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The Passions of Pluralism: Multiculturalism and the Expanding Community

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There have always been newcomers in this country; there have always been strangers. There have always been young persons in our classrooms whom we did not, could not, see or hear. In recent years, however, invisibility has been refused on many sides. Old silences have been shattered; long-repressed voices are making themselves heard. Yes, we are in search of what Dewey (1954) called "the Great Community"; but at once we are challenged as never before to confront plurality and multiplicity. Unable to deny or obscure the facts of pluralism, we are asked to choose ourselves with respect to unimaginable diversities.

To speak of passions in such a context is not to refer to the strong feelings aroused by what strikes many as a confusion and a cacophony. Rather, it is to have in mind the central sphere for the operation of the passions: "the realm of face-to-face relationships" (Unger, 1984, p. 107). It seems clear that the more continuous and authentic the personal encounters, the less likely that categorizing and distancing will take place. People are less likely to be treated instrumentally, to be made "other" by those around. I want to speak of pluralism and multiculturalism with concrete engagements in mind, both actual and imagined; that is, engagements with persons, young persons and older persons, some suffering from exclusion, some from powerlessness, some from poverty, some from ignorance, some from boredom. Also, I want to speak with imagination in mind as well as metaphor and art. As Ozick (1989) notes:

> Through metaphor, the past has the capacity to imagine us, and we it. Through metaphorical concentration, doctors can imagine what it is to be their patients. Those who have no pain can imagine those who suffer. Those at the center can imagine what it is to be outside. The strong can imagine the weak. Illuminated lives can imagine the dark. Poets in their twilight can imagine the borders of stellar fire. We strangers can imagine the familiar hearts of strangers. (p. 283)

Passions, then, engagements, and imagining. I want to find a way of speaking of community, an expanding community, that will take shape when diverse people, speaking as *who* and not *what* they are, come together in speech and action, as Arendt (1958) puts it, to constitute something in common among themselves.

According to Arendt, "plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody

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is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live" (p. 57). For her, those present on a common ground have different locations on that ground, and each one "sees or hears from a different position" (p. 57). An object such as a classroom, a neighborhood street, or field of flowers shows itself differently when encountered by a variety of spectators. Its reality arises out of the sum total of its appearances. In thinking of these spectators as participants in an ongoing dialogue, each one speaking out of a distinct perspective and yet open to those around, I find a paradigm for what I have in mind.

Another paradigm can be found in the work of Gates (1991), who writes that "the challenge facing America in the next century will be the shaping, at long last, of a truly common public culture, one responsive to the long-silenced cultures of color" (p. 712). (Recall that, not long ago, Gates asked in a *New York Times* article, "Whose canon is it, anyway?") More recently, Gates evoked the philosopher Michael Oakeshott's notion of a conversation with different voices. Education, Gates suggests, might be "an invitation into the art of this conversation in which we learn to recognize the voices, each conditioned by a different perception of the world" (p. 712). As he further adds: "Common sense says that you don't bracket out 90% of the world's cultural heritage if you really want to learn about the world" (p. 712).

What is common sense for Gates represents for many an attack on the coherence of what we think of as our heritage, our canon. The notion of different voices conditioned by different perspectives summons up the specter of relativism; and relativism, according to Geertz (1983), is the "intellectualist Grande Peur" (p. 153). It makes people uneasy because it appears to subvert authority. It eats away at what is conceived as objectively real. Geertz asks, as the uneasy might ask, "if thought is so much out in the world as this, what is to guarantee its generality, its objectivity, its efficacy, or its truth?" (p. 161). There is irony in Geertz's voice, for he knows and writes the following as well: "For our time and forward, the image of a general orientation, perspective *Weltanschauung*, growing out of humanistic studies (or, for that matter, out of scientific ones) and shaping the direction of the culture is a chimera" (p. 161). Geertz speaks of the "radical variousness of the way we think now," and suggests that the problem of integrating cultural life becomes one of "making it possible for people inhabiting different worlds to have a genuine, and reciprocal, impact upon one another" (p. 161).

This perspective is troubling for people seeking assurances and certainties. Yet, they, like the rest of us, keep experiencing attacks on the familiar, or what Clifford (1988) calls "the irruption of otherness, the unexpected" (p. 13). It may well be, however, that our ability to tolerate the unexpected relates to our tolerance for multiculturalism, for the very idea of expansion, and for the notion of plurality.

We are well aware that historians such as Schlesinger (1992), among others who must be taken seriously, sees in the making a "disuniting of America" if shared commitments shatter, if Americans lose touch with the democratic idea. Proponents of what is called "civism" are concerned that pluralism threatens the existence of a democratic ethos intended to transcend all differences (Pratte, 1988). That ethos, they contend,

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encompasses the principles of freedom, equality, and justice as well as regard for human rights; and they fear that the new relativism and particularism will subvert the common faith. There are others, like Hirsch (1987), who see the concept of "background knowledge" (and the shared content it ensures) undermined by "variousness" and by multicultural emphases that distract from the common. What Hirsch and others call "cultural literacy" is undermined as a result, and the national community itself is eroded.

At the extreme, of course, are those on the far right such as D'Souza (1991), who find a conspiracy in challenges to the so-called Eurocentric canon and in what they construct as "political correctness," a concept that signifies to them a new orthodoxy built out of oversensitivity to multicultural concerns. As for the religious fundamentalist right, Hughes (1992) notes that one of the motives driving men like Jesse Helms (the Republican senator from North Carolina) is their need to establish themselves as defenders of what they define as "the American Way" now that "their original crusade against the Red Menace has been rendered null and void" (p. 21). Not only do fundamentalists of Helms's ilk argue for their construct against programs such as National Endowment for the Arts grants to avant garde artists, they attack such deviations as manifestations of multiculturalism. It is important to hold this in mind as we try to work through a conception of pluralism to an affirmation of the struggle to attain the life of "free and enriching communion" Dewey identifies with democracy.

The seer of this life of communion, according to Dewey, was the poet Walt Whitman (1931), who wrote about the many shapes arising in the United States of his day as "the shapes of doors giving many exits and entrances" and "shapes of democracy. . .ever projecting other shapes" (p. 201). Whitman's "Song of Myself" stands in total contradiction to the fundamentalist version of "the American Way":

> Through me many long dumb voices,
> Voices of the interminable generations of prisoners and slaves,
> Voices of the diseas'd and despairing and of thieves and dwarfs,
> Voices of cycles of preparation and accretion,
> And of the threads that connect the stars, and of wombs and of the father-stuff,
> And of the rights of them the others are down upon. . . .
> Through me forbidden voices. . . . (p. 53)

Whitman's communion, from all appearances, arises out of "many shapes," out of multiplicity. In his work there is no suggestion of a melting pot, nor is there a dread of plurality.

For some of us, just beginning to feel our own stories—the reminders of the "long dumb voices," the talk of "the rights of them the others are down upon"—are worth telling cannot but draw attention to the absences and silences that are as much a part of our history as the articulate voices, the shimmering faces, the images of emergence and success. Bartleby, the clerk who "prefers not to" in novelist Herman Melville's (1986) story, may suddenly become exemplary. What of those who, like Bartleby, said "no" to command, who found no place, who made no mark? Do they not say something about a society that closed too many doors, that allowed people to be abandoned, in Melville's

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word, like "wreckage in the mid-Atlantic"? What of those like Tod Clifton in Ellison's (1952) *Invisible Man*? Clifton, a former youth leader in the so-called Brotherhood, ends up selling Sambo dolls in front of the public library. When the police try to dislodge him, he protests and is killed. As the novel's narrator, watching, wonders:

> Why did he choose to plunge into nothingness, in the void of faceless faces, of soundless voices, lying outside history?. . . .All things, it is said, are duly recorded—all things of importance, that is. But not quite; for actually it is only the known, the seen, the heard, and only those events that the recorder regards as important are put down. . . .But the cop would be Clifton's historian, his judge, his witness, his executioner, and I was the only brother in the watching crowd. (p. 379)

The many who ended up "lying outside history" diminished the community, left an empty space on the common ground, and left undefined an aspect of reality.

It is true that we cannot know all the absent ones, but somehow they must be present in their absence. Absence, after all, suggests an emptiness, a void to be filled, a wound to be healed, a flaw to be repaired. Doctorow (1975), at the beginning of his novel, *Ragtime*, paints a landscape of denial that appeals to both wonder and indignation and demands a kind of repair. Writing about the community of New Rochelle, New York, in 1906, he presents a past that reaches into the present:

> Teddy Roosevelt was President. The population customarily gathered in great numbers either out of doors for parades, public concerts, fish fries, political picnics, social outing, or indoors in meeting halls, vaudeville theatres, operas, ballrooms. There seemed to be no entertainment that did not involve great swarms of people. Trains and steamers and trolleys moved them from one place to another. That was the style; that was the way people lived. Women were stouter then. They visited the fleet carrying white parasols. Everyone wore white in summer. There was a lot of sexual fainting. There were no Negroes. There were no immigrants. (pp. 3–4)

Focally, *Ragtime* has to do with a decent, intelligent Black man named Coalhouse Walker, who is cheated, never understood, scarcely *seen*, yet who begins his own fated strategy of vengeance that ends when promises are broken and he is shot down in cold blood. Why is he unseen? Why were there "no Negroes,. . .no immigrants?" More than likely this was due to the condition of the minds of those in power. Ellison's Black narrator in *Invisible Man* may explain it best when he attributes invisibility to "a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their inner eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality" (p. 7). This disposition must itself have been partly due to the play of power in discourse as well as in social arrangements, which leads one to wonder even now what the assimilation or initiation sought by so many educators signified when there were so many blanked-out spaces—"no Negroes,. . .no immigrants," and oftentimes no full-grown women.

Looking back at the gaps in our own lived experiences, one might think of silences such as those Olsen (1978) describes when she writes of a literary history "dark with silences"—the "unnatural silences" of women who worked too hard or were too embarrassed to express themselves (p. 6); and of others who did not have the words or had not mastered the proper "ways of knowing" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). One might ponder the plight of young Caribbean women

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like Kincaid's (1990) fictive Lucy from Antigua, who is forced to be "two-faced" in a postcolonial school, and who states: "Outside, I seemed one way, inside I was another; outside false, inside true" (p. 18). For years no more was known about people like Lucy (who saw "sorrow and bitterness" in the face of daffodils because of the Wordsworth poem she had been forced to learn) than was known about the Barbadian American immigrants novelist Paule Marshall describes as people living fragmented lives in New York City's Black ghettoes. Little consciousness existed of what Anzaldua (1987) calls *la frontera*, or the borderlands of geography and consciousness on which so many Latinos live. Nor was much said of the Cuban American immigrants fabled in Hijuelos's (1989) *The Mambo Kings Sing Songs of Love*. Then again, who of us truly wondered about the builders of the railroads, those whom Kingston (1989) calls "China Men," who chopped trees in the Sandalwood and Sierra Nevada Mountains? Who of us could fill the gaps left by a character such as Kingston's Ah Goong, whose very "existence was outlawed by the Chinese Exclusion Acts"? Ah Goong's family, writes Kingston:

> . . .did not understand his accomplishments as an American ancestor, a holding, homing ancestor of this place. He'd gotten the legal or illegal papers burned in the San Francisco earthquake and fire; he appeared in America in time to be a citizen and to father citizens. He had also been seen carrying a child out of the fire, a child of his own in spite of the laws against marrying. He had built a railroad out of sweat, why not have an American child out of longing? (p. 151)

Was any heed paid to a person like Michelle Cliff (1988), an Afro-Caribbean woman writer who comments that speaking in words that were not her own was a form of speechlessness (p. 58)? Who among us noted a child like Morrison's (1972) Pecola Breedlove, Black and unloved, who wanted to look like Shirley Temple so she could be included in the human reality? How many of us have been willing to suffer the experiences most recently rendered in Spiegelman's (1991) two-volume comic book, *Maus*, about his father—the ill-tempered Vladek, a survivor of Auschwitz—and his resentful sharing of his holocaust memories with his son. Every character in Spiegelman's book is an animal: the Jews, mice; the Germans, cats; the Poles, pigs. *Maus* is a reminder, not simply of a particular culture's dissolution; it is a reminder of the need to recognize that everything is possible, something normal people (including school people) either do not know or do not want to know.

To open up our experience (and, yes, our curricula) to existential possibilities of multiple kinds is to extend and deepen what we think of when we speak of a community. If we break through and even disrupt a surface equilibrium and uniformity, this does not mean that particular ethnic or racial traditions ought to replace our own. Although Morrison (1992) writes of pursuing her freedom as a writer in a "genderized, sexualized, wholly racialized world," this does not keep her from developing a critical project "unencumbered by dreams of subversion or rallying gestures at fortress walls" (pp. 4–5). In Morrison's case, that project involves exploring the ways in which what we think of as our Americanness is in many ways a response to an Africanist presence far too long denied. She is not interested in replacing one domination by another; rather, she seeks to show us what she sees from her own perspective.

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In so doing, she enriches our understanding not only of our own culture but of ourselves.

Morrison speaks of themes familiar to us all: "individualism, masculinity, social engagement versus historical isolation; acute and ambiguous moral problematics; the thematics of innocence coupled with an obsession with figurations of death and hell" (p. 45). She then goes on to query what Americans are alienated from, innocent of, and different from. She writes: "As for absolute power, over whom is this power held, from whom withheld, to whom distributed? Answers to these questions lie in the potent and ego-reinforcing presence of an Africanist population" (p. 45). Even as America's White settlers once defined their moral selves against the wilderness, they began to define their Whiteness against what Melville (1938) called "the power of blackness" (p. 333) and came to understand their achievement of freedom against slavery. Whether we choose to see our history that way or not, Morrison introduces a vision only she could create, and that vision offers us alternative vantage points on our world. Indeed, the tension with regard to multiculturalism may be partially due to the suspicion that we have often defined ourselves against some unknown, some darkness, some "otherness" we chose to thrust away—to master, not to understand. In this regard, Morrison relates something that seems unanswerable when she writes: "My project is an effort to avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from the serving to the served" (p. 90).

To take this view is not to suggest that curricula should be tailored to the measure of specific cultural groups of young people. Nor is it to suggest, as the Afrocentrists do, that emphasis should be laid on the unique experiences, culture, and perspectives of Afro-Americans and their link to African roots. There is no question that what history has overlooked or distorted must be restored—whether it has to do with Afro-Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, women, Jewish Americans, Native Americans, Irish Americans, or Polish Americans. The exclusions and the deformations have not kept artists like Morrison, Ellison, or James Baldwin from plunging into and learning from Western literary works any more than it has prevented scholars like Gates, Cornell West, and Alain Locke from working for more and richer interchanges between Afro-American and Euro-American cultures. Morrison's (1992) critical text begins with a verse from Eliot and goes on to pay tribute to Homer, Dostoevsky, Faulkner, James, Flaubert, Melville, and Mary Shelley. Similarly, it is difficult to forget Baldwin's mention of his reading Dostoevsky and haunting the public library; to turn attention from West's critiques of Emerson; or to ignore Ellison's writing about Melville and Hemingway even as he drew attention to what he called "the Negro stereotype" that was "really an image of the irrational, unorganized forces in American life" (p. 55). We might also recall Alice Walker (1983) engaging with Muriel Rukeyser and Flannery O'Connor, drawing energy from them, even as she went in search of Zora Neale Hurston, Bessie Smith, Sojourner Truth, and Gwendolyn Brooks. As Walker notes: "I also loved Ovid and Catullus. . .the poems of E. E. Cummings and

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William Carlos Williams'' (p. 257). Thus, as time goes on, we are aware that more and more Afro-American literature (and women's literature, and Hispanic literature, etc.) are diversifying our experience and changing our ideas of time, life, birth, relationship, and memory.

My point here has to do with openness and variety as well as inclusion. It has to do with the avoidance of fixities and stereotypes, even those stereotypes linked to multiculturalism. To view a person as being in some sense "representative" of Asian American culture (too frequently grouping together human beings as diverse as Japanese, Koreans, Chinese, and Vietnamese Americans) or Hispanic culture or Afro-American culture is to presume an objective reality called "culture" as a homogeneous and fixed presence that can be adequately represented by existing subjects. (Do Tan's [1989] maternal characters embody the same reality as does Kingston's [1976] "woman warrior"? Does Wright's [1940] Bigger Thomas stand for the same thing as does Miss Celie in Walker's [1982] *The Color Purple*?) The point is that we do not *know* the person in the front row of our classroom, or the one sharing the raft, or the one drinking next to us at the bar by her/his cultural or ethnic affiliation.

Cultural background surely plays a part in shaping identity, but it does not determine identity. It may well create differences that must be honored or occasion styles and orientations that must be understood. It may give rise to tastes, values, and even prejudices that must be taken into account. It is important to know, for example, without embarrassing or exoticizing her, why Kincaid's Antiguan Lucy feels so alienated from a Wordsworth poem, and whether or not (and against what norms) it is necessary to argue her out of her distaste for daffodils. It is important to realize why (as in Mukherjee's [1990] *Jasmine*) Hindus and Sikhs are so at odds with one another, even in this country, and (consulting what we believe to be the Western principle of justice) seek out ways in which they can be persuaded to set aside their hostilities. Perhaps by striving to sympathize with what persons of these groups feel, we can communicate our own caring for their well-being in such a fashion as to move them provisionally to reconceive.

Freire (Freire & Macedo, 1987) makes the point that every person ought, on some level, to cherish her/his culture; however, he warns that such perceptions should never be absolutized because when individuals close up against the new culture surrounding her or him, they might even "find it hard to learn new things which, placed alongside your personal history, can be meaningful" (p. 126). One must have, however, a feeling of ownership of one's personal history. In the culture of the United States, because of its brutal and persistent racism, it has been painfully difficult for Afro-American young people to affirm and be proud of what they choose as personal history. Poverty, hopelessness, the disruption of families and communities, the ubiquity of media images—all of these make it difficult for Black youth to place new conceptions against a past too often made to appear a past of victimization, shadows, and shame. Even worse, the mystification that proceeds on all sides gives rise to a meta-narrative of what it means to be respectable and successful in America. This meta-narrative too often affirms that

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which seems to doom minorities to life on the outermost borders or, as Morrison (1972) writes, "out-doors" where there is no place to go:

> Out-doors is the end of something, an irrevocable, physical fact, defining and complementing our metaphysical condition. Being a minority in both caste and class, we moved about anyway on the hem of life, struggling to consolidate our weaknesses and hang on, or to creep stingily up into the major folds of the garment. (p. 18)

It happens that Morrison's novel (*The Bluest Eye*), because of its use of the first paragraph of the basal reader *Dick and Jane*, dramatizes as few works do the coercive and deforming effect of the culture's official story: the meta-narrative of secure suburban family life. As the novel plays itself out, everything that occurs is the obverse of the basal reader's story with its themes of pretty house, loving family, play, laughter, friendship, cat, and dog. The narrator of main character Pecola Breedlove's story is young Claudia—also Black and poor, but with a supporting family, a sister, and a mother who loves her even as she complains and scolds. A short preface, ostensibly written after Pecola's baby and her rapist father have died, after the seeds would not flower, and after Pecola goes mad, ends with Claudia saying: "There is really nothing more to say—except why. But since *why* is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in *how*" (p. 9). When very young and then a little older, Claudia tells the story; and, in the telling, orders the materials of her own life, her own helplessness, her own longings. She does this in relation to Pecola, whom she could not help; in relation to the seeds that would not flower; and in relation to those around her "on the hem of life." Claudia weaves her narrative in such a fashion that she establishes an important connection to the past and (telling about Pecola and her family and her pain) reinterprets her own ethnicity in part through what Fischer (1986) calls "the arts of memory" (p. 194, ff.). Whatever meaning she can draw from this feeds into an ethic that may be meaningful to her in the future, one that takes her beyond her own guilt at watching Pecola search through the garbage:

> I talk about how I did *not* plant the seeds too deeply, how it was the fault of the earth, the land, of our town. I even think now that the land of the entire country was hostile to marigolds that year. . . .Certain seeds it will not nurture, certain fruit it will not bear, and when the land kills of its own volition, we acquiesce and say the victim had no right to live. We are wrong, of course, but it doesn't matter. It's too late. (p. 160)

As Taylor (1989) contends, we understand our lives in narrative form, as a quest, "because we have to determine our place in relation to the good, therefore we cannot be without an orientation to it, and hence must see our life in stories" (p. 51). Clearly, there are different stories connected by the same need to make sense, to make meaning, to find a direction. To help the Claudias we know, our diverse students, articulate their stories is not only to help them pursue the meanings of their lives. Rather, it is to find out *how* things are happening and to keep posing questions about the *why*. It is to move them to learn the "new things" Freire speaks of, to reach out for the proficiencies, capacities, and the craft required to be fully participant in this society and to do so without losing the consciousness of who they are.

That is not all. Stories like the one Claudia tells must break through into what we think of as our tradition, our heritage. They can, they

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should, with what West (1989) recognizes as the importance of acknowledging the "distinctive cultural and political practices of oppressed people" without highlighting their marginality in such a way as to further marginalize them (p. 93). Not only does West call attention to the resistance of Afro-Americans and that of other long-silenced people, he writes of the need to look at Afro-Americans' multiple contributions to American culture over the generations. In this regard one might think of Afro-Americans' musical contributions—gospel, jazz, ragtime; one might think of the Black churches or summon up recollections of the Civil Rights Movement and the philosophies and dreams that informed it. One might ponder—looking back and around—the images of courage and survival. As West goes on to say:

> Black cultural practices emerge out of a reality they cannot *not* know—the ragged edges of the real, of necessity; a reality historically constructed by white supremacist practices in North America. . . .These ragged edges—of not being able to eat, not to have shelter, not to have health care—all this is infused into the strategies and styles of black cultural practices. (p. 93)

Viewed in connection with the idea of multiculturalism, this does not mean that Afro-American culture, in all its variousness, should be defined mainly in terms of oppression and discrimination. One of the many reasons for opening spaces in which Afro-Americans can tell their own stories is that they, far more than those from other cultures, can explain the ways in which poverty and exclusion have mediated their own sense of the past. It is true that experiences of pain and abandonment have led to a search for roots and, so occasion, for a revision of recorded history; yet, what is crucial is the provision of opportunities for telling all the diverse stories, for interpreting membership as well as ethnicity and making inescapable the braids of experience woven into the fabric of America's plurality.

In the presence of an increasingly potent Third World, against the sounds of increasingly eloquent postcolonial (and, now, post-totalitarian) voices, we can no longer pretend that the "ragged edges" are an exception. We can no longer talk in terms of seamless totalities under rubrics like "free world," "free market," "equality," or even "democracy." Like the "wreckage in the mid-Atlantic," the "faceless faces," and the "unnatural silences," the lacks and deprivations must be made aspects of our plurality as well as of our cultural identity. Publics, after all, take shape in responses to unmet needs and broken promises; and human beings are prone to take action in response to the sense of injustice or to the imagination's capacity to look at things as if they could be otherwise. The democratic community, always a community in the making, depends not so much on what has been achieved and funded in the past. It is kept alive, energized, and radiated by an awareness of future possibility. To develop a vision of such possibility, a vision of what might and ought to be, is very often to be made aware of present deficiencies and present flaws. Although the metaphorical seeds in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* did not flower and Pecola and her baby could not be saved, more and more persons, paying heed, may move beyond acquiescence to say, as Claudia does, "we are wrong, of course." Yet, they may go on to overcome the conclusion that "it doesn't matter" and, at that moment, choose

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themselves as who they are, reaching beyond themselves and out to the common to repair.

Learning to look through multiple perspectives, young people may be helped to build bridges among themselves. By attending to a range of human stories, they may be provoked to heal and to transform. Of course, there will be difficulties in affirming plurality and difference while also working to create community. Since the days of De Tocqueville, Americans have wondered how to address the conflicts between individualism and the drive to conform. They have wondered how to reconcile the impassioned voices of cultures not yet part of the whole with the requirements of conformity, how not to lose the integrity of those voices in the process, and how not to allow the drive for conformity determine what happens at the end. The community many of us now hope for is not to be identified with conformity. Rather, as Whitman envisioned, it is to be a community attentive to difference and open to the idea of plurality. Something life-affirming in diversity must be discovered and rediscovered, for what is held in common becomes always more many-faceted—open and inclusive, drawn to untapped possibility.

No one can precisely predict the common world of possibility, nor can anyone absolutely justify one kind of community over another. Many of us, however, for all the tensions and disagreements that surround us, reaffirm the value of principles like justice, equality, freedom, and commitment to human rights—indeed, without these, we cannot even argue for the decency of welcoming strangers to our midst. Only if more and more persons incarnate such principles, choose to live by them, and engage in dialogue in accord with them are we likely to bring about a democratic pluralism without flying apart in violence and disorder. Unable to provide an objective ground for such hopes and claims, all we can do is speak with others as eloquently and passionately as we can about justice, caring, love, and trust. Like Rorty (1991) and those whom he calls pragmatists, we can only articulate our desire for as much intersubjective agreement as possible, that is, "the desire to extend the reference of 'us' as far as we can" (p. 23). However, as we do so, we must remain aware of the distinctive members of the plurality who appear before each another with their own perspectives on the common, their own stories entering the culture's story, altering it as it moves through time.

We want our classrooms to be just and caring, full of various conceptions of the good. We want them to be articulate, with the dialogue involving as many persons as possible, opening up to one another and to the world. We also want our students to be concerned for one another as we learn to be concerned for them. We want them to achieve friendships among one another as they move to a heightened sense of craft and wide-awakeness and a renewed consciousness of worth and possibility. With voices in mind and echoing the need for visibility, I end with a call for human solidarity by Rukeyser (1938), who, like many of us, sought to "widen the lens and see/standing over the land myths of identity, new signals, processes." As Rukeyser wrote:

> Carry abroad the urgent need, the scene,
> To photograph and to extend the voice,

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To speak this meaning.
Voices to speak to us directly. As we move,
As we enrich, growing in larger motion,
This word, this power. (pp. 71–72)

This power, yes, the unexplored power of pluralism, and the wonder of an expanding community.

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