

Rinaldo Walcott “The End of Diversity”

Walcott’s Calls to Action

- A doing away with the idea of diversity in favor of new, transformative, structural changes that reimagine and remake what it means to be a human being.
- Not just remove whiteness from the top of the scale of humanity but disappearing the scale entirely and completely dismantling white supremacy.
- Not just rethinking post-Columbus enlightenment and postenlightenment ideals (Eurocentrism and hierarchy of races) but doing away with them and creating new ideals.

What Does Walcott mean by “whiteness”?

- Most obviously white people, relying on a phenotype.
- Structures (logics, ideas, and practices) that both perpetuate the superiority of white people over others and create a society that is built to confirm this.
- “A structure of feeling” in which white people share and benefit from societal advantages.
- Those who are not white are positioned as “aspirants” to it (“junior partners” in white superiority and supremacy).

Why Call for the End of Diversity? Diversity’s Logical End

- Something more radical is needed both to unmake whiteness and acknowledge that whiteness is what prevents nonwhite peoples from accessing power and belonging within Canadian structures.
- The language of diversity is linked to national state policies and major institutions which use diversity as a stand in for justice and inclusion.
- Diversity continues to be employed despite critiques of its usefulness, and its discreditation as a practice, idea, or process that can create meaningful change to combat a devastating history of race and racism.
- Still employed today even though it was replaced with the rhetoric of antiracism in the middle to late 1980s (when liberation movements called for shift from diversity and multiculturalism to antiracism and equity.).

Why is it Time to Call for the End of Diversity?

- There is a real reemergence of fascism, pro-colonizers, and white liberal resentment.
- Society has reached a crucial moment, and we have the choice to turn towards truth and ethics, or turn back towards our awful past.
- If society decides to move forward towards truth, we will have to acknowledge and come to terms with the lies that hold up our current society including the rhetoric of diversity.

What are these Lies?

- The set of ideas that have cut off the present-day individual from our previous terrible past:
 - We are told not to reference this past and connect it with current day racial inequality (called white innocence by many scholars, but Walcott considers white innocence among other cultural lies).
 - White people must continuously lie to themselves by telling themselves that the past is behind us and that human life is organized in such a way that everyone has the same access to the “good life” and that diversity is enough to grant this access.
- The lie that European enlightenment and postenlightenment ways of living are the only valid ways of life:
 - These European ways of being have been consistently argued against by Indigenous People, Black people, and other nonwhite minorities, yet this lie has never been fully abandoned.
- The lie of multiculturalism:
 - Employed post World War II.
 - The idea that Canada lives peacefully with racial and cultural difference and should be lauded for it.
 - Multiculturalism works to confirm the myth of the white founding of Canada without addressing the white supremacist logics required of dispossession and enslavement.
 - Multiculturalism reinforces the idea of Canada as a white nation and all non-white others as having “adjunct citizenry.”
 - Multiculturalism celebrates certain kinds of diversity as a replacement for collective representation.

Liberative Movements of the mid-1960s: Strengths and Limitations

- This was a time when movements worked to reconfigure life and created new languages for change.
- These movements (anticolonial, Indigenous, feminist, queer rights, civil rights, etc.) were limited in their imagination, since they are identities that were/are often in competition with each other.
- Walcott calls for a reimagination of ordering human life rather than attempting to expand on these politics.
- Walcott argues that these movements and the language of inclusion limit the ability to think of a new life.
- The languages of diversity and inclusion work to produce disposable populations and demonize some of the more radical calls for transformation.
- The 1960s movements were limited by the ties to late modern capitalist logics that prevented the ability to call value into question, therefore reifying the dominant values and only works within existing structures and is limited.
- While the benefits that they were able to obtain are not meaningless, they were limited in that they deepened a society that is deadly, rather than pushing for a complete dismantling and rebuilding of society.

Changing Ideas about Race and the Limitations of Current Processes

- Even after biological determinism (the idea that race exists in biology) was disproven, other logics came into place to advantage whiteness and rank races.
- This idea that race does not exist does not mean that racism does not (although white supremacists attempt to conflate the two).
- Even with a subinstitutions (human rights offices, diversity offices, etc.), accompanied by language like diversity (equity, color blindness, unconscious bias, etc.), meant to decenter whiteness and work to enact change, whiteness is often pacified and kept satisfied so that it does not feel under attack.
- Structural change cannot transform humanity simply through race relations.
- Policies of diversity calm white fears rather than actually transform the world.
- Even when attempting to overthrow whiteness, it is coddled in the process.

Unconscious Bias and its Limitations

- Unconscious bias looks at practices and behaviors without looking at addressing the arrangements of institutions "racism without racists."
- Refuses to acknowledge how practices and ways of being are being reproduced by institutions
- Unconscious bias tries not to blame anyone for perpetuating these practices that advantage some and disadvantage others.
- Keeps whiteness in place as the authority.
- Limits empathy purely to how an excluded person might feel without connecting it to meaningful change.
- White people are both the face and the beneficiaries of white supremacy.
- By not acknowledging the way white people perpetuate racism, to not offend, we have focused simply on the structures of racism and missing how these structures actually work.
- White people must be implicated and must understand their place in these structures.

Importance of Implicating Whiteness

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Canada and North America in Crisis

- The way that society and institutions are organized are in crisis everywhere.
- In Canada and North America, the crisis is exhibited in different ways:
 - Who belongs and who counts as Canadian.
 - How both public and private institutions are organized, represent our collective interests, and fulfill those interests.
- Canada is a settler colonial state, derived from Europeanness (whiteness), and understands itself to be fundamentally a white nation-state.
 - To hold these ideas together, they must be replicated, reinforced and held up by the state.
 - Canada as a settler colonial state is reinforced through genocidal practices directed towards Indigenous Peoples, and the continued practice of excluding Black people through subordinative practices and criminality.
- Canada seeks to maintain institutions and colonial conditions while appropriating ideas like diversity, equity, decolonization, and indigenization to appear that work is being done without taking on the real work of addressing systemic arrangements of whiteness.
 - The appropriation of the language of diversity leaves institutions that are not built for all and white supremacy intact.

The Example of Trudeau's Cabinet

- In November of 2015, PM Justin Trudeau announced what was lauded as the most diverse Canadian cabinet ever.
- Sparked a debate about what constitutes diversity and pointed to the limits of gender parity (while the cabinet had gender parity, there were no Black MPs).
- In this way, diversity was employed to obscure who was being included, and Black representation was excluded completely.

Importance of Rejecting Individualism as We Move Forward

- Individual success is treated as collective success.
- Singular inclusion rather than collective inclusion.
- Reserved for those closest to whiteness (and white supremacist logics) making Black people excluded.
- Individuals being invited to enter institutions (universities, media, etc.) under the guise of diversity shows how inclusion is performative and has links to Black slave life as these Black individuals who are being included are tasked with carrying the weight of diversity.

Walcott's Conclusion and Next Steps

- Society must always imagine new ways of being, forever and always!
- Looks forward to a decolonial future, with structural change and a transformation of how human beings understand and relate to one another.
- Sees white people as capable of transformation and with a central role to play to refuse the structure of whiteness due to its fundamental lacking.
- Not reducing equality in society and its structures merely to numbers.
- The forms of knowledge that are being produced and engaged with should lead to other ways of being in the world.
- Black freedom is in direct opposition to capitalism, especially since Black bodies were treated both as a commodity and as labor.
- Indigenous calls for a different world give the potential for Black people to be accorded full personhood.
- Need to move beyond capitalist modernity and look for new possibilities for life.
- Diversity is not enough to get us there.
- Need a new language in this decolonial future, since existing language is already tainted and linked to flawed practices which leave Black people on the lowest rung of society's ladder.
- White people must risk themselves for a true wholistic change and trust that what they did to People of Colour will not be done to them.

Works Cited

Walcott, Rinaldo. "The End of Diversity." *Public Culture*, vol. 31, no. 2, May 2019, pp. 393–408, <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-7286885>.