Dilemmas of Multiculturalism

*I was born here…How many generations does it take to stop mentioning my origin?*  
  
 ------Nadir Dendoune

Most contemporary societies are ethnically and culturally diverse. Responding to diversity is a challenge—for the United States, a “nation of immigrants,” for post-colonial states of the global south, cobbled together from diverse ethnic groups, and for European nations experiencing mass immigration. Contributors to the current issue address pressing questions about cultural diversity and the dilemmas it poses.

# Multiculturalism and Cultural Diversity

## Brooks. “Cultural Diversity: It’s All About the Mainstream”

Roy Brooks compares three different models for dealing with cultural diversity: cultural assimilation, “transculturalism” or cosmopolitanism, and “pluralism” or multiculturalism as it is commonly understood. Each of these programs represents an answer to what he holds is the most important question concerning cultural diversity: whose values or perspectives should govern mainstream society when the values or perspectives of diverse groups clash?

Cultural assimilation is the classic American doctrine of the “melting pot. On this account, Brooks notes, cultural integration is a one-way process, going from majority to minority group. When it comes to socially significant institutions, cultural assimilationists insist on the domination of white-middle-class folkways which, he suggests, confronts members of minority groups with a dilemma: cultural assimilation, and the material benefits that go along with it, come at the cost of cultural subordination.

Cosmopolitanism, or “transculturalism,” represents an assimilationist alternative according to which the aim is not cultural hegemony for the dominant group but cultural convergence, with each social group contributing something of value the new, blended mainstream culture. But cosmopolitanism, Brooks notes, poses a similar dilemma since, on the cosmopolitan model, there is only one, albeit transculturalist, mainstream, which members of some minority groups might find it difficult to embrace.

Unlike either of these assimilationist options, the third alternative Brooks considers, multiculturalism or “pluralism” according to which there is no one mainstream or cultural canon but rather many mainstreams and cultural canons. Nevertheless, Brooks notes, pluralism is also problematic: to the extent that it preserves cultural identity it threatens cultural balkanization.

None of these alternatives is entirely satisfactory because there is no arrangement that will satisfy everyone. While, as Brooks suggests, maintaining distinct cultural identities is important to many Americans others regard minority identities as inherently oppressive: “[W]hiteness is the marker of racial invisibility in America,” writes Gary Kamiya, who describes himself as “Eurasian, or half-Japanese.”

White, in other words, means no race, not the master race…This is, in fact, how most white people in America -- unless they subscribe to some virulent form of identity politics, whether on the Ku Klux Klan right or the I-am-a-member-of-the-oppressors left -- see themselves. White people don't go around feeling "white" unless they are either racists or have just come out of a corporate diversity consciousness-raising session…

[W]ho wants to go around carrying the burden of being "Asian" or "black" all the time? It's a burden because it's a phantom, an abstract concept that nonetheless weighs you down. To feel "Asian," for me, would be to embrace an entirely political definition of myself, one simultaneously empty and all-encompassing. I would become a caricature of myself, a spokesman for a "myself" entirely constructed by others. Having no racial self-identification is a utopian state because it allows you to escape this malignant mirror. (Kamiya, 2007)

In spite of attacks from the right and increasing critical scrutiny by the left, multiculturalism—Brooks “pluralism”—is still heavily promoted in the US. *Prima facie* it seems to be the view that liberals, who value liberty, should adopt since it frees individuals to maintain their cultural distinctness. Nevertheless, the liberty of one person may impose restrictions on another and satisfying the preferences of multiculturalists may set back the interests of assimilationists who, like Kamiya, prefer not to think of themselves in racial terms at all—particularly members of visible minorities who cannot opt out.

# Can multiculturalism be liberal?

According to the conventional multiculturalist narrative members of disadvantaged racial and ethnic minorities would *ceteris paribus* prefer to maintain distinct identities organized around ancestral cultures but are pressed by the majority to assimilate. This is not always the story minorities tell. Many are disaffected not because they want to retain their cultural distinctiveness because they are locked out of the dominant culture. During the riots in French immigrant suburbs in 2005 both conservative nationalists and liberal multiculturalists tried to spin the protest as an exercise in identity politics motivated by second-, third- and fourth-generation “immigrants’” rejection of French culture and liberal democratic values. This was not the picture that emerged from interviews with protesters, who complained that they faced discrimination in employment and did not have adequate access to educational and other facilities because they were segregated in remote suburbs with poor public transportation. Reporting on the protests, journalist Nadir Dendoune expressed the frustration of participants and his own:

How am I supposed to feel French when people always describe me as a Frenchman of Algerian origin? I was born here. I am French. How many generations does it take to stop mentioning my origin? (BBC News, 2005)

We cannot assume that all members of racial or ethnic minorities prefer to maintain distinctive cultural identities or that they regard assimilation as a Faustian bargain in the interests of entering the economic mainstream. It seems likely that some members of minority groups want to assimilate while others do not.

Liberal multiculturalists, following Will Kymlicka, whose influential work several contributors to this volume discuss, assume that cultural preservationists and assimilationists can both be accommodated:

Existing policies [in Canada] are intended to enable immigrants to express their ethnic identity, if they so desire, and to reduce some of the external pressure on them to assimilate…while denying that groups are entitled to impose practices on members who do not wish to maintain them.

Are members of minority groups typically under pressure to assimilate—or are they, more often, segregated, excluded and effectively blocked from assimilating? Ancestry and appearance are not a matter of choice. And when they are widely regarded as markers of “culture,” which induce expectations and impose role obligations, they undermine individual liberty. Can a multiculturalism that affirms diverse cultural identities associated with race and ethnicity, be liberal?

## Christiansen. “Revisiting Multiculturalism and Its Critics”

Erik Christensen, in his sympathetic discussion of Kymlicka’s work argues that it can. “[I]f we think of the ‘cultural structure’ as a ‘context of choice’, he suggests, “liberals should acknowledge the importance of the culture or the community to the individual as it relates to his or her interest in leading a good life.” (Christensen, 2012)

The crucial proviso here is “context of choice.” Christensen recognizes the importance of a right to exist from minority communities, but underestimates the costs of exit and the extent to which multiculturalism imposes a “cultural straitjacket forcing those described as members of a minority cultural group into a regime of authenticity." (Philips, 2007) Cultural identity may be, as Kymlicka suggests, essential to the good life. The question however is *which* culture contributes to the good of an individual. We cannot assume that it is the culture of his ancestors or the minority community with which he is associated. Some immigrants and members of minority groups may prefer to maintain or invent distinct cultural identities and, all other things being equal, liberal democratic states should accommodate their preferences. However, arguably, any such accommodations should respect the interests of immigrants and members of minority groups who do not want to be identified with these groups and seek to exit.

## Stjernfelt. “Liberal Multiculturalism as Political Philosophy”

Kymlicka holds that multiculturalism is compatible with liberalism—indeed that culture provides the individual the options that make him free. Frederik Stjernfelt, in his critical reading of Kymlicka, is skeptical, arguing that Kymlicka does not succeed in creating a stable synthesis of his cultural pluralism and his liberal concerns about autonomy and liberty. He identifies the central problem of Kymlicka’s position as the difficulty of distinguishing *liberal* multiculturalism from “full, normal, liberal, rule-of-law democracy with civil and human rights.” (Stjernfelt, 2012).

Kymlicka, wants to avoid conservative communitarianism, noting that as soon as multiculturalism enters into the adoption of group rights, liberalism is in jeopardy. He recognizes also that groups can be expected to change over time and that we should expect liberal democracy to exert a gravitational pull that gradually influences the practices of ethic and religious groups. “The liberal view,” he writes, “is inevitably, intentionally, and unapologetically transformational of people’s cultural traditions.” Stjernfelt however suggests that this “liberal expectancy” undermines Kymlicka’s project:

[I]f the liberal gravitation really does pull, then the whole development of multiculturalist policies were but provisional and tactical, and every immigrant is destined to end up sooner or later, in the liberal *melting-pot—*the only question is how long it takes…[Kymlicka’s] nice-sounding ideas of not only preserving but also transforming immigrant cultures become a mere surface on the long-drawn wandering towards the liberal democrat[ic] goal. (Stjernfelt, forthcoming)

# Group rights

Multiethnic societies have responded to ethnic and religious diversity in a variety of ways. Some have recognized and accommodated cultural difference and group identities, while others have attempted to suppress group identity and promote assimilation. How should a liberal state respond to culturally diverse immigrants and minorities? Should it recognize the rights of cultural groups to maintain distinct identities and practices? Should it accommodate minority communities whose cultures are deeply illiberal?

## Biggs. ‘Liberalism, Feminism, and Group Rights’

In “Liberalism, Feminism, and Group Rights,” Stephen Biggs responds with a limited defense of group rights. Liberal institutions, he argues can distinguish harmful from innocuous rights and accommodate the practices of diverse groups when they do no harm. Biggs develops guidelines for distinguishing harmful from innocuous rights.

Still, one wonders why these innocuous rights should be granted as special accommodations for ethnic minorities. If a practice is innocuous, why shouldn’t *everyone* have the right to engage in it? The US Government grants members of the Native American Church the right to use peyote in their religious rituals and the State of California allows Indians to operate gambling casinos on tribal lands. The state does not however give Native Americans or members of any other minority a free pass to kill, steal, exceed the posted speed limit or do any action that is seriously risky or harmful. Here is yet another dilemma: if an action is seriously harmful then no one, including members of minority groups should have a right to do it. But if an action is innocuous it is hard to see why *anyone* should be prohibited from doing it. Running a gambling casino is innocuous. Indians should have the right to do it—but, arguably, so should everyone else.

We might wriggle out by noting there are some practices, which though innocuous if restricted to a minority, would be harmful if widespread. In time of war is vital to insure that a significant proportion of the population is available for military service. A minority of the population can however be excused. And the US government has traditionally excused or accorded conscientious objector status to Mennonites, Quakers and members of other traditional “peace churches.” No one wants to be drafted, but military service presumably goes against peace church members’ most deeply held convictions and so would impose a greater burden on them than it would on other Americans. Given that we can exempt a minority of the population from military service without undermining the public safety or general welfare, we get a bigger utility bang for the buck by granting those exemptions to members of these religious groups than by handing them out at random to individuals who would likely not be as adverse to military service.

Nevertheless, giving out special rights on the basis of ethnicity, or even religious preference, does not always assign exemptions in the most efficient way. Long established as a rural underclass, Indians need a boost and the state, by giving them a monopoly on gambling, creates jobs and pumps money into reservations’ economies. But other groups could use a boost too. Why should the state give this lucrative monopoly to Indians in rural areas rather than blacks, or urban Hispanics—or anyone regardless of ethnic origin who is simply poor? Ethnic or religious tests may provide a fair rule of thumb for determining how best to allocate exemptions but there may be more effective ways to make such determinations.

## Holder. “Devolving Power to Sub-State Groups: Some Worries about the Worries”

Nevertheless, representatives of some minority groups, appointed or self-appointed, clamor for “self-determination” and, historically states have ceded some decision-making powers to sub-state groups. So, in the Ottoman Empire the millet system conferred semi-autonomous status on non-Muslim minorities, which collected their own taxes and maintained separate courts. There may still be a case for devolving some powers to sub-state groups, recognizing that state-level political institutions may rightfully compel compliance with laws and regulations that promote fairness and respect for basic human rights.

As Cindy Holder notes, we may worry about devolving decision-making powers to such groups and wish to reserve powers of oversight to the liberal state in order to insure that they respect the basic human rights of their members. Our worries in this regard, she suggests, are of two different kinds. We may worry about the outcomes of the decisions sub-groups may make or we may worry about the procedures by which they arrive at those decisions. “Content-based worries,” she writes, “focus on the uses to which a group puts (or is likely to put) powers that are devolved. Mechanism-based worries are concerned with what a group does with powers only insofar as such information constitutes evidence of a problem in the decision-making mechanisms.”

Holder is worried about content-based worries since, she suggests, arguments against devolution that invoke these worries “leave a lot of space for Orientalizing, imperialist and other problematic assumptions to come into play.” She argues that if we take care of the mechanism-based worries, the content-based worries will take care of themselves. So, for example, we may worry that religiously-based courts administering family law will come to decisions that set back the interests of women—a content-based worry. What we should worry about here is the *mechanism* by which family law cases are adjudicated. We should be concerned to see to it that women are adequately represented in the decision-making process. If the decision-making procedure is fair, in particular, if women participate and have a say then we should not worry about outcomes.

Nevertheless, even if we recognize the capacity of cultural sub-groups to administer their internal affairs justly we may still ask why decision-making powers *should* be devolved to these subgroups. The millet system institutionalized dhimmitude—the inferior but protected status Christians and Jews enjoyed in Muslim lands. It existed to protect the interests of minorities whose inferior status and exclusion from many aspects of public life was taken as given. The system collapsed during the 19th Century, when Ottoman administrators struggled to come to terms with modernity.

Arguably, the case for devolving powers to subgroups is only motivated when there is reason to believe that they cannot assimilate, will never be accepted as full members of the larger community and cannot count on “outsiders” to represent their interests. A century ago this seemed to be case in the US. Recent immigrants and their children formed special interest groups and voted *en masse* for candidates who promised to address their communal concerns. By the late 20th century “white ethnics” had assimilated and white ethnic block voting was a thing of the past. The grandchildren and great-grandchildren of immigrants no longer assumed that in order to be treated fairly their elected representatives had to be members of their ethnic group or individuals who cut deals with their group’s power brokers.

Arguably, devolution for racial and ethnic minority groups is motivated only if we assume that members of these groups cannot or should not assimilate but are doomed to be dhimmi in perpetuity. And that may be a self-fulfilling prophecy. In recognizing group rights or group autonomy we perpetuate group identity. And group identity has its downside in balkanization, the legacy of the millet system in the Balkans and other formerly Ottoman territories.

# Liberal democracies and illiberal minorities

## Levey. “Liberal Autonomy as a Pluralistic Value”

Even assuming that there is a case for devolving some powers to cultural subgroups within liberal democracies, policy-makers face the vexed question of deciding which cultural practices can be accommodated as consistent with the liberal value of autonomy. Liberal democracies have banned, or considered banning, a range of cultural practices on the grounds that they violated individual liberty, including female genital cutting and various forms of Islamic dress. In “Liberal Autonomy as a Pluralistic Value,” Geoffrey Levey proposes a five-dimensional taxonomy for thinking about the operation of autonomy in practice and considers the ways in which minority cultural practices compare to indigenous practices we deem acceptable. Even if we cannot agree on an account of autonomy, we can still ascertain whether minority practices and those accepted by the dominant culture are *comparable* given these criteria.

Autonomous action, Levey suggests requires that the agent be critically reflective, that his action be independent of external constraint or coercion, and that it not be motivated by corrupting external influences. In addition, he holds that within liberal democracies an individual’s autonomy must be reciprocal insofar as his autonomous action must not undermine the capacity of others to engage in autonomous action and inalienable to the extent that it should not undermine his own autonomy.

The interpretation of each of these criteria in practice is controversial. How informed and deliberative must one be in order to count as critically reflective? What constitutes coercion? The notion of violations of autonomy through the corruption of one’s desires or manipulation is even more vexed. Am I less free because advertisers have induced me to crave expensive gadgets even if, though I know my craving is a result of advertising, don’t care, decide I want these things anyway and get them because I can? Reciprocity poses difficulties because it is controversial when an individual’s action impinges upon others to the extent that state interference is warranted. Inalienability poses the problem of paternalism. What should we say about the uncoerced decision of a critically reflective agent to repudiate autonomy—freely to accept some condition that will undermine his capacity for further autonomous action?

Leaving these controversies aside, we can still ask whether minority cultural practices are comparable to practices we regard as acceptable according to our preferred interpretation of the proposed criteria for autonomy—whatever it may be. Assuming high heels pass the autonomy test, does hijab? Does female genital cutting undermine autonomy in a more serious way than the circumcision of male infants? Precinding from any resolution of the controversies about how we should interpret criteria for autonomy we can still establish *conditionals* that may serve for practical purposes: we may decide that *if* high heels are acceptable then so are Muslim headscarves but that *even if* infant male circumcision is acceptable female “circumcision” is not, given what our criteria for autonomy suggest are significant differences.

Nevertheless, while this account suggests a principled way of accommodating minority cultural practices it will exclude some as incompatible with liberal autonomy. Moreover it will not satisfy the pluralist who objects that the valorization of liberal autonomy is itself a parochial Western fetish since the account privileges liberal values over the non-liberal values of “traditional societies” and minorities who, allegedly, wish to retain them. Levey however accepts this consequence: “Clearly,” he notes, “an autonomy-based argument privileges liberal autonomy.”

## Chatterjee. ‘Veiled Politics: The Liberal Dilemma of Multiculturalism’

This is another liberal dilemma, as Deen Chatterjee notes in his contribution to this volume: “liberalism’s idea of what counts as reasonable has a liberal tilt.” Norms of cultural well-being, may not always coincide with those of individual autonomy and liberal attempts to accommodate these cultural norms pose the question which, Chatterjee suggests, pushed Rawls from his earlier robust egalitarianism to political liberalism: how can liberal democracies, committed to equality for diverse cultural groups, give equal recognition to those cultural groups that reject equality?

Chatterjee considers the work of three writers who have addressed this question: Monique Deveaux, Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen. “The liberal project,” they suggest “should be focused on rectifying injustice through a proper understanding and appreciation of the interdependence that would take us beyond the limitations of the narrowly construed boundaries of liberalism to a genuinely inclusive and pluralistic liberal theory of justice.” This position has been most recently defended by Sen. In response to what he calls Rawls’ “transcendental institutionalism,” Sen focuses on assessing the comparative merits of available states of affairs and proposes a comparative and pluralistic approach that is primarily concerned with rectifying injustices rather than locating perfect justice.

Nevertheless, accommodating illiberal cultures remains problematic. Arguably, we should not assume that the values and norms of cultures are internalized by all of their members or figure importantly in forming their “identities. They may comply with what we take to be cultural norms because opting out is not feasible. Cultural groups are neither monolithic nor static. There may be significant minorities, or majorities who do not endorse what are taken to be the culture’s norms and wish things were otherwise. Even if we are committed to giving equal recognition to diverse cultural groups within a multiethnic, religiously diverse society and to accommodating diverse values and practices, it is not clear what form this recognition and accommodation should take—given that minority groups are themselves diverse.

# Cultural diversity and social capital

## Ford. Cultural Rights versus Civic Virtue

A number of social critics suggest that there is a tension between cultural diversity and social cohesion. David Goodhart, writing with an eye to European countries coping with mass immigration worries that cultural diversity undermines the social solidarity required to maintain a robust welfare state. Robert Putnam in his study of ethnic diversity in the United States notes that in the short run immigration and ethnic diversity tend to reduce “social capital.” “In ethnically diverse neighborhoods,” he observes, “residents of all races tend to ‘hunker down.’ Trust (even of one’s own race) is lower, altruism and community cooperation rarer, friends fewer.”(Putnam, 2007)

Citing Putnam, Richard Thompson Ford argues that “the mere perception of cultural difference and the resulting social divisions—real and imagined—can trouble democratic institutions that require social trust and shared ideals.

My hypothesis is that perception of group cultural difference—a sort of “difference panic” on the part of some and fetishization and valorization of group difference on the part of others—may be much more destructive of civic enterprises than the normative conflict generated the actual practices of various social groups…Cultural difference rhetoric (pro and con) encourages us to see social conflicts in terms of inscrutable group difference. But often, conflicts filed under the label “cultural difference” are better understood in terms of the type of ideological or normative conflict that democracies and markets routinely mediate.

Ford asks: why is culture special? Individuals engage in a variety of practices, which for various reasons may be subject to legal scrutiny, control or prohibition. Should same sex partners have the right to marry? Should 14-year-old children? Does the state have the right to control access to prescription drugs? Does it have the right to prohibit the sale or possession of recreational drugs? Can Jehovah’s Witness be legally required to accept blood transfusions? Can the state legitimately prohibit male infant circumcision? Can it legitimately prohibit female genital cutting?

Why should we treat practices associated with other cultures as peculiar? Ford suggests that invoking “culture” when it comes to deciding whether a practice should be controlled, prohibited or freely allowed, “can lead us either to turn a blind eye to a practice that we should confront and condemn (“it’s ‘their culture’ and therefore not our concern”) or to prematurely condemn a practice we should seek to understand (“it’s ‘barbaric’ and an assault on our values.”)” We should certainly legislate and enforce regulations prohibiting discrimination against individuals in virtue of their status or group membership but not, Ford suggests, on the basis of behavior: indeed, he notes, discriminating against *behaviors* is the *sine qua non* of the law.

“An inevitable and perhaps desirable result of growing up in a multicultural society,” Ford concludes, “will be the gradual erosion of some of the most distinctive elements of ethnic group culture.”

It’s precisely the possibility of this type of slow erosion of group identity that many would like to forestall with cultural rights. It seems to me such desires, while understandable, are not desires liberal societies can accommodate.

Multiculturalism—Brooks’ “cultural pluralism”—seems permissive: *prima facie* it makes a range of cultural alternatives available and protects the right of minorities to preserve their traditions. However, in order to stay the otherwise inevitable “slow erosion of group identity,” cultural preservationists impose role obligations on members of minority groups and discourage exit. Ethnically identified individuals are expected to “take pride” in their ancestral cultures and pressed to maintain their assigned groups’ traditions. Cultural rights empower individuals within minority groups who want to preserve their communities or distinctive identities to enforce conformity to cultural norms. *Prima facie permissive, multiculturalism is de facto normative.*

As Anthony Appiah notes, even where ethnic roles are self-affirming and socially valued, they impose norms and demands on individuals who, in virtue of unchosen, immutable characteristics, are expected to act their assigned “scripts”:

An African-American after the Black Power movement takes the old script of self-hatred, the script in which he or she is a nigger, and works, in community, to construct a series of positive black life scripts…What demanding respect for people *as blacks* or *as gays* requires is that there be some scripts that go with being an African-American or having same-sex desires: there will be expectations to be met; demands will be made. It is at this point that someone who takes autonomy seriously will want to ask whether we have not replaced one kind of tyranny with another. If I had to choose between Uncle Tom and Black Power, I would, of course, choose the latter. But I would like not to have to choose.[[1]](#footnote-1)

If we understand liberalism as the doctrine that insofar as possible the kind of life a person lives should be a matter of choice, then multiculturalism is illiberal. Race, ethnicity and national origin are ascribed and immutable: characteristics that individuals cannot choose and from which they cannot escape. The more we hang on these characteristics, the more significant we consider them and the more expectations we attach to them, the more burdens and constraints they impose. This is the liberal case against multiculturalism. (Baber, 2008)

Many advocates of multiculturalism, and their critics, assume that immigrants and members of ethnic minorities want to retain and perpetuate “their” cultures. But that is puzzling: like Moliere’s bourgeois gentleman who had been speaking prose all his life without knowing it, most people do not know they live in cultures. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that, as Richard Thompson Ford notes, “the commitment to group cultural difference may be a reaction to the failure of liberal societies to confront and eliminate bias and discrimination on the basis of race or national origin.”

Citing the plight of a Danish couple of Turkish descent bullied by their immigrant families for refusing to accept arranged marriages, Ford writes:

[O]ne might expect that, “having suffered at the hands of old Turkish custom, the young, bruised couple … both Danish citizens, should be enthusiastic supporters of their adoptive land and its campaign to bring ‘Danish culture’ to all, … But the young couple complain of discrimination in employment and note with dismay that ”there is always the sense of “us” and “them,” the old Dane and the new Dane, the blue-eyed and the dark-skinned” and that “the Danes say one thing, that they want to integrate us, and do another. That’s why we fight.” These statements suggest that robust prohibitions against discrimination on the basis of statuses such as race, religion and national origin may be a precondition to effective social integration and necessary to foster social trust between ethnic and cultural groups.

This is the most serious dilemma of multiculturalism, which confronts members of racial and ethnic minorities: maintain your cultural difference and you will be rejected for refusing to assimilate; lose your cultural difference and you will be rejected anyway; recognize your outsider status and you will be taken to reject assimilation. So, in a *Washington Post* article entitled “immigrants shunning idea of assimilation” Maria Jacinto, a naturalized US citizen, is quoted as saying that she does not feel like an American. “I think I’m still Mexican. When my skin turns white and my hair turns blonde, then I’ll be an American.” Incredibly, the author interprets her remarks as showing that “she seems resistant to the idea of assimilating into US society.” (Branigin, 1998) Jacinto and her husband worry also that their children are “assimilating…to the worst aspects of American culture” echoing sociologist Alejandro Portes who, reflecting a large-scale study of the children of recent immigrants, is concerned that they are “assimilating downward to a rainbow underclass.” (Portes & Rumbaut, Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation, 2001)

In the 19th century, European states actively promoted programs aimed at assimilating rural populations in the interests of forging national identities. Ford notes that “French elites Parisian-ized the French peasantry, repressing local dialects and rewarding fluency in Parisian French, incorporating certain local customs into a unified national identity and discouraging others.” In early the 20th century state agencies and social service organizations in the US invested in programs intended to “Americanize” European immigrants, on the assumption that they could, and should, assimilate. Currently however many Americans, and Europeans assume, that the current wave of immigrants is different—that they cannot and will not assimilate. Friends of multiculturalism, taking this assumption as given, demand group rights and special accommodations for immigrants and minorities; critics object that they unfairly privilege minorities.

But cultural rights and other accommodations do not privilege members of minority groups at the expense of the majority. Rather they privilege cultural preservationists at the expense of assimilationists. And we cannot assume that all or most members of minority groups are cultural preservationists—or that they should be. Moreover we cannot assume that all or most members of the dominant culture want minorities to assimilate. Many want minority cultures preserved for their curio value: ethnic neighborhoods, Indian reservations and Amish communities are desirable tourist attractions. Others, in particular those who object most vigorously to the alleged tendency of minorities to “keep to themselves,” have a taste for segregation: “the Danes say one thing, that they want to integrate us, and do another.”

Multiculturalism poses a dilemma but it is a familiar one. People want different things and, more often than not, they cannot all get what they want. Contributors to this volume address the dilemmas of multiculturalism, but responses are controversial and solutions remain elusive.

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