THE DIVERSITY INITIATIVE AS ANTI-REVOLUTIONARY PROJECT

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ABSTRACT: *Through diversity initiatives, academia and business have recruited many new talented individuals from historically underrepresented communities. These institutions are now in the position of possessing, managing, and deploying a massive amount of diverse talent. We examine what we may expect from these institutions as they continue to absorb diverse talent, as well as what we can expect from these talented individuals as they become a newly established class.*

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INTRODUCTION

Recently within business and academic institutions, diversity initiatives have become curiously "popular." *Fortune* magazine has begun ranking "The Best Workplaces for Diversity" with juggernauts like Comcast, NBC Universal, Capital One Financial, Marriot International, Nordstrom, and AT&T high on the list.[1] Likewise, many universities including Rutgers, Brown, University of Arizona, Notre Dame, University of Oregon, Northwestern, and Vanderbilt have developed offices to officially handle diversity initiatives on campus. Even more curiously, this "progress" seems to have come about without the force of legal mandate, particularly in the United States. Of course, affirmative action law prevents any project financed by federal funds from engaging in discriminatory practices, but recently businesses and universities seem to have gone the extra step by not being reluctantly non-discriminatory, but by actively promoting diverse spaces. With some of the most recognized and powerful institutions in the country digging deep to adopt diversity as an institutional value, we might be left scratching our heads, wondering what monumental change convinced these companies and universities to allow their internal culture to be easily disrupted by an annoyance like "diversity." We might entertain the thought that every power-wielding institution in the country has somehow become home to moral saints, truly learnt in the history of oppression and fired about social change at any cost. More likely, there would seem to be some incentive, so what might be the incentive that has somehow committed institutions of power to participate with so much excitement and determination towards the goal of diversity?

I will argue that diversity initiatives, under the umbrella of social justice, are no longer revolutionary forms of activism. The values and ideas cultivated in the

1 "The 100 Best Workplaces for Diversity," *Fortune*, 2017, http://fortune.com/best-work-places-for-di-versity/.

context of the social justice movement are being further developed not as mere mechanisms of civil advancement or the foundations of a robust humanity but as strategies and techniques to absorb talent from marginalized groups, to discover and integrate the knowledges of the oppressed, and to better extract their labor for contribution to their rationalized agendas. This allows institutions to mend their flaws and eliminate their inefficiencies, becoming even more impenetrable to criticism and optimized towards their ends of wealth accumulation and social control.

In this paper, I will study the concept of diversity in the contemporary era, focusing primarily on how business has latched on to and worked with this idea. I will argue that diversity has become a strategy for human resources acquisition and that removing the barriers of discrimination for recruitment have made businesses much more efficient, powerful, and less vulnerable to radical revision or external opposition.

I

A great number of handbooks, articles, and academic journals have been written on "diversity management" to highlight the benefits of workplace diversity on decision-making effectiveness and error prevention. Many studies to ascertain the benefits of diverse teams have been performed. The general conclusions are that diverse teams are more likely to reexamine facts, remain objective, and make fewer factual errors in estimations, expectations, and judgments. Diverse teams are also more likely to be innovative and original in tasks like product development.[2]

There has been a proliferation of interest in bringing to the attention of firms that diverse teams make better market predictions, bring higher returns, and operate more efficiently. This empirical evidence is a boon to social justice advocates who can now wed the moral responsibilities of anti-discrimination to the common sense of business. The financial world, along with academia, were once well-guarded bastions of resource with *de facto* rules about who could participate in wealth production and distribution of material, intellectual, and social capital. Diversity initiatives represent the hope that these concentrated and accumulated resources within the

2 David Rock and Heidi Grant, "Why Diverse Teams are Smarter," *Harvard Business Review, Diversity Section*, Nov. 4 2016, https://hbr.org/2016/11/why-diverse-teams-are-smarter.

limited spaces of the corporate world or academia will be shared more equitably with minority groups.

The strategy of social justice politics has often been to penetrate isolated internal cultures of inegalitarian institutions and conform them to values thought better than the oppressive beliefs that dominated them previously. This penetration was treated as a one-sided conquest; advocates of diversity thought of it as an idea and initiative that penetrated and inserted itself into contexts where it was not before and transformed them without being mutated itself. However, the concept of diversity is itself penetrable; interaction with contexts where diversity was not before present transforms the concept of diversity.

This observation that diversity and all manners of social justice work are themselves penetrable and fully mutable is the beginning of the concept of *infiltrated ideals*. The center of this concept is that ideals once meant to *infiltrate* and transform inegalitarian institutions have been themselves infiltrated and transformed over time through their interactions with these newly entered contexts. Therein, ideals like diversity have become increasingly incorporated into systems of power as strategies, and those systems have likewise mutated.

I will proceed to demonstrate this point in a limited study. I will examine pieces on the benefits of diversity alongside a diversity management handbook. These texts will demonstrate how thinking about the underlying discourse of diversity has shifted as it more intimately and frequently interacts with the world of business.

Let us begin with examples from articles that attempt to inform the reader of the benefits of diverse teams in the workplace:

> Researchers found that individuals who were part of the diverse teams were 58 percent more likely to price stocks correctly, whereas those in homogenous groups were more prone to pricing errors. . . . In another study . . . the authors concluded that increased cultural diversity is a boon to innovativeness. They pooled data on 7,615 firms that participated in the London Annual Business Survey . . . the results revealed that businesses run by culturally diverse leadership teams were more likely to develop new products than those with homogenous leadership.[3]

3 Rock and Grant, "Why Diverse Teams are Smarter."

> Companies in the top quartile for racial and ethnic diversity are 35 percent more likely to have financial returns above their respective national industry medians . . . Companies in the top quartile for gender diversity are 15 percent more likely to have financial returns above their respective national industry medians . . . Companies in the bottom quartile both for gender and for ethnicity and race are statistically less likely to achieve above-average financial returns than the average companies in the data set (that is, bottom-quartile companies are lagging rather than merely not leading).[4]

4 Vivian Hunt, Dennis Layton, and Sarah Prince, "Why Diversity Matters," *McKinsey & Company*, January 2015, http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/why-diversity-matters.

Readers should pause to notice the robust empirical evidence and business-oriented evaluative principles that are present throughout; the articles seek to demonstrate that diversity as a variable is positively correlated with several measures of success. Statements like "Companies in the top quartile for racial and ethnic diversity are 35 percent more likely to have financial returns above their respective national industry medians" suggest that the argument of the article is that diversity should be appreciated as a predictive dimension of success in the workplace. Diversity, then, is treated merely as a composition of human relationships with given sets of properties that yield an influence on workplace activities. The authors' goal is to advise managers about how this positive compositional state can be instrumental in securing advantages. This is a re-coding of the social attribute of "diversity" with a new underlying system of intelligibility that does not evaluate things like the moral worth of equality or the authoritative claims of justice.

We previously thought of diversity initiatives as something inherently liberal, as possessing its political character is necessary in its definition. We now see diversity as something that can be politically indifferent, something that can be merely *instrumental* in its political character rather than revolutionary. It can be a compositional schema: a mechanism for transforming and mobilizing resources of human capital by aggregating certain *kinds* of people for certain tasks.

II

Let us move to another analysis that demonstrates how diversity as a concept of human resource management can be abstracted from history, politics, and

morality. *World Class Diversity Management* by Thomas R. Roosevelt is something of a handbook meant to allow management to develop "state-of-the-art strategies and approaches for addressing any diversity issue in any setting in any geographical location."[5] Even here, we may pause to observe that the strategies that the author offers are meant to be effective in "addressing any diversity issue" in "any setting" and "any geographic location." Diversity issues are treated as things without strict and immutable integrity in their particulars. Incomparable diversity issues are seen as aggregateable. Moreover, Roosevelt even suggests that it is preferable not to get bogged down in the particularities of race, gender, and ethnicity, stating,

> the individual dimensions—race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, thought, globalism, political, functional, or generational—consume the attention and time of many organizations, which emphasize them one at a time and seek practitioners and consultants with expertise in the priority of the moment. . . . Rarely do organizations or community leaders focus on learning about diversity as a field. . . . The focus is on creating an environment that enables leaders and managers to access talent however it comes packaged in terms of race, gender, and ethnicity.

Roosevelt continues by offering an anecdote detailing an experience consulting for an English client:

> Not long ago, I made a presentation in England. The client requested that I arrive early so that I might be oriented. . . . They simply had wanted to be sure I had not come with a way of thinking about diversity that was at odds with their thinking; in particular, they did not want me to bring a race and gender perspective that they considered to be peculiar to the United States. My model and its assumption of a global application to any diversity issue appeared attractive to them.[6]

It is difficult to parse what the client meant by a "way of thinking about diversity that was at odds with their thinking." It could mean that they wanted a way of dealing with diversity that reflected the historical and political context of England; however, this appears unlikely since in the end they chose to embrace Roosevelt's generalist approach. It seems that companies seeking Roosevelt's consultation want to pull pure calculative power out of diversity, to extract its pure

5 R. Roosevelt Thomas, *World Class Diversity Management: A Strategic Approach* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2010), 3.

6 Roosevelt, *World Class Diversity*, 17.

efficaciousness concerning their goal without being bothered by the political struggle of the broader social justice movement.

If we understand diversity as a functional idea that works with compositions of human difference in a population, and based on that composition yields outcomes, then we can imagine people as the intersection points of various qualities—characteristics to be aggregated by these schemas. If a person is a composite bundle of certain perspective-driven knowledges related to ethnicity, gender, race, disability, etc. intersected with the knowledge of white cisgender male hegemony, then a function of diversity management might inform the selection of persons for recruitment that carry particular relations of these qualities, all of which make them serviceable to their project. This means that diversity does not necessarily resist or oppose white cisgender male hegemony (or any hegemony for that manner). Diversity management takes variables describing the difference of persons, chooses those with the right bundle of these variables, recruits these persons, disciplines them in labor functions to output knowledge and skills, adds positive representation institutions, and uses them effectively towards the ends of specific rational schemes that rely on people as inputs—be this scheme a business, an academy, a culture, or a general social organization of any kind.

We may understand diversity management as the organization and mobilization of human resources otherwise made inaccessible by negative social interaction patterns (e.g. oppression and discrimination). The "rationalization agenda" of business, as Roosevelt refers to it, was always handicapped by segregation and discrimination because it made certain knowledges unavailable for use in its projects.

III

There is a condition for the utilization of minorities through diversity management in various social schemas: those recruited must be conversant in the dominant discourse to some degree. Aberrations from the norm that minorities represent, be it in race, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, etc., must not be of the radical or incompatible kind. In other words, in elite institutions those who are

different cannot act like "hillbillies," nor like "ghetto kids," nor like "FOBs," etc. They cannot maintain radically disruptive performances in the center of the institution; this would be bringing the outside in, not to be absorbed and incorporated but to take from the center, create chaos, and dismantle its base. Those authorized minorities must differ only enough so as to inform the center of the activity in the margins, such that they can bring those marginalized resources within access of the institution. Their role is to rationalize and expand hegemony by contributing their knowledge of how difference positions them epistemically.

Businesses can more effectively market to minorities if they have access to knowledges from people who have lived in spaces outside of the center. The academy can be a more complete encyclopedia of the world through contributions from minorities. Diverse teams can help business penetrate markets that are otherwise inaccessible on account of cultural ignorance or their lack of the right "palette of faces" that would allow minority consumers to open up. Diversity allows for the *amendment* of central schemas of knowledge. They help cover the gaps and span the irrationalities of hegemonic knowledges.

The diversities referred to in the workplace or in academic settings are not radical, irreconcilable diversities. They are not diversities that indict the main identity. If the central paradigm of knowledge is informed by a worldview indebted to the history of Western thought, we cannot necessarily assume that it is exploded as a natural consequence of diversity or that this paradigm is not always present to some degree in the assumptions of every actor regardless of origin or identity. These diversities critique and expand the main identity without radically breaking its structure. In this way, diversity aids in broadening, modifying, developing, and improving white-male-hegemonic identity. Diversity is a critical-social dynamic that only refines and resolves the irrationalities of the central social thesis but does not break it.

Diversity becomes nothing more than an asymptotic perfect homogeneity. The contradictions, epistemic blindness, and creative limitedness of a more illogically assembled composition of homogeneity are trumped by a homogeneity that has more ingeniously engaged the premises of its necessary conditions of "sameness." The

7 For more on the view that intellectuals' role as critic has been impoverished and replaced with a socially reproductive role, see Stefano Harney and Fred Morten, "The University & the Undercommons," in *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study,* (New York, NY: Minor Compositions, 2013). They continue, even when academics do offer up critique meant to revolutionize our capitalist political economy, these critiques are absorbed into the hegemonic order, actually helping to strengthen the status quo.

conditions of sameness in traditional white–patriarchal homogeneity (skin color, hair texture, etc.) create inconsistent connections between the properties that they are supposed to preserve in its members.

Skin color, hair texture, nose shape, etc. are supposed to capture members who share an experience of the world—a background, an intellectual experience, a set of skills and values, etc.—but this metric fails to observe that the frameworks of the white cisgender man extend into a substratum that far out-extends the category of people with white skin, straight hair, and straight noses. The epistemic, financial, evaluative positions of the white man are so thoroughly disseminated, recapitulated, and subtly reinforced that we all experience reality to some degree from the position of the white man.

The diversity we are now seeing may be more accurately called "rational homogeneity." It is still in dialogue with a central premise attached to all the assumptions and goals operative in the context of business and academia, rooted far backwards in time and extending itself forward with the vestiges and inheritances of its oppressive past. These vestiges interact and combine with diversity as it enters these new institutional contexts.

IV

From these authorized minorities elected by diversity management emerges a new elite who act as an excuse for the structures of oppression and who more thoroughly bind those successfully tracked and branded by the system as undesirables: the radically unassimilable. The new elite, sanctioned by diversity management and critically imperceptive of social justice politics, are still conversant with the old era of exclusion. The preexisting culture of exclusive circles was not suddenly extinguished by the advent of social justice. There is continuity, although now modified to share a context with social justice. Bigotry evolves and even *mates* with social justice; a new hybrid politic emerges, one that cannot be separated into any previous category now that their DNA has been commingled.[7]

Business and academia emerged co-historically with institutions of racism, sexism, homophobia, etc., and these discriminatory histories still permeate and transfigure

them. "Diversity" cannot dissolve that history; when it enters the mix of the tumultuous corporation and faces its alliance with discriminatory institutions, its effect cannot be assumed to be pure positivity. The heritage of discrimination changes the terms of diversity as much as diversity changes the terms of the institution.

This portrayal gives us a better understanding of what is meant by infiltrated ideals. Social justice ideals, particularly social equity, behave more like strategies and techniques than positive social goals. Diversity and multiculturalism do not belong to one team or camp; they do not invariably lead to a better society. They are just new elements that must be recognized in contemporary politics due to its growing ideological clout. Intentions to consolidate power, maintain privilege, etc. are not in retreat simply because the terms of the discourse have changed. Just as the success of the Civil-Rights Era prompted new discursive racism characterized by coded language and colorblind systems of racial control, the salience of recognizing diversity institutionally is that it may shift the way in which systems of oppression operate.[8]

Diversity, however, may offer a more paradigmatic transformation over colorblindness." The political strategies of colorblind oppression were invented to maneuver, dodge, avoid, and remain indecipherable. Indeed, the indecipherability of systems of oppression remains important in an era of infiltrated ideals, but the overall strategy shifts away from evasiveness towards incorporation. In fact, diversity has given new life to social inequalities. When race, ethnicity, gender, disability, etc. are no longer criteria for discrimination, then individuals whose circumstances determine their life outcome are pitted against those who escape this decisive branding. The systems of oppression in place lose their legibility as racist, sexist, ableist, etc. Not all oppressed people experience oppression equally, and the oppression experienced by one person may not preclude all possible opportunities of success. Discriminatory institutions *track* certain kinds of people and contribute to the determination of their life through adverse social mechanisms. Sometimes the mechanisms do not do their job and some escape. Further, the mechanisms may aid individuals of interest in escaping so that their talents may be utilized. This "accident of escape" may ultimately be

8 Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2012).

held as an accomplishment of merit, demonstration of talent, or feat of perseverance; this allows the failure to escape to be seen as a personal failure of responsibility.

In a society publicly embracing diversity and multiculturalism, those who escape oppression are lauded and brought into the spotlight instead of being sequestered. In fact, recruitment systems and scouting agencies can be used to identify, recruit, and aggregate those with special *variables* that allowed them to escape the system. Perhaps it was the child with active parents despite being born in poverty, maybe it was the child with disabilities given access to nature and art such that their disability was mitigated, or maybe it was the girl in a household of strong feminine personalities such that she never developed limiting self-perceptions. These variable cases can be gathered and recruited as vanguards of the privileged elite in a newly branded system of control. The best and brightest are integrated into complicity with society's inegalitarianism.

Once the bodies of sophisticated inegalitarianism are expanded in color palette and behavioral pattern, an excuse is given for the continued oppression of those still caught in the net. In fact, the bind can be tightened on them as the system of control is invigorated by the intellectual capital of diversity. If middle-class blacks who don't experience the resource deprivation of the urban poor are elevated and accepted into elite institutions—or if middle-class Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Asian-Americans are made to represent "Asian Americans" proper even though people of Hmong, Cambodian, or Laotian descent remain struggling—then a wedge is set between the elected minorities and those thoroughly enmeshed in oppression. The circumstances between them are conflated as being "equivalent," and therein systems that continue to code and oppress people are more easily ignored.

CONCLUSION

Contemporary diversity initiatives can be said to be continuous with the ideas that were developed in social justice movements. However, these ideas now serve new purposes; they have been reduced and adapted. In fact, in a stroke of irony, it may have been the enforced

inefficiency of oppression that prevented white supremacy and its institutions from becoming supremely powerful. Oppression deprived hegemony of critical talent and rendered key knowledges inaccessible. The organizational schemes of oppression—racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, disability discrimination, etc.—made the regimes of power less optimal. There were still truly talented individuals in the margins, resisting oppression, escaping conscription, and protecting revolutionary knowledge by the mere fact of exclusion. Now these people have been offered a seat at the table. More than poverty or the miseducation of oppressed people, diversity and inclusion can be seen as the ultimate strategy of resource deprivation, depriving oppressed people of the most critical resource: human capital. Indeed, one may ask oneself the question: who will fight the resistance when there is no left to fight, when all our heroes are seduced into better lives as enemies?