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Cultural Citizenship and Educational Democracy

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The term *cultural citizenship* is a deliberate oxymoron, a pair of words that do not go together comfortably. Cultural citizenship refers to the right to be different and to belong in a participatory democratic sense. It claims that, in a democracy, social justice calls for equity among all citizens, even when such differences as race, religion, class, gender, or sexual orientation potentially could be used to make certain people less equal or inferior to others. The notion of belonging means full membership in a group and the ability to influence one's destiny by having a significant voice in basic decisions.

The term *citizenship* includes the legal definition where one either is or is not a citizen and where all citizens should receive equal treatment and enjoy equal opportunity. Yet the term moves a step further to embrace a notion that is at once more subtle and more familiar. People often speak of citizenship, not as an either/or matter, but along a continuum from full citizenship to second-class citizenship. Most people in the United States probably would agree that democracies aspire to achieve full citizenship for all their members. Nobody should have to settle for second-class citizenship.

The term *culture* introduces vernacular ideas about first-class citizenship. If you want to know about first-class citizenship, don't run to a dictionary. Go instead and ask the person concerned. In low-income neighborhoods, the people concerned will speak of goods and services, jobs and wages, health care and housing, education and income-segregated neighborhoods. Without the material conditions that give people reasonable life chances, other questions of vernacular citizenship may recede into the background. In more favorable material circumstances, people will speak about well-being, thriving, dignity, and respect. Or, by contrast, they may speak about feeling unsafe, violated, humiliated, and invisible.

The process of learning vernacular definitions of full to second-class citizenship involves the art of listening attentively to how concerned parties conceive, say, equity and well-being. For example, a man must listen attentively,

and curb his culturally conditioned tendency to make authoritative pronouncements, as a woman talks about what gives her a sense of well-being and dignity. To do otherwise would be like hearing somebody say that he or she felt thirsty and then trying to convince him or her that they were mistaken.

Consider, for a moment, how cultural citizenship appears when set within the official version of the national community promulgated by the nation-state since its relatively recent invention in the late 18th century. In its official pronouncements, the state emphasizes its capacity to enfranchise and plays down its twin capacity to disenfranchise. Liberty, equality, fraternity—the slogan of the French Revolution—can, perhaps, convince all citizens of their membership in a horizontally organized egalitarian community. Does one routinely notice that the fraternal ideal of equality excludes women? Can one imagine the alternative slogan: liberty, equality, sorority? The nation-state's original exclusion created the conditions for the women's suffrage movement and present day feminism. Similarly, the North American failure to grant voting rights, not only to women, but also to nonwhites eventually led to antislavery and civil rights movements. Lines of exclusion drawn by democracy in the United States have in the long run produced movements by the once-excluded and now-"new" citizen-subjects who demand recognition as full citizens.

The 19th century solidified a model of the national community that was socially homogeneous, spatially continuous, and well defined in its outer boundaries. The ideology of the melting pot made assimilation a coercive national project in which, by the end of the 19th century, every citizen had to learn English only and become part of the mainstream. From the nation-state's point of view, diversity was a threat.

From a Chicano perspective, one cannot help but notice that the doctrine of sameness fails to consider the possibility of polyglot citizens. Why is it that five-year-old children are at risk if they are fluent in a language other than English? And why is it that at the age of 21 they are not at risk but are becoming cultured as they struggle to learn another language? At the Monterrey, California, Military Language School, for example, officers touted their language instruction in classrooms where, with only six months of instruction, soldiers had learned to speak heavily accented Spanish. Yet on nearby streets I heard children who spoke both English and Spanish with a high degree of fluency. Why squander local linguistic resources?

It is as if this national community imagines that language is a finite good—one citizen, one language, no more, no less. The notion of the monolingual citizen implies a hydraulic model in which the more Spanish one speaks, the less English, and vice versa. The polyglot citizen works with another linguistic economy, one where language is an expandable good, not a finite one. In certain cases, the more Spanish one speaks, the better one's knowledge of English, and vice versa.

It may help to recognize that all people have various speech registers and speak at various levels. "Git" real. We're all, if only we recognize it, polyglot citizens. Try to follow a few Chicano registers. Consider the beginning of a

poem by José Montoya called “El Louie.” It begins: “Hoy enterraron al Louie.” (Today they buried Louie.) That line is fine; it passes muster in a textbook, in Mexico City, or in Tucson, Arizona. It is so-called standard speech. But then, speaking in another register, the poet shifts to a more colloquial mode, the slang of street talk: “Wacha, va a haber pedo.” (Watch out, there’s going to be a fight.) Speakers can also mix and blend, code-switching, like this: “Me compré unos calcos y me costaron fifty nine ninety five. Hiiiijo, prices sure have gone up.” (I bought some shoes, and they cost me 59.95. Geez, prices sure have gone up.) Shifts in register can be more subtle and involve English words pronounced as Spanish and vice versa. Gestures and body language further enrich the range of registers.

Curriculum Debates

The framework just sketched, particularly the workings of cultural citizenship in the national community, provides one explanation for the intense public interest in news about university debates regarding curriculum, political correctness, and affirmative action. One reporter, for example, called me from the *Christian Science Monitor*. “We want,” he said, “to hear about the Stanford Western culture debate.”

“Look,” I replied, “that’s settled on our campus. It’s over. It’s not an issue here anymore. Even the teachers who most vehemently opposed the changes in the program now support them. Why do you care about it?”

The reporter said, “Well, that’s a good question. I’m not sure about myself, but I’m sure that our readers really care about it.”

Popular concern with issues of change in institutions of higher education grows out of the parallels with issues of diversity and inclusion that pervade the renegotiation of our national contract. Struggles to remake the national community appear in miniature on university campuses and mirror the hopes and fears that accompany any process of change. Transitions are never easy, and their outcomes are never certain.

In thinking about processes of change in higher education, one should remember the strange metabolism of universities. The student body turns over every four years, and the faculty turns over every 40 years. The contrast between rapidly changing student bodies and slowly evolving faculties gives conflicts in higher education a peculiar character. In times of especially rapid change, newcomers to faculty ranks must contend with powerful old soldiers who slowly fade away, debating fiercely all the way to retirement and beyond. Change in higher education has long been typified by contentious public debate that borders on the hysterical.

Universities make their sea changes through heated verbal conflict because of their distinctive metabolism. During the 1880s and 1890s, for example, the debate concerned whether modern languages as well as classical ones should be in the curriculum. The question was not one of discarding Greek and Latin but one of also including French, German, Italian, and Spanish. During the 1920s and 1930s, the debate concerned whether or not American literature was worthy

of being taught in addition to European and classical literatures. During the 1980s and 1990s, the curriculum debate concerns the inclusion of works written by racialized minorities, women, and gays and lesbians. Despite publicity to the contrary, current curricular changes do not aim to exclude classical, European, or white American literatures.

The changes of the present in fact are part of a longer trajectory of greater inclusion in the humanities that dates back to the 1880s. The trend toward the democratization of culture has broadened the spectrum of materials available in the classroom. In the larger process, yesterday's debates have turned out to be today's common sense. Despite all predictions to the contrary, the sky has not fallen.

During the Western culture controversy at Stanford University, faculty members who argued against change, in my view, feared losing a monopoly on the authority of determining what counted as great works. They felt anxious about eliminating any books that to them represented the best of human thought. If one were to read a Mayan Indian telling of the creation (the Popol Vuh) alongside Genesis, they claimed, it would dilute—not enrich—the mix. They argued that education was like a building. “How,” they said, “can people construct an education without first laying a good foundation?” Students of this persuasion carried placards that said, “Save the core.” Certain faculty members added that one needed to teach “our heritage” before going on to teach other cultures.

A caricature of this view, one that reveals at the same time as it distorts, would be that the university's mission was a civilizing one. The task of higher education was to civilize the savages. Who were the savages? They were children who had been brought up in barbarian encampments otherwise known as public high schools. Colleges and universities were to enlighten the barbarians by introducing them to the best of universal thought and human reason. High school graduates would emerge four years later as civilized women and men. It was, I suppose, a noble dream.

This line of thought reached a particularly difficult sticking point in the notion of teaching our heritage first. Students and teachers heard the phrase “our heritage” and asked, “Who's the we?” Imagine, for a moment, the situation of the classroom teacher explaining that the Western-culture course was about our heritage. The entering first-year undergraduate classes at Stanford were about half female and about 45 percent nonwhite. The required reading list for the Western-culture course, however, included no books written by nonwhite authors. Nor did it include any women authors. Moreover, the list included no citizens of the United States among its authors. Literary theorist Mary Louise Pratt has suggested that the United States has succeeded in its political and economic decolonization but that it has yet to achieve cultural decolonization (in press). How otherwise does one explain the pervasive conviction in the United States that the here-and-now is a wasteland? True culture only exists elsewhere, in another place and in another time.

Poet-essayist Adrienne Rich has posed the “Who’s the we?” question from another telling angle in a pithy essay called “Invisibility in Academe,” in which she says:

But invisibility is a dangerous and painful condition, and lesbians are not the only people to know it. When those who have power to name and to socially construct reality, choose not to see you or hear you, whether you are dark-skinned, old, disabled, female, or speak with a different accent or dialect than theirs, when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing. Yet you know you exist and others like you, that this is a game with mirrors. It takes some strength of soul—and not just individual strength, but collective understanding—to resist this void, this nonbeing, into which you are thrust, and to stand up, demanding to be seen and heard. [1986:199]

In creating a more inclusive heritage, educators refuse to place students in the position of looking into the curricular mirror and seeing nothing. One should not have to face the kind of indignities a Japanese-American colleague of mine has often confronted when well-intentioned people politely tell her, “You speak wonderful English.” She has learned to reply, “Thank goodness. I’m so relieved to hear that because, you know, it’s the only language I’ve ever spoken.”

In many respects, at least at Stanford University, the curriculum debates no longer matter. The so-called culture wars drone on as media events that pose the great questions of should we or should we not. Has nobody noticed that change has already started in both curriculum and classroom composition? I recall one man who walked onto campus for the first time in years and said, “There are a lot of students who look as if they don’t belong here.” Indeed.

One unintended consequence of these changes is that classroom teaching has surfaced as an area of urgent concern. The question before us now is not whether or not to change, but how to teach more effectively in changed classroom environments. The new classrooms are not like the old ones. The new students do not laugh at the old jokes. That is the surest sign of change. Standing still is not an option. Those who try to repeat the old words find that they take on new meanings in diverse classrooms. In diverse classrooms, the question of “The Other” begins to dissolve. Who gets to be the we and who gets to be the other rotates from one day to the next, depending on the topic of discussion. And before long the stable us/them dividing line evaporates into a larger mix of differences and solidarity.

New classrooms and new readings often arouse stronger feelings than the old ones. One can be tempted into following the dominant culture’s conditioning by separating thought from feeling. On the other hand, one can ask: What in the book or discussion has produced these feelings? Rather than wishing them away, teachers can use such feelings as starting points for analysis and intellectual discussion. Consider that matters that are deeply felt can also be deeply thought, and vice versa. In my experience, matters that arouse strong feelings often concern students deeply and can lead to more searching analyses than other issues.

In such classrooms there is also a dispersal of authority. Can a male teacher speak with unquestionable authority about feminine consciousness? All members of a class can read a text, but they must listen with care to students who speak from social positions different from their own. It is in this sense that classroom authority becomes dispersed. The result is that classrooms become less comfortable than they were before. Instead of seeking maximum comfort, teachers should strive for tolerable discomfort. Educators have often reported that tolerable discomfort often goes hand-in-hand with written work of exceptional quality. The quality of the written work, I think, grows out of the increased range of perspectives with which students vex one another. Intellectual analyses become more thoroughly tested because they must meet more challenges than in homogeneous environments.

One consequence of changing reading lists is that as the context changes the text changes. Books that I've taught in other contexts become fresh and challenging because of the new texts around them. Teachers must seek diversity without sacrificing quality in classroom assignments (as well as in works cited in lectures and publications). The idea is to change the search process and look in new ways and in new places, so that a new array of authors and books will be reviewed for inclusion in a course. Changes in how one seeks out publications does not mean settling for dull, second-rate teaching materials.

The resulting reading lists can seek out unaccustomed juxtapositions. They bring together books that normally are not read side-by-side. For example, I taught Augustine's *Confessions* (1992) next to *Son of Old Man Hat* (Left Handed 1967), a Navaho as-told-to autobiography. The meaning of Augustine's inner struggle with paganism becomes more vivid because it is placed next to the life story of a living pagan. Reciprocally, the Navaho man's life story takes on new meanings as well. In its new context, *Son of Old Man Hat* includes both familiar matters of kinship and shepherding *and* also fresh attention to the intricacies of local knowledge. It becomes a book of wisdom. The class explores ideas of knowledge, ethics, and morality. And questions of how to read an oral, rather than written, text come to the foreground.

Changing Human Composition

Thus far, I've spoken about cultural citizenship and curricular change. Let me now turn to processes of institutional change. Institutional change requires a set of coordinated efforts. First, there's admission to the institution, letting new people in the door. This is the *green-card phase*. Can more diverse people enter the institution? During the green-card phase, the institution seems to say, "We have norms in this institution. You're welcome to come here as long as you conform with the norms. Sit down and shut up! If you don't like our norms, go someplace else."

In a later phase the institution becomes concerned with retention. It needs support services and a critical mass of people so that the newcomers do not grow isolated and disaffected. Otherwise new people enter the institution and then

exit within six months, or somewhat longer if they have internal fortitude and stamina. A revolving-door policy will not do.

The next and present phase involves the question of institutional responsiveness. Can the institution change in ways that are responsive to its new members? How should it change? How do the negotiations for change work? If a police force suddenly became 50 percent female, other things would no doubt have to change. If the human composition of an educational institution changes, other things must change as well. A few years ago, students sat in the president's office at Stanford and demanded an education that was responsive to the projects of the new students. Institutions now are in the phase of negotiating responsiveness and change.

At this point, one probably has to say a word about affirmative action. Is affirmative action a great idea? No, it's not a great idea. I can think of a better idea. Economic democracy is a better idea. Adequate income, health care, education, housing, and an end to income-segregated neighborhoods would be a better idea. Yet I support affirmative action until another plan is in place. When critics bash affirmative action, one must ask, "Do you have a better idea for creating diversity in our nation's major institutions?" Constructive criticisms that offer positive alternatives ("Here's how to make this work better") are welcome and necessary in working for institutional change, but it will not do to throw away the available tools until better ones are in hand. Negative carping from the sidelines is easy, but it does not help. Or do such carping critics really mean to say that they oppose democratic inclusion and basic civil rights?

Affirmative action has produced an odd anxiety about quality and lowering standards. To begin, one needs to think of plural, not singular qualities. A colleague, for example, combined Latin classics with West Indian literature; yet his total range of capacities remained unrecognized because it fell between departments. When he helped organize and teach the new frosh culture course called "Europe and the Americas," his combination of specialties proved invaluable in drawing together a course syllabus. New scholars often combine fields in a plurality of ways that institutions do not readily value as long as they use a single traditional yardstick of quality.

Affirmative action also means changing search processes so that new names enter the applicant pool. There's no single recipe for changing the process, but the result must be that new names enter the pool. In the early 1970s, for example, my department searched for an Africanist. The candidates who came to give job talks turned out to be all men because the department followed the standard process of the time and phoned colleagues asking, "Who's your best Africanist?" The search failed, and the following year the people who phoned listened to the names of men and then asked, "Do you have any women?" The applicant pool happily changed for the better. No change will come if the process stays the same.

Who benefits from affirmative action? The institution first and foremost stands to benefit from affirmative action. Colleges and universities gain by offering new analytical perspectives and valuable role models when they include

more women on their faculties, at all ranks and with equal pay. During my undergraduate years (1959–1963), I never once saw a woman give a lecture, and my only two female instructors led discussion sections of French language classes where the main lecturer was a man. The tacit message about the impassable glass ceiling for women came through loud and clear. Institutional self-interest demands changes in human composition.

In recent years, a number of people have claimed that affirmative action stigmatizes women and people of color. It seems that somebody has confounded cause and effect. Perhaps only a young person could in good faith make such a mistake. A noted Chicano novelist who grew up in El Paso, Texas, said that in high school during the 1950s he already wrote well but was never given better than a C in English. Why? Because Chicanos don't know English and, even if they did, they're too dumb to do better than C work. Or so, it seems, the El Paso teachers thought at the time. In sorting cause from effect, it helps to remember which came first. Eliminate affirmative action today and the stigma will remain. The stigma and the impassable glass ceiling were among the reasons for institutionalizing affirmative action, not the other way around.

Institutional change also requires an interplay between mainstreaming and special programs. People often debate about whether to mainstream or to continue specialized programs, such as feminist and ethnic studies. This dilemma rests on a false dichotomy. Institutions need both mainstreaming and special programs, not one or the other. Colleges and universities must mainstream diversity because such courses reach large audiences and confer institutional authority on their faculty members and programs. Students benefit from the broader range of perspectives brought to key areas of learning, and they take heart from seeing how porous the impassable glass ceiling can become. Otherwise, new faculty members and their subject matter become institutionally marginal. They become second-class rather than full citizens of their institutional republics.

Special programs, on the other hand, guarantee that newcomers can become articulate about their distinctive intellectual projects. Institutions thus tell their newcomers, "Bring your gifts into the room. Do not leave them at the door." Set-aside spaces allow faculty and students to work at the edges of their thought without having to debate basic assumptions. The only way to become articulate about new projects is by talking about them, hopefully in a stimulating environment where ideas can be tested in debate without having to return to ground zero at every turn. The price of admission in higher education is being articulate about one's project. When smart students lack special programs, they enter mainstream seminars with something to say, but they remain unable to say it. Being tongue-tied does not contribute to the life of the institution. Special programs make mainstream classes richer because newcomers become articulate about their new perspectives. This is precisely the benefit one hopes diversity will bring to higher education.

Diversity and inclusion should eventually encompass most rooms, especially decision-making rooms. Always ask, "Who was not in the room when the

consensus was reached?" Introducing diversity into decision-making rooms makes them less comfortable and a consensus becomes harder to reach. In the long run, however, the decisions usually prove more durable because they have been tested against a broader range of opinions.

A New Ethic

Now I'd like to talk about an ethic that could inform institutional change in a time of a politics of difference and coalitions. The two models that inform institutional change in the present could be called the *ethic of the pie* and the *ethic of love*. The ethic of the pie derives from institutional pressure to divide and conquer, and watch the spectacle of people fighting over crumbs. In this ethic, the image of limited good makes resources appear finite so that, if the other person has more, then you have less. Translated into the realm of self-esteem, the ethic says that you can increase your self-esteem by capturing some from somebody else. If the other loses, you win; if the other grows shorter, you appear taller. No doubt we all know the ethic of the pie.

The ethic of love says we are all in the same boat. It recognizes our shared fate and the fundamental interdependence among members of a group or institution. If people think of themselves as connected, the other's well-being enhances yours. If they thrive, you thrive; if they suffer, you suffer. Love is also an expandable, not a pie-like finite resource. If you love one person, that does not mean that you have less love for another. It could be that your capacity for love increases so that you have even more to offer somebody else.

Conclusion

Changes in higher education need to be understood as parts of long-term processes of change. These changes have involved efforts to fully enfranchise all citizens in accord with this nation's democratic ideals. The ideal of cultural citizenship grows out of the conviction that, in a plural society, one group must not dictate another group's notion of dignity, thriving, and well-being. Cultural citizenship also implies a notion of the polyglot citizen. Curriculum debates bring up questions of "Who's the we?" in a plural society and offer hopes of bringing about cultural decolonization by recognizing the value of cultural life in the United States. Changing the human composition of institutions of higher education raises matters of admissions, retention, institutional responsiveness, affirmative action, prime time, safe houses, and getting diversity in decision-making rooms. How can new processes enfranchise a greater plurality of people? Work for such institutional changes requires an ethic of love that emphasizes shared fate, connectedness, and attachment as an expandable, not finite, resource.

Notes

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