

In traditional terms, Multicultural Studies can be defined as the interdisciplinary study of diversity, with a primary *but not exclusive* focus on ethnic minority groups and on the historical/social importance of culture and gender identity in America.

However, despite the fact that “gender” features prominently as part of the general definition, it appears that the jury is still out for many schools as to whether Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) issues belong under the rubric of “Multi-cultural Studies.”

This exclusion of a large and important wing of multicultural studies in many of our schools brings to mind a story told me by an old-guard socialist named Mirta who attended one of my lectures at Wellesley College in Massachusetts. In 1950, Mirta had joined forces with famous union organizer Clinton Jencks in a worker strike against Empire Zinc Company in New Mexico, and as a result, she was invited the following year to speak at an International Workers conference in Paris. On her arrival, she noticed activists from all over the globe armed with pamphlets advocating *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. She noticed a group of African congregants clustered around a table by the service entrance. She suddenly realized that there was not a single African sitting at her table or, in fact, at any other table except



Multicultural Studies, as we come in all colors and from all ethnic roots. But if *culture* is meant to define a group of people who share *particular and individual* cultural traits, both intrinsically and as a result of persecution by the society at large, then Queer not only belongs under the rubric of “multicultural,” it practically defines it.

For one, GLBT people are discriminated against across the board—from employment to government to social institutions—and as such, are grouped together as a cultural minority. According to a recent *Wall Street Journal* survey, 66 percent of chief executive officers of Fortune 500 companies are reluctant to promote GLBT employees to management-level positions. Except in some branches of the arts, where there is a robust presence of Queers, “Out” GLBT Americans are often relegated to the lowest and least responsible positions. It is well known among

all GLBTs that “coming out” (a term coined by Queer culture and now used by mainstream America for everything, even “out” chocolate ice cream lovers) in the workplace can be tantamount to career suicide; to survive means to deny your identity and try to “pass,” even if it means laughing at jokes about Queers in the company cafeteria.

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for the one by the service entrance. So she asked the obvious of one of the organizers: “Can you tell me why Africans are all sitting together by the service entrance? Is this meeting not about *all* people having the same rights?”

“African people have their own cause to shoulder,” he responded. “Besides, we need to be sensitive to some of our American guests not yet comfortable with integrated seating.”

Sound familiar? How often have we heard that Queers have their *own* issues to shoulder and that GLBT studies do not fit within a definition of “cultural,” and ergo should not be part of Multicultural Studies per se? How often have Queer studies people been asked to sit someplace else by the service door?

If we allege that *culture* means “race” or strict “ethnicity,” then, indeed, GLBT people do not fall under the rubric of

To date, only the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has legalized same-sex marriage in the United States. Some states have passed “separate but equal” ordinances that allow GLBTs some measure of legal protection in domestic unions, but not *the* measure of protection and recognition given to heterosexual unions, thereby creating a “second-class citizenship” for those of us identified as Queer.

What’s more, dozens of states have introduced ballots to ban same-sex marriage outright, and the Bush administration has advocated the introduction of a constitutional amendment barring same-sex marriage. This, incidentally, would be the first time in our history that a constitutional amendment would be passed for the explicit purpose of forbidding someone’s rights to liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The Nineteenth Amendment was passed to grant

women the vote. The Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments gave full citizenship to Blacks, and the 1965 Voting Rights Act reaffirmed that right and made it possible for African Americans to exercise their rights as citizens. Not since the ominous days of slavery, Jim Crow, the Chinese Exclusion Act, and the anti-immigration laws of the 1920s have we seen anything similar. Doesn't this put GLBT Americans squarely into a "social and cultural" class? And doesn't Multicultural Studies strive to teach about the history and plight of such discriminated and underrepresented minorities? In fact, GLBT is currently the only group whose equal rights and full recognition under the laws of our country are still considered debatable and up for grabs. At present, some anti-miscegenation laws may still be on the books in a couple of Red states, but there is no African American or Asian American who will be put in jail or be told that his/her marriage to a white person (of the "opposite" sex) is illegal.

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Yet those same-sex couples who married in San Francisco and in New York State some months ago were told just that. They learned that they could be thrown in jail if they attempted to claim the legality of their marriages, performed at City Hall. And in New York State, charges were filed against the ministers and public officials who conducted these marriages.

Another way we judge cultures and minorities when deciding whether to let them into the Multicultural Studies rubric is the amount of persecution they are liable to encounter from the society at large. While it is true that violence continues to be perpetrated against women, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos, it is also true that far and away the vast majority of victims per capita at the hands of modern-day lynch mobs are Queers.

According to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Safety and Fitness Exchange, the victimization of gays, lesbians, and transgender people includes harassment, vandalism, robbery, assault, rape, and murder. The location of these crimes is not restricted to dark streets leading from gay establishments. Violence against GLBT people occurs everywhere: in schools, in the workplace, in public places, and in the home. Those who commit these acts come from all social/economic backgrounds and represent different age groups. Anti-gay violence can help in-group members feel positive about their group and consequently about themselves as well. Regardless of the attackers' motives, victims almost always are chosen for *what* they are rather than *who* they are. This is why the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force considers anti-gay hate crimes a form of terrorism. The attack against a single GLBT individual is, in fact, an attack against the GLBT community as a whole. Nationwide, in

2005 there were 2,475 reported cases of anti-gay violence against GLBT people. As high as this number may seem per capita, most GLBT organizations consider these statistics conservative, as the majority of crimes go unreported, and many are mishandled by police or labeled something other than anti-gay.

Another aspect scholars look at when deciding which groups to include in Multicultural Studies is the cultural contributions the group makes to language, to science and the arts, and to our social identity as a whole. And here is where all bets are off. Because if, in fact, we look at the enormous contribution that Queers throughout history have made to the arts in particular, as well as to all other disciplines and fields of endeavor, then *our* contribution tips the scales.

Those who would want to exclude GLBT studies from what is defined as multicultural argue that such contributions were made by "people who *happened* to be gay," and

that theirs was not a gay contribution per se. This argument bears unmasking. Would those same people who claim Cole Porter's or Gertrude Stein's contributions not to be gay contributions but "contributions by people who *happen* to be gay" apply the same litmus test to Louis Armstrong or Ella Fitzgerald? Would they dare say that Armstrong's or Fitzgerald's contributions were not made by "Black people" but by "people who *happen* to be Black"?

So to the point of the enormous and defining contributions of Queers to American and world culture, I list just a few Queer notables on the web site <http://supernovas.org/indexqueer.htm> and leave you to ponder where they belong by paraphrasing Sojourner Truth's famous question: *And ain't these people Queer?* And do their contributions to history and civilization not deserve to be taught in Multicultural Studies courses that honor the very Queer culture that informed their identity and their lives? And one more thing: What would America and the world—and academia—be without them?

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