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THE CHALLENGES OF DIVERSITY IN AMERICA: FROM THE BLACK PERSPECTIVE

Abstract:

Diversity remains a contested and controversial subject. The depiction of America as a nation of diverse peoples remains visionary and aspirational. Molding America into one nation out of multiple and complex entities seems insurmountable. Black Americans have vigorously contested the representation of America as diverse and multicultural. A truly diverse and multicultural nation, critics contend, has to eradicate all trappings of ethno-cultural hegemony. Even as she strives for "a more perfect union" America seems incapable of transcending the historical legacies of slavery and racism. From the "melting pot" to the "salad bowl" and more recent characterizations, America seems incapable of becoming an embodiment of her diverse peoples. An increasingly alienated black American population conceptualizes America within the discourse of alienation as a nation of permanently fractured racial and cultural identities. These blacks seek an alternative and countervailing African-derived protest identity—Afrocentrism. Thus they reject E Pluribus Unum (Out of many, one). Though America may seem multicultural, the ideal of one nation unifying and representing multiple cultures remains a distant and elusive aspiration. Skeptical of diversity, and distrustful of Multiculturalism, Afrocentrists offer an alternative African-centered philosophy of inclusiveness which, not surprisingly, critics denounce as inherently hegemonic and a negation of America's celebration of plurality. This paper discusses the historical, social and cultural underpinnings of contemporary discourses and counter narratives about the prospects of diversity in America. It examines the challenges that Afrocentrism represents for defining what being "American" truly means. There are two critical questions at the core of this paper: First, would multiple hyphenated American identities become the norm? Second, what are the implications of essentialist constructions of the black experience and identity for diversity and multiculturalism in America?

Keywords:

Diversity, Multiculturalism, Afrocentrism, African-Centered, Ethno-Cultural