

Multiculturalism in the Workplace

Linda S. Gottfredson¹
College of Education, University of Delaware

Multiculturalism is the latest American social reform dedicated to attaining social equality. Its three major forms—pluralism, relativism, and racialism—are all quintessentially American in origin and content, but represent different visions of man and society. They promise different futures for society in general and for the workplace in particular. Some promote “managing workforce diversity” initiatives that affirm human freedom and dignity but others erode it. Building on the former, the “affirming climate” is proposed here as the most constructive means of managing cultural diversity in the workplace.

Like any other reform movement, multiculturalism reflects the social hopes, fears, and political currents of its time. It has spawned passionate debate, diverse experiments, some worthy successes, and disturbing side-effects (e.g., see Jackson, 1992; Landers, 1990). It has about as many definitions as it does advocates, but all emphasize the need to recognize and respect cultural differences. A fairly typical definition is the “commitment to increase awareness and knowledge about human diversity in ways that are translated into more respectful human interactions and effective communications” (D’Andrea and Daniels, 1995, p. 18). As I shall illustrate, however, some forms of multiculturalism degrade individuals more than they foster respect for cultural differences.

I will focus on multiculturalism in the workplace where it is generally referred to as “managing workforce diversity.” Diversity initiatives vary considerably, but they generally include one or more of the following activities (Gottfredson, 1994, p. 366): aggressively recruiting women and minorities and enhancing their promotability by providing them special opportunities and support; easing work-family

conflicts by offering dependent care benefits or flextime; linking managers’ pay and promotions to their success in meeting specific targets in hiring, retaining, and promoting women and minorities; and holding “valuing differences” and “discovering differences” workshops that urge employees to appreciate cultural differences, explore their own ethnic identities, and “get in touch with their stereotypes and false assumptions.”

Three Major Forms of Multiculturalism

The three major forms of multiculturalism all seek to recognize and accord respect to the variety of ethnic and racial groups that compose American society. All would agree that such recognition and respect is long past due. From there, however, they diverge markedly and postulate very different visions of man and society, ones that often directly contradict each other.

Western Pluralism: Equality via Universal Individual Rights

The first conception argues that America is composed of many groups that

do not share either a common culture or common history, but that all Americans do, however, share a common political regime with a distinctive set of principles which apply to all individuals regardless of group membership. Those principles, many of which are specified in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, provide the common protective structure (equal rights of individuals under the law, due process, checks and balances) under which all of us pursue our individual interests. They provide for sociopolitical commonality and political equality of individuals despite vast differences in behavior and belief.

The form of multiculturalism arising from this vision of man and society tells the story of America as one of many peoples creating a new nation in the process of struggling together, and sometimes against one another, to actuate the principles of the American regime (for an example, see the revised multicultural history curriculum in California, Landers, 1990). The nation has not always lived up to its principles, but those principles—a gift of the West to the whole world—remain our common conscience and guide for living together. They belong to everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, and the like; they are universal. They create the unity in our diversity. This view of multiculturalism accords all groups respect, but by recognizing the rights and contributions of their individual members.

In the employment setting, the Western pluralist vision involves strict adherence to the principle of nondiscrimination, which is that individuals should be judged on the basis of their individual merits without regard to their race or other group memberships. It also scrutinizes the definition and measurement of merit to assure that the organization recognizes, taps, and rewards fairly the full range of job-related knowledge and talents available to it, particularly those it may have

slighted in the past. Diversity initiatives of the pluralist variety might include efforts to better develop those talents (say, via career development programs), ease workers' constraints in offering them (using, e.g., dependent care benefits or flextime to reduce work-family conflicts), or train workers in cross-cultural knowledge and communication skills.

Relativism: Equality via Valuing All Group Differences

This view of man and society argues that there exist many cultures and ways of life, but all are equal; none can be considered superior to any other. It is "non-judgmental," arguing that what is right or good must be determined relative to the needs and values of the particular culture to which individuals belong. The traditional American principles honored by the pluralists, which are based in the Western Enlightenment, are therefore inherently no better than any other set of principles. They are merely an arbitrary preference, the relativists argue, and hence a mere prejudice when applied to other groups. All cultures and beliefs, Western and non-Western, deserve equal respect, and thus it would be "Eurocentric" to accord Western civilization any special deference.

Relativists claim, similarly, that competencies differ across cultures, meaning that traditional American views of merit are no more than that—traditional. It is discriminatory by this view to apply one group's standards of merit to another. "Difference is not deficiency" is their saying. Indeed, difference need not imply deficiency, but the claim here is that differences never reflect deficiencies—except in the observer who might perceive them as such.

The relativist vision departs from the pluralist vision in two key ways. First, there are no—and can be no—common or universal principles that transcend groups and embrace us all. Second, because the only principles we share with others are

those we share within particular cultural groups, this vision emphasizes groups and not individuals as the fundamental units within the larger society. In essence, each of us belongs to a tribe that defines who we are. Individuals are deprived of the respect they are due and their personal identities are damaged, the relativists assert, when their cultural groups are not accorded equal tribute. For the relativist, unity arises from mutual respect for what differentiates us. It is a unity sought by celebrating that which divides us.

In the employment setting, relativism takes the form of educational activities—educational seminars, ethnic theme days, and the like—that encourage workers to "value and celebrate" their different cultures. Metaphorically, all groups get to have their stories heard and lauded in the form they would like them told. It often also seeks to enforce civility with rules prohibiting speech that minority individuals might consider demeaning or insensitive. Diversity programs in this mold seek not just to eradicate negative stereotypes, but to instill positive views of all groups (except perhaps for white European males). These valuing diversity activities differ from the race relations seminars and other anti-discrimination training of the 1960s in that they aim to have workers develop and express acceptance of, not just tolerate, beliefs and values different from their own. Essentially, they would have us all become relativists, or at least profess that we are.

This form of managing diversity rejects color and gender blindness as being unfair, insensitive, and inefficient because it imposes one culture's (white male) preferences (e.g., for linear thinking, competitiveness) on another (minority or female), no matter how objective its standards might seem. Rather than ignoring group identity, employers must be sensitive to it. The presumption is that employers get different but equally worthy contributions from people of different

racess, ethnicities, genders, and social classes. Equal representation of races and genders, they suggest, assures that previously unappreciated forms of talent will flower within the organization.

Another problem with a common standard for all, according to the relativist form of multiculturalism, is that it necessarily creates an inhospitable and destructive climate for non-majority employees by creating a cultural mismatch for them. Under relativism, organizations are expected to adapt to the different cultures of their employees, not vice versa. Accordingly, treatment within the organization (e.g., mentoring, training, job assignments) may therefore appropriately vary by group membership. Criticisms of group-targeted treatment are generally construed either as the critics' failure to understand the importance of cultural differences or as their effort to retain an undeserved cultural hegemony.

Racialism: Equality via Balance of Power among Conflicting Groups

The racialist vision agrees with relativism that there are no universal values or principles that can unite us. There can be no common tent. In particular, it asserts that races and ethnicities are groups that compete from different power positions, and those in power victimize those that are not. Not only are individuals divided into conflicting groups, but groups are divided into the oppressors and oppressed. It considers white European males the oppressors, and women, minorities, and all "third-world" peoples the oppressed.

Under racialism, power relations are the dominant fact about cultural groups, which in turn crucially shape personal identity. By this view, all social norms, political traditions, and organizational procedures that do not produce race and gender parity reflect the hegemony of one group over others. Like the relativists, racialists believe that institutional arrangements reflect the values of the domi-

nant group, and that all cultural advantage and disadvantage is due to subjugation by the dominant group. They differ from relativists, however, in believing that the dominance is intentional. For them, continued inequality in education, jobs, and income is proof that an increasingly pernicious, ingrained, and unconscious racism and sexism has replaced overt discrimination, which they agree is now mostly eliminated. Racialism tends to be angry and accusatory, and to speak of past glories of "oppressed" groups that have been stolen or misrepresented by white Western society (for an example, see Landers, 1990, on Afrocentrism in the New York City school system). Some detractors (Steele, 1990) refer to this third form of multiculturalism as the "identity of accusation." Supporters see it as the route to the "liberation" of oppressed peoples (Banks, 1994).

Advocates of this racialist view argue, however, that socioeconomic parity is not enough. They want equal power for all groups. They want all groups to have what they call an equal "voice," by which they really mean that all minority groups should be equally able to satisfy their goals, whatever they are. Having a voice does not refer to arguing one's position via reasoned debate, because there is no such thing as objective truth in this view. The Western emphasis on the importance of reason over power and the possibility of discovering objective truths reflects not just a cultural prejudice, say the racialists, but a covert tool to enforce Eurocentrism. Hence the higher priority racialists give to the identity of those who assert a claim to truth than to any independent evidence for the claim—the reverse of what Western pluralists would urge.

Agreeing with relativists that every group constructs its own moral principles, racialists similarly agree that there are no universals which can unite diverse peoples. However, they would reject the relativists' solution—mutual regard for

our differences—by asserting that the only thing that counts is the power to enforce one's collective will. Social stability consists not in unity, which is impossible, but in a balance of power among conflicting groups.

Theories of oppression and victimization are a staple ingredient in many multicultural training activities, but the racialist emphasis on equalizing group power within organizations has gone less noticed. Diversity advocates in industry tend not to be as explicit or strident about equalizing power as are multiculturalists in educational settings, but some of the most highly sought after consultants are racialists in this regard (for an example, see Thomas, 1991, on putting minorities into "the driver's seat"). Diversity initiatives that seek equal representation of all groups in decision making would qualify as racialist, especially if they emphasize "authentic" representation.

Distinctly American Nature of Multiculturalism

The three forms of multiculturalism would seem to take very different stances toward Western civilization: Western pluralists endorse it, relativists profess neither to favor nor disfavor it, and racialists repudiate it. Ironically, however, the concept of multiculturalism is itself distinctly Western. The three forms merely represent different currents in modern Western thought (Gottfredson, 1996). All forms speak the same Western language that we take for granted—freedom, equality, rights, progress, and democracy. None even imagines—let alone dares to propose—a society rooted in the ancient principles of faith, duty, tradition, stability, and reverence for authority, principles which still rule large parts of the world. More notably, multiculturalism does not exist outside the West. Indeed, it would be unthinkable in many societies (consider particularly Asia and the Middle East) which proudly proclaim their cultural

superiority and seek to preserve their homogeneity.

Multiculturalism is not just a Western phenomenon. It is parochially American as well, both in content and origin. While multiculturalism professes a concern with cultural differences, most multiculturalists actually know or care little about them. They trivialize and collapse profound contrasts among societies across other continents (say, by depicting people from the very different cultures in the Far East and Asia as simply "Asian"), but they greatly exaggerate supposed cultural differences among American subgroups (for example, men vs. women). The "cultural differences" they focus on are, in fact, the demographic divisions most relevant to American politics. Hence multiculturalists often truncate the definition of diversity to mean mostly race and gender, and, moreover, to prescribe that certain race and gender differences (presumed differences in values and perspective) are to be celebrated but others (documented differences in job-related skills and abilities) are to be vigorously denied.

Multiculturalism is, more precisely, the politics of social equality. Americans are so steeped in their pursuit of social leveling that they generally take the pursuit for granted. But that quest is a notably American trait, as deTocqueville (1990, p. 97) observed, not uncritically, in the 1830s.

I think that democratic communities [America being for him the purest example] have a natural taste for freedom; left to themselves, they will seek it, cherish it, and view any privation of it with regret. But for equality their passion is ardent, insatiable, incessant, invincible; they call for equality in freedom; and if they cannot obtain that, they still call for equality in slavery.

That passion is directed today toward

achieving equality of condition, not just rights, among key demographic groups in the United States—races, ethnicities, genders, social classes, and ages. The managing workforce diversity movement is this single-minded democratic passion at work in the employment setting.

Although today's concept of multiculturalism has roots in an earlier century, multiculturalists like to trace the movement's origins to the civil rights movement of the 1960s. That earlier movement galvanized national efforts for racial equality and legitimized and empowered previously disenfranchised voices of dissent. These successes have shaped the multicultural movement, but it is primarily the failures of the civil rights movement that have impassioned multiculturalists. Racial inequalities have remained stubbornly large despite much fervent hope and effort to eradicate them in recent decades (Humphreys, 1988). The nation has not succeeded in filling the pipeline to higher education and good jobs with equal proportions of minorities. Even where women and minorities have "gotten in the door," they have not succeeded in climbing the corporate ladder in comparable numbers.

The more radical versions of multiculturalism would deny that much if anything was accomplished by the civil rights movement. What for the pluralists has been a good faith effort to include all citizens under the big American tent, relativists would argue was just an inept or insincere effort to improve what is actually hostile and alien cultural territory for disadvantaged individuals. For racialists, that effort merely exposed what they see as the vast infrastructure for covert white male domination.

In other words, all three forms of multiculturalism claim to carry on the civil rights movement's pursuit of social equality, but they do so with very different views of how much has been achieved and what remains to be done. But their impli-

cations run deeper than the racial politics they most obviously serve. The three forms represent quite different philosophies about the roles, rights, and identities of individuals in society, and they would usher in different futures, some of which would dismay even many enthusiasts of multiculturalism. More and more managers are being asked to implement one or another of these philosophies in their organizations, so it behooves them to ponder their likely consequences.

Slide into Destructiveness

Déravage is a French word meaning a skid or a slide. It is used by historians to describe the moment when the French Revolution veered into fanaticism and dogmatism, when it "skidded from the enlightened universalism of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen into the rule of the Committee of Public Safety and the Terror" (Bernstein, 1994, p. 3). Bernstein uses the term to describe multiculturalism's slide into tyranny—a "dictatorship of virtue"—in higher education today. The term is also apt for many managing diversity initiatives in the workplace.

New Pretext for Old Quotas

One major complaint about multiculturalism is that it is too often reverse discrimination in disguise. While true, what is most disturbing is actually the new pretext that multiculturalism offers for the old quota-oriented affirmative action. What troubles many people about such affirmative action is that it violates the "rules of the game." What is disquieting about the new rationale is that it changes the rules of the game while purporting to enforce them.

The dilemma the nation continues to struggle with is that treating individuals in a race- and gender-blind manner does not produce race- and gender-blind results, because people of different races,

ethnicities, and genders tend to possess different skills, abilities, and interests (Gottfredson, 1992; Sowell, 1991). Conversely, equal results can often be obtained only by adopting race and gender preferences. The principle of nondiscrimination and the goal of equal outcomes conflict, which is precisely why the nation has become embroiled in such a contentious debate over affirmative action. Multiculturalists seek to reconcile the two by redefining race and gender blindness as discriminatory.

The new rationale begins by shifting attention away from the debate about the social justice of affirmative action, which has reached a stalemate. Rather, it contends that "representation" enhances organizational productivity. "Workforce diversity," by which advocates usually mean race and gender proportionality, is a matter of "business survival" or "corporate viability" (e.g., Thomas, 1991, p. 311). Some advocates go so far as to deny that managing diversity has anything to do with concerns over social justice. According to one of the earliest and most prominent leaders in managing diversity (Thomas, 1991, p. 311):

[D]ealing with diversity is not about civil rights or women's rights; it is not about leveling the playing field or making amends for past wrongs; it is not about eliminating racism or sexism; and it is not about doing something special for minorities and women. Rather it is about enhancing the manager's capability to tap the potential of a diverse group of employees.

This shift in rationales, from the more to the less controversial, is accomplished by a shift in the definition of merit and the conditions necessary for its utilization. As already described, most multiculturalists contend that different demographic groups are actually different cultures. All are

equal; none is deficient. Each develops its own distinctive (but never clearly specified) forms of competence. They then argue that the talent in different cultures cannot be tapped by "monocultural" organizations. The organization can "unleash" the potentials of the "culturally different" only if it adapts itself to the cultures of its members so that they can "be themselves." Expecting all workers to adapt or assimilate to the organization (the dominant culture) psychologically harms "non-traditional" workers and suppresses their potential.

This new rationale that diversity is good for the bottom line is pretextual for several reasons. Its advocates offer no evidence to support their contentions that American demographic groups are substantially different cultures; that these supposed cultures possess different ("non-traditional") but coequal kinds of skill, ability, and knowledge; that proportional representation enhances organizational productivity; or that cultural mismatch within organizations is prevalent and injures women and minority individuals. When pressed for evidence beyond the anecdotal, advocates often retreat to the moral assertion that assuring equal outcomes is "the right thing to do." On the other hand, they ignore all the considerable evidence that job-relevant qualifications and interests often differ across groups, and that the major "traditional" merit standards predict job performance as well in minority as majority groups. Like Thomas (1991) himself, they continually make moralistic appeals and dismiss opposition ("backlash") as racist and sexist despite professing a concern only with productivity. And, managing diversity programs are generally run by the organization's affirmative action staff as part of its effort to meet EEO regulatory imperatives.

As already noted, the reasoning undergirding the new rationale may itself be more harmful ultimately than the actions

for which it currently provides a pretext. First, it changes the rules of the game while purporting to protect them. What was prohibited in the name of fairness (race and gender consciousness) is now required in the name of efficiency. The principles of merit and nondiscrimination are turned upside down. Second, by treating talent as a function of group identity, relativist multiculturalism treats individuals as largely interchangeable creatures of their groups. By attributing any apparent deficiencies in interest or capability among women and minorities to external circumstances, multiculturalism treats them as hapless, helpless creatures. On the other hand, any apparent superiority in skill or interest among white men is dismissed as the result of advantage wrested in exercising their collective will over others.

Thus, third, relativism is accusatory, and indiscriminately so. It assigns all responsibility for race and gender disparities to white males, who are presumed to dominate social and economic life. Racialism is especially accusatory, because it argues that all disadvantage is intended by the group in power. Neither relativism nor racialism allows any white male to claim innocence, but they allow all women and minorities to claim disadvantage and the moral high ground. Guilt and innocence, privilege and disadvantage, are seen to inhere in birth groups, not individuals. Once again, individuals are viewed primarily as products of their birth groups.

Intolerance and Divisiveness in the Name of Acceptance and Unity

The second major complaint about the more radical forms of multiculturalism is that they can be tyrannical and divisive (Bernstein, 1994; Schlesinger, 1991). The broadest claim of the multicultural movement is that it fosters greater social harmony in culturally mixed societies. However, it would seem improbable that a

stable and harmonious society could be created by the relativist and racialist versions, which minimize and denigrate that which we hold in common, exaggerate the "inherent" differences among us, and then expect us to cherish that with which we may disagree. Simply dividing people into groups, rather than emphasizing their cross-cutting memberships, is by itself destructive: it impedes the very acceptance that multiculturalists claim to seek. In particular, creating and highlighting group distinctions stimulates stronger in-group loyalty (a well-known phenomenon in social psychology) and thus makes it less likely that individuals will tolerate—let alone approve and respect—competing and contradictory ways of thinking, living, and relating. It increases the tendency for individuals to do precisely that which multiculturalism supposedly seeks to suppress.

Hence, no doubt, the effort in many diversity programs to teach positive stereotypes (except of white European males) and to coerce public obeisance to them. It is what Bernstein (1994) refers to as "compulsory chapel," where students and workers are compelled to profess beliefs they do not hold, deny ones that they do, and shun their fellows who fail to toe the ideological line. Hence, also, the utility for many multiculturalists of emphasizing the merely exotic, curious, and more entertaining but superficial differences (food, dance, dress, music) among cultures around the world. This expedient for gaining acceptance is near-sighted, however, because individuals now attuned to looking for group differences will see past the exotica to beliefs and behaviors that, to them, are sometimes not just disturbingly alien but outright reprehensible.

Relativism and racialism are seductive because they speak the language of liberal democracy and play on its core sentiments: freedom and equality for all. But they make one change that is at once sub-

tle and devastating: "all" refers to groups and not individuals. There would seem to be no more fundamental repudiation of liberal democracy, because this shift destroys its essential core principle—that all *individuals*, by virtue simply of being human, have certain inalienable rights ("life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness") which, although they might be violated (as in slavery), can never be taken or given away, and that the state exists to protect these rights.

Racialists, in particular, generally prefer that political rights inhere in groups, not individuals, because only then, they seem to argue, can a minority group effectively compete against the majority. Seeming also to presume that political interests always coalesce on racial lines, they assume that most members of racial and ethnic minorities must necessarily lose under the principle of majority rule—that, in essence, American democracy is the programmed political subjugation by whites (and males) of the "other." They therefore speak of group "liberation" and "racial democracy" (Banks, 1994) rather than individual rights and freedoms. They are indeed correct that a permanent, unshifting majority invites tyranny, but it is multiculturalism itself that now threatens to create such a state of affairs by drumming into all minds the belief that the fates of individuals rest with the fate of their birth group—that individuals must not act as individuals but must always align themselves with their race or "culture." Racialists are fostering what they have already falsely proclaimed to be true—namely, that whites (and males) consistently act as a solid group against others. Many whites (and males) have treated relativists with amused and dismissive contempt, but they will not forever suffer the outrages of racialism (see, for example, the highly literate but disquieting publication, *American Renaissance*, which urges whites to coalesce around a

racial identity in opposition to blacks).

There can be no amicable, democratic multi-racial society (or organization) when all *political* interests and factions coincide permanently with race. Nor would there even be social stability, for balances of power among contending groups are unstable. Far from assuring the freedom and dignity of individuals, racialism makes us all indistinguishable prisoners of our birth groups.

An Alternative: The Affirming Climate

Most people would agree that some form of educating for and managing cultural diversity is appropriate in schools and workplaces. The challenge is to fashion a constructive multiculturalism that supports, educates, and unites rather than accuses, coerces, and divides. It is not clear how to recognize the differences among us in a way that unites us rather than aggravates further the divisions that these differences often create. This is the monumental challenge to any multiracial society. However, I would suggest "the affirming climate" as one possibility. It is based in the Western Pluralist version of multiculturalism, which recognizes the primacy of the individual over the group and therefore rejects race- and gender-conscious policies and procedures. However, the affirming climate elaborates on the pluralist approach by trying to confront the often underappreciated dilemmas in dealing with diversity (Gottfredson, 1992).

Affirming the Individual

Good management practice in the United States seems to echo fundamental Western principles and can serve as a guide in fashioning a healthy multiculturalism. It stresses the dignity, development, and participation—the empowerment—of individual workers. As such, it concerns itself with recognizing and de-

veloping a worker's individual strengths and respecting the worker's needs as an individual. The organization commits itself to the individual in order to enhance the individual's commitment to the organization (e.g., consider Motorola's Individual Dignity Entitlement program). Individuals' strengths and needs may be distributed somewhat differently by race, gender, ethnicity, nativity, religion, and the like (for example, women may have more family responsibilities), but these strengths and needs belong to individuals *qua* individuals. Members of a group (a race, a gender) are not alike. They generally differ more among themselves than groups differ from each other, and so should be treated on their individual merits and not as representatives of any group.

Experience in implementing diversity programs has shown that neither source of diversity—individual or group—can be ignored in affirming the dignity of employees (e.g., consider the evolution of diversity programs in Digital Equipment Corporation as described by Walker and Hansen, 1992). Group memberships may be important components of one's identity, but neither race nor gender (nor any other demographic characteristic) can possibly be the defining attribute of a healthy individual or relationship, at least in a democratic society. Given our still-ingrained Western and very American emphasis on the sanctity of the individual, it remains an indignity to treat a person first as a member of a group and only secondarily as an individual.

Many organizations inadvertently give group membership primacy when they establish race- or gender-based groups within the organization for purposes of training, mutual support, or advice to management (e.g., Xerox's "caucus groups," Sessa, 1992). While common, such race- and gender-based grouping breeds the divisive notion that individuals' rights, privileges, and worth within

the organization rest on group membership. Such grouping simultaneously stereotypes and demeans. These same side-effects also result from "valuing diversity" seminars that force people into cultural pigeonholes by emphasizing intergroup differences but ignoring intragroup variation among workers.

Affirming Over-arching Goals

Workers may not share strengths, life styles, or personal goals, but they can work toward common functional goals. This is readily apparent in multinational corporations such as Pepsi-Cola International (Fulkerson and Schuler, 1992), where large cultural differences truly do exist and must be accommodated for the organization to function. Such differences can be accommodated by setting common, clear production, marketing, sales, or service goals and by enhancing cross-cultural communication and coordination in service of those goals. Organizations are likely to flounder in the shoals of multiculturalism when they make all other goals subservient to the multicultural, as some diversity consultants seem to advocate. It is hard to see how multiculturalism can benefit the organization and its employees unless it marshals workers' energies and commitment to serve some larger, shared organizational goal.

Affirming Effective and Fair but Realistic Personnel Practices

Multiculturalism cannot, by itself, eliminate the racial-ethnic inequalities (e.g., in skill, employment, and income) that enliven it. It is a mistake to continue expecting employers, by themselves, to somehow relieve us of that burden. Multicultural initiatives must be more realistic in this regard.

Employers and managers can be expected, however, to do their part, and to pursue it with commitment. They must provide a discrimination-free environment for all employees, and they can be ex-

pected to treat all their employees with respect. In this regard, multiculturalism may be helping to drive more general improvements in human resource management by emphasizing the need to heed workers' individual differences in capabilities, constraints, and goals. For example, diversity initiatives seem to be reinforcing several salutary innovations in recent years, including flexible benefits and career development services for employees.

Conclusion

The multicultural reform movement springs from real problems. While it has many faces, all are directed primarily to the goal of increasing social equality. As I have shown, however, they differ in the kinds of equality on which they insist (rights vs. outcomes) and for whom they seek it (individuals vs. groups). None will fully meet the contradictory ends that Americans pursue—freedom for individuals as well as parity for groups. However, some promise to crush the very human dignity that all work to advance. The relativist and, especially, the racialist approaches both tend to tyrannize in order to promote an uneasy civility and to dehumanize in the service of social leveling.

Respect for diversity has to mean just that. To be true to its professed aims, multiculturalism must promote respect for individuals as individuals, for they differ at least as much within birth groups as between them. Moreover, to encourage individuals to base their self-conceptions in perceptions of their groups, to seek only a "reflected" dignity, would seem to stunt and deny their potential as unique, striving beings (Steele, 1990). To demand in addition that none seek or be accorded distinction above any other is to destroy any impulse to discover our individual and collective potentials as human beings. That impulse lived, despite impediments to its full realization, is the surest founda-

tion for respect from self and others.

The goal of multiculturalism should be to remove as many impediments as possible to that realization, not to substitute the sham dignity of homage coerced in the name of "valuing diversity." The grandeur and inspiration of the early civil rights movement grew from its affirmation of human dignity through freedom nobly sought and won. Multiculturalism can be the affirmation of human dignity through individual freedom fully protected, honored, and embraced.

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¹Correspondence to: Linda S. Gottfredson, Ph.D., University of Delaware, College of Education, Newark, DE 19716. E-Mail: gottfred@udel.edu