

VOICES OF THE STRANGER

Introduction

There is no more compelling or urgent issue on college and university campuses today than that of ethnic and cultural diversity. Nearly every institution of higher education has appointed a committee to investigate the most effective way to teach students about societies and cultures other than their own, and many of them are already in the process of establishing ethnic studies requirements. The tendency throughout the country is two-fold: (1) to bring disciplined attention to the subject of diversity as this is reflected in a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society, and (2) to direct particular attention to four specifically targeted groups, namely, Asian Americans, Black Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans.

Purpose of Voices of the Stranger

Voices of the Stranger is designed to serve as the basic introductory text to the subject of ethnic and cultural diversity. It has been conceived as the introductory text to be utilized in the introductory course on the subject. That is, its intention is to provide a reliable and comprehensive orientation to the subject itself -- an orientation that can be drawn upon in both a single-course offering (say, Introduction to Ethnic Studies and/or Introduction to Cultural Diversity and/or Introduction to the Multi-Culture, et al) and/or in combination with other texts used in classes and courses that are part of a more extensive ethnic and cultural diversity academic program. Thus, the textbook has been designed as the one indispensable book on the subject (if the student is encountering the subject for the first time or, perhaps, the only time), but a book that both grounds and complements other more particularistic approaches to the subject. In short, Voices of the Stranger is being offered as the primer, and in a quickly expanding and extraordinarily expanding field in which there is, as yet, no suitable and generally acknowledged primer.

Why the title "Voices of the Stranger"

The title Voices of the Stranger derives from the course title of an Interdisciplinary Studies course, first offered at the University of California, Santa Barbara, which has been offered for the past three years. The title itself was suggested by the observations of Thomas Merton, the late Trappist monk, who observed that the truth comes in three distinctive ways: through the sacred texts (or great books), from within our own hearts, and, most profoundly, through the "voice of the stranger" (or via an encounter with a person from whom one did not expect to receive the truth). Merton offered this observation when describing the work of missionaries, who always have things to say to those to whom they are bringing the truth but are sometimes unmindful of the truth that those "others" are able to communicate to them, and when describing the then missed dialogue between representatives of the two superpowers, whom, he said, offer declarations in each other's direction but don't listen very carefully to what the other may be saying back. Thomas Merton's observations have served as the avenue through which the subject of ethnic and cultural diversity has been approached in the UCSB course, a course incidentally that registered several hundred

students the first time it was offered, then promptly filled the auditorium of 900 students the next two years, and now has a waiting list of 200-300 students.

The title is meant to signal that the dominant mode and temperament of the course is not to chastise persons who are guilty of racist attitudes and discriminatory practices or to surround the subject with power politics, but to accept the dynamics of diversity as the emergent multi-cultural reality and to prepare students both to recognize these facts and to live effectively within such an environment. In other words, the purpose of the class is not to debate the propriety of the multi-cultural reality, but instead to acknowledge this reality and to become cognizant of both its challenges and its opportunities.

Author/Editor's Qualifications

As noted, I have been teaching "Voices of the Stranger" for the past three years on the UCSB campus. The class has enjoyed rather remarkable success. In its third year (just concluded) it was telecast on local cable television, to an estimated twice weekly evening audience of between 3,500 and 5,000 viewers. It was also offered at UCSB's Learning Center in nearby Ventura, there also to an appreciative group of students.

My own background is in religious studies, but the two undergraduate courses for which I am known -- the other being the course on "The Impact of the Vietnam War" (which was featured twice on "60 Minutes") -- are both offered as interdisciplinary studies courses on the UCSB campus. That is, both courses are recognized as belonging to both the humanities and the social sciences, and regularly enroll students from the various humanities, social sciences and sciences majors.

My interest in the subject was piqued by my involvement in the University of California study on Undergraduate Education. I represented the Santa Barbara on the systemwide committee, from which committee came the Smelser Report which argued for "the internationalization and diversification of higher education" on all campuses of the University of California. I wrote the draft paragraphs of the report on "diversification" and thus was called upon to play something of a leading role on our campus in establishing courses on ethnic and cultural diversity. During the past several years I have been most attentive to developments in this field, and have assembled an impressive bibliography on the subject.

It should also be mention, I suppose, that I have been nominated for National Professor of the Year on three occasions, and have won "Best Professor" several times on our campus. Also significant is the fact that I chaired the California Council for the Humanities, was president of the Federation of State Humanities Councils, and have served as Director of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions.

T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S

Introduction

The purpose of the Introduction is to define the subject, give evidence of its significance, state the objectives of the book, and preview some of the conclusions and discoveries. Here the author/editor will describe the rationale for a "voices of the stranger" approach to ethnic and cultural diversity, and will distinguish this approach from others that would appear to be viable. Much of the material and information to be included in the Introduction has come from the first two weeks of lecture in the undergraduate course the author/editor teaches as well as from background material from the Minority Discourse program that will be established at the University of California Humanities Research Institute next year (1991-92) at Irvine. This, by the way, is additional evidence that the University of California is taking the lead in this crucial educational arena. From a variety of sides, we are treating the subject as focusing on groups that have been marginalized or excluded. Race and ethnicity figure prominently within this scope as do issues of gender, sexual preference, disability, class, and immigration.

Since much of the material will be presented from autobiographical standpoints, the Introduction will give some treatment to the processes by which human lives are formed. In this respect, we are relying rather heavily on the insights of Jerome Brunner and, of course, others who deal with ways in which self-conceptions are made explicit through autobiographical portrayal. Methodologically, this approach carries the added advantage of giving readers permission to utilize the materials in the anthology to help define, construct or create their own identities. As often happens, the "voice of the stranger" may be one's own voice -- but a voice that has gone unrecognized until awakened through the stimulation of others' self-presentations.

By this means we also wish to establish the discussion on grounds of discourse, literature and literacy. That is, we are talking about the function of language as well as the full range of social communications and interactions between individuals and groups through which means majority/minority status are asserted and sustained. To treat this subject in the latter portion of the Introduction is to create a transition toward a discussion of National vs. Multi-Cultural Literacy, which is the subject of Part One of the anthology.

I. From National to Multi-Cultural Literacy

The intention here is to root the subject in the current debate about cultural literacy and its requirements. Selections

will be offered from the writings of E. D. Hirsch, Alfred Bloom, Lynne Cheney, and others, all of which focus on the dictates of national cultural literacy alongside some emergent essays on the requirements of multi-cultural literacy. For the latter two recent publications in the Graywolf Series (out of Saint Paul, Minnesota) are in the right key: Rick Simonson's and Scott Walker's Toward Multi-Cultural Literacy and Scott Walker's Stories from the Rest of the World. The introduction in Paula Gunn Allen's Spider Woman's Granddaughters probes significant ground as well. I am discovering like-minded publications from publishing houses like Crossing Press, West End Press, Thunder's Mouth Press, and others.

The purpose of including essays of this kind side-by-side is to force consideration of the ingredients of contemporary culture. It is apparent that there are new and diverse centers of culture that very much affect how inhabitants feel about themselves as well as how the lines of marginality are drawn. I think we are saying that the boundaries between what was regarded as central and what was regarded as marginal or peripheral can no longer be set with anything like a former traditional self-assurance. And when the boundaries are altered so are criteria that define literacy and certify discourse.

II. The Meaning of Diversity

Here the intention is to work with some conceptual models through which the subject of diversity is made accessible. Such models include "melting pot," "rainbow" (and the colors thereof), "quilt-like patches" and other figurative attempts to make sense of the principle of e pluribus unum within the contemporary social and cultural framework. Alongside these well known analogies we will include others that are more difficult to discover. But they are available via literature on ethnicity in anthropology, literature on comparative religion in religious studies, and, to a certain extent, in the vocabulary employed by physicists, biologists, and chemists.

The remaining chapters of the anthology focus on specific kinds of alleged marginality that are ingredient in a diverse society, as follows:

III. Ethnicity and Race: Black American Voices

Concentrating on autobiographical statements which portray and/or reflect upon Black American experience, we will include a sequence of essays of W. B. Dubois, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Angela Davis, Sojourner Truth, Marcus Garvey, James Baldwin, Carter G. Woodson, Richard Wright, Alain Locke, Larry Neal and

others. The faculty in Black Studies at UCSB has been assisting the author/editor in compiling this list, which work is also being supported by a grant from the Learning Resources division of the campus. A very knowledgeable graduate student is being employed to conduct the comprehensive search.

IV. Ethnicity and Race: Asian American Voices

The same principles and intentions apply here. This section of the anthology will consist of autobiographical statements by writers chosen for their ability to portray and/or reflect upon Asian American experience, including Maxine Hong Kingston, John Okada, Hisaye Yamamoto, Garrett Hongo, Cathy Song and numerous others.

V. Ethnicity and Race: Hispanic American Voices

The same principles, intentions and aspirations apply, met by selections from essays by such writers as Bernice Zamora, Simon Ortiz, Pedro Pietri, Victor Hernandez Cruz, Judith Ortiz Cofer, Corky Gonzales, Tony Estrada, Luis Omar Salinas, Armando Rendon, Luis Valdez, Ernesto Galarza and others.

VI. Ethnicity and Race: Native American Voices

The same principles, intentions and aspirations, with selections by Scott Momaday, Black Elk, Chief Joseph, Mourning Dove, Leslie Silko, Wendy Rose, Joy Harjo and others.

VII. Sexuality and Gender

The intention here is to place autobiographical accounts and analytical reflections side by side.

VIII. Disabilities

For prospectus purposes, I have no compelling examples to cite in this category. But we regularly approach the subject when dealing with diversity/marginality in class, and we try to make the subject accessible by focusing on blindness, cerebral palsy, life after amputation has occurred, et al. I am confident that there are compelling self-descriptions on this subject, but I have not tracked them down as yet. We do have personal testimony upon which we can draw from presentations made in the class itself.

IX. Immigrants and Refugees

It is apparent that being dislocated is a disorienting experience and leads to a recognition of marginal and/or minority status. Our intention is to include essays in this section that reflect upon two kinds of dislocation: one that has been selected by the immigrant, and one that has been imposed by others.

X. A Multi-Cultural Society

This section will exhibit both a backward and a forward look. It is designed to be reflective of the past and projective of the future. Its focus is on the nature of the society that is coming into being -- a society in which diversity is the rule rather than a debatable or grudging option. The content of this chapter is more societal and cultural than individual and personal. Attention will also be given to the political process as the vehicle by which diversity will come more and more to be acknowledged, respected and perhaps even welcomed.

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