

Investing in Diversity: Advancing Opportunities for Minorities and the Media

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Diversity and the Media

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The Market Value of Diversity: A Cultural Analysis

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As Stuart Hall has noted, America is a land not only of ethnic minorities but of ethnic hierarchies.¹ The course of American history has witnessed one ethnic minority after another struggling to move upward through the culture toward a point when its members would no longer be identified by their ethnic status but be assimilated into the mainstream culture. Once there, they would still maintain, more or less loosely, ethnic identities based on their cultures of origin; they would become, for example, Italian Americans and Polish Americans.

Typically, these minority communities have been immigrants, and European in origin. Because of the commonalities of their skin colors and racial characteristics, they have eventually been integrated into the mainstream, white community and have begun to enjoy the status privileges associated with the dominant group. Even for European groups, however, some have assimilated faster than others. It has taken longer for Catholics to be absorbed into the American mainstream, for example, than it did for Protestants. Similarly, it has taken even longer for American Jews to become identified with the dominant group; indeed, they among all Eurocentric groups still maintain a distinct identity primarily because of their religious background. In the long term, it seems, distinct identity does not prevent an immigrant group from assimilating.

Still, some U.S. immigrant groups have remained in perennial minority status. Consider the experience of Hispanic Americans, who have not been accorded full majority status because of geopolitical factors, even though some could easily qualify as

white based on skin color, racial characteristics, and European ancestry. Or consider Japanese Americans and Chinese Americans, who have never been considered part of the dominant group although their ancestors began to immigrate to the United States more than a century ago; the obvious reason for these groups' enduring minority status is that they are not of European extraction. (Recent immigrant populations from Asia and the Middle East may prove inassimilable for the same reason.) Of course, all of these examples pale beside the case of American blacks, whose social history in North America predates the American Revolution.

The explosive growth of racial and ethnic diversity in the United States has forced the various sectors of the economy, the government, and the media to reexamine the ways in which they have traditionally dealt with minority groups and their concerns and interests. Historically, the American social response to diversity has taken three distinct forms. First is benign neglect, often combined with hostility to some groups. Given the central values of American philosophy and culture, it is assumed that most ethnic communities will be absorbed into the mainstream by trial and error, and over time. In this view, although some groups will be slower to assimilate than others, and some may even be left out of the assimilation process, it is only a matter of time before most arrive on the level playing field. The guiding principle here is homogenization. This attitude toward diversity continues to dominate the American mind and rule mainstream consciousness even though history tells us that this process has not worked effectively in all cases.

The second perspective toward diversity is that ethnic groups represent specific identities, values, and cultural positions that must be recognized and accommodated within the mainstream culture. The idea here is to grant the distinct identities of the ethnic groups, but keep them subordinate to the goals of the mainstream. If ethnic groups are absorbed into the mainstream, so much the better, but if not, their value systems can still find expression within the larger context. The guiding principle here is accommodation and tolerance of differences. This approach dominates current progressive thinking.

More recently, a third perspective toward diversity has emerged that regards ethnic groups as positive contributors to mainstream culture. In this view, the diversity question is not one of accommodation and tolerance of difference but one of active receptivity to ethnic values that can be transferred into the mainstream culture. The guiding principle of this perspective is the creation of mutual benefit via interaction, or what I call *mutual asset formation*. Mutual asset formation occurs when different groups within a community or society contribute synergistically to its betterment. The idea here is that each group has something to offer to the whole system that others are unable to offer; together, the pooled contributions make the system much richer. Ideas about the social and market value of diversity are deeply embedded in this third approach, which provides both the framework and the mechanism to enable people to identify and derive value from the notion of diversity.

It is the third approach that this chapter urges, the channeling of multicultural forces into positive social ends. I begin my argument with a discussion of Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital and their dynamic roles in the creation and sustainability of market value. I then present some of the research describing the minority status of blacks in American culture, and discuss the roles of the mainstream and minority media in reinforcing that status. Next, I explore the social capital issues of ethnic consciousness and cultural projection. I then discuss the blending of forms of capital and the market value of diversity. Finally, I propose a research agenda to help American culture overcome its continuing burden of race.

CAPITAL AND SYMBOLIC SPACE

"Capital" can be defined as the accumulated resources of a group or community that can be employed productively for the benefit of the group/community as well as the larger social order. Although capital is most commonly understood as an economic resource, the French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu notes that capital can appear in other forms than economic capital, such as cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital.²

Economic capital is accumulated economic wealth and power, manifested in the ability to acquire goods and services, participate in certain key professions (medicine, law, etc.), enter corporate life, exercise control over productive resources, have access to scientific knowledge that can be translated into material wealth, and influence or participate in economic policies that shape individual and collective welfare. The economic capital of American blacks tells an interesting story. Measured in dollars, it is quite significant. For example, in 1993, U.S. blacks earned/controlled/spent \$300 billion. If the American black community were a nation it would constitute the tenth wealthiest country in the world in terms of gross national product.³ Yet, this combined wealth does not generate equivalent economic power. This pronounced discrepancy is not difficult to explain. The economic capital of blacks is diffused, not concentrated in nationally recognizable institutions such as national banks, national media, Fortune 500 companies, and national universities (institutions that Marxists call the *ideological apparatuses of the state*). The fact that blacks do not enjoy economic power commensurate with their economic wealth should come as no surprise; they are hardly an exception. Take for instance the gender situation. Women comprise about half of the U.S. population. Even taking into account that their earning power is only roughly 70 percent that of men, women's economic power should be considerable. In fact, it is insignificant when compared to that of men.⁴ These examples demonstrate the fact that other types of capital are at work here.

Social capital is closely connected with economic capital in the American context, much more so than in other Western societies; in the context of diversity, one might even think of social capital as racial/ethnic capital. Social capital accrues from educational attainment, desirable living conditions, and access to public spheres, markets, jobs, and opportunities. Social capital also includes generational transformation, that is, the ability to hand down from one generation to the next the values and institutional skills that will help the new generation negotiate its position within the society at large. Ability to transfer social knowledge is becoming particularly significant as American society approaches

a knowledge economy ruled by technologies of information and communication.

Cultural capital includes both social and economic capital; in the American context, cultural capital is gained through participation in fashion, design, music, fiction writing, arts, and aesthetics. The media constitute some aspects of cultural capital by shaping the cultural dialogue and portraying roles and group identities. While economic and social capital are primarily extrinsic (that is, they mediate between a group and dominant/other cultures), cultural capital is both extrinsic and intrinsic (operating within a cultural milieu). A group can, for example, build intrinsic self-esteem through participation in its own culture, enjoying a high degree of cultural sensitivity within its own boundaries. This intrinsic cultural capital may not, however, reflect the group's position with respect to extrinsic cultures or the dominant culture; the slogan "black is beautiful," for example, has intrinsic cultural value that does not translate as powerfully to the dominant culture. Unsurprisingly, the dominant culture usually enjoys both extrinsic and intrinsic aspects of cultural capital.

Economists tend to reduce all forms of capital to economic capital. This must be done, they argue, because the concept of capital does not make theoretical or pragmatic sense unless it can be measured, and the only way to make measurement possible is to transform all forms of capital into economic, measurable units. Otherwise, the argument goes, we will be comparing apples and oranges.

While there is merit to this reductionistic analysis, there is danger too, in that many forms of capital cannot be easily translated into economic or measurable terms and must therefore be left out of consideration. Once thus barred, they tend to assume an inferior extrinsic status although they may function as important resources within any given community or group. Concern about this issue provides strong justification for retaining the distinctions among forms of capital so that we can examine them in institutional and historical terms, and discover their roles in explaining the social condition of a given group.

Bourdieu rounds off his analysis with what he terms symbolic capital, a form of capital that fuses the other three forms into

symbolic space. Symbolic capital is not a reductionistic concept; rather, it describes the outcomes of the operationalization of different forms of capital in practice. All forms of capital have the potential to transform into positions of power and status. But how are they transformed, and how do they manifest themselves in the daily lives of individuals? To address this issue, Bourdieu's classic work *Distinction* introduces a term that has been the subject of continuing critical scrutiny. According to Bourdieu, a culture's *habitus* is the durable set of practices and mental frames of reference its members carry around in their daily lives, and which they gain from their experiences and their contact with the world in which they live.⁵ These experiences are governed by language, social position (class, ethnicity, and gender), social networks, employment, and schooling, all of which may be collectively labeled the symbolic codes and processes that constitute the habitus.

It is the habitus that connects us to various forms of capital. The specifics of Bourdieu's insightful analysis are concerned with French society. But its principles can be applied to other social contexts as well, with the usual caveats that surround such generalizability. One such context is that of the United States, where American blacks constitute a seemingly permanent minority.

A DISADVANTAGED MINORITY

When American scholars use the term "minority," what is usually meant is nonwhite groups, which are further divided into two main categories: the disadvantaged (or underrepresented) minorities and the nondisadvantaged minorities. In general, disadvantaged groups have lower educational skills and lack the economic opportunities accorded nondisadvantaged groups.

American blacks, who have more recently used the labels "Afro-Americans" or "African Americans," form the most significant example of a disadvantaged minority in the United States. In a seminal work on black economic and social status, William Julius Wilson describes American blacks as "the truly disadvantaged."⁶ He describes black economic status as a paradox, noting that during the very period of "the most sweeping antidiscrimina-

tion legislation . . . the economic position of many poor blacks actually deteriorated."⁷ Wilson also notes the gradual emergence of a black middle class comparable to the white middle class on many socioeconomic characteristics. This new black middle class is an important development in the social and economic history of this country and has many implications for issues relating to the contemporary ethnic discourse.

Even so, John Ogbu argues that American blacks represent what he calls a *castelike* minority.⁸ Castelike minorities are different from other minorities in that they are groups that remain permanently separate and disconnected within the social milieu due to various historical and cultural factors; they tend to have less ready access to social goods because of their secondary position. In his analysis of social position, Ogbu concludes that the variable of race may not be sufficient to describe a group socially or culturally, or to explain its place in social hierarchy. A more useful variable for this purpose would be the term *racial stratification*, which captures how hierarchies are established and sustained. Still, Ogbu argues that even though recent efforts have been directed toward minimizing the damage done by racial stratification by giving blacks professional training in productive disciplines and raising their skill levels through education, their minority status has not been drastically altered.

Accompanying racial stratification is the *physical stratification* of minority communities.⁹ Throughout the United States, a significant majority of blacks live in separate geographical regions, whether it be middle-class, black suburban enclaves or the "inner cities" inhabited by low-income blacks. Such separate physical spaces exist in the case of other minorities as well, but are most pronounced in the cases of blacks, Hispanics, and native American Indians.¹⁰ In all these cases, physical separation is clearly linked to these communities' social isolation.

The de facto social segregation of blacks and other minority groups manifests in many institutional settings and cultural practices, where their secondary status is repeated through cultural dynamics. Nowhere is this more telling than in mass media (television and film) where the portrayal of blacks has been particularly controversial.

BLACKS, THE MEDIA, AND THE HABITUS

The role of the media in translating the codes of social groups (the habitus) is significant and undeniably critical in many societies. In the United States, it is now well established that media play a vital role in interpreting symbolic processes and converting them into sources of social power. Much of the contemporary criticism in minority discourse (as well as in majority discourse) is directed towards the dominant position of the media in setting social standards and norms of interpretation. It is often argued, for example, that the mainstream media perspective is usually hegemonic, that is, it portrays blacks from the perspective of the white dominant culture: Blacks are portrayed positively when they have adjusted to the dominant cultural values. If they are portrayed negatively, it is because they have not been able to lift themselves up in spite of the opportunities given to them.

In a detailed study of the American media's role in mediating cultural values, Jeter analyzes the current situation as follows:

The media are more often than not agents of the power structure reinforcing the status quo. The media are pervasive and consumers are bombarded with messages that say this or that person, action, idea, is beautiful, good, decent, and right while other things are ugly, bad, obscene, and wrong. These functions have combined to result in a less-than-optimal state of regard for blacks. . . . A 1990 survey provided empirical data that coincide remarkably with what critics have charged. The survey found that a majority of persons believed that as compared to whites, blacks were less hard-working, less patriotic, less intellectual, less universal, more violent.¹¹

Camille O. Cosby's study of television over a 30-year period also found portrayals of blacks to be overwhelmingly negative.¹² Paradoxically, this same study reported that blacks watched more television than nonblacks. Several explanations are possible. Television offers a variety of entertainment possibilities; perhaps black audiences are watching shows where black characters are not presented. Perhaps they are watching sports and other programs where role portrayals are less of an issue, or are gener-

ally positive; in some sports, after all, blacks outperform members from other groups and are considered stars. It may be that black audiences put up with negative portrayals because television watching provides their sole or main low-cost entertainment outlet. Finally, some black audiences may accept the medium's unflattering portrayals of the black community as a condition of their existence in white-dominated culture.

Manning Marable reminds us that the reality of average black community life hardly matches the media portrayals:¹³

Contrary to the pathology projected by the popular media, the vast majority of black people have little tolerance for crime and violence—blacks understand all too well that we are their principal victims. But so many TV programs and major films automatically focus on that tiny fraction of the African American community that engages in drugs and violence. . . . Media images of African Americans aside, most of us work for a living. There are black criminals, of course, but most black people are not—they struggle to keep their households together, raise their children with love and attention—they are responsible and hardworking people. . . . When the reality of blackness contradicts the stereotype of racism, TV producers, directors, and corporate executives demand that reality conform to their prejudices.¹⁴

The negative role portrayals pervasive in the media can result in negative self-perceptions on the part of black Americans.¹⁵ Television as a major institution in American public life over the last 30 or so years has caused immense harm to the self-esteem of blacks by repeated negative portrayals that have had a lasting and devastating impact on young children preparing themselves to live in the larger social world.¹⁶ When television's main message to a community as a whole is negative, that message often prompts negative community reaction in the forms of resentment and despair. Habitually distorted or negative images invite resentment directed toward the medium as well as toward the culture that dominates or shapes the medium. Habitual portrayals of a

group as inferior to the dominant culture invite a sense of helplessness and eventual identification with that inferior status.

Figure 1 presents a schematized version of the role of the media in black cultural transformation. As shown in the figure, the formation of cultural capital for any group follows two distinct stages, one within the group and the other outside the group. In the first stage, the cultural codes and ideas originate within the cultural habitus of the group; each group has its own cultural apparatuses that allow the codes to diffuse within the group. Specifically, in terms of blacks as the minority community that we are focusing on here, the black cultural apparatus organizes its cultural codes and ideas (path A) and channels them into the second stage, where black media project them onto the popular imagination (paths D and E). At the same time, the dominant media picks up the codes and ideas, filters them through its own cultural apparatuses, and also projects them onto the public (paths B and C). Although the two processes are the same, they do not yield equivalent results. The dominant media view of the black cultural scene is generally unflattering to the black community; although the black media's representation of its own cultural domain is, as is to be expected, generally very positive, this portrayal does not necessarily have an impact on the larger audience since the channels of communication to this audience are controlled by the white media apparatus (paths B and C).

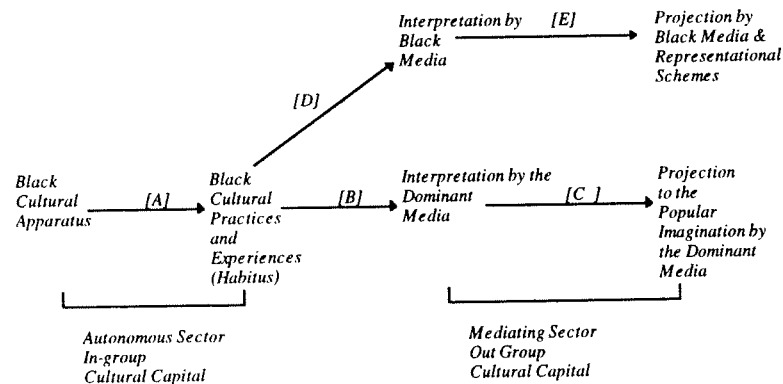


Figure 1: Cultural Transformation Process—The Role of the Media

Let us now examine some of the institutional settings that are described in Figure 1. Historically, blacks have owned very few radio or television stations. In April, 1994, for example, the magazine *Black Enterprise* noted that out of a total of 4,948 commercial AM radio stations in the country, blacks owned 110; of 4,945 commercial FM stations, blacks owned 71; of 1,153 commercial television stations, blacks owned 19. These figures, based on the 1993 Census, should be relatively current in terms of the general picture. In other words, in terms of paths D and E in Figure 1, the cultural presence of black media is minuscule. Would it then make a difference to the general image-building of blacks in the dominant mainstream culture if these numbers were increased? Probably not. As long as the mainstream media control the dominant channels, there is little that minority ownership can do to make a difference.

Two cultural schema are in operation here, one having to do with the dominant media, and the other having to do with media in the hands of minority groups. According to the theory of critical mass,¹⁷ minority numbers will matter only once they reach a certain threshold. At this point, it is unclear where that threshold may be. If blacks are able to enter the dominant media, it may be that cultural decision processes can change if the dominant cultural apparatus treats inputs from the black cultural apparatus responsibly. Blacks (and any minority group) will remain marginal and marginalized until they enter mainstream institutional structures.

ETHNIC CONSCIOUSNESS AND CULTURAL PROJECTION: ISSUES OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

Over the past several decades, black consciousness has evolved in several ways. Until the 1960s, blacks generally accepted their condition of secondary political and economic status and the feeling of inferiority that status engendered in many. During the '60s, social conditions began to change dramatically as black culture emerged as a culture of resistance and aggressive self-expression. Beginning to view themselves in terms of black pride, blacks celebrated their own norms of success despite their collec-

tive perception that the dominant culture was trying to manipulate them. The outward manifestation of this new black consciousness was evident in Afro-American fashion and hairstyles, in music, art, and political/social dialogue. A number of factors combine to create and project black social capital.

Black Cultural Projection

Richard Merelman proposes four models representing black perspectives of their status vis-à-vis the dominant culture: syncretism, hegemony, polarization, and counter-hegemony.¹⁸ *Syncretism* refers to a possible fusion of black and white cultures that would give rise to a new set of cultural norms and practices. This model emphasizes mutual collaboration between blacks and whites, projecting positive results from their interaction. In contrast, the *hegemonic* model portrays blacks as subordinate to white culture with no hope of establishing self-identity. Adoption of a hegemonic perspective tends to result in resentment because of the absence of a black voice. The *polarization* model depicts blacks and whites on opposite sides of issues, with neither willing to accommodate the demands of the other. Outcomes for the polarization model are similar to those of the hegemonic model in that both result in black resentment of white culture. However, the polarization model is not one of black subordination but of black separateness. The *counter-hegemonic* model views black cultural beliefs as actually prevailing in some cases over white cultural beliefs or values (e.g., in fashion and music). This model is an exception and has not found expression in practice within the American context, because unassimilated ethnic minorities here remain fragmented and no single minority group has demonstrated the ability to make serious inroads into the dominant culture. The first three models represent the current reality of blacks' interpretations of their status in American culture, although it must be conceded that the hegemonic and polarization models seem to prevail over the syncretistic model.

Poverty and Cultural Isolation

Many social theorists have argued that the cultural isolation of distressed minorities is a result of economic poverty and structural antecedents that create poverty.¹⁹ Three areas are identified as contributing to this condition: economic needs as measured by such indicators as poverty, unemployment, and educational deficiencies; behavioral problems such as long-term welfare dependency, family instability, drugs, crime, and others; and attitudinal problems of deep isolation and alienation.

Inclusionary and Exclusionary Practices

Black identity is a product of the conflict between inclusionary and exclusionary practices. In the last 30 years, many social programs and public legislation measures have focused on providing institutional opportunities for blacks in various social and economic situations. Unfortunately, this public expression of inclusionary emphasis has been weakened by private exclusionary practices. The more that members of the dominant culture believed that blacks were being provided many opportunities, the less they believed it was necessary to open any more doors.

Television represents both an inclusionary and exclusionary culture. It is inclusionary because blacks feel they have access to the technology in the same way as whites. However, it is exclusionary in the sense that television has continued to promote negative images of blacks. Television is a complex phenomenon. As a technology of entertainment, it induces passive activity; given the social isolation of blacks and other minorities, TV watching may be a beneficial activity because it is a window to the outside world where one has access to the outside world but does not encounter it directly. As a technology of public culture, television is viewed by blacks as part of the white entertainment culture. Although the black consciousness has evolved into a mode of greater self-assertion and expression, this does not seem to have been incorporated into "TV-land." Television, by many accounts, continues to downgrade the social position of blacks even here at the end of the millennium.²⁰

Technology and Identity Formation

In the contemporary technological era, identities are formed by interaction of several factors—race, social class, reference groups, etc.²¹ Technologies have substantially dissimilar impacts on different groups of people based on gender, education, age, ethnic characteristics, occupational categories, and lifestyles. How does one evaluate the differential impacts on these different groups? One solution is to do a comparative study, that is, to examine how these groups compare to others with respect to the use of technologies. But comparative studies generally use white families as standards for analysis and white family theory as their theoretical frame of reference; deviation from the normative aspects of white families is labeled “deviant” or “pathological.”

Marie Ferguson Peters proposes an ecological approach to the study of black families instead of simple comparative studies of black and white families.²² The ecological approach considers the behavior of black families within the environmental conditions and constraints of black cultural life. It also takes into account normative practices of black family life. For example, black culture generally favors an approach to parent-child relationships in which the child is strictly obedient to parental authority. In white families, in contrast, insistence on obedience is often replaced by indirect forms of control. Black culture also encourages noncompetitive individualism; black families rely heavily on family networks instead of professional services to meet family crises, and black parents tend to bring up their children to be comfortable with their “blackness,” and to go to the next level of “black pride.” Socializing children in black families is motivated by a desire to build friendship networks; socializing them into the white world is governed by a need for survival.

Structural Factors

Various structural factors distinguish blacks from whites, poor blacks from poor whites, and blacks from other immigrant communities such as Japanese, Chinese, Koreans, etc. Because of these factors, blacks have developed status mobility systems that have special characteristics. For example, blacks often regard educational opportunities as follows: Either they receive inferior

education or the adequate education they receive does not open up the possibilities within the white world. Some blacks pursue education, believing that while schooling and educational opportunities will not help them advance socially within the mainstream, they can use what they learn *against* the mainstream. Another strategy is to use these structural factors to advance status within their own community. For this purpose, white community recognition is welcome but not essential.

In this chapter, I have barely touched upon the problems of the inner city and the problem of middle-class flight, problems that have been widely discussed in the literature and overanalyzed by many scholars. I refer to these problems only in terms of what they mean to the link between economic capital and social capital. As I noted earlier in the chapter, William Julius Wilson raises the following paradoxical question:

[Backers of the discrimination thesis] find it difficult to explain why the economic position of poor urban blacks actually deteriorated during the very period in which the most sweeping antidiscrimination legislation and programs were enacted and implemented. Their emphasis on discrimination is even more problematic, in view of the economic progress of the black middle class during the same period.²³

According to Steven Gregory, Wilson himself provides a sociological explanation to the problems of urban poverty.²⁴ That is,

changes in occupational structure widened the income gap between the poor and nonpoor, provoking an outmigration of the working and middle classes from inner city areas. The exodus of the nonpoor, Wilson (p. 56) contends, weakened community institutions and divested the inner cities of “mainstream role models that help keep alive the perception that education is meaningful, that steady employment is viable alternative welfare, and that family stability is the norm, not the exception.”²⁵

Wilson provides a striking instance of increasing economic capital combined with fracturing social capital. Upon reflection, one can easily understand the mechanism at work: As economic opportunities open up for minorities, they do so at the expense of available or existing social spaces. Since economic prosperity does not touch everybody equally and existing social spaces cannot accommodate the newly formed middle classes, communities have to realign themselves, sometimes at considerable cost to their collective welfare.

BLENDING FORMS OF CAPITAL

How can American society utilize the three forms of capital—economic, social, and cultural—to maximize the social opportunities for racial minorities and bring them into the mainstream in a mutually beneficial way? What is the value of diversity—the *market* value of diversity—in this changing, complex social order?

Historically, much tension and dissension have surrounded the welfare debate in the United States. In recent years, the welfare concept has been called into intense question and the pendulum seems to have swung to a point where the concept is viewed suspiciously, to be gradually replaced by the idea of empowerment of minority groups through self-discipline and competitive spirit.

For the ordinary citizen on the street, the two major sources for economic welfare were always the government or the private (business) sector, or a combination thereof.²⁶ These two sectors, situated at opposite ends of an ideological spectrum, operate from different perspectives. Certainly one major difference is that in the case of the private sector, the profit motive fuels all actions. Operationally, the profit motive understands all citizens to be part of a market system; unless citizens participate in the market system under its terms, no benefits will accrue to them. Theoretically, the market system simply evaluates individuals or groups of them as economic units and as sources of revenues and profits, viewing them from a unidimensional view: What is their economic capital? In practice, however, this question is complicated by the fact that straightforward economic principles do not

prevail in practice. Simple economics do not dictate the business approach to the minority groups; rather, it is a judgment of the consequences of serving them in terms of impact on the mainstream. Economics became embroiled in social acts of inclusivity and exclusivity. This is particularly true in media politics and it is now amply recorded that minority groups remain invisible in the media radar—a version of the condition of benign neglect discussed earlier in the chapter. Of course, for some critics, the term “benign” might sound overly charitable. What benign neglect has meant in practice over the years is that businesses have been quite prepared to sacrifice the interests of the 20 percent of the population as long as the remaining 80 percent of the market was intact. At the same time, businesses did not mind serving the 20 percent if this had no deleterious effect on their dealings with the majority.

What has changed in the last decade is that businesses have carefully reevaluated their position in regard to the issues of diversity. New demographic trends clearly show that the U.S. population is becoming more and more diverse; in the next two or three decades there will be fundamental shifts in the population composition. Second, the various so-called “minorities” will not only gain in numbers but will represent a strong economic base that will be hard to ignore. This is the reason why many large corporations are adopting a target-market approach to ethnic populations in enlarging their customer base. This is indeed the economic capital argument.

But what about cultural capital and social capital? How does a society begin to respond to these? Let me take an example from the black cultural scene. The rich traditions of the black community as manifested in their musical forms is illustrative of the tensions within a community as it tries establish its links with the social world outside via its own economic capital. Reebee Garofalo presents the problem with particular poignancy:

Like any popular music that originates outside the mainstream, African American popular music has long been faced with trying to negotiate a path between the joint dangers of isolation and exclusion on the one hand, and incorporation and homogenization on the other. Despite

the wellspring of creativity that African American artists have brought to popular music, they have historically been relegated to a separate and unequal marketing structure which has tended toward ensuring one unacceptable outcome or the other for their music.²⁷

At the same time as the black community tries to preserve and produce music on its own terms, the mainstream market structure reduces it to a commodity for sale. The black economic apparatus is not powerful to resist this commodification.

THE MARKET VALUE OF DIVERSITY (ONE MORE TIME)

What is the market value of diversity and racial representations? It all depends on point of view. For example, Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., has shown that the market value of diversity operates in various ways.²⁸ Diversity can be viewed as difference, that is, diverse groups may be portrayed as different from the mainstream in positive ways or in negative ways. Diversity can also be portrayed as lack of difference, that is, as if there are no inherent differences between the mainstream and the subcultural groups. Gandy suggests that the popular media seem to maximize market opportunities by portraying diversity as negative difference. If the mainstream media portray minority communities in a negative fashion and this increases the white readership, the market value of diversity lies in projecting negative images of the minority community. Thus for example, in a typical evening news broadcast on any Los Angeles TV station, a number of crime stories will predictably involve Mexican Americans, illegal immigrants, and Asian criminal gangs. These stories have little to do with how minority communities live their daily lives, but are instead fodder for a kind of commercialism that results in negative externalities for the minority communities who are exposed in the mainstream media. As Gandy succinctly puts the problem,

The current love affair Americans seem to have with the marketplace as a guarantor of all sorts of values beyond allocative efficiency assumes that this market provides

value in exchange for its equivalent. This is an assumption of equality. The finding that differences in the values actually received are linked to differences in the race of the consumer raises concern about the operation of the market. An observed disparity may be newsworthy in itself; that the disparity is the product of racial discrimination is quite a different story, one that has implications for public trust, and that calls for a policy response.²⁹

CONCLUSION

Many debates are currently in progress as American society takes a careful look at its changing cultural and social scene. Debates on this issue occupy the entire spectrum of ideas from the religious to the philosophical to the pragmatic. One form of fundamentalism that has emerged appeals to the "basic principles" on which this nation is founded, principles based on Eurocentric thinking, embedded in neoclassical economics and nineteenth-century liberalism, and related to religious Calvinism. Activist groups of this type ask the following question: How can we preserve the ideals upon which the nation is founded when the national character seems to be drifting in multiple subcultural streams?

For anyone with a sense of history, this debate is not new. Such concerns have been raised whenever the United States has been faced with "waves" of new immigrants. In the past, however, the question was answered with the "melting pot" theory, which states categorically that every new addition to the population can be absorbed into the American value system, and every new immigrant can become an American by a process of assimilation and socialization. According to this principle, what changes is the character of the immigrant via assimilation; what remains constant is the nature of American character.

As appealing as this myth can be, the pragmatics of assimilation and the historical evidence surrounding it do not convincingly support this contention. First, the American social and cultural landscape has changed and continues to change, some-

times more dramatically than at other times. Second, the melting pot theory was never universally applied to all sections of the population, in particular to blacks, although they have been residing in this country for three centuries. Yet, the principle of melting pot has continued as a guiding metaphor of social absorption. In recent years, the metaphor of the American melting pot has yielded to competing metaphors as the reality of population diversity has begun to alter earlier assumptions. Levels of anxiety seem to be rising in the face of the changing social scene.

What this chapter proposes is that some of these concerns may be without foundation and that all the social changes that we are witnessing must be viewed optimistically and realistically. Notwithstanding the enticements of the metaphors we might use, we must focus on the reality of the changing landscape and the potential it offers to take us into the next millennium. I do not see any reason to worry about an impending cultural or social crisis in the next two or three decades. Nor is there justification for the worry that American ideals will somehow be compromised by new subjectivities.

I propose a research agenda that contributes to the channeling of multicultural forces into positive social ends, an agenda that includes the following:

- Demonstrating to dominant media and institutions that cultural variations are part of a changing and progressive society.
- Encouraging the media and other institutions to acknowledge how subcultural values, practices, and imagery are already shaping the behavior of mainstream culture via the interplay of habitus and habitus in such matters as aesthetics, art, music, food, clothing, language, and other symbolic processes. There is no reason to make these influences invisible.
- Making the case that what is considered "quintessentially American" has always been subject to change brought about by influences that are multiculturally based.

- Inviting institutions to make a conscious effort to educate themselves about the cultural characteristics of the different groups and provide an atmosphere that permits mutual exchange of ideas.
- Charging the media and other institutions to educate the general public and promote an understanding of the cultural characteristics of different subcultures and practices.
- Replacing benign tolerance of subcultures with active promotion of subcultural values as part of the American consciousness.

To quote Manning Marable,

How do we overcome the legacy of inequality and the continuing burden of race? To deconstruct racial barriers, we all must actively foster an environment of multicultural dialogue and understanding. People cannot talk to each other if they are influenced by stereotypes and half-truths about other Americans who, though they live, shop, work and raise their children in the same communities, are "different" from themselves. Media, film, and educational institutions have a decisive role to play in overturning America's pervasive images of inequality.³⁰

Endnotes

1. Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities," in *Race, Culture, and Difference*, ed. J. Donald and A. Rattansi (London: SAGE Publications, 1992), 252-260.
2. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Critique of Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984). Translated by Richard Nice from *La Distinction: Critique Social du Jugement*, 1979.
3. James P. Jeter, "Setting and Philosophical Perspectives in the Twentieth Century," in *International Afro-Mass Media*, ed. J. P. Jeter, K. R. Rampal, V. C. Cambridge, and C. B. Bratt (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996), 213-226.
4. *United Nations Report on "Women in a Changing Global Economy"* (New York: United Nations, 1994).
5. See Bourdieu's discussion of the habitus in *Distinction*, chapter 3.

6. William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
7. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged*, 30.
8. John Ogbu, "African American Education: A Cultural Ecological Perspective," in *Black Families*, ed. Harriett P. McAdoo (London: SAGE Publications, 1997), 234–50.
9. William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996).
10. Susan F. Feiner, "The Conservative/Free Market, the Liberal/Imperfectionist, and the Radical/Exploitation Schools," in *Race and Gender in the American Economy*, ed. Susan F. Feiner (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1994), 22–27.
11. Jeter, "Setting and Philosophical Perspectives," 216.
12. Camille O. Cosby, *Television's Imageable Influences: The Self-Perceptions of African Americans* (New York, University Press of America, 1994).
13. Manning Marable, "Reconciling Race and Reality," in *The Media in Black and White*, ed. Everette E. Dennis and Edward C. Pease (New Brunswick, Conn.: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 11–20.
14. Marable, "Reconciling Race and Reality," 13–14.
15. Janette L. Dates, "Commercial Television," in *Split Image: African Americans in Mass Media*, ed. Janette L. Dates and William Barlow (Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1990), 253–302.
16. Cosby, *Television's Imageable Influences*.
17. Everett Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations* (New York: Free Press, 1983).
18. Richard Merelman, *Representing Black Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
19. Wilson, *When Work Disappears*.
20. Cosby, *Television's Imageable Influences*.
21. Steven Gregory and Roger Sanjek, eds., *Race* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994).
22. Marie Ferguson Peters, "Parenting of Young Children in Black Families," in *Black Families*, ed. Harriett P. McAdoo (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 1997), 167–182.
23. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged*, 30.
24. Steven Gregory, "Race, Identity, and Political Activism: The Shifting Contours of the African American Public Sphere," *Public Culture* 7, no. 1 (Fall, 1994): 147–64.
25. Gregory, "Race, Identity, and Political Activism," 151.
26. The nonprofit sector has played a relatively minor role in this process and is not a significant factor for our discussion.
27. Reebee Garofalo, "Culture versus Commerce: The Marketing of Black Cultural Music," *Public Culture* 7, no. 1 (Fall 1994): 275–88.
28. Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., "From Bad to Worse—The Media's Framing of Race and Risk," in *The Media in Black and White*, ed. Everette E. Dennis and Edward C. Pease (New Brunswick, Conn.: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 37–44.
29. Gandy, "From Bad to Worse," 39.
30. Marable, "Reconciling Race and Reality," 16–17.