



The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race & Ethnicity
433 Mendenhall Laboratory
125 South Oval Mall
Columbus, OH 43210
www.kirwaninstitute.org

Written in summer 2004

Title: Brief comments on Diversity: Means vis-à-vis Ends

by Hiram José Irizarry Osorio

What should be done to support diversity? Attempting to respond to this question after Melanie and Denis, gives me the privilege of departing from their thoughts on this matter. Thus, I am going to try to incorporate their responses within my own with the hope of broadening our debate around “diversity.”

I think that Melanie’s response cautions us in taking for granted the meaning and/or the usefulness of “diversity.” While Denis puts forth its purpose, “supporting diversity is a question of equality, equity and structural advantage.” Melanie underscored “diversity’s” purpose, paraphrasing her, as an issue of ‘empowerment.’ It is an issue of paying attention to the power structures within which we are embedded.

I do not see Melanie and Denis’ perspectives in conflict because both are stating the need to look beyond the issue of diversity for diversity’s sake. Thus, my take on this issue is that an important departing point in any discussion should be to be clear on what we mean by diversity; followed by why it is important; and finally what we can do to further that cause, which is not diversity and we need to make this clear. Diversity is a strategy to achieve something else and that something else is the elimination of barriers, injustices, hierarchies that have been cemented through time, which have pernicious effects on the abilities of specific members in our society.

These statements are for our discussion and not to depart from the premise that the Columbus Urban League has not thought about this issue, but I think that it is an essential departing point. Furthermore, as Denis underscored, this strategy of promoting diversity has representative implications. The idea of diversity is for trying to mirror and represent the distinct members of the society within which an organization is embedded; thus, in a way attempt to debunk past injustices and exclusions.

These comments are general and will need to be adjusted to specific cases that we cannot anticipate. Nevertheless, the question presented by the Columbus Urban League was a general one to be able to have a message to disseminate for a broad audience. Hence, from my perspective that message should be one of underscoring “diversity” as a means to an end and not an end in and of itself. That end is the eradication of exclusion, discriminations, or in a more positive perspective, expansion of opportunities to all members of society for liberation, freedom purposes. The importance of this strategy

labeled “diversity” lies on the last comments of opportunities, inclusion with further possible instrumentalities like economic growth, societal peace and understanding...Finally, what could be done for supporting all this besides underscoring the stated message? Inviting and encouraging organizations to understand the communities within which they are embedded to better prepared themselves to adapt to those realities and design strategies to surpass those encountered inequities. Furthermore, we need to underscore the importance of building partnerships with other organizations because the work that this entails is humanity’s work and not the work of one sole organization.