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**Book Reviews**

Jennifer Balint, Editor

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*The Enigma of Diversity: The Language of Race and the Limits of Racial Justice.* By Ellen Berrey. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015.

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“With the realization that the salvation of racial equality has eluded us again, questions arise from the ashes of our expectations: How have we failed—and why?”

- Derrick Bell, *And We Are Not Saved: The Elusive Quest for Racial Justice*

In reading sociologist Ellen Berrey’s provocative and disquieting book, *The Enigma of Diversity: The Language of Race and the Limits of Racial Justice*, my mind kept returning to the above questions from Derrick Bell’s foundational Critical Race Theory (CRT) text (Bell 1987: 3). Professor Bell’s book was an allegorical exploration of the failure of society to fulfill the promise of full equality portended by the civil rights era. The title of Bell’s text derives from the bible verse, “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved (*Jeremiah 8:20*).” Like Jeremiah, Bell laments the harms of an empty harvest. Bell posed his despondent questions just as the civil rights era was succumbing to a period of retrenchment. Three decades after Bell posed his questions, Berrey’s research serves as a modern day response to those questions. In the post-civil rights era, diversity—a concept once promisingly advanced as a justification for and approach to integrating historically disenfranchised peoples—has often been treated as an imperfect but seemingly useful tool for achieving greater racial inclusion. Berrey’s thought-provoking and award-winning book, however, constructs a rich and unsettling account of diversity, one which significantly disrupts this conventional wisdom. Through the use of mixed methods that combine review of historical sources dating back as far as the 1950s with six years of fieldwork at multiple sites,

Berrey deftly demonstrates how contemporary definitions of diversity have resulted in civil rights-era claims for racial justice being replaced with despairing, tokenistic institutional practices that invest more in diversity as symbol than as a meaningful catalyst for creating greater inclusion.

The effectiveness of Berrey's manuscript emanates from her use of multiple ethnographic case studies to assess diversity's meaning across three distinct contexts. Through largely qualitative and interpretive means, she evaluates the meaning of diversity in three different contexts: the University of Michigan's admissions policies, activities in and around the redevelopment of the Rogers Park neighborhood of Chicago, and inside a human resources department at a large consumer products company in the U.S. Across these locations, Berrey thoughtfully maps a series of repeating moves that largely result in diversity being rendered a "presumptively positive (42)" but superficial buzzword, and that both produce and mask retreating commitments to racial justice. These moves include institutional pronouncements that initially appear to endorse racial progress, but that then quickly morph into more universal mechanisms for assessing difference, such as multiculturalism, economic status, and varying intellectual viewpoints. These moves also reveal definitions of diversity to be adaptable and, at times, ambiguously situated between race-conscious and post-racial understandings of inclusion. Ultimately, she demonstrates how organizations and institutions espousing diversity not only ignore structural disadvantages, but legitimate inequality through cultures that "enable and validate the unequal distribution of recognition, resources and rewards (49)."

I should say upfront that given the significant amount of data collected and reviewed at multiple sites over several years, what I summarize here should be understood as a mere snapshot of research that is extensive and compelling. Each of the sites where Berrey researches diversity reveals unique characteristics of the disjuncture between diversity as a claimed progressive commitment and diversity as tepid practice. In the case of the University of Michigan, Berrey mixes an analysis of policies and records dating back to the 1960s with recent interviews and cases which helped to define the U.S. Supreme Court's approach to diversity in higher education. In particular, she traces how diversity narratives shaped the university's use of affirmative action to admit students of color across a time frame that includes the *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978) decision—in which the U.S. Supreme Court first considers the diversity rationale as a compelling interest to justify the consideration of race in admissions—through two later University of Michigan cases argued before the Supreme Court in the early 2000s.

In *Gratz v. Bollinger* (2003), the U.S. Supreme Court found that the University of Michigan's undergraduate policy, which involved an impersonal and largely formulaic consideration of race in admissions decisions, violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. In *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003), by contrast, the Court reaffirmed the diversity rationale articulated in Justice Powell's opinion in *Bakke*. They did so based on the university's practice of using a highly individualized review for law school admissions, a process that considered race as one among a number of factors in the admissions calculus. In the lead up to *Gratz* and *Grutter*, Berrey points out the university had maintained that diversity, defined as a function of the educational benefits attained through viewpoint exchanges among persons of different races, was a core value. After the victory in *Grutter*, however, the university embraced diversity as a guiding principle in admissions, but "publically downplayed the topic of race or stopped mentioning it altogether, instead emphasizing viewpoints and geography in statements about diversity (113)." University claims, then, that academic excellence was consistent with racial inclusion were undermined by officials' efforts to disassociate diversity from race and historically entrenched racism. Berrey identifies the harm of this approach in her discussion of statewide political activities that followed the *Grutter* decision. Through a voter-approved ballot initiative that was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Schuette v. Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action* (2014), affirmative action was repealed in Michigan. Berrey astutely observes that in defining diversity in a more universal fashion, Michigan essentially "sanitize[d]" racial progress "by making it very difficult for political participants to credibly assert a civil rights argument for justice (102)."

In the Rogers Park case, Berrey reviewed twenty-five years of newspaper coverage and lived in the neighborhood for 2 years, attending the local meetings of the various constituencies. In her time there, she observed a concept of diversity that is constantly under construction, morphing with the shifting goals of the parties advancing it. Prior to redevelopment within the 2000s, racial diversity was part of the community identity of Rogers Park. Uneven gentrification challenged the neighborhood as the number of Black and Latino community members declined and the number of Whites increased. As developers, neighborhood activists, and politicians haggled over Rogers Park's future, invoking diversity became a tool to placate anyone who raised concerns over the changing demographics of the neighborhood. Each constituency, however, engaged in what Berrey terms the "symbolic politics of diversity (163)," appropriating the meaning of diversity "to drive out long term, low income, residents from prime real estate (191)." Replacing these residents with more desirable ones was achieved over

time by shifting references to diversity in housing from racial inclusion to socio-economic breadth. In this move, diversity is paired with colorblindness as a means of justifying a development plan that included no affordable housing. Berrey demonstrates how diversity can become an “e-racing” mechanism that results in the ideal Rogers Park resident becoming “a tolerant member of any background committed to an egalitarian civic community (166).”

At Starr Corp. (a pseudonym), a Fortune 500 company, Berrey spent nearly a year conducting thirty-one interviews with diversity management personnel and senior executives and reviewing forty-five years of annual reports for Starr and its parent company. From this data, we see both new and familiar moves around defining diversity. Starr, like the University of Michigan and the Rogers Park community, saw managing diversity as important to its reputation, with the company proclaiming on its website that diversity was one of its strengths. Berrey describes the push for diversity at Starr as “a managerial move to demonstrate concern for the representation of employees of color and female employees (196).” Berrey also notes, however, that diversity practices largely omitted nonexempt—unionized and typically lower level—workers and did not seek to uplift all exempt women and workers of color. In a move similar to the Rogers Park attempt to appeal to minorities who benefited from class privilege, Starr too sought to reward those “at the top of the class hierarchy (197).” Starr Corp., however, also engaged in some practices that were unique to its culture. For example, one gets the sense that diversity was part of an elaborate public relations campaign that proclaimed a commitment to multiple meanings of the term but narrowly focused programming to “a few minority groups (205).” Managing diversity so that the optics of the composition and treatment of its workforce reflected well on Starr was an essential part of its brand identity. It was an identity that overlooked Starr’s previous history of maintaining a nearly all white and male executive corps and the fact that it provided diversity management personnel few resources and little power. Importantly, diversity managers had no role in the most important aspect of the practice: “holding managers accountable for racial minority and female representation (222).” With her finding that there were no consequences for failing to meet diversity goals, Berrey again demonstrates diversity being used to describe initiatives that fail to focus on what one assumes would be at the heart of such programs—meaningful inclusion.

Berrey painstakingly uncovers the numerous and myriad decisions and practices that create space between an imagined world where a firmly defined understanding of diversity serves the ends of racial justice and the real world. While she finds that diversity can be subject to multiple definitions at varying locations, the work also identifies important commonalities in how diversity is used in her

three cases. First and foremost, diversity is a slippery concept without a fixed or accepted meaning. The flexibility of the concept, however, results in parties in all three case studies being able to unmoor the idea from this country's history of racial hierarchy and exclusion. Second, the term diversity is easily coopted. Without a hardened definition, politicians and others take advantage of shifting definitions to justify goals that leave full racial equality off the table as an end goal and may actually decrease inclusion. Third, Berrey repeatedly documents how organizations use class to mediate racial opportunity and how definitions of diversity summarily ignore members of some historically subordinated groups such as gays and lesbians.

This work is illuminating in the great detail it provides to how meaning-making is accomplished in these distinct localities. It also complements previous critical and sociolegal work that examines how despite societal efforts at greater racial inclusion, racial hierarchy remains instantiated. For example, Berrey's work serves as stark empirical proof a recent claim in legal scholarship that has criticized the diversity rationale from *Grutter* as "underserv[ing] the law's equality values by deferring to institutional constructions of diversity's benefits" and "failing to distinguish between exploitative and egalitarian objectives (Rich 2016: 1200-01)." As I mentioned above, Berrey's work also evokes themes of germinal CRT work. Berrey acknowledges this connection in her discussion of the Michigan case where she describes the applicability of Derrick Bell's theory of interest convergence—which posits that gains for racial minorities will only be achieved when they are accompanied by benefits to Whites (Bell 1980). Her work further illuminates findings from other important work at the intersection of race and social sciences. For example, in her explication of the ways in which diversity is defined through organizational practice, we see powerful examples of how racism and racial hierarchy are maintained without ostensible racists (Bonilla-Silva 2003). At bottom, Berrey's research, like the best work on race in the post-civil rights era, reveals the ways in which supposedly progressive commitments and seemingly innocuous organizational actions can operate to subvert greater racial inclusion.

While undeniably persuasive, Berrey's book left me with some questions. First, with the exception of the Starr Corp., where at least the diversity managers' awareness of the ineffectiveness of the programs should have created a feedback loop, it is not clear whether other actors who invested in shifting understandings of diversity were aware of the dangers of such practices. Second, I wondered whether these cases suggested opportunities for disrupting diversity's fluid meaning and organizational practice. Finally, I longed for more discussion of the organizational motives behind adopting a particular approach to diversity. In particular, there is little discussion of whether some organizational decision makers had greater

commitments to racial inclusion but settled for the watered-down approaches to diversity they believed to be the only politically feasible pathways to any form of inclusion. Having better insight on these motives and understandings would be helpful. Without them, one is left to believe that most decision makers were either duplicitous or incredibly naïve in their constructions of diversity. Only one of these conditions, however, forecloses hope. These questions, however, do not undermine the absolute excellence of the findings and analysis in *The Enigma of Diversity*. In a macro sense, Berrey has perhaps produced a quintessential exploration of the counterintuitive effects that may result when fluid ideological meanings combine with brittle organizational practice. More narrowly, her insightful observations across time, location, and context have uncovered how malleable, “feel good” definitions of diversity become the apparatus for frustrating opportunities for real racial progress. Once again, we are not saved.

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