

DIVERSITY

The Invention
of a Concept

PETER WOOD



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PREFACE

Diversity is a large idea in the way that Wyoming is a large state: it is a big part of everyone's map of America, but there is not much there.

Of course, on closer inspection the comparison falters. Wyoming has Casper, Rock Springs, Thunder Basin National Grassland, Cheyenne, I-80, Bighorn National Forest, Devils Tower, lots of fossils and, its crowning glory, Yellowstone National Park. Diversity has . . . well, what does diversity have? Mainly, diversity has lots of admirers.

If an idea can be said to be important simply because of the number of people who uphold it, diversity is indeed an important idea; many millions of Americans regard it so. They are, I think, mistaken. In this book I argue that it is time to retire diversity from the small company of concepts that guide our thinking about who we are as a people and how we might best reconcile our differences.

I do not mean to diminish the idea of diversity unduly. It has genuine imaginative appeal, and the millions who extol it are not merely deluded. Rather, they are moved by its promise of providing a way of looking at the world anew and a way of escaping tired old prejudices. Diversity bids us to be tolerant, open-minded, helpful and fair; and many respond to this call in good faith. But diversity offers doubtful directions to these worthy destinations.

The concept of diversity in its contemporary social and political sense is fairly new. It was admitted to the union, so to speak, by one man, Justice Lewis Powell, in June 1978, in his stand-alone opinion in the Supreme Court case *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*. In that case,

Justice Powell asserted that the goal of “attaining a diverse student body” provided a “constitutionally permissible” reason to allow racial preferences in admissions to a medical school. In Powell’s view, the goal of achieving diversity overrode the Fourteenth Amendment’s guarantee of equal protection under the law.

The discontents and longings that diversity gives voice to, however, are older, and the story continues long past Powell’s eccentric legal whim. Diversity as we know it has been shaped by an odd history of opportunism, idealism, miscalculation, shrewd maneuver, deception, self-deception, truth-telling and deceit. To present this story in an entirely straightforward way would be, in some ways, to falsify it. Diversity entered our lives more by half-recognized allusions, pinpricks of implication and evocative symbols than by a clear sequence of events. I have written its biography accordingly, and its intellectual geography as well.

Wyoming fits four-square into our map of the country, but if we merely speed across it on I-80 in a hurry to get to Utah, it is likely to remain to us essentially a blank—familiar in outline but not understood in its specificity. To see it rightly we must take its inner dimensions. Diversity too has its dry washes full of fossils, its eerie basalt towers of infernal design, and its azure depths of scalding springs.

In the pages ahead, I provide the reader with a geologist’s crack hammer and a few other tools—rock pick, pry bar and chisel as needed—to get beneath the surface of diversity.

ONE

DIVERSITY IN AMERICA

Loose Threads

In his *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, April 16, 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. offered a striking image of human unity. He wrote:

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a *single garment of destiny*. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.

King had used the phrase “single garment of destiny” before, as early as a 1961 commencement speech at Lincoln University, and he would use it again in many more speeches and sermons. Sometimes he varied the surrounding language:

We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. All life is interrelated.

(Nobel Peace Prize lecture, Oslo, Norway, December 11, 1964)

We are tied together—white and black Americans—in a single garment of destiny. There cannot be a separate black or white path to power.

(Address at the University of Pittsburgh, November 2, 1966)

You must recognize in the final analysis you are all tied together in a single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality.

(Sermon at Washington National Cathedral, Palm Sunday, 1968)

And sometimes he was oddly misquoted:

You must recognize in the final analysis you are all tied together in a single *garment* of destiny.

(Quoted in *The Cathedral School*, January 18, 2002, supposedly transcribing the text of a sermon at St. John the Divine Cathedral, May 17, 1965; emphasis added)

Quoting Martin Luther King Jr.—“We are woven into a seamless garment of destiny”—Clinton called for Americans to make the country “one America.”

(Report in CNN/Time on President Clinton’s speech in Little Rock, Arkansas, commemorating the [Little Rock Nine](#), September 25, 1977)

But King wore the garment of destiny so often in his speeches that there could be little doubt that it was to him among his most important turns of phrase.

I don’t know where Dr. King originally found this metaphor with its biblical echoes (e.g. “for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,” Isaiah 62:10; Joseph’s “coat of many colors,” Genesis 37:3) or if he came to it first while composing his 1961 commencement speech. Perhaps King’s deep interest in Gandhi, who had made much of boycotting British textiles and spinning his own cloth, is also woven into the image. In any case, by dint of repetition the “single garment of destiny” became a figure woven into King’s own legacy. It is probably quoted in his honor in thousands of sermons and speeches each year.

The “single garment of destiny” in which we are all tied or bound is a slightly strange image. King’s language (“network,” “tied together”) suggests that we are all part of the *fabric* of this garment, but the garment itself is vague. What is this unity of which we are all part? Society? Humanity? And who wears the garment?

Granted, we ought not to make too much of a metaphor, which serves its purpose if it lights up one good

idea. And King's metaphor does that splendidly: he puts us in mind of the myriad connections that make us one people.

King's emphasis on our connectedness and underlying unity is self-evidently *opposed* to what we now call "diversity." This presents a problem for those who today would honor King's memory but discard most of his message. For proponents of *diversity*, King's "single garment of destiny" is a musty old wrap, but too well known simply to throw away. For some, the solution has been to reinterpret it by emphasizing the separateness of the threads rather than the forceful interweave.

This thread-finding has become an increasingly common conceit. In January 2002, [Rohit Ananth](#), a seventh grader from Park Forest Middle School in central Pennsylvania, won a Martin Luther King Day essay contest on the theme "A Single Garment of Destiny." Young Mr. Ananth opined, "It is unrealistic to think that our country is like a perfectly woven garment. There are many loose threads." These loose threads, presumably, are the people not fully woven into the fabric of American life: individualists, outcasts, whole groups that go their separate ways, the excluded and the self-excluded.

But once we deny Dr. King's basic premise—that we are all part of "an inescapable network of mutuality"—the whole garment unravels. In fact, Americans in the last quarter-century have turned that unraveling into a new social ideal. This is what we call *diversity*, a word that I will italicize when it refers to the contemporary set of beliefs, as distinct from its older meanings. *Diversity* bids us to think of America not as a single garment, but as divided up into separate groups—on the basis of race, ethnicity or

sex, for starters—some of which have historically enjoyed privileges that have been denied the others.

Diversity, though, is more than a propensity to dwell on the separate threads that make up the social fabric. It is above all a political doctrine asserting that *some* social categories deserve compensatory privileges in light of the prejudicial ways in which members of these categories have been treated in the past and the disadvantages they continue to face. *Diversity* sees itself as a tool for knocking down the door to exclusive enclaves—colleges, workplaces, churches, organizations of all sorts—of the favored groups. A university that admits more minority students, a company that hires more minority workers, and a museum that shows more works by minority artists can each be said to have taken the first step toward *diversity*.

Many more steps follow. *Diversity* is not merely a reformulation of the idea of equal access to social goods; it is also an attempt to redefine the goods themselves. The ideal of diversity is that once individuals of diverse backgrounds are brought together, a transformation will take place in people's attitudes—primarily within the members of the formerly exclusive group, who will discover the richness of the newcomers' cultural backgrounds. Diversity will breed tolerance and respect, and, because it increases the pool of skills, will enhance the effectiveness of work groups and contribute to economic prosperity. In the more extended flights of the diversiphile's imagination, *diversity* creates good will and social betterment in every direction. The African-American manager, the gay white secretary and the Latino consultant learn from each other's distinctive cultural experience and become better workers, better citizens, better persons.

Diversity in this cascade of meanings is deeply appealing to many Americans, but not all. Those who resist the dream of *diversity* see it instead as a rubric for racial and ethnic quotas in college admissions and on the job; for acts of petty and not so petty discrimination; and for a system of ethnic favoritism that undercuts the principle of rewarding demonstrated merit and ability. *Diversity*, to its critics, calls to mind cultural elites who promulgate convoluted reasons why discrimination is wrong, except when *they* do it.

Diversity is only a few decades old, but diversity (without the italics) is nothing new. Let us start with the older meaning. America was made up of diverse peoples even before the first Europeans (and soon after, the first Africans) arrived. People who thought seriously about the New World and about the North American colonies that became the United States were already thinking about diversity centuries ago. In his first letter back to Spain in January 1493, [Christopher Columbus](#) carefully described the people he encountered in the Caribbean, who he said were not “slow or stupid,” and whom he hoped to “conciliate” to Christianity and the Spanish Crown. His hopes in this regard, as in so much else, were dashed by the rapacity of the Spanish conquerors, but Columbus’s legacy is far more complex than either the old schoolroom story of simple “discovery” or its up-to-date replacement, a story of nothing but genocide.

Dr. Diego Alvarez Chanca, the physician who accompanied Columbus on his second voyage, has left us a letter in which he describes the joy of some Native Americans rescued by Columbus from their cannibalistic captors. Columbus had arrived in the New World to find not one people, but myriads of peoples, many in perpetual war with each

other. One of his first tasks was to come to some practical understanding of this diversity of native peoples. That concern has echoed through hundreds of years of Spanish, French, English and Russian colonial relations with Native Americans and echoes still in the independent states that arose from European colonization.

The diversity *among* native peoples posed intellectual as well as practical problems that generations of historians, theologians, philosophers, linguists and eventually anthropologists wrestled with, as they also confronted the problem of the diversity *between* Europeans and Native Americans as a whole. As early as the 1550s, some Europeans were offering profound arguments in favor of an encompassing concept of our common humanity. At that time, Bartolomé de Las Casas, a Dominican priest, wrote his passionate and learned book *In Defense of the Indians* as a plea to the Catholic Church to intervene against the enslavement and brutalizing of Native Americans.

Diversity in this older sense of relations between culturally disparate groups is a major aspect of the history of all New World nations. Their patterns of resistance to and accommodation of cultural diversity differed, and the United States can be understood as a particular answer to the problems posed by cultural multiplicity. By the time of the American Revolution, we not only claimed but also *felt* a sense of unity as a people, but we also divided ourselves by region, state, race and religion. The many-ness, the diversity of America, was not somehow overlooked or invisible to the founders. They saw it clearly, took steps to keep it from overwhelming the unity they hoped would thrive, and persisted in worrying whether those steps would be sufficient.

Negro slavery loomed as perhaps their greatest worry, for as certain as many of the founders were that slavery was wrong, they also saw the difficulty of successfully assimilating African-Americans, who had been deprived of education, as free and equal citizens. Benjamin Franklin in the last few years of his life served as the president of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, penning calls both for the end of slavery and for public assistance to “emancipated black people.” Franklin’s last public act at age eighty-three was to compose and sign a petition dated February 3, 1790, to the U.S. Congress citing its constitutional duty of “promoting the welfare and securing the blessings of liberty to the people of the United States” as grounds for abolishing the enslavement of “fellow-creatures of the African race.”

The Constitution set up an unstable compromise on the issue, allowing slavery to stand in the states that permitted it and, for purposes of taxes and apportionment of seats in the House of Representatives, counting the population of the states as “the whole number of free persons, including those bound to service for a term of years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three-fifths of all other persons.” The Constitutional Convention also set a date, 1808, when the federal government would be empowered to end the importation of slaves, which in fact it did. In December 1787, James Wilson, a Pennsylvania delegate to the Constitutional Convention, expressed the hope of many that this provision would lay “the foundation for banishing slavery out of this country.”

The temporizing of the founders on slavery, however, is rightly understood as part of a larger history of diversity. They were engaged with a real question of how much real diversity a free nation could contain without pulling

itself apart, and diversity in that sense has remained central to the definition of American society, through the early republic, the Civil War, emancipation, the great waves of immigration, and on up through the Civil Rights struggle and King's telling metaphor. Diversity—called appropriately by diverse names—has always been on our minds.

But diversity is not *diversity*. The new movement is something different, and in some ways a repudiation of the older attempts to find a oneness in our many-ness. *Diversity* in its new form tends to elevate many-ness for its own sake. But I do not aim in this book to oversimplify a complex social and cultural movement. The new *diversity* has its vision of unity too, and many separate threads of its own.

But let's not take just a thread-by-thread view. *Diversity* is big. It's everywhere. Schoolchildren are taught to celebrate it; high courts weigh and scrutinize it; corporate personnel offices assiduously seek it out; unions that once feared it now robustly champion it; artists offer searching introspections of diversity in their own lives; museums exhibit it; restaurants serve it; churches worship it; and tourists vacation in it. *Diversity* is enunciated in the dolls we buy for our children (the American Girl collection), the fashions teenagers buy for themselves (think of the "United Colors of Benetton" ads, featuring lots of contrasting flesh tones), and in the admissions brochures of the colleges and universities those teens hope to attend. *Diversity* plays its part in every electoral campaign for every candidate and in the sales pitches for a great many products. The pursuit of *diversity* is held to be both practically good and personally redemptive; and *diversity* is depicted in popular entertainment as both fun and—there is no better word for it—virtuous.

Marvelous Wonders

Now largely forgotten, Henry Davenport Northrop was a popular writer of the 1880s and 1890s who catered to the taste for the eye-opening spectacle of human variety. He was the IMAX theater of his day, with heavily illustrated books such as *Marvelous Wonders of the Whole World* (1886). But it would be difficult to find a writer less suited to the temper of *our* times. The title alone of his 1891 volume, *Indian Horrors or Massacres by the Red Men, Being a Thrilling Narrative of Bloody Wars with Merciless and Revengeful Savages . . .*, shows Northrop to be a man who dealt in sensationalized stereotypes, a stirrer-up of the fantasies that fuel discrimination and ethnic strife. Northrop represents a part of cultural history that most Americans today notice only with a shudder.

Yet Northrop may still have some important things to teach us. His world was one that abounded in surprises. Diversity for him was not the thin gruel of attempting to accentuate slight differences among people who, in every important respect, are similar. His diversity was rather a feast of differences, from his delight at watching native Hawaiians surf, to his mischievous pleasure in describing the African Wagogo as “great thieves and extortioners” whose enlarged earlobes “fall as low as the shoulders.” Northrop’s dislikes and enthusiasms were unfiltered; ours, by contrast, are timid and self-conscious. Respectful, eager to understand, fearful of offending, our basic stance toward human difference is that we must admire it.

Must we really?

Northrop is also surprisingly ahead of us in his sense of the ironic complexity of the exchanges between cultures. *Indian Horrors or Massacres by the Red Men* lives up to its

ghastly title, but doesn't hesitate along the way to mention how the name of the great Delaware chief Tammany (actually *Tammanend*), who sold the site of Philadelphia to the English in 1682, became a Philadelphia May Day festival, and in time the Tammany societies and Tammany halls of American towns. Northrop observes, "The old relic of Indian greatness has degenerated onto an organization for political purposes."

Interspersed with his account of raids and killings, Northrop quietly retells other stories of Indians cheated and betrayed. Some of the stories come with a history of retellings that make clear that Northrop is the heir not just to a tradition of anti-Indian lore, but also to a counter-tradition of recognizing the bonds of common humanity. He repeats Benjamin Franklin's recounting of a story that Franklin had received in turn from Conrad Weiser, about Cassanatego, an Onondaga Indian who shrewdly told him how the fur traders colluded to cheat the Indians, and more:

If a white man, in traveling through our country, enters one of our wigwams, we all treat him as I do you—dry him if he is wet; warm him if he is cold; give him meat and drink that he may allay his thirst and hunger; and we spread soft furs for him to sleep on.

But if I go into a white man's house in Albany and ask him for meat and drink, they say, "Get out, you Indian dog!"

In telling this story, the author—no matter what other tales he tells—has taken hold of a corner of Martin Luther King's "single garment of destiny."

Diversity As Counterprinciple

For Northrop, Indians were both victims and perpetrators of injustice. While I think we can still acknowledge this as a realistic assessment, the pieties of our age push us strongly toward seeing only the victimization. We remember General Custer's depredations on the Sioux culminating in his defeat at Little Big Horn in 1876, but not the Outbreak of 1862, in which the Sioux in Minnesota massacred some seven hundred innocents.

The new perspective of *diversity* is not just about emphasizing groups at the expense of the whole; it is also about treating groups as having saved up a right to special privileges in proportion to how much their purported ancestors were victimized in the past. This quid-pro-quo view has become a quasi principle that aims to encompass American life. It is invoked by its advocates, for example, as a reason why the federal government should set aside a certain percentage of federal contracts for minority-owned businesses, and why the federal courts should *not* apply the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to racial and ethnic preferences in college admissions.

But it is more than a matter of government mandates. The *diversity* principle is also a *belief* that the portion of our individual identities that derives from our ancestry is the most important part, and a *feeling* that group identity is somehow more substantial and powerful than either our individuality or our common humanity. *Diversity* combines these elements of law, belief and intuition to claim both cold legal authority and warm personal allegiance.

Few principles spread so widely and so deeply through a society. In America, the only principles of similar scope are those on which the nation was founded.

Indeed, to find any ideas of comparable sweep in American society, we have to go back to such antique concepts as the notion that all men are created *equal*, and that one of the fundamental human endowments is *liberty*. These ideas, like the idea of *diversity* today, were understood not as narrow technical or merely legal doctrines, but as basic claims about the right ways for humans to behave toward one another.

Equality was certainly meant to entail equality before the law, but it also voiced the American sense of personal equality. We did not regard—and mostly we still don't—other people as *better* than us just because they were richer or descended from more illustrious ancestors. Equality, like *diversity*, was an idea that could be translated into law, but was simultaneously part of everyday experience.

As with equality, so with *liberty*. Our basic liberties are enunciated in the Bill of Rights and, in this sense, they have clear legal form. But the principle of liberty goes much further than the law can or should imagine. One of the basic stories of American life is the recognition by individual men and women that they are responsible for themselves and must choose exactly who they want to be. Many of our key national stories, whether grounded in fact or created as literature, deal with this choice. The treason of Benedict Arnold and the attempted usurpation of Aaron Burr, no less than George Washington's decision to risk everything on the Revolution, are stories about the nature of liberty; but so too are *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Great Gatsby* and *On the Road*. We Americans make ourselves by our own choices large and small, these stories tell us, and we are therefore ultimately responsible for what we become.

Liberty can, of course, be ironed and starched into a formal caricature of itself, but Americans have generally embodied the *spirit* of liberty, not just its outward form. We are people who like to defy conventions—or at least show we can defy the old rules before submitting to an updated version of them that we have made our own. We have done this over and over in popular music, from nineteenth-century folk songs through rock-and-roll, and we have done it as well in dance, sports and movies. Singers from Robert Johnson to Snoop Doggy Dog, dancers from George Primrose (of soft-shoe fame) to Twyla Tharp, and sports figures from John Heisman (whose proposal to add the forward pass to football was adopted in 1906) to the snowboarding champs at the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics have created new rules by defying the old ones. The American love of change is rooted in our love of liberty, for we don't feel free unless we have actually freed ourselves from something. As a nation, we may live in a perpetual adolescence of finding fault with the previous generation, but that is by no means a heavy doom or too large a price to pay to ensure a deeper cultural continuity. For each generation that finds its parents' conventions stultifying, dull or phony discovers its own sense of liberty.

Like the principles of equality and liberty, *diversity* is gigantic in its ambition. The size of that ambition will perhaps best be judged by the end of this book, but let us at the outset hear what one friend of *diversity* has to say about its scope. Charles Vert Willie is a Harvard professor of sociology who was once a classmate of Martin Luther King Jr.'s at Morehouse College. In 1987—a breakout year for the *diversity* creed—Professor Willie explained his view of diversity to a reporter from the *Christian Science Monitor*:

“If we want our laws to be beneficial to all, we have to make sure that the lawmaking structures are diversified,” he stresses. “Diversity is our source of security. It was our source of security when the Constitution was formed, and it will continue to be our source of security today.”

This is a peculiar assertion. The diversity of the colonies and their inhabitants was indeed on the minds of the delegates of the Constitutional Convention from May 25 to September 17, 1787, and it was an issue in the subsequent public debate over the ratification of the draft Constitution—but diversity was seen almost entirely as a source of difficulty and *insecurity*. The question for the founders was whether they could create a stable and good government despite the many differences separating the states and dividing the broader population. Madison’s view of diversity—which he called “faction”—can be fairly gauged by his comment in *The Federalist No. 10*:

A zeal for different opinions concerning religion, concerning Government and many other points, as well of speculation as of practice; an attachment to different leaders ambitiously contending for pre-eminence and power; or to persons of other descriptions whose fortunes have been interesting to the human passions, have in turn divided mankind into parties, inflamed them with mutual animosity, and rendered them much more disposed to vex and oppress each other, than to co-operate for their common good.

The most that Madison could say in favor of diversity was that if the republic were sufficiently large and the “variety of parties” sufficiently great, the chances of “one party

being able to outnumber and oppress the rest” would be diminished. A well-designed republic might have the capacity to thwart the naturally destructive tendency of diversity.

Professor Willie does not stop with the idea that “diversity is our source of security.” He adds: “to the extent that gender and race are important social variables in our society, these ought to be represented . . . and ought to be prescribed by law.” And he says he would legislate that “the members of our decision-making groups must consist of unlike kind, and the unlike kind should represent major social categories that are significant at the period when such persons are being selected.”

Professor Willie’s vision of *diversity* as a basis of governing the United States would, in other words, replace our freedom to elect leaders of our own choosing with quotas of people chosen to represent whatever “unlike kinds” *someone* has decided are “significant.” Diversity thus trumps liberty. And as “social categories” under this principle of diversity would command representation, Professor Willie’s principle of *diversity* trumps individual equality as well.

But even this does not capture the full scope of this vision of *diversity* for Professor Willie. He adds, “Indeed, I would classify diversity as the source of our salvation.”

Diversity—our supposed source of security, grounds for radical transformation in the ways we elect and appoint our decision makers, and source of salvation—*diversity* in this vision is truly gigantic in its ambition. And like the genuine constitutional principles of liberty and equality, it proposes to organize a whole society and, in so doing, to make that society better. But unlike equality and liberty, the principle of *diversity* is not announced in the

Declaration of Independence. In fact, it is not discernible anywhere in the founding documents of the United States. Nor was it a stowaway idea, like the right to privacy, that some later interpreters located in the “penumbra” of the Constitution, even though it was not mentioned as such. “Diversity” is not cited in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution or the Bill of Rights; not covered by some synonymous term; not even remotely implied.

Madison and the other founders were, however, on the alert against the dangers of factions. *Diversity* might well be understood as an attempt to reverse the founders’ efforts to check the growth and power of factions in American society. *Diversity*, in effect, enshrines certain kinds of factionalism as a universal good, just like liberty and equality. Well, no, not *just* like liberty and equality—better. *Diversity* raised to the level of counterconstitutional principle promises to free people from the pseudo-liberty of individualism and to restore to them the primacy of their *group* identities; and *diversity* raised to the summit of “critical thinking” insists that traditional notions of equality are a sham. Real equality, according to diversicrats, consists of parity among groups, and to achieve it, social goods must be measured out in ethnic quotas, purveyed by group preferences, or otherwise filtered according to the will of social factions.

The Declaration of *Inter-dependence*?

The absence of *diversity* as a positive principle in our founding documents and the likelihood that it would have been seen as a rationalization of factionalism are not necessarily arguments against it. Perhaps the advocates of *diversity* have discovered a flaw in our constitutional

arrangements that they can now help us rectify. Perhaps we are a more far-seeing and enlightened people than those who came before us. After all, diversity advocates tirelessly remind us, the framers of the Constitution made room for slavery. Why should we listen to *those* dead white males?

But if we are prepared to consider *diversity* on its merits, we should understand the stakes. *Diversity* is not about fine-tuning American society or replacing some worn-out parts; and it is not about adding some new features that weren't available in the earlier model. *Diversity* isn't a way of tweaking equality and liberty to achieve *more* equality or *greater* liberty. It is, rather, a brand new thing, a principle that aims at no less than transforming American society through and through.

We do not, of course, usually talk about *diversity* as such a revolutionary idea. No one has proposed a "*diversity* amendment" to the U.S. Constitution. Even the strongest advocates of *diversity* do not generally argue that it is time to scrap the Declaration of Independence, or that *diversity* should be explicitly acknowledged as trumping equality and liberty. (I have, however, come across a plea from a worshipper at the shrine of *diversity*, a "diversity consultant" named [Bryant Rollins](#), for a new national "visionary statement" in the form of a "Declaration of Interdependence.")

So is the rise and widespread acceptance of *diversity* as a principle really a challenge to the constitutional order in the United States? And if it is, why does it seem so uncontroversial to so many?

The answer to both questions lies in whether we see the constitutional order of our society primarily as the set of legal doctrines through which we govern ourselves or

as the set of cultural assumptions that underlie the legal order. I believe that the cultural assumptions are more fundamental and what we call the constitutional order sooner or later is adjusted to reflect what we really think about ourselves as a people and as a society.

Our constitution, in this view, is more than our Constitution. The actual document adopted in 1788 and subsequently amended twenty-seven times compels our deepest respect, but it is not everything. Long before it was written, the mostly English colonists in what was to become the United States had worked out a view of what they understood to be the liberties of free men and had developed a clear sense of social equality. In drafting the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson drew on particular formulations of these ideas that he had read in Locke and various Enlightenment thinkers, but he was not propounding strange and foreign ideas for his colleagues and countrymen. Rather, he was giving eloquent form to views that were already widely held by American colonists.

In this sense, cultural change can precede legal change, as it frequently has, and a constitutional order emerges from the widespread acceptance of a new fundamental principle. So the real question is whether *diversity* amounts to such a fundamental challenge.

In the chapters that follow, I aim to show that in one area of American life after another, the principle of *diversity* represents an attempt to alter the root cultural assumptions on which American society is based. Even if the *diversity* movement fails to achieve a new constitutional order in the United States, it already has achieved a substantial record of increased social discord and cultural decline. The *diversity* movement has contributed significantly to falling educational performance and lower

academic standards (e.g. attacks on the SAT as a tool for identifying high school students who have the aptitude to succeed in college); undermined love of country (by elevating racial separatism); trivialized art (by emphasizing the social identity of the artist, e.g. Toni Morrison); and made certain forms of racialism respectable again. This is not to say that diversity is always and everywhere detrimental to our legal, social, moral and personal well-being. To many, it is an attractive idea and, in the right circumstances, can be enlivening and uplifting. But that could also be said of Turner Movie Classics, and we are not tempted to turn our key legal judgments and the tenor of cultural life over to the custody of cable television.

Whatever its virtues, *diversity* is a challenge to higher virtues and greater goods. We jeopardize liberty and equality by our friendship with this new principle. It is an unruly guest in our house, and the time may have come to call a cab and send it home.

Bias

Writing a book about the history of the *diversity* movement presented some unusual challenges. *Diversity* is an idea without a clear intellectual context. Its background is murky, and the language in which its proponents speak is often misleading.

Thus, to see diversity clearly we must always look more than once. Sometimes, within what looks like arrant prejudice, such as in Henry Davenport Northrop's accounts of *Indian Horrors*, lurks a hint of real diversity. And sometimes the opposite is true: what proclaims itself as diversity turns out to be little more than prejudice. This book is concerned with both kinds of diversity: the real

(and natural) diversity of our social life, and the movement that has appropriated the name of diversity, not to achieve a better kind of national unity, but to give license to ethnic privilege and other forms of separatism.

This separatist, privileging *diversity* is simultaneously a concept, a political orientation and a personal taste. It is, if not literally everywhere in contemporary American society, nearly so. We need, however, a name for its proponents. Sometimes these advocates of *diversity* are spoken of as “the multicultural Left” or simply “multiculturalists,” but these terms cover only part of the story. Diversilogues trade in the ideology of *diversity*; diversidacts teach it; diversicrats regulate it. Each of these words has its place in the story, but for the sake of having one term for the whole tribe, I will write of “diversiphiles” when I mean to speak generally of those who elevate the ideal of *diversity* above the ideal of national unity. Diversiphiles are a dominant voice in many precincts of American culture.

I write as an opponent of the *diversity* movement as a whole, but one whose opposition is rooted in disappointment. The concept of diversity draws on some profoundly important human realities that, call them what we will, ought to be central to any enlightened and humane view of humanity. But diversity in this sense is mangled, compromised and ultimately destroyed by *diversity* in the sense that has prevailed in the *diversity* movement.

America’s *real* diversity sometimes seems on the verge of disappearance, while a phony, impostor *diversity*—made up of spurious claims to separate cultural identities, fashion statements and fantasy vacations—has taken its place.

A Million Pillows

In 1996, Susan Jacobsen and Larry Marcus founded a store in Delmar, New York, to sell handmade goods from artisans around the world. Taking their inspiration from “their idea that ‘all of our lives are woven together in a garment of destiny,’” they named their store “[Destiny Threads](#).” There one can choose among kimono-silk quilts, mudcloths, wool sweaters, tapestry handbags, baskets made from pine needles, sweetgrass, paper, reeds, roots or telephone wire, and “about a million” pillows.

Ms. Jacobsen and Mr. Marcus have, I think, named their store aptly. *Destiny Threads* implies a kind of reduction of Dr. King’s “single garment of destiny” to its myriad filaments of silk, wool, pine needles, sweetgrass, reeds, roots and telephone wire. This is an image not of the magnificence of the whole, but of the smaller pleasures, the textures and the particularities of the parts.

Diversity is far more than a political movement or a demand for social privileges; it is also the sort of cultural principle that shapes personal tastes. *Destiny Threads* caters to a longing many Americans have found in themselves for an authentic touch of cultural otherness. A century or so ago, when Northrop wrote *Indian Horrors*, Americans had a lively sense that cultural difference might be hedged with mortal dangers. In midcentury, Dr. King summoned Americans to overcome their sense of mutual estrangement. Today we have a million pillows.