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Multiculturalisms Past, Present, and Future

Marilyn Edelstein

Once upon a time, most classes, in both schools and universities, focused on historical events shaped by white men, scientific discoveries made by white men, philosophies constructed by white men, and literary and artistic works created by white men. This time was not so long ago—and during some of our lifetimes.

Since at least the late 1960s, this normative maleness and whiteness—which always claimed to be universal—has been challenged by the development of ethnic studies, women's and gender studies, and multiculturalism. Especially in literary studies—and nowhere more than in the field of American literature—the canon has exploded, as more works by writers of color and white women writers have entered it (while very little work by white male writers has exited—the dire predictions of opponents of multiculturalism notwithstanding). In turn, syllabi, anthologies, curricula, and scholarship have changed to include a far more diverse array of writers, texts, voices, and experiences than had been included even ten, let alone thirty or forty years ago. Most universities' student bodies have become much more diverse—culturally, ethnically, linguistically, experientially, socioeconomically. Although faculty diversity has not increased nearly as much and while not all teachers and disciplines have been equally influenced by multiculturalism, for the most part, what is taught—to whom and by whom—is very different in 2005 than it was in 1960.¹

For some, these changes signal the victory of multiculturalism—although its supposed victory is greeted with sorrow or anger by some, and with gladness by others. For some, multiculturalism has gone too far; for others, multiculturalism has

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not gone far enough. For many thinkers in this latter group, multiculturalism's focus on difference has not yet made enough of a difference in our society, culture, or world. Especially in the wake of "September 11"; the U.S. invasions of and continued presence in Afghanistan and Iraq; the sharpening ideological divides among the U.S. electorate captured in the recent metaphor of "red states" versus "blue states"; and increasingly polarized national debates not only about international politics but also about gay marriage, affirmative action, reproductive rights, "values," and patriotism (and the PATRIOT Act)—and as we move further into a new century and a new millennium—a revitalized multiculturalism in American education may play an increasingly important role in influencing our national and global futures.²

Many critics *and* supporters, both within and outside of educational institutions, think of multiculturalism as primarily a matter of politics and/or demographics. I share the widely held view that multicultural education always connotes a commitment to political and social change (along with a rejection of assimilationism and of passé metaphors like the melting pot³); I also believe that genuine multicultural education is at least as much a matter of *ethics* as of politics.

In spite of its far-reaching effects over the last forty years or so, multiculturalism in the twenty-first century is faced with a number of challenges, many of which entail balancing or integrating two seemingly binary choices:

1. How to teach about multiple cultures without homogenizing them ("We are all human beings/Americans," "We have all suffered")⁴ or essentializing them ("Let's consider the black experience in the U.S."), but also without abandoning hope of finding commonalities and connections ("If every racial/ethnic/sexual group is distinct and every identity is heterogeneous, how can anyone ever have anything in common with anyone else?")
2. Whether and how to move beyond what Christine Sleeter calls the "single group studies" model of multicultural education—primarily based on race and/or ethnicity—toward a more relational model of cultures and identities, without losing sight of the distinctive histories, literatures, and experiences of racial and other groups
3. How to teach classes on multiculturalism that achieve our desired outcomes for both white students *and* students of color—students who have widely varying degrees of knowledge about and attachment to their various racial, ethnic, gendered, classed, and other identities, traditions, and histories
4. How to explore whiteness as a racial identity without recentering whiteness
5. How to teach about histories and current practices of racism, oppression, disempowerment, and violence without ignoring histories and practices of resistance, affirmation, creativity, and agency, and without removing all possibility—for ourselves and our students—of the very hope that is required for agency, activism, and change

I address some of these challenges and some of the theoretical resources that can help teachers respond to them and achieve a more politically and ethically effective—because stronger and more radical—multiculturalism.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MULTICULTURALISM

Every discourse is rooted in its history, and the discourse of multiculturalism is no exception. Before I suggest some possible futures for multicultural education, I review briefly the histories of the term “multiculturalism” and its application to educational theory and practice.

The 2005 *Oxford English Dictionary Online* traces the genealogy of the term “multicultural” back to 1935, when it was used in an article in the *American Journal of Sociology*. In “The Problem of the Marginal Man,” Everett V. Stonequist analyzes the experiences of the person of mixed race (“the marginal man” who “arises in a bi-cultural or multi-cultural situation”) (1). Seventy years ago, Stonequist began to make arguments continued today by leftist thinkers about race, as when he addresses the power asymmetries of cultural assimilation, noting that it is “those who belong to a minority group” who are “expected to do most of the melting. [. . .] The more powerful or dominant group does not expect to adjust itself to the others” (2). He also distinguishes between two “situations”: “one where the cultural difference also includes a racial (biological) difference; the second where the difference is purely cultural” (3). Although today most thinkers do not see race as biological, much of multicultural education has been organized as if “culture” equals “race” (so, for example, what is usually distinctive about “multicultural” curricula, syllabi, and anthologies used for composition and for literature is that they include works by writers of different races).

The *OED Online* traces another early use of the term “multicultural” to a 1941 *New York Herald Tribune Books* review in which it was applied to a book that provided “a fervent sermon against nationalism, national prejudice and behavior in favor of a ‘multicultural’ way of life” (Barry 3). Use of the term “multicultural” as an alternative or antidote to certain kinds of nationalism and to assumptions about cultural homogeneity continued from the 1950s through the 1970s. In the first use traced by the *OED* of the term “multiculturalism,” Edward A. Medina, a senior official in the Department of Education in New Mexico, writes of his region that “its Indians, its Americans of Spanish descent, and its ‘Anglos’ meet in daily contact. They must not only co-exist but contribute to each other’s lives. The key to successful living here, as it is in Switzerland, is multilingualism, which can carry with it rich multiculturalism” (349).

Many people have used and still use the term “multicultural” in its most basic and relatively neutral sense to refer to “a society consisting of a number of cultural groups”—however one defines such a “cultural group” (by race, ethnicity, language). Is multiculturalism simply the coexistence (peaceful or otherwise) of different cultures within a larger culture that may or may not try to subsume them? Even the *OED Online* reflects more recent and progressive developments of the term when,

in a recent draft revision, it defines “multiculturalism” as “the characteristics of a multicultural society; (also) the policy or process whereby the distinctive identities of the cultural groups within such a society are maintained or supported.” Whether one believes the maintenance of distinctive cultural identities within a larger society is a good thing depends on one’s political beliefs, of course. This definition does not indicate whether these groups and identities have productive or conflictual contacts, whether and how they interact with, influence, despise, harm, tolerate, respect, recognize, and/or desire to learn about one another.

But what is the “culture” in “multiculturalism”? As cultural anthropologist Renato Rosaldo defines it in *Culture and Truth*, culture “refers broadly to the forms through which people make sense of their lives, rather than more narrowly to the opera or art museums [. . .]. Neither high nor low, culture is all-pervasive.” Having written his book during “the ‘Western Culture Controversy’ at Stanford in 1986–88” (x), Rosaldo clearly rejects the traditional (and conservative) equation of “culture” with just such things as operas, museums, and canonical literature, and the distinction (going back at least to Matthew Arnold) between “high” and “low” or “popular” culture. As Rosaldo argues, “[h]uman beings cannot help but learn the culture or cultures of the communities within which they grow up” (26). Rosaldo associates “cultures” with “communities.” A compatible but more detailed definition of culture is provided by Cary Nelson, Paula Treichler, and Lawrence Grossberg in the introduction to their edited collection *Cultural Studies*: “[C]ulture is understood *both* as a way of life—encompassing ideas, attitudes, languages, practices, institutions, and structures of power—and a whole range of cultural practices: artistic forms, texts, canons, architecture, mass-produced commodities, and so forth” (5).

So, according to some of the major contemporary cultural theorists, culture is “an ensemble of beliefs and practices” (Greenblatt 225), “a way of life [. . .] and a whole range of cultural practices” (Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg), and/or “the forms through which people make sense of their lives” (Rosaldo 26). Such broad definitions of “*culture*,” however, leave open the question of what “*a culture*” is and where its borders are (and the related question of what constitutes “a community”). What defines a particular culture and what separates and/or connects it to other cultures? Is it useful to think about subcultures within a broader culture? Whose “way of life” and “cultural practices” constitute a distinct culture—small or large—especially if we grant that multiple “cultures” can and do coexist within most societies and nations? (Is “hip-hop” a “culture”? Is there such a thing as “deaf culture” or “transgendered culture” or “working-class culture”?)

Although, as Rosaldo notes, “[c]ultures are learned, not genetically encoded” (5) and many scholars today dispute any genetic or biological basis of race (see, for example, Graves; Omi and Winant), for a host of complex historical and political reasons multiculturalism has come to be associated primarily with racial groups and

communities. “Multiculturalism” has often been used, especially in educational settings, to mean “including many races,” and sometimes even as a synonym for “racialized,” “nonwhite,” or “including people of color” (for instance, when universities trumpet their “multicultural student population”). Similarly, “multicultural American literature” has often meant “literature by U.S. writers of color”—usually, literature by Asian American, African American, Native American, Chicana/Chicano and/or Latina/Latino writers—rather than, say, the literatures of several different nation-states, or the literatures of various white ethnic groups, or some combination of the aforementioned. I agree with Susan Stanford Friedman that such uses of “*multiethnic*, *multiracial*, and *multicultural* to refer only to people of color [. . .] reinforces the racist notion that whiteness or Euro-Americanness is a ‘natural’ identity, not a social construct” (37).

Others use multiculturalism to mean “pluralistic” or culturally diverse, or simply including a variety of cultures (however such “cultures” are defined), as in the phrase “American society is multicultural.” For some, “multiculturalism” suggests an interest in and celebration of a diverse array of experiences, communities, and traditions—specifically those of previously (and/or currently) subordinated and underrepresented racial or ethnic groups. For instance, I’m sure my campus is not alone in having regular events like “Multicultural Week,” in which student groups organized around racial and ethnic identities—Filipina/Filipino, Asian Pacific, Chicana/Chicano, African American—celebrate the food, dance, music, and dress of their cultures. Although such celebrations can be enjoyable, and culturally affirming for members of these racial and ethnic groups, for many white visitors this form of “multiculturalism” (and its academic equivalent) can be an invitation to “cultural tourism” or “cultural voyeurism,” rather than to genuine multicultural engagement or education, let alone analysis of systems of power and privilege. Those attending such celebrations can wind up both literally and figuratively “eating the other,” as bell hooks puts it, as otherness and difference are safely commodified (*Black Looks* 21, 39).

Such cultural tourism on campus or in the classroom may have two related effects: it may reinforce exoticism and Orientalism, and/or it may affirm the liberal idea of “tolerance” of others unlike oneself. “Tolerance” implies that those in the dominant or majority group are or should become benevolently and paternalistically willing to “allow” the “other” to exist and act differently. As Jacques Derrida puts it in an interview about the aftermath of September 11, the term “tolerance” “is most often used on the side of those with power, always as a kind of condescending concession”; such tolerance “is first of all a form of charity” (127). Of course, tolerance (like charity) is clearly preferable to its opposite, but is a far from adequate educational or political goal in a multicultural society or for multicultural education.

In universities, the development of multicultural education in the late 1960s and early 1970s was indebted in particular to the student movements demanding not only an end to the Vietnam War but the creation of ethnic and women's studies courses and departments—demands which got a sympathetic hearing among many, but certainly not all, faculty and administrators. These movements and demands in turn reflected many of the major social and cultural upheavals of the 1960s (the Free Speech Movement, the women's movement, the Black Power movement, hippie culture), which in turn reflected the influence of the civil rights movement in the 1950s. As a result of these demands for change, for greater inclusiveness, for “relevance,” the late 1960s and early 1970s saw the beginnings of programs—and these were usually *programs* rather than *departments*—of black studies and women's studies. Programs in Chicana/Chicano and/or Latina/Latino studies, Native American studies, and Asian American studies would develop somewhat later at many universities. Most colleges and universities today have programs in ethnic studies, which usually include African American, Chicana/Chicano and/or Latina/Latino, Asian American, and Native American studies. Larger universities often have individual programs, and sometimes departments, in these areas rather than including all of them within an “Ethnic Studies” program. Most of these programs and the courses they offer follow the “single group studies” model—one largely based on race and/or ethnicity—since they were created largely in response to demands by members of these groups.

Most college and university English departments today have courses in what are sometimes called “ethnic literatures.” Such courses usually focus on one of the four major underrepresented, marginalized, subordinated, oppressed, or muted groups in the U.S.: Chicana/Chicano and/or Latina/Latino, African American, Asian American, and Native American. Most universities still have plenty of “plain” “American Literature” courses, but these usually now include at least some attention to—and, often, genuine integration of—a range of cultures, voices, authors, communities, and often specific attention to issues of multiculturalism and cultural diversity. I believe (or hope) that in 2005 there are only a few classrooms in the United States in which American literature is presented monoculturally or in which the curriculum looks the way it might have in 1960.

Books on multicultural *education* began to appear in the mid-1970s, with a major burst of publishing in the 1980s; many of these texts focused on K–12 education. Books on multiculturalism and *literature*—especially American literature—began to appear frequently during the 1980s and 1990s, often focusing on the canon debates and/or the related “culture wars.” One of the pivotal early feminist analyses of the canon—which dealt with not only gender issues, but also class, with some attention to race and ethnicity—was Lillian S. Robinson's 1983 “Treason Our Text : Feminist Challenges to the Literary Canon.” The same year also saw the publication of Paul

Lauter's pathbreaking edited collection, *Reconstructing American Literature: Courses, Syllabi, Issues*, published by the Feminist Press.

By 1990, the centrality of multiculturalism to rethinking American literature in particular was acknowledged with the MLA's publication of the influential text *Redefining American Literary History*, edited by A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff and Jerry W. Ward, Jr., and also the publication of the first edition of the *Heath Anthology of American Literature*, edited by Lauter and a diverse roster of prominent scholars, including Richard Yarborough, Amy Ling, and Juan Bruce-Novoa. The *Heath Anthology* reflected new ideas about the canon, American literature, American culture, and literary pedagogy, and it was self-consciously shaped by the principles of multiculturalism and diversity of genres, styles, and voices. But its publication also provoked attacks by scholars who did not share these values and who saw the *Heath* as reflecting what they claimed was the abandonment of traditional criteria for canonization—timelessness, universality, aesthetic merit—in favor of solely “political” criteria of inclusiveness and representativeness. In these critics' view, obscure, “minor,” and/or “mediocre” women writers and writers of color had been included primarily if not exclusively because the editors wanted to be demographically representative or, even worse, “politically correct.” The possibility that scholars might be able to find—and redefine—literary merits in these newly added texts seemed to elude most conservative critics.

Robinson aptly captures the rhetoric of many conservative attacks on canon reformers like Lauter: “You know the routine: we feminists and multicultural types want ‘to throw out’ the entire received tradition, replacing it with literature chosen ‘simply because’ it is the work of writers of color or of the female sex or both.” Robinson knows that many of us actually felt that this rediscovered or revalued work “should be read and taught because it had literary resonance; it did to and for us what literature does” (*In the Canon's Mouth* 121). Neither Robinson nor most other canon reformers were abandoning all concern with aesthetic or literary merit (see, for example, the essays in *Aesthetics in a Multicultural Age*, edited by Emory Elliott, Louis Freitas Caton, and Jeffrey Rhyne). Many of us have found aesthetic value, depth, and complexity (or powerful simplicity) as well as new ways of seeing, being, and writing in the many works that have entered the canon in recent decades. Yet, from Hume to Bloom (Allan and Harold), many (white male) theorists and critics who have advocated universality as a primary criterion of greatness and therefore canonicity have been able to find it in a novel about whaling (and obsession) but not a novel about courtship or marriage, or a slave narrative, or a *corrido*. Whether such works have “universal appeal” or “universal themes” depends, of course, on who is reading and judging them.

CRITIQUES OF MULTICULTURALISM FROM SUPPORTERS ON THE LEFT

Changes not only to the literary canon but also to curricula and pedagogy more broadly over the last few decades—changes spurred largely by the development of ethnic studies, women’s studies, and multiculturalism—have provoked criticism not only from the right but also from the left. *College English* readers are no doubt familiar with the conservative critics of multiculturalism—Allan Bloom, William Bennett, Dinesh D’Souza, among others—who, beginning in the late 1980s, publicly bemoaned the loss of a monoculture, a supposedly “common” culture, whose demise they blame on feminists, multiculturalists, student radicals, and/or postmodernists—often not distinguishing among them. These right-wing ideologues and others like them (for instance, those currently lobbying across the country for an “Academic Bill of Rights” that will supposedly give “equal opportunity” to conservatives within academia) continue to receive far more media attention than has ever been paid to the work of scholars trying to expand the traditional canon, critique the illusion of a monoculture, and/or theorize and practice multiculturalism (or feminism, or critiques of capitalism or imperialism). Much more interesting and provocative than these conservative attacks have been some recent critiques of multiculturalism by progressive antiracist thinkers, some of whom welcomed its advent but believe it has not lived up to its potential. It is these critics and others who have begun to reimagine multiculturalism to whom I turn now.

Christopher Newfield and Avery Gordon, in an essay in their fine 1996 collection *Mapping Multiculturalism*, note the changing meanings and methods of multiculturalism since the 1970s. As they suggest, its earliest advocates saw it as “an idea that supported other everyday work toward antiracist social and cultural life.” Although they acknowledge that this early multicultural education “did not envision revolutionary change,” they believe it did decenter white experience and “recover lost knowledge and thereby produce new understandings of U.S. history and social life” (“Multiculturalism’s” 77). In their view, since its emergence, “[m]ulticulturalism’s cultural turn has been highly significant in advancing our understandings of race, power, identity, and social institutions. It has helped to displace biological notions of race and is compatible with anti-essentialist notions of racial, ethnic, gender, class, and sexual identity” (78). In that sense, multiculturalism reflects the ideas about race developed by Michael Omi and Howard Winant, who argue that we should more properly speak of “racial formation” than “race” per se; their “theory of *racial formation* emphasizes the social nature of race, the absence of any essential racial characteristics, the historical flexibility of racial meanings and categories, [. . .] and the irreducible political aspect of racial dynamics” (4).

Many current thinkers, in the sciences, social sciences, and humanities, now believe that race is a social construction. Evolutionary biologist Joseph L. Graves, Jr., begins his recent book *The Race Myth: Why We Pretend Race Exists in America*, by stating “The traditional concept of race as a biological fact is a myth. [. . .] [N]early everything you think you know about race is a social construct. You don’t have to be a racist to be wrong about what race is. That doesn’t make the effects of a belief in race any less damaging [. . .]”(ix). Yet, as he notes, most Americans, including most college students, “still believe in the concept of race the way they believe in the law of gravity—they believe in it without even knowing what it is they believe in” (ix). Some might argue that deconstructing the idea of race is incompatible with arguing for the existence and support of programs in African American or Asian American studies, or for curricular inclusion of writers from oppressed racial groups. But one can accept the view that race, like gender, is a social construction while also believing that it has been a powerful force shaping the lives, opportunities, histories, and experiences of those inhabiting a racialized society like ours. For example, as Henry Louis Gates observes, while “it’s important to remember that ‘race’ is *only* a sociopolitical category,” such awareness of its metaphorical nature and constructedness does not help him, as a black man in the United States, avoid its real effects and “practical performative force” when he tries to hail a cab to or from Harlem (37). (And I would add that even if “Woman” as a unified category or an essence doesn’t exist, real women still get raped because they are women.)

Clearly, much multicultural education has focused on issues of race—sometimes distinguished from ethnicity and sometimes used interchangeably with it. Richard Dyer suggests that ethnicity is a matter of “identity based on cultural origins such as British, Italian, or Jewish or [. . .] Irish-American [. . .] and so on” (4). Ronald Takaki also differentiates between the two: “[R]ace in America has not been the same as ethnicity,” since “race [. . .] has been a social construction that has historically set apart racial minorities from European immigrant groups” (10).⁵ Much of the work to make the American literary canon more multicultural has been directed at making it more multiracial, by including writers of color. Yet sometimes such writers are added without also changing the fundamental conceptual organization of the course. I agree with Newfield and Gordon and other recent theorists that not only readings of texts by people of color, but also analyses of race and racism, of structural social and economic inequities, are crucial to any genuine and effective multiculturalism.

Newfield and Gordon acknowledge the slipperiness of the concept of “culture” that is central to multiculturalism. They argue that “[a]lthough the concept of culture can insist on the sociocultural reality of race and racism, it doesn’t always do so. The culturalism of multiculturalism threatens to shift attention from racialization to culture and in so doing to treat racialized groups as one of many diverse and

interesting cultures" (79). Such "culturalism" could, for example, take the form of an Asian American film festival, an exhibit of African American photography, or a multicultural literature course in which weeks 2 to 4 "cover" Native American literature. As Newfield and Gordon argue, "multiculturalism's culturalism can allow for the segregation of culture from systematic social relations of power like capitalism, patriarchy, and neocolonialism" (79). Even if one believes that culture is *never* separable from "systematic social relations and power," some multicultural events, workshops, and courses may make it appear that is. Newfield and Gordon consider this form of culturalist multiculturalism to be what they call "weak multiculturalism" (82); they see it growing out of the ideology of "assimilationist pluralism," in which, although multiple groups are acknowledged, the final goal is that they be "subsumed into a single whole" (81)—that of the dominant group. They advocate instead "strong multiculturalism" (81)—much like what David Palumbo-Liu calls "critical multiculturalism" ("Introduction" 2). Such strong multiculturalism relies on "[s]trong versions of cultural pluralism, like the 1970s multiculturalism developed largely by people of color," which "tried to rehabilitate pluralism as an *alternative* to assimilationism" (Newfield and Gordon 81). Strong multiculturalists, whom Newfield and Gordon also refer to as "race progressives," critique weak multiculturalism as "Eurocentric assimilationism in disguise" that has merely "tolerated harmless kinds of diversity while continuing to enforce Euro-American norms." Strong multiculturalists like Newfield and Gordon instead advocate for "cultural equal time and a redistribution of institutional space and power" (81–82)—and not only within educational institutions but in society more broadly.

But for rightist critics, multiculturalism has gone too far rather than not far enough. As Newfield and Gordon note, rightist and neoliberal critics of multiculturalism "denounced multiculturalism as a stalking horse for cultural separatism" and saw multiculturalism itself as "responsible for civil unrest and national decline." These rightist critics influenced the media, which often presented multicultural education as undermining "the rainbow harmonies of a post-civil rights pluralism." For many such conservative critics, "[s]ocial unrest is traced to calls for racial equity rather than to the emperor's efforts to contain them" (82). Or, I would add, to the emperor's/empire's deluded belief that "we" (citizens of the United States) already have all the "racial equity" we need, or that we live in a "postracial," "color-blind" society.

I agree with Newfield and Gordon that both weak multiculturalism and such right-wing critiques of strong multiculturalism are misguided. As Newfield and Gordon argue, "[f]ortifying itself with various race-based nationalisms, and retaining its interest in antiessentialist and hybridized forms, strong multiculturalism can continue to develop its long-standing *rejection of assimilationism from within cultural pluralism itself*" (82). Of course, many may object that anti-essentialism is incompat-

ible with all forms of nationalism, including racial and/or ethnic nationalism. How does one form a group or collective identity when the very concept of identity has been called into question?

This brings us to one of the most complex issues facing multiculturalism and multicultural education: identity politics. Given recent critiques of unitary “identity” and of essentialism—by postmodernists and poststructuralists but also by many feminists, queer theorists, and critical race theorists—can one still deploy identity politics strategically even while deconstructing it? And, if “race” has now been deconstructed—or its social constructedness rather than biological reality revealed—how do we bring racial issues to the forefront in teaching multiculturalism without either reifying or eliding racial identity/ies?

THEORETICAL RESOURCES FOR RENEWING MULTICULTURALISM IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Several theoretical concepts have evolved in recent decades in feminist, critical race, and/or postcolonial theory that may help in our thinking about how to develop more effective multicultural education for this century. Many of these concepts also connect to newer, nonessentialist theories of identity, race, and gender. These concepts, which seem to me intimately related to one another and to our historical and theoretical moment, include *positionality*, *standpoint theory*, *perspectivism*, *intersectionality*, *relationality*, and “*the contact zone*.” All these concepts address issues of relationality and contiguity—which are integral to both ethics and politics.

The acknowledgement of the degree to which our own identities, experiences, and subject positions shape our perceptions of ourselves and others, and our relation to new knowledge, is central to several of the concepts above—especially positionality, standpoint theory, and perspectivism. In *Negotiating Difference: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Positionality*, Michael Awkward develops his idea of a “politics of positionality,” related to the “autobiographical turn” in much recent theory and criticism, whereby the scholar “locates” himself or herself “publicly along a series of identity axes” (in Awkward’s case, as a black male feminist “who grew up in a South Philadelphia ghetto,” among other things; 4). To engage in public self-positioning requires, first, engagement in self-reflection about the positions from which we speak and from which we view the world. As Awkward argues, such a “[l]ocation within a geography of difference contributes to its inhabitants not essential being and insight, but strategies of racial, gendered, class, and sexual performance” (6), and awareness of how such strategies and performances shape both what and how we see.

Standpoint theory or “standpoint epistemology” also works with the assumption that “all knowing will substantively involve the standpoint or social and historical context of particular knowers” (Alcoff and Potter 5). As Sandra Harding, one of

its foremost theorists (along with other feminist thinkers like Donna Haraway, Nancy Hartsock, and Patricia Hill Collins), writes, “Standpoint theory emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as a feminist critical theory about relations between the production of knowledge and practices of power” (1). Most feminist standpoint theorists critique the claims to “objective knowledge” and “universality” made primarily by those who belong to dominant groups within a culture. Instead, they suggest a new epistemology that attends particularly to (and sometimes privileges) the standpoints of those who have been historically marginalized and thus may see differently in important ways. While much of the earliest work in standpoint theory focused on women as knowers, many later theorists have applied standpoint theory to those marginalized by virtue of not only gender but also race, class, and/or sexuality.

Both positionality and standpoint theory are related to “perspectivism,” a term used by Ellen Messer-Davidow and then further developed by Amy Ling in her response to Messer-Davidow’s essay. Messer-Davidow defines perspectivism as “a feminist philosophy that counters objectivism, which privileges objects, and subjectivism, which privileges subjects. [. . .] It would explain how we affiliate culturally, acquire a self-centered perspective, experience the perspective of others, and deploy multiple perspectives in inquiry” (89). After quoting this definition, Ling says, “I applaud the philosophical basis that would not only validate the stance I have taken but would require all scholars to be aware of their own perspectives, that would make perspective central and basic to all inquiry instead of seemingly peripheral and irrelevant” (152). The direct relevance of perspectivism to multiculturalism and multicultural literary studies in particular is apparent when Ling argues that

[p]erspectivism would validate, respect, and encourage every perspective so that WASP males, Jewish males, black males, and white females would need to stretch themselves out of their own skins to understand Maxine Hong Kingston, Lin Taiyi, or Han Suyin, as I have always had to stretch outside of myself to understand James Fenimore Cooper, Bernard Malamud, and Richard Wright. This is what I have always believed reading literature is really all about—getting inside other people’s skins and experiencing their lives, regardless of the color of their skin, time period, gender, sexual preference, class, or ethnic background. And yet, at times, it seems a utopian notion. (153)

Ling seems to suggest, and I agree, that literature has a special ability to create empathy and thus understanding among people who occupy radically different subject positions.

The belief that groups, experiences, texts, cultures, and identities cannot be understood in isolation but only in relation is central to the concepts of “intersectionality” and “relationality.” The idea of “intersectionality” was first developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, an important critical race theorist and legal scholar, in her 1989 law review essay “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex.”

Crenshaw critiques “the tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis” (manifested, for instance, in the “conventional usage of the term ‘Blacks and women’”—much less common now than it was in 1989) and to ignore “the multidimensionality of Black women’s experience” by using a “single-axis analysis” (139). In a later essay, Crenshaw argues that “[t]he problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite—that it frequently conflates or ignores intra-group differences.” She argues that “ignoring difference *within* groups contributes to tension *among* groups.” Instead, she advocates analyzing the *intersections* of race and gender, especially (but not only) in addressing violence against women of color. For Crenshaw, it is inadequate to analyze “identity as ‘woman’ or ‘person of color’ as an either/or proposition” because this will “relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling” (“Mapping the Margins” 357). Many feminists and theorists of race have adapted the idea of intersectionality to analyze additional intersecting identity categories, like class and sexual orientation, so that more stories can be told and heard.

Another argument for contextual and relational analyses of culture and of both identity and knowledge formation is made by Friedman in *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter*, in which she develops and historicizes the concepts of “relationality” and “relational positionality.” Friedman observes that “scripts of relational positionality began to emerge during the 1980s in feminist theoretical discourse out of the accusatory and confessional stories about race, ethnicity, and racism. Produced by women and men of different racial and ethnic standpoints, these scripts regard identity as situationally constructed and defined and at the crossroads of different systems of alterity and stratification.” In particular, these “scripts” are indebted to “the analysis of multiple oppressions and interlocking systems of oppression that has been pioneered especially by women of color and the new discourses of location, positionality, and standpoint” (47). She finds these analyses compatible with “poststructuralist and postcolonial critiques of identity and formulations of subjectivity, which stress the nonunitary, indeterminate, nomadic, and hybrid nature of [. . .] identity” (47). As Friedman argues, the notion of “relational positionality” can help us resist and move beyond “the fixities of the white/other binary” (47), especially since it includes the “concept of permeable boundaries” between identity categories (48). For Friedman, the idea of relational positionality includes attention to relations of power and dominance—relations that are mobile rather than fixed—and avoids either neutralizing or reifying difference (48; see also Newfield and Gordon’s critiques of assimilationism as a “domestication” or neutralization of difference).

As border theory and border studies have grown increasingly influential in literary and cultural studies—so much so that critiques of them have begun to appear

(for example, in Michaelsen and Johnson's collection *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics*), many scholars now attend to relations of contiguity and locations of contact, which can be sites of conflict but also of resistance and creativity. Mary Louise Pratt's 1991 essay on the "contact zone" has been widely used in both literary and composition studies to explore borders, boundaries, and boundary-crossing—as theorized even earlier in Gloria Anzaldúa's germinal work *Borderlands/La Frontera*, first published in 1987. For Pratt, contact zones are "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (34). In *Imperial Eyes*, Pratt uses "contact zone" as "synonymous with 'colonial frontier.' But while the latter term is grounded within a European expansionist perspective (the frontier is a frontier only with respect to Europe), 'contact zone' is an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect" (6–7). While "intersectionality" has usually been used to signify intersecting categories of identity and experience (most commonly, race, gender, and class; sometimes sexuality), Pratt's work suggests an extension of this intrasubjective idea to the intersubjective realm, wherein both subjects and cultures have intersecting "trajectories"—which are, by their very nature, mobile—as they come into contact with one another.

Since contact zones are sites of asymmetrical power relations, they have often been locations of conflict and even violence. Although such "contact zones" can also be sites of mutual exchange and understanding, the acknowledgment of any asymmetries in power must precede such mutuality. Clearly, in university discussions of departmental curricula, in multicultural classrooms, in required courses on multicultural issues, both aspects of the contact zone—as place of contestation and struggle, or as site of mutual respect and dialogue—may come into play. As Pratt argues, a "contact" perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other" (*Imperial Eyes* 7). This is also the concern of both psychoanalysis and ethics. A contact perspective can bring together psychological, ethical, and political analysis in mutually illuminating ways.

AN ANTIRACIST PEDAGOGY OF CONTACT AND RELATIONALITY

A contact perspective has been applied most often to analyzing the contact zones among different cultures, nations, races, communities, and/ or traditions, as well as literatures. A contact perspective may also help us understand and negotiate the points of contact between different voices and perspectives within texts (literary and cultural), between readers and texts, and between different readers. So, for example, in teaching multiculturally, we need to consider the contact zones between students

and the course materials, between students (in class discussions or small-group work), and between the teacher and the students, and ways to create productive exchanges within and among these different contact zones.

A different contact zone may be created in U.S. classrooms when white students interact with course readings and discussions of race or racism, for example, than when students of color do, even in the same classroom (although, as Jennifer Seibel Trainor demonstrates, we should be wary of essentializing—let alone demonizing—white students as typically resistant to critical analyses of race and racism). And students of color who strongly identify with their own race, ethnicity, and/or nationality may enter the contact zone differently than do students who have had a more assimilationist personal history. Especially when dealing with issues of race, ethnicity, and multiculturalism, the contact zone between a white teacher and a white student, between a white teacher and a student of color, between a teacher of color and a white student, and between a teacher of color and a student of color will vary, depending on both teacher's and student's awareness of race (their own and others') and interest in and/or commitment to eradicating racism and other forms of oppression. In many teachers' cases, this awareness and commitment may take the form of critical and/or feminist pedagogy in the classroom as well as other forms of activism outside the classroom. And of course the "highly asymmetrical relations of power" that Pratt speaks of in contact zone institutions like slavery apply, if far less dramatically and painfully, in classrooms, where even the most nonauthoritarian, feminist and/or antiracist critical pedagogue still has (with rare exceptions and whether she or he wants it or not) the power to grade students.

Some students (both white and of color) taking a course on multiculturalism or on racial and/or gender issues may already be deeply engaged in thinking about issues of racism and sexism (through prior courses and/or by virtue of who they are and what they value); some may even be activists in feminist, antiracist, and/or other social-justice movements (environmentalism, for instance). Other students (primarily white ones) may enter such a classroom not having thought much about race or racism (and often not at all about whiteness as a racial identity), or having decided that racism (and sexism, and all other forms of oppression and exploitation) are things of the past. Conflicts may occur in the multicultural classroom contact zone between white students and students of color, between students with different political views or degrees of open-mindedness, or between students with widely varying motives for taking such a course in the first place. (On the complexities of racial dynamics in the classroom, including teacher-student relations, see TuSmith and Reddy.)

Who occupies the classroom contact zone depends on what curricular niches are inhabited by courses that deal with multicultural literature or specific ethnic literatures, and/or with race, gender, class, and/or sexuality. Some students take

courses on multiculturalism to fulfill general-education, core-curriculum, and/or major requirements. Sometimes students have a wide array of choices to fulfill these requirements, so enrolling in a course dealing with multiculturalism might be largely due to genuine interest, as it is when students take such a course as a free elective. But in some colleges and universities like my own, students must take a course dealing with race/ethnicity and/or a course dealing with gender. And some students major in ethnic studies or women's and gender studies or similar disciplines. Students' degree of engagement with multicultural curricula and pedagogies will clearly be shaped by their own racial, gender, and other identities, histories, and identifications—and the knowledge and critical thinking skills they bring to the classroom—as well as by their reasons for taking classes on these issues. Analyzing classrooms, curricula, and “extracurricula” as contact zones can be a useful supplement to thinking about the literatures and cultures we are teaching about as contact zones; both can become arenas of painful cultural collision but also of respectful and productive dialogues. Acknowledging our own and our students' standpoints, perspectives, and multiple identities may help us negotiate the terrains of these contact zones successfully.

One recent development largely spurred by both multiculturalism and critical race studies has been the emergence of whiteness studies, which analyzes whiteness as a racial formation or racial identity and thus disrupts its previously invisible normativity. Yet, if whiteness is another “racial formation,” to use Omi and Winant's term, it is still not *just another* racial formation, given the history and existence of white supremacy (and of what I call “blancocentrism”), especially but not only in the United States. Can whiteness be another object of study within the framework of multiculturalism without becoming “central” or dominant, as it was when its centrality was unspoken and unexamined, and in a world in which white people still have disproportionate access to culture, capital, power? But can we *not* teach whiteness if we hope to have all of our students—white and of color—think about race and racism? Perhaps teaching whiteness intersectionally and relationally and from a “contact perspective” can be one means to integrate but not centralize whiteness studies in a multicultural literary curriculum—for example, by exploring the constructions of racial identities in texts by both white Modernist writers and African American writers of the Harlem Renaissance, or by analyzing “representations of whiteness in the black imagination,” as hooks puts it (*Black Looks*, Chapter 11).

Clearly, relations both among and within racial, ethnic, and other groups are historically contingent. In the U.S., Jews, Italians, and the Irish (among other groups) were not always considered white; how they “became” white has been the subject of much recent study (for example, in Karen Brodtkin's *How Jews Became White Folks* and James R. Barrett and David Roediger's “How White People Became White”). But few would argue that in contemporary U.S. culture there are structural inequi-

ties that keep Jews or Italian-Americans from access to all the privileges of whiteness (although there is still far more anti-Semitism in the United States and abroad than “anti-Italianism”). Given histories as well as current practices of oppression, discrimination, and underrepresentation, some cultures may still need more attention within multiculturalism than others.

Teaching about white privilege can be an important element in deconstructing and decentering whiteness in multicultural courses—especially (but not only) when such courses include many white students. For Peggy McIntosh, who first wrote about male privilege and white privilege in the 1980s, such “privilege” is “an invisible package of unearned assets” (1), “a form of unearned power conferred systemically” (13), which is always in effect but which its possessor is not supposed to see (or critique), and which is embedded in power relations. In my experience, both students of color and white students find McIntosh’s arguments and especially her many examples of such privilege quite revelatory. For instance, a white student (or teacher) can identify her white privilege in response to the following questions developed by McIntosh: “I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely and positively represented” (5); “When I am told about our national heritage or about ‘civilization,’ I am shown that people of my color made it what it is” (6); “I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race” (6).⁶ Clearly multiculturalism and related sociocultural changes have already greatly increased the chances that the answer at least to this third question would be “yes” in 2005. But responses to many of McIntosh’s questions about daily life would still be significantly different for most white people today than for most people of color.

Analyzing whiteness and white privilege, discussing the white racial formations and identities of authors and literary characters whose race was previously invisible, can be valuable parts of multicultural education (although see Keating for some of the difficulties of “interrogating whiteness” in the classroom). Toni Morrison told Bill Moyers in a PBS interview that she sometimes will intentionally not mention the race of her characters. Henry James did not feel any need to tell us that Daisy Miller is white—she’s not introduced as a “white woman”—but it’s been much more common for white writers writing about characters of color—and even for some writers of color—to note race if the character is “other than white.” As Dyer points out, “The sense of whites as non-raced is most evident in the absence of reference to whiteness in the habitual speech and writing of white people in the West” (2); “[o]ther people are raced, we [whites] are just people” (1). Why shouldn’t we teach T. S. Eliot as, among many other things, a white writer if we are going to teach Sandra Cisneros as a Chicana writer? Can we ask our students how whiteness and masculinity are enacted or constructed in Eliot’s poetry? Teaching and theorizing about whiteness as a racial identity in the context of multiculturalism can aid in developing a rela-

tional and intersectional view of racial and cultural identities. (And what would be the effect if antiracist white students had booths at “Multicultural Week,” too?)

The invisibility of whiteness until quite recently has played a large role in the canon debates. In a culture in which whiteness and white privilege have remained largely invisible, white writers are seen, Dyer argues, as able “to speak for the commonality of humanity,” since “they do not represent the interests of a race.” But “[r]aced people” supposedly “can only speak for their race” (2). Hence many conservative critics of canon-expansion either claim or assume that writers of color can neither be read nor taught as universal. But if we are all “raced”—and we *are*, in a racialized society (just as we are all gendered)—then either none of us can speak for or to those of other races (or genders, or sexualities), or all of us can, at least potentially. Discourses and interpretive conventions in the classroom, the academy, and the society shape whether and how a poem by Garrett Hongo or a short story by Louise Erdrich can be taught and read as both particular and “universal”—as able to intersect with at least some of the multiple identities, experiences, affiliations, and imaginations of readers unlike the writers along many other axes of identity.

Many recent versions of multiculturalism are less explicitly based on identity politics (and/or more self-conscious about the problematics of identity politics—especially the risks of essentialism) than were many 1960s and 1970s versions. Although there have been heated disputes between some theorists of race and multiculturalism and theorists of postmodernism, there are also important areas of overlap between postmodernism and multiculturalism, especially in theorizing identity and subjectivity and in critiquing essentialism (for more on the relations between feminism, postmodernism, and critical race theory, see, for example, McDowell; Edelstein). For instance, the idea that the subject is heterogeneous, in-process, multiple, contradictory, is shared by most contemporary psychoanalytic theorists *and* by such theorists of race, gender, and culture as bell hooks. hooks argues that “the critique of essentialism encouraged by postmodern thought is useful for African-Americans concerned with reformulating outmoded notions of identity” (*Yearning* 28). For her, “such a critique allows us to affirm multiple black identities, varied black experience. It also challenges colonial imperialist paradigms of black identity which represent blackness one-dimensionally in ways that reinforce and sustain white supremacy” (28). Like Crenshaw, hooks argues that most versions of “identity politics” efface the differences *within* groups and rely on a form of racial essentialism. If one accepts the ideas that each of us inhabits multiple and mobile subject positions and that all identities are intersectional and heterogeneous, the possibilities emerge for a variety of affiliations and alliances between and among people who, on the surface, might seem to be radically different. For instance, an Asian American working-class lesbian may share some aspects of her multiple identities and needs with not only Asian Americans—male and female—but also lesbians—white and of color—

and working-class people—male and female, white and of color. Clearly, for many political purposes, strategic alliances have formed across differences, bringing together people whose major identity affiliations (whether singular or plural) differ but whose specific goals on one or more issues are similar. Otherwise, we would not have diverse memberships in union movements, or feminist and environmental organizations, or AIDS activism, for example.

Like multiculturalism, with which it is usually associated, “identity politics” has been attacked primarily from the right if also from the left. As Benjamin Alire Sáenz argues, contrary to many accusations from the right, “identity politics” was not “invented” by people of color or sixties radicals. As he puts it, “The ‘identity wars’ did not begin in 1968, did not begin with Gloria Steinem, did not begin with Malcolm X, [. . .] did not begin with César Chávez [. . .].” Rather, he argues, “The West’s obsession with identity began with Plato and Aristotle and was extended by (among others) Thomas Aquinas, Augustine, Descartes, Locke, Hume, Heidegger, and Marx” (75). Given the centrality of “identity” to Western thought, it has been the “politics” in “identity politics” that has provoked many of the attacks on it. (Interestingly, those critical of “identity politics” do not seem to accuse whites of deploying them.) But, as Sáenz argues, “[I]dentity’ cannot exist without an attendant politics—and everybody engages in identity politics. [. . .] We all privilege certain categories or discourses over others and organize ourselves around these discourses” (75). Sáenz mentions such discourses as sexuality, national origin, and gender; clearly other discourses can be added to his list (such as disability or age). Yet, these discourses and identities overlap, intersect, and sometimes come into conflict, both within an individual subject and between subjects.

Black feminist critic and theorist Cheryl Wall, like hooks, embraces the idea of multiple, shifting subjectivities, and, like hooks, critiques essentialist ideas of experience, without abandoning the relevance of “experience.” As Wall puts it, “Appeals to experience need not be essentialist and ahistorical, because the experience of Afro-American women is unmistakably polyvalent. The simultaneity of oppressions in their lives resists essentialist conclusions” (“Introduction” 10). Wall’s “simultaneity of oppressions” is similar to what hooks calls “interlocking systems of domination” (*Talking Back* 21) and Crenshaw calls “intersectionality,” and need not apply only to African American women.

I would add that not only histories and axes of oppression or domination can intersect, interlock, and make contact but so can multiple forms and expressions of agency and resistance. Counterhegemonic literary and cultural texts, rhetorics, and other expressive practices manifest such agency and resistance. I think Newfield and Gordon are right in arguing that strong and effective multiculturalism must foreground and confront issues of racism and structural inequality, especially if it is to avoid fostering mere cultural tourism. But I also believe that it is important to give

students reasons for hope and examples of successful action for change. I find valuable a strategy Rosemarie Garland Thomson describes in “Integrating Disability Studies into the Existing Curriculum”: “in order to expose the systematic nature of oppression without suggesting that it inevitably overwhelms individual agency, the first part of the course delineates the complex working of oppression while the second part explores potential strategies of opposition.” So, for example, she pairs Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* with Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*, since, as she argues “Morrison’s is a descriptive account of the tragic political and personal consequences precipitated by what I am calling ‘the ideology of beauty,’ [while] Walker’s account offers students an optimistic paradigm for resistance and transformation” (303). Many teachers of multicultural literatures do or might pair literary texts in this way, or pair historical texts depicting the horrors of slavery with slave narratives representing resistance to slavery (just as we might pair analyses of metaphor with analyses of the material conditions in which the writers who created those metaphors lived). Focusing in the classroom on hegemony, domination, oppression, and violence without providing any countervailing narratives of agency, creativity, and resistance may produce numb acknowledgment rather than activism in our students.

How do we decide what to include in a course on multiculturalism, multicultural theory, and/or multicultural literature(s)? In addition to thinking about sequencing and pairing of texts, we also need to decide what experiences and what “cultures” might be included in multiculturalism and how they should be taught. One of the earliest and most powerful forms of multicultural education used what Sleeter calls the “single group studies” model, largely based on race and/or ethnicity—as in the development of Black or Asian American Studies programs—or, in the case of women’s studies, the sex/gender system. As many scholars and teachers have become more aware of and interested in the contact zones and intersections between and among these groups—and the challenges to the assumption of both group identity and unified subjectivity—alternatives have been proposed to this “single group studies” model. And even when courses are organized around this “single group studies model”—such as courses in Chicana/Chicano and/or Latina/Latino literature or Asian American history—many teachers spend considerable time on the intersections of various dimensions of identity, especially race, gender, class, and sexuality, but sometimes also disability, religion, age, and/or language.

In the wake of burgeoning scholarship on other groups, identities, experiences, and cultures that had until recently not been studied *as* distinctive cultures—gays and lesbians, the disabled, the working class—some universities have added new courses and hired faculty to teach work by and about these groups. Some debate whether a group like the disabled or lesbians or the working class is a distinct “culture” or tradition and thus should be considered an integral part of a truly multicultural curriculum. (And, of course, members of such groups may also be part

of the four racially defined groups usually included in most ethnic studies programs). Given the multiplicity of definitions of “culture” and “cultures,” it is not surprising that even those committed to multiculturalism may not agree about what counts as a culture in the context of multicultural learning.⁷

Since quarters/semesters, curricula, syllabi, and anthologies cannot be expanded indefinitely (unlike an imaginary canon), I would suggest that *both* specific histories *and* current practices of oppression, marginalization, and underrepresentation produce the need for only some cultures and groups to be studied in separate courses at particular moments in history. Such courses may serve not only a compensatory function (adding perspectives and experiences previously missing from the curriculum), but also a transformative one, in requiring us and our students to rethink the development and principles of our discipline, and to examine the intersections and relations among cultures, texts, voices, and histories. But, as Palumbo-Liu argues, we do not want to teach these texts and histories in ways that make “race relations [merely] manageable” (“Introduction” 11; consider also the focus on “diversity management” in the business world). We want more than to have students be “able to ‘relate’ to diverse and highly differentiated experiences by reducing difference to individual encounters via ethnic ‘texts’” (“Introduction” 11). And we should also be wary of teaching such texts in ways that foreground only or primarily their “ethnicity” and ignore their textuality (see Emory Elliott, who notes that teachers—especially those who are not members of the cultural groups they teach about—often “cover mainly the biographical, historical, and political circumstances in which the text was written and avoid discussing the formal [or aesthetic] qualities that they normally would consider in teaching established white authors”; 3).

TOWARD A “NEW” MULTICULTURALISM

In addition to introducing students to theoretical concepts like intersectionality, perspectivism, and the contact zone, and teaching texts and theories relationally and historically, we can think about other ways to “do multiculturalism” differently. For instance, what might be the advantages and disadvantages of focusing on the interactions and intersections of various racial and ethnic communities—and of these with other communities, traditions, groups, identities—instead of or in addition to studying each community’s literature, history, culture separately? What practical and theoretical concerns might shape the development of new courses on multicultural literatures of the United States that focus on the interactions between or among cultures—for example, in a course on relations between African American and Native American communities and literatures in the nineteenth century? What would be the effects of a multicultural curriculum that included both courses on Asian American or Chicana/Chicano literatures and courses on multicultural or

multiethnic American literatures (possibly including white/white ethnic literatures), gay and/or lesbian cultures, disability studies? Should we continue to organize our curricula by nationality and period, or will multicultural education be enhanced if instead we organize courses, as Patricia Bizzell suggests, “in terms of historically defined contact zones, moments when different groups within the society contend for the power to interpret what is going on” (53)? Would courses on multicultural literatures or cultural contact zones be more likely than existing courses (for example, “American Literature from the Civil War to the Present”) to ask students to think seriously about issues of race, class, gender (and perhaps sexuality, ability, religion), as well as issues of power, conflict, oppression, and resistance? (And would many students resist such courses?) What could courses on the literatures of the African diaspora, or on the relations between Latin American and Chicana/Chicano literatures add to our students’ understanding of multiculturalism? What might American multicultural literatures and experiences have to tell us about globalization—and vice versa?

We can teach multiculturally in ways that confront racism, colonialism, hegemony, homophobia, sexism, but that also emphasize the relations between domination and resistance, between coercion and creativity. Strong multiculturalism attentive to both the hegemonic and the counterhegemonic can be enriched by the insights of postcolonial, feminist, and critical race writers, theorists, and activists. Multicultural education can also be imbued with awareness of how our own and our students’ positionalities and standpoints shape our views of and experiences in the world, and our relations with others and “Others.”

Rather than tolerating, effacing, or reifying difference, effective multiculturalism needs to be based on a more radically ethical idea of acknowledging and respecting alterity (including, as Julia Kristeva among others has theorized, an awareness of the otherness of the self to itself). Such an awareness that we are all both someone’s other and “strangers to ourselves,” as Kristeva puts it, can positively transform our relations to “others.” “Otherness” and “difference” are always relational rather than fixed. Rethinking the relations between sameness and difference, center and margins, dominant and oppressed has helped to give rise to multiculturalism in education and can help us reimagine it for the twenty-first century.

In her useful history of multicultural education in the United States, Sleeter distinguishes five different approaches to multicultural education. The first two of these, what she calls the “*human relations* approach”—which emphasizes that “we are all the same because we are different”—and the “*teaching the culturally different* approach”—which emphasizes giving students of color access to the skills that can enable them to succeed in society—fit Gordon and Newfield’s definition of “weak multiculturalism,” in that they “miss entirely multicultural education’s challenge to oppression” (Sleeter 11). The next two approaches—“*cultural democracy*” and “*single*

group studies”—enable empowerment because of their focus on “collective social action” (11). Yet it is the fifth type, what Sleeter calls “*education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist*” that is the most effective, because it “forges a coalition among various oppressed groups as well as members of dominant groups, teaching directly about political and economic oppression and discrimination, and preparing young people directly in social action skills” (12). For us and our students, being able to understand and respect differences as well as to discern or imagine commonalities, being able to face the existence (past and present) of oppression but also consider—and enact—multiple forms of resistance to it seem crucial to the future of multicultural education.

As many of its practitioners as well as its detractors would agree, multicultural education is political, but perhaps it can become even more politically effective. (Of course, those who criticize multiculturalism, feminism, and other recent “isms” as being political are under the illusion that their advocacy of ideas like “a common culture” and “great books” is *not* political.) Many of us committed to multiculturalism think—or hope—that multicultural education can have positive political, cultural, social, and material effects. Many of us believe that teaching literature and culture multiculturally is a necessary though surely not a sufficient condition for attaining a more just, humane, truly democratic, peaceful, nonracist and nonsexist society. As Sleeter suggests, forging coalitions, not only “among various oppressed groups” but between oppressed groups and “members of dominant groups,” is crucial in order to move toward these goals. As teachers, learners, scholars, and members of both local and global communities, we need to be able to form strategic (and respectful) alliances and coalitions across differences without ignoring or reducing difference.

Perhaps we will begin to see newly visible “cultures” and differences in the future, much as scholars have only recently begun to think of “deaf culture” or “transgender culture.” Such cultures and perspectives can be integrated into a dynamic multicultural curriculum in a relational, intersectional, perspectival way. Rosemarie Garland Thomson notes that in her teaching about disability,

rather than focusing exclusively on disability as the sole form of social otherness under consideration, I simultaneously investigate the bodily based social identities of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation as parallel but distinctive social categories whose function is, among other things, both to differentiate and in some cases to stigmatize individuals on the basis of corporeal differences. By intertwining analyses of a range of identities culturally constructed from bodily traits and behaviors, I encourage students to draw comparisons among them as well as mobilize their own varied experiences of different types of social marginalization or oppression. (297)

Yet, while we “intertwine” (or “knit”), as Thomson puts it, analyses of these identities and cultures, we also should be wary of doing so in ways that seem to equate all experiences of domination and oppression.

I believe that strong, active, and effective multiculturalism involves a set of related strategies: acknowledgment and analysis of both past and present forms of domination, oppression, disempowerment, marginalization, and unearned privilege; examination of histories and practices of agency, survival, and resistance to domination, including learning about the active creation and transmission of cultures other than the dominant one, in order to develop theories and practices of resistance and alternative ways of being and acting in the world; analysis of both positive and negative forms of cultural contact and collision; and a commitment to work toward a just, egalitarian, and peaceful society that not only acknowledges itself as multicultural but embraces its own—and the world's—diversity. Strong multiculturalism challenges existing power relations and social inequities, and acknowledges the structural nature of racism and oppression, while weak multiculturalism does not. Meaningful and productive multiculturalism must address issues of race and racism—not primarily as matters of individual behavior but in terms of systemic inequities in distribution of and access to social, political, economic, and cultural capital—as well as issues of imperialism, colonialism, hegemony, decolonization, and resistance.

The United States neither had nor has one unified common culture—inhabited and created by WASP men—although until the 1960s many Americans may have thought we had this because of the educations they had received, in which little if anything was presented about groups other than WASPs. But with increasing globalization, migration, hybridization, and border crossings (literal and figurative), the United States, like much of the rest of the world, is increasingly shaped and reshaped by a host of cultures, a symphony of voices, a wealth of experiences and traditions. Clearly, not all our experiences in the contact zones have been or will be free of conflict and idyllically dialogic, as is clear when we consider the persistence of ethnic, racial, religious, ideological, and economic struggles both in the United States and around the globe. In our roles as citizens and teachers, we can try to learn and teach how to listen to and learn from and about the many cultures—using whatever meaning of “culture” we embrace—that are part of the United States and the globe.

Although I sometimes feel that to become really effective teachers of multicultural literatures we need to follow Gertrude Stein's gentle command, “Kindly learn everything, please” (187), I readily admit that we cannot know—or teach—everything about everybody everywhere and always; as Amy Ling astutely notes, “we cannot all be remembered all the time” (159). Our courses only last ten to fifteen weeks, and we can assign only a reasonable number of texts during those weeks. Anthologies can only hold so many pages (and expand to so many volumes). Students take only so many courses in any subject—and only so many subjects—during their studies (although, in the rhetoric of the contemporary university, we do hope

to encourage them to be “lifelong learners”). Although we obviously cannot learn or teach everything, most of us engaged in multicultural education already have learned much more than we were taught when we were students. I suspect that, for many of us, our commitments to critical pedagogy and multiculturalism grew out of our own frustrations with the limitations and narrowness of our educations (whether we realized it at the time or only years later), and our desires to know more. Effective multicultural education is obviously important to help our students live and work successfully in an increasingly diverse and multicultural nation and a globalized world. But multiculturalism has a more important role to play in helping both us and our students understand and embrace our ethical responsibilities, as educated people, to work toward making a world that has so often been fractured by differences become, instead, a world enriched by them.

NOTES

1. Earlier versions of parts of this essay were presented as a plenary talk at the 2003 NCTE Summer Institute, “Teaching Multi-America: Redefining Multiculturalism and U.S. Literatures,” in San Francisco; at Santa Clara University’s Center for Multicultural Learning, in October, 2003; at SCU’s Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, in April, 2004; and at the session “The Literature Classroom: Different Clues,” sponsored by the Division on the Teaching of Literature, at the 2004 MLA Convention in Philadelphia. I thank Bridget Cooks, Marilyn Fernandez, Sandra Kumamoto Stanley, the anonymous readers for *College English*, Jonathan Hunt, and especially Julie Chang and Michelle Burnham for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay. I also thank my student assistants Kathryn Ortiz and Claire Elam, and the students in my Fall 2004 senior seminar on “Multicultural Theory and Literature.” I am grateful to the Irvine Foundation and to the Santa Clara University Center for Multicultural Learning for two grants that helped in the writing of this essay: one supporting the 2003 NCTE Summer Institute and an earlier Curriculum Development Grant for “Multicultural Literatures of the United States: New Course Development,” a collaborative project with colleagues Juan Velasco, Eileen Razzari Elrod, and Michelle Burnham, whom I also thank for their insights.

2. My primary focus in this essay is on multiculturalism in a U.S. context, especially in the teaching of American literatures in colleges and universities, although I suggest later that one of the desirable reformations of multicultural education is that of connecting studies of diverse cultures, literatures, and histories *within* the United States to studies of cultures and nations *other than* the United States. For further analysis of multiculturalism in a global context and in the wake of September 11, see Palumbo-Liu, “Multiculturalism Now.”

3. See Angela Davis’s analysis of the most recent metaphor for multiculturalism: “The metaphor that has displaced the melting pot is the salad. A salad consisting of many ingredients is colorful and beautiful, and it is to be consumed by someone. Who consumes multiculturalism is the question begging to be asked” (45). The salad metaphor, while preferable to the melting pot, also elides questions of power and domination among its “ingredients.”

4. See, for example, Benjamin Alire Sáenz: “Some of us deny the relevance of race- or ethnicity-based identities simply by invoking a democracy-based identity that is supposed to supersede all other arguments and discourses: ‘We are all Americans. We are all equal.’ This particular strategy is facile, lazy, and anti-intellectual, and has more to do with denial and erasure than with examining our material culture and how that material culture is decidedly built upon inequalities” (70).

5. Takaki argues that the idea of race emerged in the United States in the seventeenth century, when the New England colonists sought a justification for removing Native Americans from their land:

"What emerged to justify dispossessing them was the racialization of Indian 'savagery,'" seen as one of their essential "inborn group traits" (38). So, for the English colonists, Irish immigrants, while inferior, could be civilized, whereas the indigenous Indians could not. Takaki, like many other scholars, uses "ethnicity" primarily as a matter of national origin, so that Irish Americans would be an ethnic group (10), whereas African Americans would be a racial (or racialized) group.

6. In my senior seminar, "Multicultural Theory and Literature," I used an abbreviated version of McIntosh's privilege questionnaire and asked students to answer and discuss it in pairs, unobtrusively pairing up a white student with a student of color. It surprised many students to see how different their responses were from that of the student with whom they were working. I then asked the whole class what their scores were (based on the number of "yesses" and "noes"), and we "discovered" that the widely varying scores closely correlated with the students' race. Even for the white students interested enough in multiculturalism to have taken this seminar in the first place and for all the students who had already begun to read about white privilege (with little if any resistance to the idea), this exercise proved quite enlightening. Many students of color have found the idea of white privilege helpful in analyzing both racism and their own experiences.

7. For instance, there were recent debates at my university about whether the student group GALA (the Gay and Lesbian Alliance) should be able to join the Multicultural Center, alongside its current member organizations organized around ethnic/racial identities (such as MECha, Barkada, and Igwebuiké). These debates focused both on the meaning of "multiculturalism" and on questions of race and ethnicity, visible versus invisible markers of membership in an oppressed group, white or heterosexual privilege, and so on. Finally, citing both philosophical and practical reasons (for instance, lack of space in the Multicultural Center), the MCC student organizations decided not to admit GALA (although they had admitted the Arab Cultural Society weeks before).

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