National Identity and the Politics of Multiculturalism

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Global changes have provided the conditions for the emergence of new theoretical discourses that pose a powerful challenge to modern assumptions regarding the unity of nationalism and culture, the state and the nation, and national identity and the universal imperatives of a common culture. The changes that have, in part, produced new forms of theorizing about globalization, the politics of diaspora, immigration, identity politics, multiculturalism, and postcolonialism are as profound intellectually as they are disruptive politically. Judith Squire captures the scope of these changes, while expressing some reservations about what they have come to mean as they are rapidly absorbed into new theoretical discourses:

The global economy is a given in our life now: transnational corporations cross borders to maximize productivity and transnational intellectuals cross academic boundaries to maximize knowledge. The academic discipline, along with the national state, is subject to powerful forces of change. And, as we might acknowledge the failings of the old model of state sovereignty and hegemonic nationalism but nonetheless remain deeply skeptical about the gains to be had from the free movement of...
international capital around the globe in pursuit of profit, so we must be attuned to the benefits of jettisoning the status of empirical area studies, the constricting patriarchal academic canons and oppressive hierarchical department structures, but also the pitfalls. (v)

The pitfalls to which Squires refers are the lack of specificity and theoretical blurriness that sometimes accompany the scholarly rush to take up issues of the politics of globalization, diaspora, multiculturalism, and postcolonialism (see also Grewal and Kaplan, Ien, Calhoun, “Nationalism,” and Parry). I am particularly concerned here with a position that does not differentiate among radical, liberal, and conservative forms of multiculturalism within the politics of the nation state. Such generalizations often recycle or reproduce colonialist discourse. What must be resisted is the assumption that the politics of national identity is necessarily complicitous with a reactionary discourse of nationalism and has been superseded by theories which locate identity politics squarely within the discourses of postnational, diasporic globalism, or what Arjun Appadurai calls the “search for nonterritorial principles of solidarity” (417).

This is not to suggest that diverse nationalisms can be addressed outside of their transnational links, or that the mechanisms of a dominant and oppressive politics of assimilation can be abstracted from the pain, anguish, and suffering experienced by those diasporic groups who define themselves through “nonnational identities and aspirations” (Appadurai 418). What I am resisting is the claim that nationalism can only be associated with ethnic conflict, that nationalism is witnessing its death knell, or that the relationship between nationalism and national identity can only be framed within a transnational discourse. The importance of such arguments must be acknowledged, but at the same time it is important to recognize in the context of the current conservative ideological offensive in the United States that it is crucial for critical educators and others to “locate our theorizing in the grounded sites of cultural and political resistance” within the United States, on the one hand, and to guard against the tendency to “overgeneralize the global current of so-called nomadic, fragmented and deterrioralized subjectivity” (Squires vi).

Nationalism is crucial to understanding the debates over identity and multiculturalism in the United States. As important as the discourse of globalization might be, it cannot be used to overlook how national identity reasserts itself within new discourses and sites of learning. More specifically, I want to argue that rather than dismissing the politics of identity as another essentialist discourse, progressives need to address how the politics of identity and difference are being constructed around new right wing discourses and policies. Central to the construction of a right wing nationalism is a project of defining national identity through an appeal to a common culture that displaces any notion of national identity based upon a pluralized notion of culture with its multiple literacies, identities, and histories and erases histo-

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tries of oppression and struggle for the working class and minorities. Stuart Hall is right in arguing that the 1990s is witnessing the return of recharged nationalism in big and small societies that serves to restore national culture as the primordial source of national identity ("Culture" 353). But this should not suggest that the relationship between nationalism and culture manifests itself exclusively in terms of oppression or domination or that any attempt to develop an insurgent multiculturalism through an appeal to radical democracy necessarily assumes or leaves intact the boundary of the nation as an unproblematic historical, political, and spatial formation. At stake here is the need to acknowledge the existence of the nation state and nationalism as primary forces in shaping collective identities while simultaneously addressing how the relationship between national identity and culture can be understood as part of a broader struggle around developing national and postnational forms of democracy.

The relationship between culture and nationalism always bears the traces of those historical, ethical, and political forces that constitute the often shifting and contradictory elements of national identity. To the degree that the culture of nationalism is rigidly exclusive and defines its membership in terms of narrowly based common culture, nationalism tends to be xenophobic, authoritarian, and expansionist. The latter reflects the most commonly cited example of a nationalism steeped in the practices of ethnic cleansing, genocide, or imperialist aggression. On the other hand, nationalism moves closer toward being liberal and democratic to the degree that national identity is inclusive and respectful of diversity and difference. And yet, a civic nationalism that makes a claim to respecting cultural differences does not guarantee that the state will not engage in coercive assimilationist policies. In other words, democratic forms of nationalism cannot be defended simply through a formal appeal to abstract, democratic principles. How nationalism and the nation state embrace democracy must be determined, in part, through the access diverse cultural groups have to shared structures of power that organize commanding legal, economic, and cultural institutions on the local, state, and national level (see Kymlicka).

Cultural differences and national identity stand in a complex relationship to each other and point to progressive as well as totalitarian elements of nationalism that provide testimony to its problematic character and effects. On the negative side, recent history bears witness to the second world war steeped in forms of national identity that mobilized racial hatred and supported right wing, anti-democratic governments in Germany, Italy, and Japan. Following 1945, one of the most flagrant legacies of such a poisonous nationalism is evident in the longstanding apartheid regime that, until recently, dominated South African politics as well as in the continuing attempt on the part of Turkey to deny the Kurds any status as a national group.
Representations of national identity constructed through an appeal to racial purity, militarism, anti-semitism, and religious orthodoxy have once again surfaced aggressively in Western Europe and can be seen in the rise of neo-nazi youth movements in Germany, the neo-Fascist political parties that won the recent election in Italy, and the ethnic cleansing that has driven Serbian nationalism in the former Republic of Yugoslavia. This highly selective list merely illustrates how national identity can be fashioned around appeals to a monolithic cultural identity that affirms intolerance, bigotry, and an indifference to the precepts of democratic pluralism. Needless to say, these forms of demagogic nationalism emerge from a diverse set of conditions and circumstances, the roots of which lie in a complex history of racial conflict, the unstable economic conditions that have gripped Europe, and the dismantling of the Soviet Union and its empire. As a social construction, nationalism does not rest upon a particular politics; it takes its form within, rather than outside of, specific historical, social, and cultural contexts.

The more positive face of nationalism has emerged in a number of countries through a legacy of democratic struggles and can be seen not only in various anti-colonialist struggles in Asia and Africa, but also in diverse attempts on the part of nation-states to mobilize popular sentiment in the interest of expanding human rights and fighting against the encroachments of undemocratic social forces. While many of these movements of national struggle are far from unproblematic, particularly during periods in which they assume state control, they do provide credibility to the emancipatory power of nationalism as a defining principle in world politics.1 A progressive notion of nationalism requires the coordination of a democratic politics of difference and multiculturalism with a notion of border crossing, diasporic politics, and postnationalism that recognizes the transits, flows, and social formations being produced on a global scale. It is precisely in the interaction of the national and global that a borderline space exists for generating new forms of transnational literacy, social relations, and cultural identities that expand the meaning of democratic citizenship beyond national borders.

MYTHIC NATIONAL IDENTITY

For many Americans, questions of national identity seem to elude the complex legacy of nationalism and take on a mythic quality. Informed by the powerful appeal to assimilation and the legitimating discourse of patriotism, national identity often operates within an ideological register untainted by the historical and emerging legacies of totalitarianism. Rather than being viewed cautiously as a potential vehicle for undermining democracy, national identity in the United States has been defined more positively in commonsensical terms as deeply connected to the mythic march of progress and prosperity at home and the noble effort to export democracy abroad. Hence, national identity has all too often been forged within popular memory as a
discourse that too neatly links nation, culture, and citizenship in a seamless and unproblematic unity. Invoking claims to the past in which the politics of remembering and forgetting work powerfully to legitimate a notion of national belonging that "constructs the nation as an ethnically homogeneous object" (Gilroy 3), national identity is rewritten and purged of its seamy side. Within this narrative, national identity is structured through a notion of citizenship and patriotism that subordinates ethnic, racial, and cultural differences to the assimilating logic of a common culture, or, more brutally, the "melting pot." Behind the social imaginary that informs this notion of national identity is a narrowly defined notion of history that provides a defense of the narratives of imperial power and dominant culture and legitimates an intensely narrow and bigoted notion of what it means to be an American.

In an era of recharged nationalist discourse in the United States, the populist invocation of national identity suggests that social criticism itself is antithetical to both the construction of national identity and the precepts of patriotism. Of course, national identity, like nationalism itself, is a social construction that is built upon a series of inclusions and exclusions regarding history, citizenship, and national belonging. As the social historian Benedict Anderson has pointed out, the nation is an "imagined political community" that can only be understood within the intersecting dynamics of history, language, ideology, and power. In other words, nationalism and national identity are neither necessarily reactionary nor necessarily progressive politically. They give rise to communities which, as Anderson points out, are "to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (6).

The insight that national identity must be addressed according to the ways in which it is imagined signals for me the importance of pedagogical practices that are central to the current debates around questions of identity characterizing much political debate in the United States. It is the pedagogical processes at work in framing the current debates on national identity that interest me most. More specifically, the questions I want to raise are: what forms of address, images, texts, and performances are being produced and used in popular discourses to construct what it means to be an American, and what are the implications of these dominant representations for extending or undermining a substantive plural democracy?

The current debate over national identity represents not only a conservative backlash fueled by the assumption that "those common values and consensual freedoms that have defined the 'American' way of life, circa Norman Rockwell" (Bhabha, "A Good Judge" 233) are now under attack by racial, sexual, and political minorities. Moreover, the current conservatism produces a new nationalism rooted in an imaginary construction of national identity that is dangerous to any viable notion of democracy. This is not meant to suggest that the discourse of national unity voiced through an appeal to
shared language of difference (not the assimilationist language of a common culture) should be summarily dismissed as Eurocentric, racist, or patriarchal. The vision of national identity steeped in a shared vision of social justice and a respect for cultural differences is to be applauded. At the same time, the healing grace of a national identity based on a respect for “lived cultures in the plural” (Graff and Robbins 434) should not be confused with a politically reactionary notion of national identity whose primary purpose is to restrict the terms of citizenship and community to a discourse of monoculturalism and nativism. National identity in the service of a common culture recognizes cultural differences only to flatten them out in the conservative discourse of assimilation and the liberal appeal to tolerance (see Ien, Hage). However, the relationship between national identity and nationalism is not bound by any particular politics, and by definition is not intrinsically oppressive. Hence, it is both important and necessary as part of a progressive politics of national identity to provide a theoretical space to address the potential of both a pedagogy and politics that can pluralize cultural differences within democratic relations of power as part of an effort to develop an emancipatory politics of national identity and nationalism. This is especially important at a time in the United States when the discourses of nationalism and national identity have taken a decidedly reactionary political turn.

The appropriation of national identity as a vehicle to foster racism, nativism, and political censorship is not specific to the 1990s, but has a long history in the United States. What is somewhat new are the conditions, contexts, and content through which the discourse of national identity is being produced and linked to virulent forms of nationalism. For example, media culture with its new cable technologies coupled with the proliferation of radio and television talk channels has created a public sphere that vastly expands the intrusion into daily life of mainstream discourses that greatly restrict the possibility for real debate, exchange, and diversity of opinions. These electronic media, largely driven by corporate conglomerates, have no precedent in American life in terms of their power both to disseminate information and to shape how national identity is configured, comprehended, and experienced as part of everyday life. Secondly, popular culture has become a powerful site for defining nationalism and national identity against diversity and cultural differences, the latter rendered synonymous with disruption, disunity, and separatism. In this populist discourse, there is a theoretical slippage that equates national identity with a common identity and the assertion of cultural pluralism with an assault on the very character of what it means to be an American. At issue here is a politics of forgetting that erases how disparate social identities have been produced, legitimated, and marginalized within different relations of power. But there is more at stake than the erosion of social memory; there is also the emergence of a racially saturated discourse that mobilizes national identity as the defining principle for a national

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community that is under siege. Similarly, the new nationalism in foreign policy employs the chauvinistic bravado of the marketplace with its call for the United States to be number one in the world while simultaneously stigmatizing internal social criticism as unpatriotic and a threat to American culture and civility.

MEDIA CULTURE AND THE POPULIST CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONALIST IDENTITY

I want to examine briefly some populist examples of the new nationalism that speak from different places in the cultural apparatuses that shape public opinion. In different ways, these populist voices advocate a pedagogy and politics of national identity that serve to reproduce some reactionary elements of the new nationalism. For example, expressions of the new nationalism can be found in several sites: in the backlash against multiculturalism in the public schools and universities; in the rise of the English Only movement; in the notion of the state as a "stern parent" willing to inflict harsh measures on welfare mothers; and in educational reforms demanding a national curriculum. Ideological signposts pointing to the new nationalism can be found in analogies invoking metaphors of battle, invasion, and war, which increasingly shape the debates over immigration in the United States, as in the passing of anti-immigration legislation such as California's Proposition 187. Crime is represented in the dominant white media as a black issue, implying that race can only be understood through a reductionist correlation of culture and identity. Representations of black men appear ad nauseam on the covers of magazines such as Newsweek, The New York Times Sunday Magazine, and Time whenever a signifier is needed to mobilize and draw upon the general public's fear of crime and urban decay. Recent Hollywood films abound with racist representations that link criminality to skin color. Some of the most popular examples include Pulp Fiction (1994) and Just Cause (1995) (see Giroux). All of these examples underscore how nationalism is currently being shaped to defend a beleaguered notion of national identity read as white, heterosexual, middle-class, and allegedly threatened by contamination from cultural, linguistic, racial, and sexual differences.

The power of the new nationalism and its centrality to American political life can also be seen in its growth and popularity in a number of popular and public spaces. One example can be found in the written and television commentaries of Republican presidential hopeful Patrick Buchanan on shows such as CNN's Crossfire. Buchanan represents a new version of the public intellectual speaking from such critical public sites as the news media, especially the growing number of news programs on cable television that are largely dominated by right-wing commentary. For Buchanan, the new nationalism is defined through a bellicose nativism that views cultural differences as a threat to national unity. Buchanan argues that the reality of cultural dif-
ference, with its plurality of languages, experiences, and histories, poses a serious threat to both national unity and what he defends as Judeo-Christian values. According to Buchanan, calls for expanding the existing potential of political representation and self-determination are fine in so far as they enable white Americans to “take back” their country. In this reactionary discourse, difference becomes a signifier for racial exclusivity, segregation, or, in Buchanan’s language, “self determination.” For Buchanan, public life in the United States has deteriorated since 1965 because “a flood tide of immigration has rolled in from the Third World, legal and illegal, as our institutions of assimilation . . . disintegrated.” Ushering in the discourse of nativism, Buchanan asks: “Who speaks for the Euro-Americans? Is it not time to take America back?” (qtd. in Krauthammer A4). Similarly, populist right-wing conservative Rush Limbaugh, who describes himself as the “Doctor of Democracy,” rails against the poor and disadvantaged minorities because they do not act like “real” Americans who “rely upon their own resources, skills, talents, and hard work” (26). Limbaugh has become the populist equivalent of Beavis and Butt-Head. Combining humor, unrestrained narcissism, and outright buffoonery with a virulent and mean-spirited attack on progressive causes, Limbaugh accentuates the current appeal of the talk-show that is part of a broader reactionary, conservative offensive through popular media. Perhaps the only thing interesting about Limbaugh is that he exemplifies how right wing conservatives no longer limit their political agenda to the traditional channels of policy, news, and information. They have now extended their influence to the more populist cultural realms of radio and television talk shows, the world of stand-up comics, and other texts of media culture.

Rush Limbaugh, Howard Stern, Andrew Dice Clay, and other popular media figures represent a marriage of media culture and the lure of extremist attacks in what appears as a legitimation of a new form of public pathology dressed up as entertainment. Limbaugh echoes the increasingly popular assumption that an “ethnic upsurge” threatens both the American model of assimilation and the unity of America as a single culture. Extending rather than challenging the ideological assumptions that buttress the old racism and Social Darwinism, Limbaugh and others echo a view of cultural unity less as an overt marker for racial superiority than as a discourse for privileging a white “minority.” Within this populist discourse, racism is couched in the critique of the welfare state but serves primarily as a signifier for cultural containment, homogeneity, and social and structural inequality. Just as Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein warn in The Bell Curve against the effects of immigration on the gene pool of white, middle-class Americans, and the religious right calls for a “holy war” to be waged in the schools to preserve the identity of the United States as a “Christian” nation, right wing populist commentators add a twist to the new nationalism and its racial coding by appeal-

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ing to a nostalgic, romanticized view of history as the “good old days” in which white men ruled, blacks knew their place in the social and political hierarchy, and women attended to domestic work. The appeal is no longer simply to racial supremacy but also to cultural uniformity parading as the politics of nationalism, national identity, and patriotism. These anti-multicultural attacks organize themselves around a view of nationalism that eschews any disagreement by simply labelling critics as “America-bashers.”

In the world of TV spectacles and mass entertainment, the Buchanan
s and Limbaughs represent the shock-troops of the new nationalism. On the academic front, a more “refined” version of the new nationalism has been advanced. Two examples will suffice, though they are hardly inclusive. In the first instance, public intellectuals writing in conservative periodicals such as The New Republic, The New Criterion, and The American Spectator increasingly put forth an argument for the new nationalism in terms that both dismiss multiculturalism and reproduce the discourse of assimilation and common culture. Rather than analyzing multiculturalism as a complex, legitimate, and necessary “on-going negotiation among minorities against assimilation” (Bhabha, “Beyond the Pale” 15), the new nationalists see in the engagements of cultural difference less a productive tension than a debilitating divisiveness. John B. Judis and Michael Lind echo this sentiment in their own call for a new nationalism:

[T]here is a constructive and inclusive current of American nationalism that runs from Alexander Hamilton through Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt. It emphasizes not the exclusion of foreigners, but rather the unification of Americans of different regions, races and ethnic groups around a common national identity. It stands opposed not only to nativism, but also to today’s multiculturalism and economic or strategic globalism. (21)

Nationalism in this discourse becomes the marker of certainty; it both affirms monoculturalism and restores the racially coded image of “Americanness” as a beleaguered national identity (Hall, “Culture” 357). The new nationalism also posits national identity against the ability of different groups to articulate and affirm their histories, languages, cultural identities, and traditions through the shifting and complex relations in which people imagine and construct national and postnational social formations. This is evident in the attack being waged by the right and the Republican Congress on affirmative action, quotas, immigration, bilingualism, and multiculturalism in the public schools. But the new nationalism is not confined to right wing conservatives and evangelical Christians.

A more moderate version of the new nationalism can be found in the work of writers like Richard Rorty, a prominent liberal philosopher from the University of Virginia. While Buchanan, Limbaugh, and their followers might be dismissed as simply populist demagogues, public intellectuals such as Rorty command enormous respect from the academic community and the
established press. Moreover, such intellectuals travel between academic and popular public spheres with enough influence to bring professional legitimacy to the new nationalism as it is taken up in television and talk radio programs, the electronic media, and in the major newspapers and magazines in the United States. Hence, it is all the more important that arguments that reinforce the logic of the new nationalism and parade under the banner of a "tough" or "patriotic" liberalism be critically engaged, especially for individuals who find in such arguments a semblance of reason and restraint.

RICHARD RORTY, LIBERALISM, AND THE PROBLEM OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

Writing in the Op-Ed section of The New York Times, Rorty has argued under the head-line, "The Unpatriotic Academy," that left-wing academics who support multiculturalism are "unpatriotic." For Rorty, the litmus test for patriotism is not to be found in social criticism that holds a country up to its professed ideals, but in a refusal on the part of "this left . . . to rejoice in the country it inhabits. It repudiates the idea of a national identity, and the emotion of national pride." Speaking for an unspecified group of "patriotic" Americans, Rorty, in this instance, insists that "We take pride in being citizens of a self-invented, self-reforming, enduring constitutional democracy" (E15). One wonders: for whom do intellectuals such as Rorty speak? Have they appointed themselves as spokespersons for all Americans who disassociate themselves from the left? And does this generalization further suggest that one gives up respect and love of one's country if one engages in criticism that can be conveniently labeled as left-wing? Does a public assertion of patriotism, as ritualistically invoked by all manner of demagogues, suggest that such rhetoric provides a certified stamp of legitimacy regarding one's own politics?

Of course, Limbaugh and Buchanan consistently engage in the rhetoric of love for their country while simultaneously baiting gays, blacks, feminists, and others. Moreover, one must consider the implications of Rorty's attack on the left social critics in light of the ways in which the United States engaged in red-baiting during the 1920s and the McCarthy witch-hunts of the 1950s. Is he suggesting that left-wing theorists (as if they could be grouped homogeneously) should be policed and punished for their lack of patriotism? There is a recklessness in Rorty's charges that places him squarely in the camp of those who would punish dissenters rather than support free speech, especially if it is speech that one disagrees with. Maybe Rorty was simply being rambunctious in his use of the term "unpatriotic," but given the way in which the term has been used historically in this country to squelch social criticism, such a lapse of historical memory seems unlikely. So what is the point?

Rorty seems to be caught between liberal guilt and the appeal of a rabid conservatism that equates cultural differences with a threat to national unity, a threat that has to be overcome. Equating the politics of difference with a
threat to national unity, Rorty then takes the extraordinary step of identifying all those academics who support some version of multiculturalism as posing a threat to the social order. For Rorty, there is no contradiction in feeling one’s heart swell with patriotism and “national hope” and feeling “shame at the greed, the intolerance and the indifference to suffering that is widespread in the United States” (E15). In this theoretical sweep, multiculturalism is not addressed in its complexity as a range of theoretical positions that run the ideological gamut extending from calls for separatism to new forms of cultural democracy. Multiculturalism for Rorty is simply a position that exists under some absolute sign. In this reductionistic perspective, there are no theoretical differences between multicultural positions espoused by academic leftists such as Hazel Carby, Guillermo Gomez-Pena, June Jordan, and bell hooks, on the one hand, and liberals such as James Banks, Gregory Jay, or Stanley Fish on the other. But there is more at stake here than Rorty’s suspect appeal to patriotism. Social criticism is not the enemy of patriotism, it is the bedrock of a shared national tradition that allows for many voices to engage in a dialogue about the dynamics of cultural and political power. In fact, national identity must be understood within a broader concern for the expansion and deepening of democratic public life itself.

I believe that Rorty’s notion of national identity closes down, rather than expands, the principles that inform a multicultural and multiracial democracy. However, Rorty is important in terms of exemplifying the limits of the reigning political philosophy of liberalism. Rorty’s gesture towards tolerance “presupposes that its object is morally repugnant, that it really needs to be reformed, that is, altered” (Goldberg, Racist Culture 7). As David Theo Goldberg points out:

Liberals are moved to overcome the racial differences they tolerate and have been so instrumental in fabricating by diluting them, by bleaching them out through assimilation or integration. The liberal would assume away the difference in otherness maintaining thereby the dominant of a presumed sameness, the universally imposed similarity in identity. (Racist Culture 7)

National identity cannot be constructed around the suppression of dissent. Nor should it be used in the service of a new fundamentalism by appealing to a notion of patriotism that equates left-wing social criticism with treason, and less critical forms of discourse with a love of nationalism or national identity. It is precisely this type of binarism that has been used, all too frequently throughout the twentieth century, to develop national communities that make a virtue of intolerance and exclusion. Moreover, this kind of logic prevents individuals and social groups from understanding and critically engaging national identity not as a cultural monument but as a living set of relations that must be constantly engaged and struggled over.

Rorty’s facile equating of national identity with the love of one’s country, on the one hand, and the dismissal of forms of left social criticism that

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argue for various forms of multiculturalism, on the other, are simply an expression of the new nationalism, one which views cultural differences and the emergence of multiple cultures as a sign of fragmentation and a departure from, rather than an advance toward, democracy. Rorty's mistake is that he assumes that national identity is to be founded on a single culture, language, and history when in fact it can't. National identity is always a shifting, unsettled complex of historical struggles and experiences that are cross-fertilized, produced, and translated through a variety of cultures. As such, it is always open to interpretation and struggle. As Hall points out, national identity "is a matter of 'becoming' as well of 'being.' . . . [It] is never complete, always in process. . . . [It] is not eternally fixed in some essentialized past [but] subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture, and power" ("Cultural Identity" 225).

The discourse of multiculturalism represents, in part, the emergence of new voices that have generally been excluded from the multiple histories that have defined our national identity. Far from being a threat to social order, multiculturalism in its various forms has challenged notions of national identity that equate cultural differences with deviance and disruption. Refusing a notion of national identity constructed on the suppression of cultural differences and social dissent, multiculturalism, especially its more critical and insurgent versions, explores how dominant views of national identity have been developed around cultural differences constructed within hierarchical relations of power that authorize who can or cannot speak legitimately as an American. Maybe it is the insertion of politics and power back into the discourse on difference that threatens Rorty so much that he responds to it by labelling it as unpatriotic.

Pitting national identity against cultural difference not only appeals to an oppressive politics of common culture, but reinforces a political moralism that polices "the boundaries of identity, encouraging uniformity and ensuring intellectual inertia" (Rutherford 17). National identity based on a unified cultural community suggests a dangerous relationship between the ideas of race, intolerance, and the cultural membership of nationhood. Not only does such a position downplay the politics of culture at work in nationalism, but it erases an oppressive history forged in an appeal to a common culture and a reactionary notion of national identity. As Will Kymlicka points out, liberals and conservatives often overlook the fact that the American government "forcibly incorporated Indian tribes, native Hawaiians, and Puerto Ricans into the American state, and then attempted to coercively assimilate each group into the common American culture. It banned the speaking of Indian languages in school and forced Puerto Rican and Hawaiian schools to use English rather than Spanish or Hawaiian" (132)

What is problematic about Rorty's position is not simply that he views multiculturalism as a threat to a totalizing notion of national identity. More
important is his theoretical indifference to counter-narratives of difference, diaspora, and cultural identity that explore how diverse groups are constructed within an insurgent multiculturalism, which engage the issue both of what holds us together as a nation and of what constitutes our differences from each other. Viewing cultural differences only as a problem, Rorty reveals a disturbing lacuna in his notion of national identity. It is a view that offers little defense against the forces of ethnic absolutism and cultural racism that are so quick to seize upon national identity as a legitimating discourse for racial violence. There is an alarming defensiveness in Rorty's view, one that reinforces rather than challenges a discourse of national community rooted in claims to cultural and racist supremacy.

**PEDAGOGY, NATIONAL IDENTITY, AND THE POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE**

Critical educators need a notion of national identity that addresses its political, cultural, and pedagogical components. In the first instance, national identity must be addressed as part of a broader consideration linking nationalism and postnational social formations to a theory of democracy. That is, the relationship between nationalism and democracy must address not only the crucial issue of whether legal rights are provided for all groups irrespective of their cultural identity, but also how structures of power work to ensure that diverse cultural communities have the economic, political, and social resources to exercise "both the capacity for collective voice and the possibility of differentiated, directly interpersonal relations" (Calhoun, "Nationalism" 311). Rather than waging war against the pluralization of cultural identities and the crucial spheres in which they are nurtured and engaged, educators must address critically how national identity is constructed in the media, through the politics of state apparatuses, and through the mobilization of material resources and power outside of the reach of the state (see Goldberg, "Introduction"). As part of a broader politics of representation, this suggests the need for progressive cultural workers to provide the pedagogical conditions and sites "open to competing conceptualizations, diverse identities, and a rich public discourse" necessary to expand the conditions for democracy to flourish on both a national and global level (Calhoun, "Nationalism" 327).

Secondly, national identity must be inclusive and informed by a democratic pluralization of cultural identities. If the tendency towards a universalizing, assimilative impulse is to be resisted, educators must ensure that students engage varied notions of an imagined community by critically addressing rather than excluding cultural differences. While the approach toward such a pedagogy is culturally inclusive and suggests expanding the varied texts that define what counts as knowledge in public schools and institutions of higher education in the United States, there is also a need to create insti-
tutionalized spaces obligated to transdisciplinarity and multicultural studies. But such pedagogical spaces must be firmly committed to more than a politics of inclusive representation or simply aimed at helping students to understand and celebrate cultural difference (Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, for example). The politics of cultural difference must be a politics of more than texts: it must also understand, negotiate, and challenge differences as they are defined and sustained within oppressive networks of power. Critically negotiating the relationship between national identity and cultural differences, as Homi Bhabha has pointed out, is a negating activity that should be valued for making a difference in the world rather than merely reflecting it ("Beyond" 22).

What educators need is a pedagogy that redefines national identity not through a primordial notion of ethnicity or a monolithic conception of culture, but as part of a postmodern politics of cultural difference in which identities are constantly being negotiated and reinvented within complex and contradictory notions of national belonging. A collective dialogue over nationalism, national identity, and cultural differences is not going to be established by simply labelling certain forms of social criticism as unpatriotic or national identity as a shared tradition that exists outside of the struggles over representation, democracy, and social justice. If American society is to move away from its increasing defensiveness about cultural differences, it will have to advocate a view of national identity that regards bigotry and intolerance as the enemy of democracy and cultural differences as one of its strengths. However, even where such differences are acknowledged and affirmed, it is important to recognize that they cannot be understood exclusively within the language of culture and identity, but rather as a part of an ethical discourse that contributes to a viable notion of democratic public life. In part, this suggests a pedagogy and language through which values and social responsibility can be discussed not simply as a matter of individual choice, reduced to complacent relativism, but as a social discourse and pedagogical practice grounded in public struggles. Goldberg is right in arguing that educators need a "robustly nuanced conception of relativism underpinning the multicultural project [one that] will enable distinctions to be drawn between more or less accurate truth claims and more or less justifiable values (in contrast to absolute claims to the truth or the good)" ("Introduction" 15). The issue here is not merely the importance of moral pragmatism in developing a pedagogy that addresses national identity as a site of resistance and reinvention. Equally important is the political and pedagogical imperative of developing a postmodern notion of democracy in which students and others will be attentive to negotiating and constructing the social, political, and cultural conditions for diverse cultural identities to flourish within an increasingly multicentric, international, and transnational world.

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In short, if national identity is not to be used in the service of demagogues, it must be addressed pedagogically and politically to unravel how cultural differences have been constructed within the unequal distribution of resources, how such differences need to be understood around issues of power and struggle, and how national identity must be taken up in ways that challenge economic and cultural inequality.

NOTES

1The literature on nationalism and national identity is much too voluminous to cite here, but excellent examples can be found in Anderson; Chatterjee; Bhabha’s Nation and Narration; Said; Parker, Russo, Sommer, and Yaeger; and Balibar and Wallerstein. Some recent sources can be found in Calhoun’s Social Theory and the Politics of Identity.

2For a brilliant analysis of this phenomenon, especially the marketing of Beavis and Butt-Head, see Kellner.

WORKS CITED

Hall, Stuart. “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.” Rutherford, ed.


