1   Introduction

TONY KUSHNER opens part two of his epic play, *Angels in America*, with a warning to us, the "pygmy children of a gigantic race," the historical inheritors of the West's grand theories:

Alesksii Antedilluvianovich Prelapsarianov (the World's Oldest Living Bolshevik):
The Great Question before us is: Are we doomed? The Great Question before us is: Will the Past release us? The Great Question before us is: Can we Change? In Time? And we all desire that Change will come.
(Little pause)   (With sudden, violent passion)
And *Theory?* How are we to proceed without *Theory?* What System of Thought have these Reformers to present to this mad swirling planetary disorganization, to the Inevident Welter of fact, event, phenomenon, calamity? Do they have, as we did, a beautiful Theory, as bold, as Grand, as comprehensive a construct. . . ? You can't imagine, when we first read the Classic Texts, when in the dark vexed night of our ignorance and terror the seed-words sprouted and shoved incomprehension aside. . . You who live in this Sour Little Age cannot imagine the grandeur of the prospect we gazed upon: like standing atop the highest peak in the mighty Caucasus, and viewing in one all-knowing glance the mountainous, granite order of creation. You cannot imagine it. I weep for you. (1993b, 13–14)

Yes, and we weep too. Such clarity, comprehensiveness. He asks us: "And what have you to offer now, children of this Theory? What have you to offer in its place?" We on the left will never again know such a theory. We will never have anything quite as grand. But we can know what it is like suddenly to see ourselves, we can know the power of naming our selves. We have Audre Lorde, Irena Klepfisz, Cornel West, Toni Morrison, Cherrie Moraga. For the first time in history we hear: Black, lesbian, Jewish, Chicana, poor, immigrant, slave, sick . . . poets all, and organizers, orators, prophetic voices . . . theorists.

The play's ancient, blind, and fragile figure continues:

> Change? Yes, we must change, only show me the Theory, and I will be at
> the barricades, show me the book of the next Beautiful Theory, and I
> promise you these blind eyes will see again, just to read it, to devour that
> text. Show me the words that will reorder the world, or else keep silent.
>   If the snake sheds his skin before a new skin is ready, naked he will be
> in the world, prey to the forces of chaos. Without his skin he will be dis-
> mantled, lose coherence and die. Have you, my little serpents, a new skin?
> (1993b, 14)

Here is Alesksii Antedilluvianovich Prelapsarianov on stage. He and
his bold theory are withered and broken. How are we to respond to such
a display? How are we—inside the theatre as Kushner's audience and out-
side the theatre as Prelapsarianov's "little serpents"—to respond to such
a challenge? Kushner offers us a possible alternative to the Bolshevik's call
for order through a grand theory. True to *Angels in America*'s subtitle, "A
Gay Fantasia on American Themes," Kushner offers us phantasm. From
on high above the stage, with a crashing sound, an Angel appears to add-
ress a potentially new, "thirty-something" prophet. The Angel bellows:

"The Great Work Begins: / The Messenger has arrived."

She is speaking of Prior Walter. He is on stage lying in a bed. He's a
gay man living in New York City. Prior Walter has aids. He's annoyed
with the descending Angel. Prior's opening line, after the grand speech
by the Bolshevik, after the grand announcement by the Angel, consists
of two words:

"Go away."

Did you want him to say something else? What else could he say? At
the Christian millennium, he is sick and tired, alone and afraid. After
the death of grand theory, after the death of the telos, god, pure reason,
the dialectic of history, Prior Walter has been abandoned by his lover,
he has AIDS, and he has as little energy for a new prophet as he has to be
one himself. For us, Prior Walter's experience may be prophetic, but he
by himself does not have to be a prophet. This is not the "new skin" that
we need. Why? Because so many of us are in this together. Prior Walter
is not in struggle alone. We each can contribute to a new politics and to
a new political era. Because there are political *movements,* and there are
possibilities for *joint* action on a variety of scales.

During the 1950s in the United States, Black men and women walked
together down Main Street, through their own towns run by white people

who mostly hated them. They insisted, "We will be treated with dignity." And then other women and gays and lesbians and other people of color marched through *their* towns and said, "See me and treat me with dignity." And young people said, "I will not kill." And together these groups saw that there were many connections between their oppressions and a system that drafted boys to die in an unjust war. These brave people may not have had a grand theory, but they had many compelling ideas: about freedom, and justice, and what democracy ought to stand for.[1]

Empowered with these ideas, marginalized groups in the United States began to act, to take action in historically unprecedented ways. More and more people were talking about "the movement," "true needs," "the people," and "participatory democracy." In the 1950s and 1960s, activists did not have a new set of "great works" to replace the ones Prelapsarianov had relied upon. Activists used vague reference points, searching for language, concepts, analytical frameworks, and strategies.[2] In the early stages of 1960s radicalism in Berkeley, a favorite slogan was even "the issue is not the issue" and in 1963 Betty Friedan had to name "the problem with no name." Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz (1992, 198) reminds us, however, that in spite of the work of the sixties generation, today activists still often find it difficult to choose an appropriate and effective course of action because we are still at the beginning of a new kind of political movement in the making. She and Johnson Reagon (1983, 368) write about our insecurity, fear, and skepticism. They say that we are stumbling and we will continue to do so, but that we must take the next step and we will learn as we act.

Thus, Maria Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman, heirs of all these people who took to the streets, are able to say: "Have We Got a Theory for You!" In an article subtitled "Feminist Theory, Cultural Imperialism and the Demand for 'the Woman's Voice,' " one Hispanic and one white/Anglo woman build theory, even as they challenge it, through dialogue that is committed to honest attention to identity, power, and oppression. Here they tell us that "it matters what is said about us, who says it, and to whom it is said" (1983, 573). Alesksii Antedilluvianovich Prelapsarianov, we do not offer you a grand, all-encompassing theory . . . but we do have a theory for you. It is the people at work in ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, an AIDS activist organization) or the Piedmont Peace Project (originally organized as a grassroots effort with African Americans and poor whites in South Carolina) who, even as they stumble, are giving us a theory.

In doing so, we might ask, are these activists out to obliterate the ideas and likes of Mr. Alesksii Antedilluvianovich Prelapsarianov? Although some might take Kushner's portrayal of the decaying soviet representative as a well-worn U.S. condemnation of socialism, it might better be understood as a constructive criticism of the Marxist/Leninist version of bolshevism. The theory I argue being developed in the streets by activists and grassroots organizations such as ACT UP is seen by them not as displacing Marx's ideas, exactly, but in many ways as much of a serious and much-needed critique as it is an enhancement.

It is a central assumption of this book that theory, the systematic analysis of ideas, is essential to coherent and effective political action. But despite the old Bolshevik's warning about the need for theory before action, the ideas and work of the 1960s political activists in the United States have created a new brand of theory. Diversity-based politics today stimulated by those on the margins of society is suggesting a relatively coherent form of new democratic thought. A renewed attention to diversity within the broader (U.S.) American arena has stimulated much work to reconceptualize difference. Activists, scholars, news commentators, and average citizens who may sit on a local school board are increasingly realizing that the common equation of difference with "other" has too often led to, and provided a justification for, oppression. We could say that at the root of the various moves toward what some have even termed multiculturalism[3] is the assumption of a celebration of our differences. Many of these politically salient differences are currently understood as created and nurtured through our various and intersecting communities of identification. Thus, the emergent democratic theory with which this work is concerned is a theory informed by diversity. This theory attends to issues of concern generated in the critical explorations, and in the shifting representations, of our diverse cultural identities.

Having said this, let me be clear: throughout this book I presume the importance of economic equality and issues of fair distribution. Without a fundamental transformation in the economic system no politics in this country can truly earn the right to be called democratic. By focusing on diversity politics I intend, however, to compensate for a previous omission of the political roles of difference and community-based identities in many earlier democratic and radical economic theories. Diversity politics is necessary to push us in our democratic pursuits, and it is necessary if we want to deeply challenge economic inequalities.

A radical democratic theory ought to be able to explain and to help make possible fundamental social change. Social transformation is not, however, a simple and straightforward matter. People do not just get a great idea, initiate change, oust the old paradigm, and slide into a new way of life. The fiasco that ensued during the 2000 U.S. presidential election had the nation and the world focused on the inadequacies of our electoral system. We saw for the first time in the major media that politics as usual does not even include a full, partisan-free counting of the votes cast by the bare majority of eligible voters who vote. We saw U.S. citizens in Haitian neighborhoods and numerous other minority precincts turned away from the polls. With concerted energy average citizens and elites struggled to amend the system. The flurry of activity, the numerous court cases, the constant media analysis, produced little in the way of meaningful discourse or structural change in a system plagued with inequality and discrimination. But even this is not the end of the story. Demonstrations at both the Democratic and Republican conventions were the largest we had seen in more than a generation. They gained strength and organizational momentum from the large protests of the World Trade Organization conference held earlier in Seattle. New groups and coalitions sprang up. Leftist third-party candidates such as Ralph Nader and Socialist Party candidate David McReynolds helped to revitalize activist energy. Votes cast for Nader, however, also made up more than the difference that ushered George W. Bush into the electoral college lead which made the confusion in Florida matter at all. Activists have learned not to expect linear developments. The question is how to continue to do our work and reevaluate our situations whatever the circumstances and whatever the setbacks.

On a less grandiose scale, if we pay careful attention we find that possibilities for change are created with surprising frequency. Sometimes, however, in what feels like the blink of an eye the most inspiring and radical call for action becomes a Madison Avenue marketing strategy to sell us more useless products. We need to recognize that change occurs on many levels simultaneously. Some changes will have a definitive role in the lives of ordinary people, lightening their burdens. Some of these changes can also create new problems; others can create new mechanisms for older oppressions. Even as capitalism often succeeds in commodifying newly rising voices from the very margins of society, I will argue that democratic theorists can utilize the insights and methodologies of

diversity-based politics in their vigilant critiques of oppression.[4] I wonder, however, if we can push things further. I wonder, how may diversity-based theory resist and disrupt such potential commodification?

Part of the answer lies in the fact that this *theory* has an interestingly reciprocal relation to activist *politics*. This new democratic theory may be understood in the praxis tradition. Put most simply, praxis refers to theory informing and guiding action as it is created in the processes of, and critical reflections on, action itself. This emergent political movement is open-ended, to be tailored for specific needs as they arise. It is also structured, having both parameters and purpose. This book itself is an attempt to keep the theoretical discussion connected to activist politics. It is also an attempt to offer the tools of political theory to those involved in the concrete workings of democratic practices. I hope that by offering these tools this book can help keep the talk and the work of diversity politics grounded in self-critical, radical aspirations for democracy. As Eloise Buker writes, "Hollow abstractions are used to affirm such issues as diversity, freedom, equality, and fairness without giving them sufficient content to even make conversations about them meaningful" (1999, 5). This book is intended to help us think clearly about the content of such concerns, keeping our thinking about and our acting in diversity politics meaningful.

Over forty years of grassroots activism, along with new research and interpretation by women, people of color, those with disabilities, poor and working-class folks, and various sexual minorities, have heightened our critical awareness of issues related to identity. These concerns are by no means new in Western political thought. Plato, for example, challenged his contemporaries with unorthodox ideas about women's capacities, considered foreigners to be less enlightened than Greeks, and felt homosexual love between men to be the highest form of love. However, since the social movements of the sixties, identity politics has become a distinct method and theory of politics. This newer form of engagement with identity issues in politics fundamentally transforms more traditional approaches to identity. Diversity politics from the margins has yielded new analyses of canonical, male, and privileged thinkers. In the process, diversity politics has also uncovered the historical writings of some women, nonwhites, workers, and gender/sexual boundary pushers.

What is most new in this post-1960s mode is that nondominant groups are speaking for themselves. Previously, much of what we

learned about the lives and ideas of marginalized groups was told to us by members of dominant groups. The differences between the two show us clearly that who speaks matters. Scholars and activists from marginalized groups are now increasingly setting the terms of their inquiry. Over time new kinds of discussions are taking place, locating power and modes of resistance in more nuanced understandings of human relationship and political practices.[5]

Also new is that the point of marginalized groups speaking for themselves is to help set the terms of their own enfranchisement. Previously, when dominant groups called attention to nondominant groups, it often served to further solidify their status as "other" for the purpose of exclusion. At times open-minded citizens called for tolerance. Now democratic thought coming from the margins claims that toleration is not enough.[6] During periods of liberalization, the main model for reform aiming at inclusion presupposed that the "others" could and would assimilate to the hegemonic style, rather than allowing for reevaluation and change of the older, dominant fashions.[7] The pressure to assimilate remains strong, but the point of different forms of multiculturalism is to recognize and problematize such pressure as part of a movement of resistance and creativity. Those who have been disempowered are approaching their work in various arenas of political life with the goal of transforming those arenas as they gain access to them.

Although there is much written work on related trends of diversity, identity politics, and multiculturalism, scholars have not made a sufficient effort to bring this developing body of thought together. Despite differences among thinkers and practitioners, as well as the fact that this new mode is still emerging, we need to lay out (for theorists and other academics, students and activists) the basic parameters of an emergent form of diversity politics from the margins as democratic theory. If we have a clearer understanding of this new mode of democratic politics, then those working on diversity issues, whether in academia or on the streets, will be able to grasp its impact and direct their analyses and energies. Further, those working in the field often have trouble formulating coherent responses to critiques of a community-based politics of justice that challenges presumptions about the safety of distance, self-reliance, rational cost-benefit analysis, and neutrality. Even as activists still claim to be in need of a theory, too much of (U.S.) American democratic thought has gotten divorced from the concrete struggles that citizens

face. This will not do. Democratic theory ought to serve democratic actors.

In articulating his vision of a Black identity politics as part of "a new progressive Black politics anchored in radical democracy" Michael Dyson (1995, 101) explains his project as seeking "to accent the emancipatory elements of political practice, signifying a broad emphasis on popular participation in the affairs of the citizenry." "For me," he writes, "radical democrats view issues of race, gender, sexuality, the environment, the workplace, and the like to be crucial spheres where the negotiation over identity, equality and emancipation takes place. My radical democratic principles commit me to a relentless quest for the sort of political behavior, economic arrangements, and social conditions that promote a full, productive life for the common citizenry" (1995, 197–98). Drawing on Dyson's vision, as a work in political theory, this book is intended to help us as citizens and/or members of a national community to utilize the lessons and methodologies of diversity more effectively as we work to overcome identity-based and intersecting oppressions. In the process, theory can help all those interested in exploring and establishing alternative social relations.

In this light, I found early on in my explorations that multiculturalism at its best asks us to acknowledge and explore our own identity and its constructed and multiple nature. What does it mean to say that I am a woman? How does the fact that I am Jewish change the practices through which I am gendered female? How does taking my class position, my sexuality, and my abilities seriously in politics highlight the ways that gendering some humans as female has changed over time? This is a politics that acknowledges certain cultural aspects of our lives together, and recognizes the group-based nature of contemporary social movements. In this way of understanding ourselves we see that no one has a single cultural form of identification, regardless of what individuals may prioritize at certain times. For example, one may benefit from male privilege in a sexist society, but be denied other access to privilege and social dignity due to the simultaneous workings of racism, classism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, and ableism. A person may choose to associate with a particular community as a grounding from which to innovate cultural forms and do politics even as that community will have diversity within it. Each of us has numerous points of reference in identity politics. Therefore, multiculturalism as a theory and practice is as much about acknowledging and

working from the multiplicity of our communities in national politics as it is about multiplicity within communities. It is also, therefore, concerned with intersections across communities as well as the simultaneous and mutual constitution of various communal identities. In the following chapters I will explore more specifically what such a vision offers. For now, we can say that doing well what some call multicultural politics necessitates critically engaging in cultural forms and doing the politics of even one identity community in a multiply situated manner.

An historical example might best serve to demonstrate this point. AIM, a post-1960s movement of Native Americans, strove to reclaim native lands and to end harsh conditions on reservations, to secure tribal fishing rights, to protect tribal forms of spirituality, and to end general stereotyping and discrimination against Native Americans. Working with other First Peoples in the United States, "American Indians" worked to publicize and end forced sterilization of Native women and the horrific practice of stealing Native babies to put them on the illegal "white" adoption circuit. In these efforts, AIM and other groups engaged in activist politics by and on behalf of First Peoples in the territories governed by the United States. From the outside, U.S. government officials often saw "Native Americans" as a singular group with a specific laundry list of interests. Inside the movement, however, activists came from many different tribes. Respecting and working with tribal differences was also therefore important for the movement. Engagement with AIM or other such groups was often the first time many activists had worked with members of different tribes, or worked on behalf of a "Native American" collectivity at all. Further, historical differences between full-bloods and half-bloods and between different genders also played a significant part in what AIM did and did not accomplish. As AIM women came into contact with non-Native women activists and feminists, new political ideas and methods, tensions and insights emerged in both the broader Anglo-feminist movement as well as within Native American political movement. There are times when one's Apache identity is most important, times when being a half-blood most consciously affects your struggles for enfranchisement, times when being a woman in overlapping —though differently—sexist societies takes center stage. Multiculturalism as a coherent democratic theory can help us learn that we do not have to leave parts of ourselves at the door when engaging in activist, identity-informed politics. As we

hone our skills as theorists of diversity, we can more fluently engage with shifting and multiple communities and political movements as members of multiple and shifting groups ourselves.

If multiculturalism is also often referred to as identity politics, then we must remember that it is about identities and it is about politics. Multiculturalism brings our critical eye to examining what factors of human experience are considered politically salient in any given cultural and historical context. Why are certain aspects of identities *politically* important in our era and culture? How and why have the terms of what is salient changed and to what ends? Diversity-based democratic theory thus questions and seeks to articulate the ways that different aspects of our identities situate us differently in power relationships over time. Now, for us in the United States, it compels us to ask what we ought to expect of citizens and others from nondominant groups in a democratic polity, and what we ought to be able to expect from those in dominant groups in our particular social context. Fluency with lessons of diversity-based democratic theory can enable us to negotiate the ways in which we are often multiply situated with respect to power given the multiple aspects of our historically situated and politically salient identities. Through the processes involved in such negotiations, we see that much in multiculturalism—as an emergent political theory—is reinterpreting such long-held core concepts as citizenship, justice, public space, equality, and freedom. Through this new attention to diversity, activists and scholars are also reviving old debates about, for example, the motivation in, and point of, politics. In addition, we find that those exploring issues of difference are often pushing historic debates forward and introducing new terms such as "cyborgs," "needs," "minoritizing and majoritizing," and "mestiza."[8] In this book we look at what minority communities mean when employing such terms and what these concepts might have to offer a new democratic theory.

Methodological Notes

In this book I propose to set out the basic parameters of an emerging diversity-based democratic theory. Methodologically, then, I am interested in articulating an alternative democratic theory from the views, contributions, and experiences of those historically on the margins of society as well as those with whom they stand in solidarity. What might

it mean, though, to theorize democracy specifically from the margins? Generally I understand working from the margins to indicate a sensitivity to the views, concerns, and aspirations of those on the margins of society and attempts to attend to these.

Activists and scholars have been demonstrating how previous so-called democratic theories written by privileged men served to exclude women as a group and numerous minorities from public participation in social governance.[9] They have shown how those forms of political philosophizing served to justify and also to reinforce the concrete oppression of these groups. Drawing on their work, we see that once we can articulate that concrete political problems of marginalized groups in societies classified as democratic are internally related to the form, and role, of the theories prevalent in those "democracies," we can understand such theories as problematic and in need of attention. But what kind of attention is still needed? What are some alternative approaches available to us that might help us develop further critical perspectives on, and present challenges to, such theories so intimately connected to oppression?[10]

One way to approach this project is to say that if women and oppressed minorities have been left out, let us include them. Philosophically, let us get beyond definitions of women, peoples of color (including Jews in this case), and homosexuals that essentialize them, for example, as extra-passionate, or too interested, meaning also that they are irrational or not capable of cool discernment. In the public face of the United States in this new (Christian) millennium, we all know that women and racial/ethnic/religious/gender/sexual minorities are not essentially idiots, in Platonic terms, so these groups can be included among those fit for democratic frameworks historically defined. The problem with this view of inclusion is, of course, that it retains the historical model that is problematically raced and sexed. Although we might find many useful aspects of the historical definition, a solution of enfranchisement that extends the historical category, intact, to cover previously uncovered groups does not sufficiently challenge the original model. In fact, it "covers" too much; that is, it covers *over* the distinct experiences of those marginalized that may destabilize the historical category and suggest alternative characteristics we now may wish to incorporate into our view of democratic membership and participation. By positing that we can include women, for example, into a theory that

has been patriarchal historically ensures the continuation of patriarchy, even if now in a new form.

A second approach is to work through critique. On the one hand I could offer a critique from within, showing that one theory or another contradicts itself and therefore fails to deliver on its promise of democracy. On the other hand, I could come from outside the traditional theories to write critically about how elite men have created women and certain minorities as outside their definitions of citizenship and enfranchised members of democratic polities. The goal in this case would be to explore these traditional theories further, but now naming them as patriarchal, classist, racist, homophobic, ableist, anti-Semitic. In this case I would come to understand these theories better but in such a way that I do not ultimately accept their promise of democracy. Instead, I expose the falsehoods or hypocrisies entailed in their promises. Doing so can be very helpful for developing an alternative democratic theory. I will, however, address a drawback of this approach below.

As a third option, or even along with the above, I could work to challenge the elitist theories by directly destabilizing some of their categories, such as common distinctions between public and private. Whereas it is characteristic of Western patriarchal theory to place women as a group and many minorities in a sphere it deems outside politics, I could demonstrate that the experience of marginalized minorities and of women as a group actually is, and has been, political because the process of privileged men's defining these experiences as nonpolitical is itself a political act. This clarification ought to be helpful for activists. In all, however, these three responses leave me dissatisfied.

In the exploration of a new mode of democratic theorizing that I attempt in this work, I do not want only to understand the canonical views, to further the critique of theories that result in and/or defend oppression, or to show that elite men's acting on women and marginalized subcommunities makes them political. These are worthy methods that I will utilize at times, but for the purposes of this book as a whole they do not define my project. As described, each of these approaches remains defined in terms of the ideas and actions of privileged men. Each of these responses takes elite men, their views and experiences, as primordial. I wish to explore an alternative because I understand the liberatory potential in the various versions of the multicultural project as rooted elsewhere: here, what is primordial is groups at the margins.

In order to "theorize from" this place I begin with a concern for women and members of other groups that face oppression. I begin with a sensitivity to our lives. I begin with a commitment—which emerges from our lives—to overcome these oppressions to the extent that we can as we go along, and in a way that remains sensitive to our experiences, needs, and aspirations.[11]

I want to hear from the lives and ideas of diverse communities to see what these might have to tell us about a different sort of politics. I look to the margins so that we may talk about a democracy that, as it becomes more inclusive, is also fundamentally transformed. I seek a method that will include new groups along with some of the distinct cultural and ideological contributions of the newly included. I work to draw on the myriad discerning practices employed by marginalized groups in their political activism in order to enhance the critical capacities of a democratic polity to sort through these different potential contributions. In this book I seek to theorize democracy in a way that does not perpetuate the primacy and exclusive legitimacy of elite male viewpoints, basically delegitimizing and covering over the views of "others." I am testing models of theorizing that work toward the incorporation not only of the other people, but their views (treated critically through the process of politics over time) as well.

Critical Questions

There are many challenges to this form of democratic theory. Many commentators have criticized these new theories of democracy and the critical politics of identities which generated them. Challenges to identity politics come from Conservatives, Liberals, and moderns, postmoderns, socialists, and self-critical diversity theorists.[12] Some have asked whether, in a largely antagonistic world usually hostile to non-dominant groups, we need a politics based on distance? Maybe the right to be left alone is all we can really ask of democratic politics, for a politics of aid has often created new forms of dependency for the poor and disenfranchised. How can we trust a politics that promises fulfillment through identity when the dominant groups retain disproportionate power to construct our identities? Does an attention to marginalized groups mean that *any* group claiming to be marginalized, such as white/Christian supremacists, gets designated votes in the political

process? Aren't we better off, given the fact of inequality, calculating costs and benefits as if we were disembodied selves, making the best of neutrality? Has this new form of thinking generated its own exclusions?

These are significant questions. In the course of this book these different questions will be highlighted. One thing we might want to be careful about is that although we may critique certain practices, we may not always want to simply argue for their opposites. For example, we will ask: if majority rule has historically kept minorities disenfranchised, can a "minoritizing" strategy alone bring about justice? The people who came by boat to the shores of the United States under horrific conditions from Vietnam became a new minority population in this country. Given their history, the circumstances of their arrival, and the clusters of needs for their communities, these Vietnamese immigrants had much work to do in order to establish themselves in the United States. What happened when a vocal portion of U.S. citizens protested the arrival of these Vietnamese refugees, speaking on behalf of the national, majority, interest? Such a new, and small minority does not have a lot of protection in a system governed by majority rule. But would the Vietnamese, and in the long run the country as a whole, be better served with a system that allowed all minorities to make policy on their own behalf? Activists and new democratic theorists must continue to engage with such challenging questions as we develop political praxis and break old modes that history has shown to stifle movements for social justice.

On another note, how can a politics that celebrates diversity make critical claims across communities? Does a democratic politics need to allow space for antidemocratic activities, such as the myriad white/ Christian supremacist Web sites on the Internet or demands from antigovernment militia groups? If attempts to justify an "ethnic cleansing" use appeals to diversity, we must examine how that is possible and enhance our capacities for judging in such cases. The point of talking about a more inclusive theory is not to lose the ability to set limits. It is also not necessarily about saying in advance which particular groups or individuals should be given priority in decision making. The point of developing fluency with this mode of theorizing is to be able to discern different contexts in which respect, recognition, and democratic discussions and practices may be possible and where they are not at any given point. My hope is that the discussion in the following pages will enable participants in the political process to sort through the multilayered

aspects of concern in such questions. For now, however, I will attend to an overarching critique presented by others also fundamentally concerned with overcoming oppression, but who find this form of response not only lacking but explicitly problematic.[13]

The overriding concern with the kind of democratic thought I will be discussing in the following pages is that, although at times called identity politics, it is actually a flight from politics. Some community-based thinkers look to identity and community associations as a retreat from the public world of flux and deliberation. We find some political theorists critiquing the aggressive world of agonistic, or oppositional, politics and referring to communities as harmonious. They caution against the evils of Liberalism[14] and evoke mythic notions of "home," safe-havens, in their ideal of community. In this view, multiculturalism is seen by critics as either an historically outmoded form of politics,[15] or explicitly as a reactionary foundationalism that developed merely in reaction to the disorientation of modernity. What these critics mean is that ideas of concretely bounded "communities" belong on the trash heap of modernism. They hark back to an imaginary time of essentialist notions of identity and group membership that look cozy but are, instead, oppressive and exclusionary. In the critics' view, multiculturalism is either hopelessly incapable of dealing with the difficulties of (Christian) millennial politics, or dangerously seeking a quiet, firm patch of ground amidst the dizzying superhighway of contemporary culture and knowledge production.

One of the most important articulations of this view comes from Wendy Brown, who argues that "much feminist anti-postmodernism betrays a preference for extra-political terms and practices: for Truth (unchanging, incontestable) over politics (flux, contest, instability); for certainty and security (safety, immutability, privacy) over freedom (vulnerability, publicity); for discoveries (science) over decisions (judgements); for separable subjects armed with established rights and identities over unwieldy and shifting pluralities adjudicating for themselves and their future" (1995, 37). Brown offers a clear critique of identity politics as *ressentiment*, as a politics "drap[ing] itself in powerlessness or dispossession" (1995, 45). Insofar as Brown does not mean to suggest that *ressentiment* is the basis of all leftist politics today, but that we should attend to these problems where they are,[16] those who agree with her will find much of interest in this book.

We can, and must, point to individuals, parts of movements, manifestos, and specific moments in political life that fall into *ressentiment*. At times those who seek freedom may turn toward this (Brown takes the concept from Nietzsche) "politics of reproach, rancor, moralism, and guilt" (1995, 26). In the following pages, however, I also intend to present a different understanding of diversity-based democratic theory that is as much about critique, deconstruction, and opposition as it is about construction and creation. Here we find critical discussion of harm and injury as we also find politics made toward ideals generated within the communal lives of peoples in history. Many women and members of minority communities find their identities and communal attachments empowering sources of political energy and cultural production. Unlike some others, I do not eschew the term multiculturalism. The particular view of it to be presented here is one that is neither explicitly postmodern, nor simply reactionary modernism. I hope to articulate a vision of identity that is multiple, constructed, and changing, even as it has both coherent valence in politics and meaning in people's lives. I will discuss an alternative democratic theory emerging from the margins that does relentlessly critique various forms of power in its incarnations as "possessive," "zero-sum," and the "I know I have power when I can see that I have 'power-over' you" varieties. Rather than "rejecting" power altogether, however, we will see attempts to grapple head-on with it and claim power for liberatory purposes. Rather than balkanization and an a political framework of sentiment, I find in diversity-based politics a certain internal logic of multiplicity and cross-fertilization. Theorizing from that basis leads many to principles and ethics. Moreover, theorizing from that basis leads many back to the drawing board of action when an earlier "great idea" proved disastrous once implemented.

We must address *ressentiment* and a politics of victimization, simplistic notions of home and static conceptualizations. I also find that there is far more to a diversity-based democratic theory.[17] As I will argue in the following pages, I find that critique is intricately bound with inspiration. Even songs of lamentation—usually and simultaneously—serve to strengthen. Even art depicting oppression often helps to clarify our emotions and analytic capacities for proactive politics. Discrimination weighs down heavily on the spirit of those targeted, even as historical struggles enliven individuals and communities. Many on the margins clearly recognize that their struggles have helped shape

what they find to be the richness of their cultures. We also do not want
to miss the celebratory and creative aspects of community-based poli-
tics. A central reason many fight for the self-determination and dignity
of their peoples is because their peoples—their histories, cultures, and
ways of knowing—are deemed worth fighting for.

What we often hear from those in marginalized communities with
strong ties to their peoples is that "home" is not necessarily a placid,
tranquil place. Actually, it is not even the static, serene idea that gives
"home" a feeling of refuge for many. Home is often just the place we do
a certain kind of wrangling. Sometimes struggling with members of our
own communities provides enhanced avenues toward empowerment
in comparison to (even similar) work done in a national arena. The
wrestling[18] we do "at home" in community can often provide us with
the skills, encouragement, direction, and voice we need to be effective
agents in relation to other community members as well as "outside" in
broader spaces for what we hope will be a more democratic politics.

A democratic theory grounded in cultural diversity seeks out insights
and alternatives from myriad groups and their experiences in history.
There are alternatives to rational, bureaucratic modes of welfare re-
formism as a model for progressive politics. In this light, some have even
pointed to "enchantment." Here, artists and theorists explicitly critique
the mechanistic view of politics and life that modernism promotes and
that informs the postmodern critique of "multiculturalism" as a singu-
lar endeavor which amounts simply to a politics of *ressentiment*.[19] As we
will discuss in later chapters, I will position aspects of what is often
called multiculturalism as a diversity-based democratic theory that fre-
quently moves out of the modernist/postmodernist impasse in aca-
demic writings with respect to politics.[20]

This is not to claim that activists have discovered an escape from co-
optation and commodification. To assume this is to assume there is
some radical Archimedean point, a site outside the configuration of our
social constructions that is pure democracy and mutual deliberation.
New, radical democratic theory needs no such outside point to do its
work. So, how do we go about pursuing democratic alternatives in the
midst of a messy political reality? The role of political theory here is to
help us clarify the ideas we use and work from in our political lives. The
premise of this book is that, the clearer we can get about the basic
parameters of the new form of diversity-based democratic theory, the

better we will be able to work effectively in the face of the challenges described above. For example if we prioritize overcoming oppression in our understanding of politics, we find that we must vigilantly explore the multifaceted nature and networks of oppression, both historical and current. Diversity, as it has been foregrounded by grassroots activists and academics, can keep us attuned to the power of identity, of naming ourselves, of recognition and needs as politically important categories. Many progressives in the academy and on the streets are thus exploring new strategies and methods for democratic politics, and new places to push questions of social justice. In the process they are developing new understandings of citizenship and national membership as relationships with transformative power, responsibilities, and benefits. Out of such praxis they are creating new forms of democratic theory that must be tested continually. In setting out the basic concepts and debates arising in diversity-based politics, I hope that this book can help us organize our ideas, more effectively plan our engagements, and honestly grapple with the challenges and critiques as they arise.

Chapter Outlines

In order to present a concise and coherent account of this form of democratic thought as it is emerging in the United States, this book examines the questions of the who, what, when, where, why, and how of contemporary democratic theorizing from the margins.

Chapter 2. When: History

The next chapter will introduce this emergent democratic theory in terms of the history of new social movements and the development of political ideas so that readers have a clear sense of *when*, historically, this form of democratic theory arrives as a significant force. Looking to the shift from what some have referred to as the "old left to the new left," the theory is contextualized as emerging in a cross between developments within international Marxism and traditional (U.S.) American democratic thought, and differing in certain significant respects from the French postmodernism.

Chapter 3. Who: Identity

Chapter Three will examine identity as a category of political experience to clarify debates about *who* constitutes "the people" in this new

way of thinking about democracy, touted as a system of governance by, for, and of "the people." New political views of identity will be explicated through a comparison with other philosophical approaches such as postmodernism, Marxism, and modernism more broadly.

Chapter 4. What: Recognition

"*What* is it that those involved in a politics of identity are after?" will be the central question of Chapter Four. When viewed from the margins, a primary goal of politics is understood to be overcoming oppression. An analysis of such a view leads to an examination of a politics of recognition and of other aspects of politics when the "goods" of democracy are not viewed as commodities, or products to be possessed and therefore distributed by a (perhaps even generous) central authority structure. This conceptual base leads theorists to redefine central concepts in Western democratic thought, such as freedom, justice, and equality.

Chapter 5. Why: Rethinking Universals and Particulars

In the fifth chapter I will address the *why* question: why do we engage in politics? Here I offer a critique of self-interest as a dominant understanding of political motivation in Western-style democracies. I address alternatives to this mode and make an argument for breaking down the rigid boundaries democratic thinkers find between selfish and altruistic motivations. As the debate has historically occurred under the auspices of citizenship, I look closely at democratic ideas about citizens, even as I seek a politics inclusive of all members of a democratic polity, citizens or not.

Chapter 6. Where: Multiple Publics

Moving to the *where* of this diversity-based democratic theory, Chapter Six will look to multiple and subaltern (alternative local and subnational) public spaces as the site(s) of this new politics. In addition, using insights from the field of geography, I examine democratic concerns for the relationships between these sites and among subgroups within new sites. Here we will need to challenge our understandings of community itself. Despite the growing ability to see the United States at large as a complex multicultured society, problematic assumptions of homogeneity still find their way into conceptions of the subcommunities constituting the larger mosaic. A more dialectical approach to the-

orizing community is thus necessary in the current debate as we rethink the possibilities of democratic public spaces.

Chapter 7. How: Minoritizing and Majoritizing

In Chapter Seven I look at the *how* question of this notion of democracy. We will look critically at the normative answer to this question in democratic thought: majoritarianism. By focusing on coalitions and alternatives to majoritarian democracy as the process of politics, I will examine what contributions to possible decision making and organizational structures marginalized groups have been making in democratic thinking.