Studying U.S. Cultural Diversity: Some Non-Essentializing Perspectives

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The post-1960s critiques of Marxists, feminists, postmodernists, and peoples of color have disrupted the self-assured production of holistic, timeless portraits of cultural diversity. Many anthropologists (Ortner 1984; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Rosaldo 1989; Abu-Lughod 1991; Keesing 1994) have already outlined the general direction of a new anthropology of cultural diversity. We see two major themes in these critiques.

First, anthropologists now study the cultural politics of constructing cultural differences rather than cultural difference itself. Increasingly, cultural anthropologists are interested in how mainstream, dominant society produces stigmatized, inferior cultural others. The other side of that story is how these stigmatized cultural others counter the symbolic violence inflicted upon them by producing their own self-valorizing images. The new studies of cultural difference address questions of power and the interests being served by these stigmatized constructions of cultural others in multicultural societies.

Second, since cultural difference/diversity is no longer treated as a social fact but as a social construction, anthropologists are also deconstructing their own practices of creating cultural others. They now interrogate their interpretative, writing, and representational practices and their primary analytic constructs such as culture, field, text, identity, class, race, and gender. Such personal, reflexive studies of the poetics of producing cultural images explore the extent that anthropological constructs rely and misrepresent cultural differences.

These new studies of the politics and poetics of constructing cultural others rest upon very complex philosophical foundations. The enormous influence of a new interdisciplinary field called cultural studies can neither be overestimated, nor chronicled in a short paper; consequently, we will highlight how key post-Marxist and postmodern ideas from this new field are reshaping the anthropological study of cultural diversity/difference. These categories or perspectives are slippery and ambiguous at best, but if used heuristically, they may help characterize the interpretative trends in post-1960s ethnographic studies of cultural diversity. In reality, however, there are no pure, ideal types of post-Marxist or postmodern ethnographies. Most of the texts to be cited are a complex, hybrid
mix of feminist, critical race, queer, and Afrocentric perspectives as well. After presenting key post-Marxist ideas, we will review various ethnographies that utilize that perspective. Those sections will be followed by a similar discussion of postmodern ideas and ethnographies. The chapter concludes with a few suggestions on teaching a class on U.S. cultural diversity from these two general perspectives.

A Post-Marxist Paradigm for Studying U.S. Cultural Diversity

The term “post-Marxism” represents the culmination of extended, complex theoretical debates both within and outside of Marxism. Within Marxism the debate is between pre-1960s orthodox Marxism (McGillan 1979) and their critics, unorthodox “western Marxists” (Klar and Howard 1971), and post-1960s “new left” Marxists (Best and Kellner 1991). Rather than recapitulate the intellectual history of these debates, we will focus on how the post-1960s British New Left (Forgaces 1989) has reconstructed Marxism into what Laclau and Mouffe (1985) call “post-Marxism.” The debates at the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) are quite instructive on how the New Left has generally reconstructed Marxism (Storey 1996; Morley and Chen 1996). Their brand of Marxism, sometimes labeled “cultural Marxism,” and based on ethnographic studies of everyday cultural and ideological practices, is particularly appealing to American cultural anthropologists (Lave 1992).

The most well-known, influential voice of this new synthesis is the former CCCS director, Jamaican Stuart Hall. Many of his main theoretical writings can be found in a recent volume edited by Morley and Chen (1996). Hall (1996) begins his reconstruction of Marxism by appropriating Louis Althusser’s notion of the ideological state apparatus as multiple levels of social control. After critiquing Althusser for lapsing into economic determinism, Hall proposes to salvage the social formation construct with Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony. By now, most anthropologists are familiar with Gramsci, but to briefly recapitulate his perspective, Gramsci places greater emphasis than orthodox Marxists on superstructural or cultural institutions and ideological factors. Gone is the causal model of the material base or economic mode of production determining the cultural superstructure of ideas, belief, and consciousness. Gone also is the notion of a unitary capitalist class that rules through a coercive state. Gramsci argues that ruling historical blocs, since their power is never secure, are always faced with the problem of building civil consent. They build consent by controlling what Marx called civil society, the public and private spheres of life shaped by the state and its educative institutions (schools, mass media, church, voluntary associations, and families). A historical ruling bloc’s ability to control these cultural institutions, through legal and moral force, creates the political consensus and stability necessary for capital accumulation and expansion. This concept of capitalist society and state has as many implications for the ruled as it does for the rulers. Since ideological hegemony is never secure, there is always the possibility that the working class may create a progressive counter-hegemonic historical bloc through a series of political alliances rooted in a well-developed working-class culture.

What is novel about this formulation is its highly processual notion of structure, state, social classes, and society. The accent is on a constantly shifting consensus that each ruling bloc must create and sustain. Gramsci characterizes the ongoing struggle between historical blocs as a series of “articulations” between the different levels of the social formation and the institutions of civil society. No observer can understand the construction of a hegemonic process without focusing on those key conjunctural moments or “articulations” within a given social formation. In a novel conceptual move Hall gives the Gramscian notion of “articulations” a poststructuralist, linguistic turn. He contends that anyone interested in ideology and hegemony must also study the “articulations” between various popular discourses, for example, nationalism, Catholicism, racism, classism. Such articulations take place in a multitude of everyday discursive practices through a variety of everyday institutional rituals. Studying such “discursive articulations” helps highlight the inherently contradictory, non-unitary nature of “commonsense” or popular world views/ideologies.

This new linguistic turn opens up the classic Marxist paradigm to a multiple dominance perspective that privileges the study of how collective cultural identities are produced. In this new formulation, Marx’s original notion of alienation and objectification through wage labor has been broadened to include everyday cultural practices (Foley 1990). From this general perspective, various cultural identity groups produce themselves daily through everyday communicative or expressive cultural practices in various cultural institutions like schools, media, and family. This cultural “self-production” can be dehumanizing and alienating as capitalist factories and offices. The stigmatizing discourses about inferior “cultural others” that circulate in various cultural institutions can arrest or “steal” people’s subjectivity and humanity in such the same way that laboring in commodity-producing factories does. Cultural studies researchers have just begun to document how cultural processes of objectification and “othering” work, and how stigmatized identity groups resist such alienating processes.

Ultimately, the British post-Marxist perspective, although focused more on cultural/ideological processes than on political economy, retains some vital links with a classic Marxist perspective. It retains a notion of social classes in the broader, less deterministic idea of historical blocs. But, as Hall aptly puts it, this is a “Marxism with no guarantees,” a Marxism stripped of its grand, utopian theory of a progressive proletariat and the inevitability of socialism. No historical laws inexorably lead to social order, dominance, growth, or progress. Although no longer very sure about world historical processes, most post-Marxists subscribe to the development of a thoroughly democratic political culture. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) emphasize that once the Old Left has been thoroughly sensitized to multiple forms of cultural objectification and dominance, they will be ready to build a new, more genuinely egalitarian oppositional historical bloc.

To sum up, a politicized, processual, discursive concept of multiple cultural
struggles is at the center of most post-Marxist accounts of cultural diversity. Such studies generally call attention to the ways in which "cultural differences" are produced through complex power relations and multiple discourses. What we experience as "natural," inherited cultural differences are the product of complex cultural struggles that vary at given historical junctures and moments. Cultural differences or group traditions are not stable bundles of traits and practices handed down from one generation to the next. Cultural differences are social constructions, the ever-changing product of institutional and discursive articulations between competing historical blocks and/or fragmented identity groups. With this brief characterization of post-Marxist thought, we would like to illustrate how some recent ethnographies, influenced by this perspective, study cultural diversity.

Some Post-Marxist Ethnographies of U.S. Cultural Diversity

Not unexpectedly, scholars from cultural groups who have endured a civil society ruled by white bourgeois males find post-Marxian an attractive paradigm. One can make a strong case that ethnic and feminist scholars have led the way in revitalizing and reshaping the original Marxist paradigm. White male scholars— who have not embraced their class, racial, and gender privilege—are, of course, allies in this conceptual revolution. Perhaps the British ethnographers with close ties to CCCS (Gilroy 1988, 1993; Bauman 1996) have produced the most extensive examples of post-Marxist ethnographies. Gerd Bauman's Contesting Culture: Discourses of Identity in Multi-Ethnic London is an ethnography of a suburban district near Heathrow airport. Southall is a multiethnic community of Afro-Caribbean, Muslim Sikh, Indian Hindu, and East African. Bauman provides a fascinating description of how the local ethnic groups strategically use the dominant society's essentializing, biologizing hegemonic discourses to equate community and culture into a highly reified view of ethnicity. Both mainstream politicians and oppositional ethnic politicians play these reified notions of their culture to gain civil rights and government largesse. Bauman leaves the reader with the image of individuals within the groups borrowing cultural practices, assuming multiple subject positions, and crossing ethnic boundaries, thus destabilizing the commonsense categories of Asian, African, and Afro-Caribbean.

The other CCCS-related study, Paul Gilroy's "There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack": The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation, is an exhaustive account of how national discourses of race, national identity, and class articulate through media, government policy, right-wing political groups, civic education, and discourses on crime and family. In response to images of black rioters, mudgraders, welfare cheats, and disloyal rebels, the counter-hegemonic discourses of the West Indian immigrant community are traced through various forms of black music, especially reggae and its Rastafarian philosophy. The importance of an emerging African diaspora community is emphasized, and his second book The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness develops further the notion of a black diaspora culture with organic black intellectuals articulating a new hybrid, pan-African identity.

Gilroy's work has many affinities with the seminal work of Chicano folklorist Américo Paredes (1958, 1993) on the ballads, music, dance, humor, and various folkloric performances that inspired resistance to objectifying racist, classist, and nationalistic discourses. Paredes' colleagues (Pétra 1983, 1999; Linon 1994; Flores 1995) have deepened this critique of white bourgeois hegemony with more nuanced, detailed ethnographic studies of resistance folklore. The explosion of studies that highlight counter-hegemonic aspects of oral and written expressive cultural forms is too vast to document fully in a short chapter. One can find many earlier cognate studies on African American slavery (Levine 1977), urban folklore (Abrahams 1970), and music (Keil 1970) as well. The same is true of other marginalized American ethnic and gender groups.

Studies of everyday oral expressive forms and folk artists cover some of the same ideological terrain that postcolonial literary scholars (Said 1994; Krupat 1992; Saldivar 1990) studying "resistance literature" cover. Various anthropologists and humanities scholars have also advocated the importance of studying the suppressed voices of ethnic (Fischer 1986) and women (Harlow 1987) through autobiographical novels. Other feminist scholars (Behar and Gordon 1993) and ethnic scholars (Harrison 1991) have pointed out the importance of decolonizing the anthropological discourse and the discourse of science (Haraway 1989; Martin 1987) by highlighting their oppressive, ideological character. In much of this work, post-Marxist concerns with ideological hegemony, organic intellectuals, and resistance are fused with poststructuralist/postmodern concerns over disciplinary canons and institutional practices that "normalize" the minds and bodies of culturally different groups.

A recent AAA volume on Gender and Anthropology (Morgen 1989) underscored the important role that feminists are playing in reformulating Marxism. Key socialist feminist theoreticians (Sacks 1989; Susser 1989; Lamphere et al. 1997) are now emphasizing the importance of specific racial and gender experiences in wider community and kinship networks, and unformed forms of domestic labor. Like post-Marxists, they are trying to expand orthodox Marxist notions of labor exploitation and class resistance through a wider analysis of how women's paid and unpaid work articulates with their racial and gender experiences. Isa Susser's chapter (Morgen 1989) on the anthropology of the United States is particularly instructive on the new trends in poverty and family studies. Susser, like Lamphere et al. (1997), continues to explore classic political-economy topics such as wage labor, labor struggles, migration, state regulation of families, and poverty programs. Such works are also beginning to incorporate more of the post-Marxist emphasis on objectifying identity discourses as sites of exploitation and cultural struggle. Lancaster and di Leonardo (1997) move even further towards a post-Marxist perspective on families and gender. This volume presents ideological critiques on everything from Madonna to allegedly scientific discourse on the body, sexuality, and the family. Such critical cultural studies scramble the conventional, popular notions of gender roles, sexuality, exploitation, and resistance.
It is not possible to review more than a few exemplary works in this vast "poverty studies" literature. For example, di Leonardo’s (1986) study of the interplay of class, race, and gender on Italian American families, like Stack’s (1974) classic study of African American kinship, speaks from within women’s kinship networks. This allows both authors to thoroughly deconstruct the patriarchal, middle-class white constrictions of these ethnic groups and their family systems. The important work of Stacy (1990, 1996) and Weston (1991) challenges the bourgeois, heterosexual family ideal by revealing the extraordinary diversity of the “postmodern” American family. Ethnic scholars (Williams 1990) highlight the growing diversity within their kinship systems and challenge popular stereotypes of ethnic gender roles and families.

A related, broader ideological critique in the field of poverty studies centers on the “poverty discourse” of policy makers who regulate a growing “underclass” allegedly trapped in an inferior, morally degenerate “culture-of-poverty” (Katz 1989). This conservative, bourgeois discourse about the poor articulates classist, racist, and sexist discourses into a class position as a stigmatized “class culture.” This pernicious poverty discourse about the working class has provoked progressive academics to produce a sustained body of empirical work that dismantles the culture-of-poverty view of the way of life of the poor (Foley 1997). These scholars have produced an impressive array of studies that counter the objectifying poverty discourse about the pathological black family, hard-living poor whites, immoral single female parent households, uncaring, macho Latino males, and so forth.

A particularly good example of a post-Marxist poverty study is Bourgois’ (1995) account of street life in a New York neighborhood. In search of a better life, Puerto Rican immigrants from American-owned sugar plantations come to East Harlem, but arrive during a period of “deindustrialization.” Their choice is poorly paid, demeaning service sector jobs, or demeaning predatory street culture jobs as crack dealers, thieves, and prostitutes. The struggle for Marxist and political-economy perspectives, and thus highlights both ideological and macro-economic forces. The depictions of working in the white corporate and schooling scene highlight cultural struggles against the hegemony of white middle-class communicative styles. Bourgois argues that rural, working-class Puerto Ricans simply do not fit into corporate office culture or the public schools, and thus are pushed into a search for self-respect in drugs, mugging, and violent gang rape. Ultimately, he calls for public policies that sustain women against irresponsible, hateful males and remove the politicians and bureaucrats who spread reckless rhetoric about uncaring crack mothers and immoral welfare cheaters.

Other related work on the street culture of African American males also uses a cultural production perspective (E. Gordon 1997). Such studies highlight the complex mix of traditional, communalistic African American kin- and church-centered cultural practices with the exploitative, entrepreneurial, individualistic logic of street capitalism and hustling. These new hybrid images of “black culture” disrupt easy notions of a black underclass and a dysfunctional culture of poverty. They also take a new look at the ideological hegemony of white liberal academics and policy makers to racialize cultural differences in a way that obscures the underlying hegemony of white superiority.

Perhaps the most interesting ideological critique of white racial hegemony, however, is in legal studies. Legal scholars called “critical race theorists” (Crenshaw et al. 1995) blend Marxist and postmodern theories into a powerful critique that deconstructs the allegedly race-neutral legal civil rights discourse. Like African American cultural studies scholars, these legal scholars have deployed what the postcolonial scholar Gayatri Spivak (1988) calls a “strategic essentialism discourse.” They argue against the tendency of whites to position themselves as the rational, fair, neutral center of the racial order, and to construct black culture as inferior. In a counter-hegemonic move, they racialize the social science and law discourses, thus disrupting allegedly neutral, scientific, universalistic discourses about cultural difference.

A related literature on schooling as a cultural reproduction institution also generates many ideological critiques of cultural diversity. This literature is too extensive to review thoroughly, but a few studies (Wills 1981; Foley 1990; MacLeod 1995) will illustrate how educational anthropologists disrupt hegemonic views of ethnicity, class, and gender. Paul Willis, a well-known member of CCCS has written the classic post-Marxist study of youth and schooling. Willis (1981) dismantles a culture-of-poverty view with a positive, self-valuing image of working-class culture. Foley’s (1990) study of Mexican youth in South Texas covers similar terrain but adds a race/class/gender articulation missing in Willis. The Mexican community and ethnic reform movement is marked by significant class and gender variation. Sweeping class or racial explanations of political resistance, cultural identity, and school achievement suppress such in-group differences. Moreover, such perspectives will fail to capture how some rebellious Mexican youth deploy essentializing cultural nationalist discourses and middle-class white discourses. They control their communicative labor, and thus manage their public images for success in capitalist educational labor markets.

MacLeod’s (1995) detailed ethnography of two adolescent peer groups highlights the malleability of rebellious white working-class youth and the conformity and achievement of African American youth. In the process, MacLeod turns the commonsense perceptions of whites and blacks on their head. When he returns to the community ten years later, the white youth have sunk into abject despair and the black youth have lost their innocence and optimism about civil rights reforms. Many others, especially feminist scholars (Weis 1990; Eder et al. 1994; Davidson 1996; Fordham 1996), deploy multiple systems of dominance perspectives and attend to complex discursive articulations and identity constructions. Previously passive, low-achieving, essentialized female and minority cultural others are suddenly more assertive and academically successful through everything from subtle deployments of mainstream linguistic practices and impression management to open confrontations.

Recent anthropological critiques of higher education also draw heavily upon post-Marxist ideas (Collins et al. 1999). Wesley Shumate’s (1997) College for Sale illustrates nicely the incorporation of ideological critiques into a more
conventional political-economy critique of higher education. The commodification of everything from curriculum to ethnic faculty tokens is taken up in detail. Bourdieuian notions of cultural capital, symbolic violence, and academic market places, and Foucauldian notions of surveillance, professional discourses, and intellectuals mark these new post-Marxist critiques of academia. Not all poststructuralist accounts of schooling institutions fit neatly into post-Marxist formulations, however. Devine's (1996) study of the culture of school violence in New York City presents a ringing critique of much post-Marxist educational ethnography as an overly romantic view of these cultural institutions and their heroic student rebels. For Devine, the capitalist economic order is creating a culture of violence in urban schools that makes them dehumanized war zones. He emphasizes the destruction of the stable categories of ethnicity, identity, subjectivity, institution, dominant culture, and counterculture.

Finally, post-Marxist studies of cultural production permeate cultural media studies (Kellner 1989, 1995) and ethnographic studies of popular culture. Studies of romance novels (Radway 1984), pornography (Williamson 1989), talk shows (Shattuc 1997), fairy tales (Zipes 1997), soap operas (Medleis 1982), and National Geographic magazine (Lutz and Collier 1993) explore how ideological hegemonies are consumed, resisted, and inverted. Foley's (1995) ethnographic study of white-Indian relations in a small Iowa community focuses on the articulations between media and academic representations of Indians and local representations. The study illustrates how local storytelling and academic and journalistic studies produce an objectified Indian culture that provokes a sustained, vigorous cultural struggle. Various Mesquaki everyday oral narrative practices counter the local and extralocal white story-telling practices that objectify and stigmatize Indians. Ultimately, a new group of Mesquaki organic intellectuals emerge and produce their own counter-hegemonic literary, historical, and media representations of an Indian cultural other.

The mass media are generally a major terrain of cultural struggles over objectifying images. Although such studies do not always directly document cultural differences and diversity, they often explore how women and minorities are misrepresented. Many of these new studies suggest that minorities and women are anything but passive, dependent consumers. Women cultural consumers often invert the objectifying tendencies of romance novels, soap operas, and pornography in creative, empowering ways. Even talk shows, allegedly sites of bourgeois dominance, can be used to build solidarity networks and to explore various identity constructions critically (Shattuc 1997). Finally, the study of youth subculture's appropriation of mass mediated cultural forms and images is a particularly rich body of literature on counter-hegemonic practices (Griffin 1993).

Postmodern Studies of Cultural Difference and Diversity

The concept of postmodernism was originally used to describe a cultural or intellectual trend that opposed the rigid modernist style in art, architecture, and design (Jameson 1984). However, it has come to be applied to a much wider range of philosophical and social science discourses concerned with the "crisis of modernity" — the end of assumptions, overarching theories, and meta-narratives that have gained prominence since the Enlightenment or the Age of Reason centered in the mid-18th century. The postmodern condition is said to signify a world of ever-multiplying signifying processes, a myriad of images, a dissolution of established categories and identities, and an ever-increasing skepticism toward claims of truth, meaning, and value, all perpetually linked to ideological positions of authority. What, then, is the importance of such fragmentations and contradictions for social science theory?

A catalyst in the rise and influence of the postmodern paradigm is the often referred-to debate between critical theorist Jurgen Habermas and Jean-François Lyotard concerning the significance of reason and rationalization in advanced capitalist society. Lyotard (1984) boldly proclaimed, against the tradition of modernist social theory and its emphasis on foundations of universal criteria of truth, that knowledge generated through the medium of grand or meta-theory had lost its legitimacy as either a critical or emancipatory narrative. Within the modernist paradigm, Lyotard argued that human agency and fluidity of experience had become lost within the confines of positivist, deterministic Marxist concepts. For Lyotard and other postmodern theorists, to continue to believe in the emancipatory potentials of grand theory was to be seduced by the logocentric pretense of the Enlightenment. Lyotard suggested that meta-theory was on the wane and in the process of being displaced by the development of new technologies and specialized discourses that relativized society and rendered metatheory's normative foundations superfluous, elitist, and, ironically, hegemonic in the Gramscian sense.

Such redeployment of advanced liberal capitalism was leading to what Lyotard (1984:57–58) called the "elimination of the communist alternative and the valorization of the individual enjoyment of goods and services." He contends that the legitimation of knowledge claims can only arise from "their own linguistic practice and communicational interaction" (1984:41). In other words, knowledge is produced and disseminated through discourse and representation. For Lyotard, the postmodern condition was homologous to knowledge or epistemology, which he linked to the ubiquity of power throughout society. Therefore, it was power rather than "truth" or "ideals" that would become the standard of the postmodern era.

The general influence of postmodernism on anthropology remains a seldom-told piece of intellectual history, but postmodern/poststructuralist critiques of anthropology's objectifying master narratives (Faubion 1983; McGrane 1989; Clifford 1988; Said 1979) share some of the same terrain as post-Marxism. Both focus on the discursive regimes of the new social sciences and their objectifying discourses such as "orientalism." Postmodernists have generally been even more skeptical about science, rationality, and metalanguages, than most Marxists are; consequently, postmodernists have initiated a more sustained attack on the positivistic, scientific foundations of ethnographic description. Postmodernists influenced by literary theory have also raised new issues about the production of cultural texts and cultural representations.
The most cited and best-known account of the general confluence of Marxism, feminism, postmodernism, and interpretivism into anthropology's "experimental moment" is Marcus and Fischer's (1986) *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*. They argue that the ethnographer's rhetorical use of a scientific realist narrative style often masked the ideological or theoretical interests of the author. Marcus and Fischer called for a style of ethnography that decenters the authority of "scientific anthropologists" to render detached, objective portraits of whole cultures. Having eschewed grand meta-theories that produce totalizing cultural accounts, postmodern ethnographers strive to evoke a multiplicity of different perspectives and voices. By complicating rather than resolving the issues of the writer's authority and ethnographic holism, these new more fragmented, multivocal ethnographic texts may lead to less monolithic, objectifying portraits of cultural others.

Ironically, the very groups with whom postmodernists hope to ally - marginalized scholars of color and feminists - have produced some of the most powerful and insightful criticisms of postmodernism. Some feminist scholars (di Leonardo 1991; Mascia-Lee et al. 1989; Weston 1997) and scholars of color (Harrison 1991; Rosaldo 1989) argue that postmodernism perpetuates entrenched academic standards while reproducing traditional Eurocentric conclusions about non-European cultures. Micaela di Leonardo (1989) in an article titled "Malinowskis's Nephews" calls many notions of postmodernism "Eurocentricity or high (elitist) modernism" in a new guise which still ignores insights and contributions of marginalized anthropologists. Renato Rosaldo takes di Leonardo's critique even further by arguing for conscious subjectivity in social science research. He contends that social and cultural analysts can rarely if ever, become detached and value-free observers. He adds that anthropology, even the relativistic postmodern ethnographer, still struggles to maintain this imperialistic tendency.

Although the postmodern call to give voice to the voiceless is neither new nor always necessary and possible, it has helped legitimate some of the efforts of marginalized scholars of color (Harrison 1991; E. Gordon 1997) and feminists (Behar and Gordon 1993) to attack conventional academic and anthropological canons and practices. If nothing else, the postmodern discourse may have opened up some ideological space for previously marginalized scholars. Saldívar (1990) suggests that Chicano narratives should be read as critical and ideological takes on the "human experience." It is precisely because such marginal views are different from conventional dominant views that they offer readers nuanced insights that help deconstruct static images of the "Other." Vizenor (1989) makes a similar argument for Native American narratives.

**Some Postmodern Ethnographies of U.S. Cultural Diversity**

One of the most explicitly postmodern texts we have encountered is Kathleen Stewart's (1996) ethnography of a coal-mining town in West Virginia. Her study is marked by an extended polemic on the need to abandon cultural analysis based on grand master narratives and strong knowledge claims. Rather than presenting a tidy empirical place or subject, her narrative tracks experience where it happens, as it happens. Her study takes readers in and out of the local dialect, sits through the seeming randomness of the everyday, and candy rests between the conscious and unconscious. Ultimately, Stewart's ethnography disrupts negative popular and scholarly representations of Appalachia and its inhabitants as it portrays the residents heroically reenacting themselves in time, space, and narrative memory.

Another work guided by a postmodern sensibility is Davis's (1989) depiction of a Philadelphia suburb as an idealized, timeless theme park, and Gomez-Peña (1996) who, as a "fluid border-crosser," writes a "post-Mexican literary hypertext" (1996xi) in his search to dispel the myths and barriers of identity borders. Poststructuralist feminists Patti Lather and Cris Smithies (1997) juxtapose the voices of HIV-positive women, factoids, parables about angels, and authorial reflections in a highly unconventional, disruptive, nonlinear narrative. Their text provides one with a dignified, self-valoring portrait of these women as complex individuals. Relatively few anthropologists writing about U.S. cultural diversity have produced thoroughly postmodern ethnographies, but previous studies are clearly more experimental and evocative in interpretative and narrative style.

Black scholars have also experimented with textual, storytelling practices. Gwalney (1980) and John Stewart (1989) pursue two unconventional routes into lived experiences of black folk that challenge anthropological methods pertaining to subjects and the writing of ethnography. Gwalney's research relies on the local black knowledge of "ordinary people." He notes: "My main intent is to be an acceptable vehicle for the transmission of their views" (Gwalney 1980ii). The people in the book speak for themselves about themselves and others, analyzing and interpreting their lives and the broader society which so heavily influence their culture. From an anthropological point of view, Gwalney's research opens the discourse to a marginalized, often-silent group creating a venue for them to define their own reality. He argues ultimately that despite common assumptions, black men and women are capable of literate self-expression and abstract thought which can and should be incorporated into the broader theoretical realm of academic research.

Stewart (1988) acknowledges that he uses anthropology in a "personal way" in his study of a village in Trinidad. Experimenting with literary theory, he argues that the subjective side of culture may be better captured in ethnographic fiction than in standard ethnographic writing (perhaps inspired by Zora Neale Hurston). Through eight stories in the book, Stewart experiments with culture theory, ethnography, and literature to show why the aesthetic should not be separated from the intellectual; how fact and fiction are often fluid and linked, not separate. Through this method, Stewart's stories succeed, particularly in showing how people interact where multiple cultural heritages are in close contact. At the same time, his
text is replete with lessons on innovative fieldwork methods and ethnographic writing style.

Various postmodern-influenced studies (Kondo 1990; O’Neill 1996; Fordham 1996) explore the psychological contradictions of identity construction in greater depth than post-Marxist studies of collective identity struggles generally do. O’Neill shutters popular images of the stoic, taciturn noble savage with her portrait of how one Native American group has adjusted to cultural loss and racist indignities. Signitha Fordham’s (1996) recent study of the identity struggles of black adolescents is a good example of a more complex, intimate psychological portrait of cultural diversity. Fordham stresses the double bind of black students who yearn to be successful and attain “an education,” while at the same time trying to deflect criticism from their black peers for “acting white.” She demonstrates that the educational journey for black students is temenous and often teetering on the edge of disaster because the price of success is painful cultural lininality.

Another less conventional study of cultural assimilation focuses on the middle class – the group that many consider the foundation of mainstream, assimilationist ideology (Newman 1988). Newman’s revealing ethnography presents a portrait of a serene white suburbia whose residents are sliding down the ranks of the social class ladder due to corporate cost-cutting and downsizing. This ethnography shows a vulnerable, fragile, bewildered side of the middle-class managerial lifestyle, and it undermines a number of idealized images of mainstream middle-class white American families as a homogeneous, universal ideal lifestyle.

Other white researchers have begun to interrogate the assumed racial neutrality of the whiteness category. White as a color, a race, a privileged space, an oppressive ideology or hegemony, is hardly a “postmodern” discovery. Non-whites (Harrison 1991; hooks 1991) have witnessed and recorded, to use a term from Senmeek and Cobb (1972), its “hidden injuries” for decades. Nevertheless, white scholars influenced by postmodernism have begun to deconstruct this privileged category, as well. Ruth Frankenberg’s (1993) ethnography explores how white women view themselves under the privileged social, economic, and cultural canopy of whiteness. She shows how both conservative and liberal whites practice a “race avoidance discourse” and construct themselves as neutral on racial issues. Such a construction allows them to justify and maintain their transcendental privilege, a privilege she argues is based on an ideal present and future, but often void of a present historical reality.

To minimize racial iniquities, “whiteness scholars” (Frankenberg 1997; Wray and Newitz 1997) argue that the protected space or category of whiteness is not a named and thrust into the arena of social and racial conflict. Some researchers point out that white identities are not allotted exclusively to whites and are commonly appropriated by other racial groups. Wundade-Twaine (1997) shows how mixed-race girls who grow up in a “white” suburb attempt to live out a “neutral” mainstream existence. She reveals how the girls come to be stripped of their “white identity” as they grow through puberty on their way to attending college, where they develop a “black consciousness” to shelter them from the rejection of a mainstream culture once believed to be their culture.

Moss (1998) offers a somewhat different perspective on whiteness studies in his cross-cultural work on the negotiation of privilege among poor whites in an urban midwestern city. In critiquing the essentializing nature of whiteness studies, he shows how privilege becomes a contested asset in a decontextualized space of confused racial and social class identities. Seldom do black researchers ethnographically study white culture, and in doing so Moss uncovers many of the nuanced ways poor whites align themselves with positive constructions of whiteness while distancing themselves from common negative constructions of poverty. The influence of postmodernism looms central in Moss’s work, however, in a paradoxical way because he employs postmodern ideas, he critiques postmodernism and whiteness discourse through a Derridean framework of deconstruction.

To elaborate briefly on this point, in exploring ideas of race and class Moss interprets how the method of deconstruction systematically employs the concepts or premises of one idea or dichotomy to undermine the other. The deconstructive idea works to systematically displace conceptual hierarchies (male/female; black/white; lower class/working class/middle class; center/margin). An ethnographic interpreter must work within a conceptual hierarchy or paradigm by producing an exchange of similar properties and, in doing so, displacing and disrupting that very same paradigm. For instance, the first move of a deconstructive analysis is to identify a marginal idea or image, and the second move is to disrupt the imputive flow of the hierarchy in which this idea or image is contained. For Derrida, the focus is language and an insistence that language always embodies a relationship of power between terms, one being used rather than another possible term in any text. From his perspective, terms in language are used positively (or negatively), effectively banishing those other terms from which they are differentiated. In this logic, language is structured in terms of oppositions, each term depending on and being supported by the other in order to gain or establish meaning. Although such terms interpenetrate each other, they are treated as though they exist in a hierarchical relationship of power with one term dominant over the other. Based on this very simplified interpretation, deconstruction is the means by which Derrida operates on texts – and the world itself can be viewed as a “text.”

Moss notes that critics of this method argue that deconstruction is nothing more than a simple inversion project where the bottom term (in text) or category (in the social) is valorized and juxtaposed in place of the esteemed top term, nothing more than a felling over of politics and ideologies. A good deal of “popular academic” postmodern and post-Marxist interpretation may fall into this very trap, but a thoroughly deconstructive method turns its own critique onto itself. Deconstruction, then, differs from other critical postmodern and post-Marxist perspectives because it turns postmodern arguments (anti-essentialism, anti-metanarratives, hybrid identities, multivocality) on itself and uses the paradigm to analyze its own foundations and arguments.
What this means in terms of textual practice is a narrative which literally dislocates the people and groups being represented. Moss goes on to argue that a more deconstructive ethnography disrupts the static, dichotomized metatheoretical anthropological locations or conceptual code (working class/middle class; workers/owners; black/white). Such ethnographies portray people and places with ambiguous, fragmented, decentered, destabilized, expanded images. Such ethnographies are also highly "deconstructive" in the sense that they help disrupt our conventional academic and popular notions of cultural identities and differences. Some of the new whiteness studies illustrate nicely the potentially powerful deconstructive logic of a more rigorous postmodernism turned on a dominant group that has historically represented all cultural others.

The postmodern impulse to rework all metaconcepts for inscribing cultural difference such as class, gender, ethnicity, and race ultimately includes the concepts of space, time, and body as well. McDonough (1993) interprets the experience of black Catholics in Savannah, Georgia, and reveals the continuous tensions among discourses that sustain stereotypes. He demonstrates how people become "located" in conceptual spaces like religion, and when they fail to occupy that space, their identity is thrown into question. In a related piece, David Goode (1994) interrogates the way our constructs of the human body bear upon identity questions. Goode's ethnography about two children who are profoundly disabled illustrates how the disabled are easily dismissed as not quite human. Robert Murphy (1987), disabled in mid-life from spinal cord disease, wrote an auto-ethnography about the "process" of disability and the social perception of partial bodies. He weaves an illuminating narrative that challenges "able-bodied" notions of physical mobility, cognition, and congruity. In defining himself and other disabled people as "liminal" and "ambiguous," Murphy writes: "The long-term physically impaired are neither sick nor well, neither dead nor fully alive, neither out of society nor wholly in it. They are human beings but their bodies are warped or malfunctioning, leaving their full humanity in doubt. This undefined quality, an existential departure from normality, contributes to the widespread aversion to the disabled* (Murphy 1987:133). Both of these texts on the disabled are marked by a strong personal authorial voice, a non-linear text, giving voice to stigmatized subjects, and a reflexive account of how the ethnographic texts were produced.

To sum up, we have tried to locate various new ethnographies of American cultural difference/diversity on a broad theoretical continuum of post-Marxist and postmodern thought. The limitation of such an intellectual exercise (for writers and readers alike) is that ideas, like cultures (Gupta and Ferguson 1997) are located and then presumed through narrow channels of possibility and imagination. Our construction of these two post-paradigms is obviously nothing more than a conceptual device for navigating through a complex, changing anthropological practice. It is doomed to spawn some misrepresentation of its own, but hopefully, it also helps sort through the flood of recent studies on cultural diversity.

A Pedagogical Philosophy for Teaching about Cultural Diversity in America

Given the emphasis on cultural difference as social constructions, we would want a course on American cultural diversity to teach students what Kelner (1995) calls "critical media literacy." We want students to realize that they live in a media-dominated society that produces a multitude of objectified cultural others. We want them to understand this phenomenon on at least two levels, the institutional and the textual.

On the institutional level, we want students to realize that various educative or cultural institutions of civil society systematically produce objectifying cultural images for various political and economic interests. We want them to be able to understand specific historical articulations and discern whether they live in an era of ideological "backlash" or "romanticization" of certain cultural groups or nations. We want them to understand the institutional role of anthropology in the production and deconstruction of objectifying images, in general and during historical moments of backlash and romanticization. Finally, and most importantly, we want them to appreciate the cultural struggles of stigmatized others to produce their own self-valorizing cultural images.

On the textual level, we want students to be much more critical about their general consumption of cultural images. We are especially concerned about mainstream middle-class white male students reflecting critically upon their privileged ideological position. But we want all students to be able to read cultural texts more critically and this is to recognize and deconstruct objectifying discourses about cultural others. We want students to understand how anthropologists and others rhetorically and narratively produce both objectifying and deconstructive texts. We also want them to be able to read and appreciate the counter-hegemonic images and messages in the texts of marginalized cultural others as both aesthetic and political expressions.

A key pedagogical practice for creating such a course is a multilevel approach. A good set of ethnographic cases that deconstruct objectifying cultural images is essential, but academic texts must be supplemented with autobiographical, fictional, cinematic, and popular mass media materials as well. The juxtaposition of scientific, popular, literary, and media representations is essential to disrupt students' naturalized, common sense understandings of popular cultural images. Using multiple texts is also essential to convey that scientific texts and voices are not necessarily superior to popular texts as reasonable representations or as disruptors of hegemonic discourses and images.

Another key pedagogical practice is to get students to collect and represent the dissenting voices of stigmatized cultural others. This would involve small field projects in collecting oral and life history and written texts by marginalized cultural others. A corollary exercise would be to collect the oral and written texts of groups that are explicitly organized to represent and misrepresent cultural others. Having collected the oral cultural texts of ordinary people, it is
important to demonstrate how students' own everyday speech practices are a part of ongoing objectification and de-objectification processes. The point is to bring the previous analysis of "out there" stigmatizing discourses closer to the everyday experience of students. Students need to see that they are both passive consumers of cultural misrepresentations and active producers of such images. Once these issues are personalized, changes in their ideological consciousness may be more likely.

Often, the way students (throughout elementary school into college) learn to perceive themselves and cultural groups unfamiliar to them is through the images they have seen on television or heard in their cultural group. Seldom do they personally experience cultural difference, and the role they play in its construction. For example, students from marginalized identity groups may not be aware of their own complicity in constructing overly positive images about an assumed ideal group at the expense of their own collective and individual identities. Consequently, it is not enough to simply present counter-histories of a group's virtues and triumphs. Nor can identity construction processes be presented in a narrowly contextualized manner. It is important to present the cultural histories of various groups in a less dichotomized context than black vs. white, or gay vs. straight, or native-born vs. immigrant.

In pedagogical terms, one way to open up the context is through discussion and dialogue in which students share viewpoints and work through narrow dichotomous ways of thinking about each other. The days of long-drawn-out, one-way lectures are slowly (and we emphasize slowly) giving way to a multimedia as well as multisituational mode of presenting knowledge and ideas where critical theory and critical practice supplement each other in the classroom. Our point is to adapt such theory into class practice by incorporating multiple contexts of learning (i.e., video, discussion, personal narratives, student projects) and a more "open discourse dialogue" that allows for cultural vulnerability, liminality, and possibility.

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Diversity in Anthropological Theory

Karen Brodkin

If anthropology is anything, it is about cultural diversity. Yet anthropology has been as best a marginal player in the discussions of multiculturalism in the United States. Addressing this contradiction in a course about the history of anthropological theory can provide an opportunity to understand how it came about and can suggest ways to make anthropological perspectives a more important part of the current American conversation. How have the discipline's core ideas helped — and hindered — anthropology's participation in contemporary discussions of racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual diversity? Who are the anthropologists excluded from the canons but whose work is important in order to understand this diversity? What can we learn about the discipline's current marginal contributions to today's debates by asking why such anthropologists have been "lost" from the history of the discipline's main lineage? Are there particular moments or issues in the history of anthropology that shed particular light on anthropology's relationship to racial and ethnic diversity in the United States?

Current discussions of cultural diversity in the United States focus on racial and ethnic diversity. But they also deal with their relationship to diversity in gender, class, and sexual orientation. This literature is large, growing exponentially, and spans the disciplines from critical race theory in law to studies of popular and high culture, from literature to history, from science studies to sociology and anthropology. The literature shares a theoretical framework that rests upon several points. (1) An understanding that race, gender, class, and sexual orientation are constructed institutionally and culturally, and that they are changeable. (2) Each of these dimensions of social organization is constructed dichotomously — white and not-white, women and men, and so on. (3) Each is also constituted of the others. That is, there is no such thing, for example, as an ungendered white person; the nature of racial whiteness depends on the gender, class, and sexual orientation of the individual. These points become clear in studies that examine the ethnoracial constructions underlying cultural constructions of national belonging, of being a citizen of the nation state. (4) These ideas and the rules by which social identity is constructed in the United States are part of a larger Western Enlightenment pattern of organization and thought.