of ethnic/racial identity. Understanding the eclectic nature of border cultures, critical scholars fracture concretized racial categories, in the process forcing a more complex analysis of cultural identity. Studying those cultural spaces (borderlands) in an increasingly globalized society where cultures collide, analysts are better equipped to avoid the rigidity of essentialist multiculturalism and to explore the possibilities of new notions of identity formation. While in some ways it is problematic, some scholars have resisted essentialism by using the border concept of mestizaje. Mestizaje focuses on the mutually constructed and constantly evolving nature of all racial identities – unlike the dated concept of the melting pot that attempts to assimilate everyone into a white cultural norm, mestizaje emphasizes the way all cultures change in relation to one another (di Leonardo 1994).

The confrontation with essentialist multiculturalism forces us to examine how group members define themselves and their relationship to their groups. Essentialists tend to define themselves and their relation to their groups around their authenticity as a conservative Christian white American (in a right-wing sense) or individual of African heritage who advocates Afrocentrism (in a left-wing sense); left-essentialist multiculturalists often connect difference to a historical past of cultural authenticity where the essence of a particular identity was developed – an essence that transcends the forces of history, social context and power. Such essences can become quite authoritarian when constructed around a romanticized golden era, nationalistic pride and a positionality of purity that denies complications of competing axes of identity and power such as language, sexual preference, religion, gender, race and class. Such factors invariably create diverse modalities of experience for individuals within any essentialized category. After the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, for example, black activists called for TV producers to present authentic images of blacks on their programmes. Many spokesmen argued that questions of gender, sexual preference and class simply should not be raised in the effort to present a united front to white people.

This essentialist tendency for romanticization produces a form of moral superiority among group members that sometimes translates into a form of knowledge production that streamlines the complexity of history. In some academic circumstances essentialist multiculturalism merely stands the

traditional canon on its head, producing a dominant-culture-is-bad marginalized-culture-is-good inverse dualism. The essentialist search for authenticity in identity and history leads to the privileging of identity as the grounds for political and epistemological authority. Such a grounding inevitably leads to chaos in the group, as the multiple and ambiguous nature of any process of identity formation eventuates in fights over which articulation of identity is the truly authentic one. Before this struggle occurs, critical multiculturalists seek to inoculate themselves against such authoritarianism by opening to question what exactly constitutes a group or an aggregation. At the same time they attempt to maintain a space where a race, class or gender group can discuss multiple articulations of members' identities in relation to a decentred conception of the group itself. In this way romanticized essence is undermined and the authoritarianism that accompanies it is demobilized (Butler 1992; Young 1992; di Leonardo 1994; Gray 1995; Thompson 1995).

In this context Judith Butler (1992) argues that disagreements among women in feminist circles over the content of the term woman should be treasured and encouraged. Such a conversation, she maintains, might even be used as the 'ungrounded ground of feminist theory' (p. 16). Gone here is the official set of essential characteristics that make a group what it is. Herman Gray (1995) shares Butler's insights, and argues from a racial perspective that in his use of the term blackness he makes no claim to an 'authenticity or essence about black life' (p. 13). Black intellectuals in England, including Stuart Hall, Kobena Mercer, Paul Gilroy and Dick Hebdige, pushed inquiries into the nature of difference within the signifier of blackness, opening new vistas to black scholars around the world. In this context we can see *The Cosby Show* from an angle quite different from our previous views of it. In many ways the programme worked as a corrective to the essentialist call for authentic racial portrayals, opening a new terrain on diversity within blackness.

In their valuing of the power of authenticity, essentialist multiculturalists often assume that only authentically oppressed people can possess moral agency. This moral agency or 'oppression privilege' positions subordinated people with a particular set of 'natural' experiences as the only individuals who have the authority to make particular criticisms. In such a setting a white person would not have the moral authority to criticize a Latino or a man would be prohibited from criticizing a woman. In such an essentialized identity politics one would have to submit proper credentials before offering an opinion on a race or gender issue. This politics of location bases truth on identity, privileging an unexamined set of authentic experiences as the foundation of epistemological authority. In this context critical multiculturalists, while understanding the limitations of a politics of location, still appreciate the need for individuals from privileged groups to be sensitive to power differences when interacting with peoples from oppressed groups. For

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example, a male must be very careful in an interaction with a woman not to invoke his patriarchal privilege and speak down to her or speak *for* her. Operating on the basis of oppression privilege, many essentialist multiculturalist teachers simply transfer an unproblematized body of authentic data along to students, in the process moving perilously close to indoctrination. Critical multiculturalists maintain that merely transferring data from teacher to student is an inappropriate form of teaching in a democratic society, whether it comes from left-essentialist multiculturalists or from right-essentialist monoculturalists. In contemporary Western societies students are far more often subjugated to monocultural indoctrination than from the small group we are labelling left-essentialists. Critical multiculturalists contend that educational activity becomes critical only when students are granted the opportunity both to examine various perspectives and to reflect upon the contradictions they uncover among them.

The narrowness of essentialist multiculturalism is further exemplified by the tendency of its proponents to focus their attention on one form of oppression as elemental, as taking precedence over all other modes of subjugation. Certain radical feminists view gender as the essential form of oppression, certain ethnic-studies scholars privilege race, while orthodox Marxists have focused on class. The critical multiculturalist effort to study various forms of diversity and how the oppression that grows up around each one intersects with the others is viewed by left-essentialists as a diversion from what is most important in cultural analysis. Such a stance undermines the left-essentialist possibility of articulating a democratic vision that makes sense to a broad range of individuals and groups. Instead of struggling to articulate and act on the basis of a democratic politics, the various identity groups that constitute the ranks of essentialist multiculturalism have confronted one another over who can claim greater victimization and oppression privilege.

Thus, essentialist multiculturalism has concerned itself more with self-assertion than with the effort to build strategic democratic alliances for social justice. In making this argument we in no way mean to convey that there is no need for single-group coalitions and single group curriculums such as women's studies, African studies, gay and lesbian studies, chicano studies or indigenous studies. These are extremely important in any formulation of a critical multiculturalism, providing an opportunity for scholarship and teaching long neglected in academia. The salient point in this context involves the ability of single identity groups to promote their interests not in competition but in alliance with other identity groups and broader coalitions working for an inclusive political, cultural and economic democracy. From a critical multicultural perspective such democratic work would involve bringing class-consciousness into all identity-based work.

When identity politics operates outside a critical concern with democratic solidarity, the danger arises that it will lapse into a fragmented essentialist

group-centredness (di Leonardo 1994; McLaren 1994b; Sleeter and Grant 1994; Yudice 1995; Nieto 1996; Thompson 1996).

Such a group-centredness often induces essentialist multiculturalism to exclude friendly and morally committed outsiders or non-members. Most oppressed groups in Western societies simply do not possess the power to shape political, social and educational policy without help. At the same time, the politics of authenticity allows unsympathetic outsiders to go unchallenged in their anti-democratic or problematic race, sexual preference and gender-related beliefs and activities. Obviously, critical multiculturalism wants to move essentialistic identity groups to a more theoretically viable and pragmatic politics. In many cases, this has happened over the past couple of decades, as many white feminists have worked hard to transform their agendas in the light of what lesbians and non-white feminists have argued about essentialistic delineations of the feminine (Butler 1992; di Leonardo 1994; Yudice 1995). The same is true in other areas of identity, where many racial and ethnic alliances as well as homosexual and disability rights organizations have come to realize that identity alone, especially an essentialized notion of identity, may be insufficient as the grounding for democratic and justice-related movements.

### Critical multiculturalism

All typologies reflect the values and assumptions of those who construct them – and ours is no different. Our classification of the forms of multiculturalism was formulated in order to highlight our delineation of critical multiculturalism – the form of multiculturalism we obviously find preferable to conservative, liberal, pluralist and left-essentialist varieties. In this context we will offer a few introductory statements about critical multiculturalism that will set up our detailed description of the position in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. The theoretical tradition that grounds our view of multicultural education comes from the critical theory emerging from the Frankfurt School of Social Research in Germany in the 1920s. Seeing the world from the vantage point of post-First World War Germany, with its economic depression, inflation and unemployment, the critical theorists (Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Leo Lowenthal and Herbert Marcuse) focused on power and domination within an industrialized, modernist age. Critical theory is especially concerned with how domination takes place, the way human relations are shaped in the workplace, the schools and everyday life. Critical theorists want to promote an individual's consciousness of himself or herself as a social being. An individual who has gained such a consciousness understands how and why his or her political opinions, socio-economic class, role, religious beliefs, gender role and racial self-image are shaped by dominant perspectives.

*An understanding is*

Critical theory thus promotes self-reflection that results in changes of perspective. Men and women come to know themselves by bringing to consciousness the process by which their viewpoints were formed. Strategies that can be taken to confront individual and social pathologies can be negotiated once self-reflection takes place. Critical theory is quick to point out that such strategies do not take the form of rules and precise regulations. Instead, a framework of principles is developed around which possible actions can be discussed and analysed. Multiculturalists who are conversant with critical theory are never certain of the exact path of action they will take as a result of their analysis. This can be quite frustrating to those raised in the modernist tradition who are accustomed to a specific set of procedures designed to direct their actions. Critical pedagogy is the term used to describe what emerges when critical theory encounters education. Like critical theory in general, critical pedagogy refuses to delineate a specific set of teaching procedures. Critical pedagogies, Peter McLaren (1994a) maintains, confront the modernist/positivist ways of seeing that dominate traditional liberal and conservative critiques of schooling. Moving beyond these analytical forms, critical pedagogy helps students and teachers to understand how schools work by exposing student sorting processes and power involvement with the curriculum.

Advocates of a critical pedagogy of multiculturalism make no pretence of neutrality. Unlike with many theoretical approaches, critical theorists expose their values and openly work to achieve them. Critical multiculturalism, thus, is dedicated to the notion of egalitarianism and the elimination of human suffering. What is the relationship between social inequality and the suffering that accompanies it and the schooling process? The search for an answer to this question shapes the activities of the critical teacher. Working in solidarity with subordinate and marginalized groups, critical multiculturalists attempt to expose the subtle and often hidden educational processes that privilege the already affluent and undermine the efforts of the poor. When Western schooling is viewed from this perspective, the naive belief that such education provides consistent socio-economic mobility for working-class and non-white students disintegrates. Indeed, the notion that education simply provides a politically neutral set of skills and an objective body of knowledge also collapses. This appreciation that both cultural pedagogy and schooling don't operate as neutral, ideologically-innocent activities is central to a critical theory grounded form of multiculturalism. When this historical critical theoretical base is submitted to an analysis by recent innovations in social theory shaped by feminists, critical race theorists, advocates of cultural studies and postmodern/poststructuralist scholars (a process we will detail in Chapters 2, 3 and 4) the grounding of our notion of how multiculturalism should be changed is revealed.

Changing multiculturalism, we argue, means moving beyond the conservative and liberal assumptions that racial, ethnic and gender groups live in relatively equal status to one another and that the social system is

open to anyone who desires and is willing to work for mobility. Even though contemporary economic production in the West is grounded on unequal social divisions of race, class and gender, mainstream forms of multiculturalism have been uncomfortable using the term oppression – critical multiculturalists are not, as they argue vehemently in the spirit of W. E. B. DuBois, for equality and democracy in the economic sphere of society. As Western cultures have begun to slide towards the hyperreality of post-modernity, with its fast capitalism, global markets and bombardment of electronic information, their ability/willingness to distribute their resources more equitably has substantially diminished. Class inequality is a central concern of our 'changed multiculturalism', although by no means should such an emphasis be taken as a privileging of class as the primary category of oppression. Class is a central concern of a critical multiculturalism as it interacts with race, gender and other axes of power.

Again, unlike other forms of multiculturalism, the critical articulation is concerned with the contextualization of what gives rise to race, class and gender inequalities. We are concerned throughout this book with the ways power has operated historically and contemporaneously to legitimate social categories and divisions. In this context we analyse and encourage further analysis of how in everyday, mundane, lived culture these dynamics of power play themselves out. Our friend Ladi Semali, who is a scholar of media and power, analyses 'innocent' everyday conversations for their revelations about the ways tacit racial politics operate. Along with Semali, we understand that it is at this unsuspected level that the power of patriarchy, white supremacy and class elitism accomplish their hurtful work. Critical multiculturalism appreciates both the hidden nature of these operations and the fact that most of the time they go unnoticed even by those who participate in them. The subtlety of this process is at times disconcerting, as the cryptic nature of many forms of racism, sexism and class bias makes it difficult to convince individuals from the dominant culture of their reality. Such subtlety is matched by the nuanced but vital cognizance of the fact that, contrary to the representations of essentialists, there are as many differences within cultural groups as there are between them (DuBois 1973; Sleeter 1993; Macedo 1994; Yudice 1995; Semali 1997).

Another important theme of critical multiculturalism – also a central theme of our work (Kincheloe and Pinar 1991; Kincheloe 1991, 1993, 1995; Kincheloe and Steinberg 1995; Kincheloe, Steinberg and Gresson 1996; Steinberg and Kincheloe 1997) – involves the way power shapes consciousness. Such a process involves the processes by which ideological inscriptions are imprinted on subjectivity, the ways desire is mobilized by power forces for hegemonic outcomes, the means by which discursive powers shape thinking and behaviour through both the presences and absences of different words and concepts, and the methods by which individuals assert their agency and self-direction in relation to such power plays.



Critical multiculturalists also illustrate how individuals produce, revamp and reproduce meanings in a context constantly shaped and reshaped by power. Such cultural reproduction involves the way power in the multitude of forms it takes helps to construct collective experience in a way that operates in the interests of white supremacy, patriarchy, class elitism and other dominant forces. In this context schools often work in complicity with cultural reproduction, as teachers innocently operate as cultural gatekeepers who transmit dominant values and protect the common culture from the Vandals at the gates of the empire.

Critical multiculturalism draws upon the literature and analytical methods of cultural studies to gain a deeper understanding of how race, class and gender are represented in various social spheres. Not content with merely cataloguing such portrayals, criticalists make the next step of connecting representations with their material effects. Such material effects cannot be separated from issues of resource allocation as they relate to national and multinational capital. In this way the cultural, political and economic are viewed as parts of a larger power-related, hegemonic process that grants analysts insight into how claims to resources are legitimated and the disparity of wealth continues to escalate. In this context it becomes obvious that critical multiculturalism refuses to position the mere establishment of diversity as its final objective; instead, it seeks a diversity that understands the power of difference when it is conceptualized within a larger concern with social justice. Such a concern constitutes the grounding on which all critical multicultural work takes place (Macedo 1994; McLaren 1994a, b; Yudice 1995).

Outside of this emancipatory commitment to social justice and the egalitarian democracy that accompanies it, critical multiculturalism becomes nothing more than another apology for the status quo. As a politically transformative project, critical multiculturalism absolutely must appeal to diverse constituencies who have not traditionally supported movements for social justice. This is why critical multiculturalists are so committed to the development of a pedagogy of whiteness (see Chapter 8) that speaks to the concerns of a major portion of the population – the white working and middle classes – and the anxieties they face as education, employment and a plethora of other social and economic benefits fade from the late twentieth-century neo-conservative political landscape (Yudice 1995). This is why class issues are so important to criticalists, who see themselves not merely as academic students of culture but as initiators of social movements. A multiculturalism dedicated to democracy that is unable to lead a social, political and educational transformation undermines the traditional critical notion that there is a moral emptiness to pedagogies that attempt to understand the world without concurrently attempting to change it.