

Afterword: Understanding U.S. Diversity – Where Do We Go From Here?

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The major message of this collection is that diversity in the United States is culturally and social constructed. This insight informs not only anthropological research on diversity and multiculturalism, but our teaching as well. Anthropology is a discipline particularly well situated to make this point whether in articles and books or in the classroom, primarily because we approach diversity from so many different angles. The four fields within anthropology – biological anthropology, archaeology, linguistics and cultural anthropology – each utilize different kinds of data to argue for construction, making the case especially strong. In addition, anthropologists are able to demonstrate the importance of social construction both historically (through archaeology and documentary evidence) and in the contemporary period (through ethnographic observation and other kinds of qualitative material). Finally, we are able to examine the processes of social and cultural construction from the point of view of individual lives and from the point of view of social groups. Indeed, these essays demonstrate that there is not only a rich tradition of writing within anthropology about the United States and diversity, but over the past twenty years there has been an explosion of new studies.

One of the products of cultural construction is the creation of bounded categories – those of race, ethnic group, class, and gender, as well the categories of culture itself. Thus ethnic or racial groups are seen as bounded entities, each one having a “culture.” Eric Wolf has warned us against this “pool hall” notion of culture, where cultures are seen as discrete and stable, bounded and unchanging, where “the entities spin off each other like so many hard and round billiard balls” (1982:6). Judith Goode (in Chapter 25) reminds us that this view of culture is still presented in many of our introductory textbooks and undermines our attempts to illuminate issues of diversity when we are teaching in our classrooms. It is all too easy for students to say, “They can’t help it, it’s *their* culture.” This definition of culture only supports a vision of racial and ethnic groups as homogeneous, with all members exhibiting a set of stereotypical characteristics.

Karen Brodtkin (Chapter 21) emphasizes another by-product of social and cultural construction: the creation of dichotomous categories of race and gender and to some extent class. Female is constructed in relationship to male, black in relationship to white. The male and white categories are often “invisible” as a universalistic standard against which the female, black, or minority “other” is imagined and defined.

The task, therefore, both in our research and in our teaching, is not only to show that construction takes place but to teach a more complex notion of culture and to “deconstruct” these dichotomous categories. We need to illuminate the shifting, ambiguous, and processual nature of relationships and the lack of homogeneity within so-called ethnic, racial, gender or class populations. Furthermore, our dichotomous categories of race, class, and gender are actually mutually constituted. They construct each other. As Brodtkin points out, “There is no such thing as an ungendered white person. The nature of racial whiteness depends on the gender, class and sexual orientation of the individual” (see Chapter 21 of this volume).

The essays in this collection provide a number of suggestions as to how we can both demonstrate the constructed nature of diversity and how we can help our readers and students understand the more complex processes that underlie these constructed categories. They can help us undermine the “naturalness” of these categories that gives them so much power in our social relationships and our own discourse.

Some essays, by reviewing a part of our own disciplinary history or the emergence of a subdiscipline, give important details on the nature of construction, particularly the importance of race as a constructed category. Analyzing the continued salience of race in the contemporary period, Lee Baker (in Chapter 7) reminds us that the U.S. is not a “color-blind society” and that the debate around IQ (which argues that intelligence and race are correlated), the attack on affirmative action, and recent Supreme Court decisions that are dismantling the gains of the Civil Rights movement all indicate that race is very much alive as a social category. This has certainly been true in anthropology, as well. Alan Goodman (Chapter 3) catalogs the history of race in biological anthropology and its decline after World War II among many biological anthropologists, yet racial categories persist in forensic anthropology and in the “racing” of bones. He makes the argument that biology and culture are intertwined in important ways and that ideas about racial differences have consequences – for example, in the way skeletal finds such as Kennewick Man are interpreted and the way in which race is currently used in studies of health and disease. Cheryl Mwaria and Merrill Singer in their articles (Chapters 5 and 6) examine the history of medical anthropology and its connection to racist thinking. More recent approaches such as medical ecology and critical medical anthropology often work to deconstruct oversimplified connections between populations and disease patterns (such as the association of Haitians with the AIDS epidemic through various “bizarre” cultural practices). Both articles give us examples of where environmental factors and culture impact health as

much as biology and show how racial/ethnic categorization of populations shapes the way disease or health is treated.

Other essays make use of historical, documentary, and archaeological data to show how categories get made and unmade over time. Thomas Patterson shows us how class in the U.S.A. was constructed and reconstructed over a two-hundred year period (see Chapter 9) while Sally Merry examines the construction of ethnic relations in Hawaii over a similar time span (Chapter 8). Elizabeth Scott gives examples of archaeological sites at South Carolina Plantations where racial and class inequalities are captured in the built environment, where ceramic vessels give clues to gender patterns, and where other objects shed light on healing and religious practices (see Chapter 10). Other historical archaeology sites contain data on gender inequality or the ways in which gender intersects with class, race, and ethnicity. June Nash presents a historical case study of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, which examines the economic and political forces that shaped the migration of Irish, Italian and Polish immigrants to the city in the early twentieth century (Chapter 13). She is particularly adept at illustrating the role that General Electric played in excluding some ethnic workers and documenting the ways in which worker militancy and ethnic participation in the GE workforce changed over time, as the company hired more Italian, Poles and Lithuanians, and eventually "ethnicity" became more the stuff of "ethnic fairs" rather than everyday identity.

Finally, several essays suggest pedagogical techniques for helping students to discover the nature of construction in the classroom and during a semester course. Ruben Mendoza (in Chapter 24) outlines a "problem-based approach" for studying the past that includes analysis of museum artefacts (and the deconstruction of ideal-typical displays of cultural groups) and the investigation of non-Western science and technology (for example, the mechanics or physics of stone tool production). The museum project helps students see that a display often "idealizes" or typifies a culture without examining diversity, while the non-Western technology project helps a student rethink how the study of the material past might be represented in a less typological way. Diego Vigil and Curtis Roseman suggest a course on "Ethnicity and Place" (combining anthropology and geography) which involves collecting "geoethnic family trees" connecting family genealogy with space. The course also relies heavily on visual materials including maps and film reviews (see Chapter 23).

Judith Goode suggests a number of techniques to introduce students to the problems of imposed ethnic and racial categories (Chapter 25). She asks students to fill out different forms requiring them to check boxes coding their ethnic and racial affiliation and then asks the students to critique the forms in relation to their own sense of family history and identity. They participate in and evaluate multi-cultural events on campus with an aim to understanding what extent these events reinforce cultural essentialism. The students also interview new immigrants and descendants of turn-of-the-century migrants to find out how members of both populations maintain communication and social ties with their homeland. Finally,

Douglas Foley and Kirby Moss (Chapter 20) propose a pedagogical philosophy for teaching diversity in the U.S. They want students to be much more critical of their general consumption of cultural images. They suggest two videos, *Papua New Guinea: Anthropology on Trial* and *The American Experience: In the White Man's Image*. The former shows how anthropologists construct group identity and offers a critique of the discipline, while the latter tells the story of how the U.S. has tried to assimilate Native Americans through education (a process of identity construction) but these attempts have been met with resistance, rejection and in some cases cultural genocide.

Where Do We Go From Here?

In the next decade, the study of diversity in the U.S. needs to expand in new directions to explore the impact of globalization on diversity in our economy, society, and culture. Four important processes related to the globalization of capital are shaping diversity, both in terms of the structure of our population and the cultural meanings surrounding identities and differences. First, transnational corporations are increasingly establishing fragmented and dispersed production processes which in turn require workers to be more mobile. In other words, components are being manufactured in different parts of the world and assembled and marketed elsewhere, while women and men are being forced into an international wage labor force where workers must migrate away from their cultures of origin, often at great cost to their families and their personal lives.

We need a better sense of the changing workplaces where these new immigrants are being incorporated along side already established minorities. Outsourcing and subcontracting has not only affected high-tech software engineers (many from foreign countries), but also large numbers of new immigrants in the burgeoning service economy. Landscapers, motel cleaners, busboys, and domestic workers are often working for "labor ready" firms or employers who have very small labor forces, making their everyday work experience very isolating. These work situations are much different from the large factories and shop floors common during most of the twentieth century and this has important implications for workers' rights, benefits, and pay.

We already are beginning to think of immigrants as transnational migrants (Ong 1999; Smith and Guarnizo 1998; Baker-Cristales 1999), but we need more careful studies about the way one's location in the political economy shapes these trajectories. Wealthy Hong Kong immigrants can well afford to live on two continents and bring their children up in two different worlds, but working-class Mexican, Salvadoran, and Guatemalan immigrants may also continue to participate in two nations, sending remittances, visiting for important religious occasions, and obtaining U.S. citizenship in order to facilitate regular travel to the homeland they still consider their nation.

Given these global labor flows, it seems unlikely that our constructed categories of white, black, Asian-American, Latino and Native American can continue to contain such heterogeneity, as already indicated by the 2000 census forms that allow subjects to choose more than one "race." Even the notion of "race" rather than ethnicity is being challenged as a category. We need to pay more attention to the ways in which hybridity, biracial identity, and mixed cultural heritage are being dealt with and sometimes validated – perspectives being explored in the recent work of Winndance Twine (1996, 2000) and Brenda Manuelito (2000).

Second, and closely related to this globalization of production are new forms of technology, particularly those connected with high-tech electronics – for example, computerization, communication via the internet or satellite television, and the modernized factory based on automation and robotic technology which contribute to this globalization process. While anthropologists were especially active in studying maquiladoras and factories in import-processing zones, we have been less interested in the impact of these new products on our diverse population at home. We hear about the "digital divide" in the newspapers, but we are not doing enough to document and study its impact in the school, the workplace, and the home on African-American, Latino, and Native American young people. Most upper-middle-class professionals spend hours using cell phones, the internet and fax machines, while most Navajo families do not even have telephones. There is a deep gender divide here, too, as young boys spend more time at computers than young girls, something that may hold for minority youth where boys spend hours with video games and minority girls may be as reluctant to take computer classes at school as their white counterparts.

Third, the rapid development of biotechnology has also reshaped the global market. Examples include reproductive medicine and assisted reproductive technologies (in vitro fertilization, sonograms, ultrasound, amniocentesis, and new forms of birth control), genetics (the Human Genome Project, genetic testing, and gene slicing), and medical approaches to disease (organ donation, AIDS research, and the tracking of deadly viruses). Anthropologists have already produced an important literature on assisted reproductive technologies and some studies have focused on issues of race and class (e.g., Rapp 1999; Ragone 1999, 2000). As genetic testing and the discovery of more genetic connections to disease expands, critical medical anthropologists will need to continue to study how underlying assumptions about race, gender, and sexual orientation shape medical research, treatment possibilities, and access to care.

Finally, the breakthrough in electronic technology has made possible the increased globalization of media through worldwide computer networks, satellite television circuits, and fiber optic connections. The conglomeration of media industries further contributes to the U.S.'s hegemony in the circulation of film, music, and television, including the creation of media icons. Visual and media anthropologists have been studying the impact of television on local cultures and the efforts of indigenous groups to start to control their own media resources (radio stations, local TV programming, and video). This is an

area that should not be left only to cultural studies, as anthropologists can contribute much through field studies and intensive interviews that would give us a sense of how diverse populations deal with the new global media “on the ground.”

Globalization will impact not only on the ways in which we continue to conduct research on diversity, but also the research tools we will use. For example, the new technologies associated with the Human Genome project and other genetic research will undoubtedly shape the techniques biological and medical anthropologists will use to examine human evolution and contemporary disease patterns. Breakthroughs in technology will provide new ways to analyze archaeological data. The World Wide Web has already made it possible for anthropologists to carry on “field work” with subjects in between field trips or when a country becomes inaccessible because of armed conflict. The internet also makes the connection with colleagues in other parts of the U.S. much easier and can encourage more collaborative relationships with our subjects, consultants, and interviewees.

Some of the papers in this volume have already begun to touch on issues of diversity and the impact of globalization in the U.S. For example, Ida Susser situates her analysis of poverty in the U.S. in the context of labor shifts in the New Global Economy (see Chapter 14). Likewise June Nash discusses the advent of flexible capitalism that paralleled increased Latino immigration to the U.S., placing Latino women workers at the heart of a newly feminized work site. More of these kinds of connections need to underlie our research on diversity in the coming years.

In the next decade, anthropologists need to be much more active in translating our research into contexts where we can have an impact on public policy and in bringing our perspectives on diversity into the K-12 and community college classroom. The American Anthropological Association has begun two initiatives in this direction. First, the AAA Public Policy Committee is focusing on five policy issues in order to bring anthropological knowledge to the fore in the discussion of critical social issues. Two of these topics focus squarely on diversity. The first, “Social and Cultural Aspects of Health,” concerns the kind of critical attention to the categories of race, ethnicity, gender, and class that is apparent in the articles by Cheryl Mawria and Merrill Singer in this volume. Recent anthropological research also highlights the disparities in health and the higher incidence of disease among minority populations. Finally, anthropologists have documented the ways the health care practitioners often make assumptions about ethnic group compliance based on stereotypical views. The second, “Culture and Diversity in Education,” will highlight research in schools which examines how well our schools are serving immigrants and domestic ethnic minorities. Anthropological research on bilingual education and language learning will also be showcased. The committee is constructing networks of experts in each of these areas and helping them to forge strategies for bringing anthropological research on these issues into national policy debates around diversity, health, and education.

The second initiative involves developing class-room curricula at the college and K-12 levels that communicate anthropological views on race – that is, that

race has been rejected as a valid "scientific" construct but that "culture creates race." This is the position argued in many of the papers in this volume. The aim of the initiative is to synthesize and assemble current thinking on this position and assess potential ways in which it can be communicated. During a development and dissemination phase, anthropologists will work with colleagues in other disciplines to formulate new courses at the college level, new curriculum models for K-12 teachers, and other visual and case material using new media technologies (CD-ROM, web sites, interactive computer-based teaching materials). Conferences and workshops with K-12 practitioners and outreach to colleges that serve minority populations will support the dissemination of these materials.

Diversity in the U.S. will continue to be a defining issue for American culture and society. It will continue to be debated on Capital Hill and in every classroom in America as the population becomes more heterogeneous. This volume has shown that anthropologists have a unique perspective to contribute to these debates and to a complex understanding of racial, ethnic, gender, and class differences. Our continued research will open up new avenues as we contend with the changes that occur in the initial decades of this new millennium.

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