

# Challenges of *E Pluribus Unum*: Ethnic and Racial Diversity and Public Policy

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. . . *America is God's Crucible, the great Melting Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and reforming! Here you stand, good folk, I, when I see them at Ellis Island, here you stand in your fifty groups with your fifty languages and histories, and your fifty blood hatreds and rivalries, but you won't be long like that brothers, for these are the fires of God you've come to – these are the fires of God. A fig for your feuds and vendettas! German and Frenchman, Irishman, Jews and Russians – into the Crucible with you all! God is making the American.*

- *The Melting Pot* by Israel Zangwill as cited in Glazer & Moynihan, 1963, p. 289.

*The dream of America as the great melting pot has not been realized for the Negro; because of his skin color he never even made it into the pot.*

- On the ruling on *University of California Regents v. Bakke*, US Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, 1978.

*E pluribus unum*. Out of many, one. Since its inception, the United States has always been a nation made up of different ethnicities and nationalities. But there are many ways to create “one.” The social histories of various ethnic groups suggest that the dominant approach to accommodating diverse populations was a combination of assimilation and exclusion. Assimilation is perhaps most represented by the idea of “melting pot.” First being made famous by Israel Zangwill’s 1908 play, “melting pot” became a potent metaphor for managing differences. Individuals of different cultural, ethnic, and national backgrounds leave their pasts behind as they jump into a crucible called “America” and come out as “American.” The reality did not quite follow the play, however. Groups maintained their traditions, languages, and identities (Glazer & Moynihan, 1963). Some groups were forced to melt more than others. More importantly, not everyone had access to the pot as Justice Marshall remarked, and federal policies and laws made sure that the access was kept out of

reach of unwanted groups. To name some, Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Gentleman’s Agreement of 1907, California Alien Land Law of 1913, the Supreme Court rulings on *Ozawa v. United States* (1922) and *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923), Immigration Act of 1924, and internment of Japanese Americans without due process during World War II all served to keep undesirable groups from reaching the pot.

The latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought drastic changes to legal and policy discourses about diversity. Racial and ethnic minorities gained political voices and challenged the national leaders to abandon the assimilationist and overtly racist approaches to diversity. *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) declared the unconstitutionality of racially segregated public schools. The passage of Civil Rights Act of 1964 meant desegregation and equal rights in voting, service in public facilities, government funding, employment, and all significant aspects of public life. Affirmative action, a poster child policy of the civil rights movement, first appeared in President John F. Kennedy’s Executive Order 10925 of 1961. To correct for a lack of opportunities and representations in public institutions resulting from past discriminations, Kennedy obliged government contractors to take affirmative action to ensure equal opportunities and equal employment regardless of national origin, race, or religion. President Lyndon Johnson’s Executive Order 11246 (1965) further solidified equal employment opportunity as a federal policy. Three decades later, several states – California (1996), Washington (1998), Michigan (2006), and most recently Nebraska (2008) – determined that affirmative action is no longer necessary.

On the immigration front, the Immigration Reform Acts in 1965 replaced the national origin quota set by the Immigration Act of 1924 and opened the door to an unprecedented and unanticipated flow of previously excluded immigrants from Asia and Latin America (Hirschman, 2001; Kim, 2004). In

1960, Europeans made up 80% of total immigrants, but in Census 2000, immigrants from Latin America made up a half of all immigrants (King, 2005). Latinos surpassed African Americans in 2003 to constitute the largest racial minority in the United States. The geographical settlement patterns changed over the years, too. In the past, immigrants and refugees tended to settle in large cities such as Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York, but this is no longer the case today. Many medium and small size cities became the settlement destinations for refugees, and migrants are found in all states, creating opportunities for interracial, interethnic, and intercultural interactions.

All these changes in civil rights and immigration appear to indicate that we have reached a point where race and ethnicity are obsolete in public policies. However, evidence suggests otherwise. Elimination of affirmative action, for example, has drastically reduced the opportunities and representations of African American and Latino students in elite universities and law schools (Barrios, 2006; Chambers et al., 2005; Espenshade & Chung, 2005). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 established a federal policy that holds schools and districts accountable for test-based achievement. Studies show that this test-driven accountability has increased drop-out and push-out rates of lower achieving students rather than motivating schools to help them succeed (Orfield, 2004). California's Proposition 227, in combination with NCLB, has been found to further marginalize English language learners by forcing them to take tests without adequate language proficiency (Gándara & Baca, 2008; Wright & Li, 2008). These examples suggest that race and ethnicity are very much relevant to public policies today. Moreover, just because people of diverse races and ethnicities live and work in close proximity, it does not mean that they engage in meaningful interactions nor does it mean inequalities based on race and ethnicity have been eliminated. In this paper, I problematize current praxes of policy-driven diversity initiatives and dominant discourses of racial and ethnic diversity and suggest some ways by which Communication Studies can contribute to more inclusive, social justice-based policy processes.

### **Policies on Difference that Do Not Make Difference**

Since the publication of *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam's theory of social capital has been influential in policy initiatives in the United States and abroad. He theorized that, as voluntary associations increase, people develop a norm of reciprocity and trust,

eventually creating a cohesive community. In his recent work, Putnam (2007) reported that ethnic diversity negatively affects social solidarity and social capital in a short/medium run, because U.S. Americans are uncomfortable with diversity, but that, in the long run, diversity is desirable and will produce a new kind of solidarity. He concluded that "the central challenge for modern, diversifying societies is to create a new, broader sense of 'we'" (p. 139). According to Putnam, this goal is achieved by "bridging" social capital where associations are formed across diverse populations (as opposed to "bonding" social capital that occurs between people of similar backgrounds). Eventually, people transcend differences and come together to form a trusting, unified community.

Putnam, however, does not suggest any concrete way to realize this goal. So, the question remains. If diversity is the reality whether U.S. Americans are comfortable with it or not, how can social capital be built across diverse populations? What are the obstacles to building cohesion? What policies are likely to help here? Some may say that, since groups are still segregated, more integration is necessary so that members of diverse groups interact and get to know each other better toward improved intergroup relations. This logic, originally based on the contact theory (Allport, 1956), served as an impetus for most integration efforts. However, just because people are brought into a close proximity, it does not mean that they interact with each other, let alone form positive relationships. Using an example from England, Robinson (2005) discussed the difficulty of actualizing this theory. In England, a community cohesion agenda emerged after the street disturbances in three cities in 2001. The government identified housing as a key theme in the agenda; they diagnosed that residential segregation as to blame for different populations living, working, and socializing separately. The community cohesion policy was developed to intervene in the problematic housing patterns. By promoting residential integration, more interactions between previously segregated groups occur, which, in turn, leads to increased understanding, tolerance, and harmony between the groups. Even in integration, however, there was little interaction between people of different social backgrounds. Moreover, Robinson noted that the frequent contact could engender animosities between groups. This example showed the difficulty of creating a truly integrated community based on a top-down policy; collaborative local structure and communication network must be created so the integration does produce more understanding and appreciation.

In addition to top-down, artificial integration, integration is problematic when it is used synonymously with assimilation. Grillo (2007) told a story that vividly illustrates this point. In 2005, the UK government launched an initiative called *Improving opportunity, strengthening society* at a conference attended by some 500 delegates. During a panel of distinguished leaders, an audience member asked a question about integration. He wanted to know, as a Muslim, what he should do to show that he had integrated. The panel responded that he should be proud of being both British and Muslim, but this did not satisfy this man:

I would like to know how I can prove that I'm a Muslim and I have integrated into society. Look at me, I wear British clothes. I speak broken English but, still, I speak English and I have got a beard. That gives away my identity. Some people would recognise who I am. Now, people ask me "Why don't you integrate?" and I say, "How do you mean?" I go to schools, give talks about how to deal with racist incidents and very often the teachers ask me, "Why don't Muslims integrate?" I say, "What do you mean?" I pay tax. I obey the law of the land. (cited in Grillo, 2007, p. 983)

Grillo shared this episode to demonstrate the fuzziness of the word, "integration." The episode, however, illuminates more than that; it reveals the public's assimilationist expectation that, if people want to be considered citizens (in this case English), they must shed anything that suggest otherwise (such as broken English and beard). Unless the expectation is changed, those who embody differences, like the man in the above example, will be always constructed as the other. A lesson from the above two examples from England is that, for a genuine integration to occur, policy should not be simply designed to bring groups together artificially; efforts need to be made to make it a participatory, collaborative process through which plurality is embraced and assimilation is challenged.

In this collaborative process, addressing the issue of power and structural limitations is critical but is often missing. The difficulty of (or rather reluctance to) addressing structural problems can be seen in an example of one southern city. In 2004-2006, Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation Project (GTCRP) took place in Greensboro, North Carolina, through grassroots effort to establish healing relations between the opposing parties in a 1979 shooting that resulted from conflicts over racial and socioeconomic inequalities.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the GTCRP, city leaders refused to acknowledge the city's participation in the tragedy, despite the fatal role that its police force played in the shooting. They concluded that the 1979 shooting was a conflict between two extreme groups that are outsiders to the city and saw the GTCRP as unnecessary and detrimental to the city's progress. The Commission made policy and initiative recommendations for institutional changes and requested the city council to consider the recommendations, but the city council voted down the request.

While the city leaders were reluctant to engage the GTCRP, they were willing to promote interracial dialogue on a personal sphere. Then mayor Keith Holliday launched an interracial dialogue program called Mosaic Partnerships in September, 2004 – around the same time the GTCRP began. Mosaic Partnership was "designed to increase communication, trust, and cooperation among the city's racial and ethnic groups."<sup>2</sup> The program was a response to a nationwide social capital survey that found Greensboro low on interracial trust. Over the course of one year, 144 participants from different races met in pairs as well as in small groups.<sup>3</sup> Following Robert Putnam's theory, it was believed that, as individuals get to know each other, they develop personal relationships that allow them to improve communication, trust, and cooperation across racial lines. The personalized approach of the project framed interracial (dis)trust as an individual matter that can be solved through personal relationships without examining the role of institutions. While on a personal level, the project might have been "rich and rewarding" as one participant commented (Johnson, 2006), no community wide benefit to interracial relationships has resulted from this project. The city's contrasting approaches to the two projects reveals the continuing presence of progressive mystique (Chafe, 1981) in which the city presents itself as racially progressive while disengaging itself from unresolved social injustice that remains at the core of interracial distrust. Policies and initiatives that promote diversity without addressing structural inequalities are easier but are not likely to be transformative.

But even when dialogue is designed to address racial inequalities, policy-driven dialogue is difficult. During his presidency, Bill Clinton launched Initiative on Race, which he called "a great and unprecedented conversation about race." The initiative aimed to address complex issues related to racial oppressions experienced by people of color, the growing racial and ethnic diversity, and possible role

of federal policy in reforming the existing problems. According to one analyst, the initiative accomplished several things, including research, dialogue, and action (Goering, 2001). The initiative did not result in policy but produced some research findings useful for engaging Americans toward reconciliation. About 18,000 people participated in 1,400 conversations about race over a period of one year. The conversations resulted in a publication called "One America Dialogue Guide" in spring 1998. The guide included suggestions for racial dialogue, which Department of Justice still uses for assisting communities. According to Goering (2001), through research and dialogue, the Initiative helped to expose the depth of racial and socioeconomic gaps in the U.S. society and the need for long-term federal and local programs to narrow the gaps. Nonetheless, it failed to achieve its overarching goal of articulating a vision of racial reconciliation. Goering concluded that "[t]he American people, in late 1990s, were unready and unprepared for serious racial dialogue, reconciliation, or for major new Federal policies that would meaningfully transform the racial status quo" (p. 481). Other more pessimistic critics observed that the failure of Clinton's Initiative is no surprise because no initiative or commission in the past was able to significantly transform the racist structure that is deeply etched into the dominant culture (Reed, 2000).

### **Dominant Discourse of Racial and Ethnic Diversity**

If people are unready for genuine integration, serious racial dialogue, or transformative policies, the larger discursive context in which people are located must be examined. Consciousness and attitudes do not arise in vacuum but are formed and informed by dominant narratives. In this section, I discuss ideologies of celebration, race-neutrality, and civility as contributors to the narrative of racial and ethnic diversity in today's U.S. society. First, racial and ethnic diversity is acknowledged as cultural differences to be celebrated. For example, listen to Berkowitz's (2008), a mother and feeding interventionist, living in New York City:

I sat with my teenage son and daughter as we enjoyed a Pakistani meal in New York City. When I commented on the stainless-steel dinnerware, they looked at me quizzically. "It's common in South Asian cultures to use stainless steel drinking cups," my daughter said. To her, this was a piece of knowledge acquired at an early age, and as natural as knowing that apples come from trees. "Some of my Korean and Chinese friends use coffee mugs for hot and

cold drinks at home. They don't make a distinction," added my son. . . . Here our cultures bump up against each other every day. Imagine my chagrin when I advised a mother that perhaps it was time to discontinue breast feeding, only to be interrupted by the co-treating gastroenterologist who informed me that mothers from this ethnic group are under a religious obligation to nurse their babies until 2 years of age. I had just told a mom to go against her upbringing. As I back-pedaled red-faced, I realized that this multicultural adventure never ends – there are always new people to meet, whose experiences and habits and mores are different from mine. (p. 55)

Her description of multicultural experience represents a prevailing way in which racial and ethnic diversity is understood and accepted in the United States; affirming diversity is about celebrating differences. This discourse is everywhere. Most of the racial minority groups, for example, are given designated heritage and history months when their historical contributions are noted and their cultural heritages embraced. Businesses, educational institutions, and communities often include in their promotional materials statements of support for racial and ethnic diversity. University homepages typically use photos of students from every major racial group regardless of how these groups are indeed represented statistically and substantially. In the business world, "diversity training" (or "sensitivity training") is given to employees so they become aware of differences and avoid offending others.

Celebration of diversity often appears in remarks by nation's leaders as well. This is, for example, exemplified by Bill Clinton, whom Toni Morrison, called "first black president." In his commencement speech at the University of California at San Diego in 1997, Clinton noted that America is special because it has people from all over the world. He further demonstrated his affirmation of diversity by personalizing its value:

I am a Scotch-Irish Southern Baptist, and I'm proud of it. But my life has been immeasurably enriched by the power of the Torah, the beauty of the Koran, the piercing wisdom of the religions of East and South Asia – all embraced by my fellow Americans. I have felt indescribable joy and peace in black and Pentecostal churches. I have come to love the intensity and selflessness of my Hispanic fellow Americans toward *la familia*. As a Southerner, I grew up on country music and county fairs and I

still like them (Laughter). But I have also reveled in the festivals and the food, the music and the art and the culture of Native Americans and Americans from every region in the world.<sup>4</sup>

The presence of diverse groups is not just personal but great for the nation. In his speech at the NAACP national convention a month after the commencement speech, Clinton remarked that the presence of diverse groups gives America a competitive edge in the world economy (Kim, 2003).

This celebratory tone continued into the next presidency despite the two presidents' contrasting politics. While he opposed affirmative action, George W. Bush emphasized that he was not anti-diversity. In discussing the University of Michigan Affirmative Action Case, for example, one of his first remarks was that "I strongly support diversity of all kinds, including racial diversity in higher education."<sup>5</sup> In this short, 7-minute speech, he repeated his support for diversity several times while at the same time expressing his intention to intervene in the Supreme Court decision process on the university's admission policy. Bush has expressed his support for diversity in numerous other occasions. In his 2002 speech on Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, he opened his remarks by noting that "I'm so proud to be the President of a diverse nation, a nation with 13 million Americans of Asian or Pacific Island heritage. What a great country, to welcome such diversity."<sup>6</sup> Similar remarks are repeated in his other heritage month speeches dedicated to Latinos and Native Americans.

There is of course nothing wrong with celebrating cultural differences in food, customs and traditions and acknowledging the fact that U.S. Americans have different cultural heritages. These are important practices of affirming multiculturalism of the nation and its citizens. The presidents' remarks must be celebratory, because these events are after all designed to celebrate the contributions of various racial groups. However, the celebration discourse becomes a problem if that is all there is to the understanding of diversity, which often is the case in the widely embraced version of multiculturalism. If diversity is to be affirmed, the struggles and challenges that diverse groups face due to structural inequalities must be also acknowledged. When this acknowledgement is lacking, celebration becomes no more than a self-serving practice for the dominant group. In a groundbreaking film, *Color of Fear* (1995), one of the white males, David, frustrates participants of color and the other white male participant by being excited about race talk but refusing to acknowledge institutionalized racism that

people of color face. For him, "the world is wide open" and it is the racial minorities themselves who place limitations to their possibilities. A more recent film, *What's Race Got to Do With It?* (2006), also illuminates the problematic of the reluctance to face the issue of structural inequality. In this film, students at University California, Berkeley engaged in a semester-long interracial dialogue. In one session, Latino students shared their struggles with identity and discrimination. At one point in the session, Mark (a white male) comments that the stories shared are only about the harsh experiences of being Latino in America and that he was disappointed because the rich culture of Latino lives were not shared. Latina student, Myra, responds that that's because "social justice is what's important for brown people." In a later interview, Myra elaborates this response: "I think celebrating cultures and social justice are very different things. Yeah, I can tell you what I eat and what's my family's like. I don't think that helps with social justice. . . . The class isn't about what I eat. The class is about how my life is." Both films illustrate that race talks that only celebrate diversity without addressing social justice is not likely transformative.

It is not only the celebratory tone that characterizes the dominant discourse of ethnic and racial diversity; it is complemented by another ideology – race-neutrality or colorblindness advocated by many influential conservatives like Dinesh D'Souza who served as a policy advisor for the Regan Administration. In his numerous publications, D'Souza has repeatedly argued that public policy must be strictly colorblind so the government maintains its fairness. Race-neutrality was perhaps most clearly expressed by President Bush in his two remarks on the University of Michigan affirmative action case. In the first statement made in January, 2003, he called the university's admission policy divisive, unfair, and unconstitutional and called for a race-neutral approach.<sup>7</sup> In the second brief statement in June, 2003, he expressed his satisfaction with the Court ruling that supported the law school admission policy but ruled against the undergraduate admission policy that used a point system. The Court decision meant that "colleges and universities must engage in a serious, good faith consideration of workable race-neutral alternatives. I agree that we must look first to these race-neutral approaches to make campuses more welcoming for all students."<sup>8</sup>

But how can racial and ethnic differences be recognized and celebrated while at the same time being muted? The dominant discourse of diversity

appears contradictory. Oregon attorney Elisa Dozono (2008) commented recently in a weekly newspaper, *Asian Reporter*, that, “diversity” became a buzz word and yet “diversity initiatives” have not achieved the same status. If diversity is something to be embraced, why are initiatives and policies discouraged? According to Angela Davis (1996), this is because the words, “diversity” and “difference” depoliticize race and lets institutions off the hook of responsibility for racial justice:

“Difference” and “diversity” are descriptive: people are different; cultures are diverse. In this context, we must be aware of the fact that multiculturalism can easily become a way to guarantee that these differences and diversities are retained superficially while becoming homogenized and harmonized politically. (p. 45)

Political scientist Clair Jean Kim (2004) echoes Davis. Multiculturalism can theoretically disrupt the “triumphalist” narratives that represent America as a uniquely great nation that overcame past obstacles and is marching toward greater justice, freedom, and equality. However, what Kim calls “official multiculturalism” relegates racial and ethnic differences to private sphere where racial and ethnic heritages are inspirations for individuals, while it adheres to colorblind laws and policies so difference supposedly does not make a difference in public sphere (Kim, 2004). Framed as anti-discriminatory and fair, colorblindness rhetorically serves as a powerful “American” principle that not only opponents of affirmative action stand by but all Americans should embrace.

The dominant discourse of diversity is also often characterized by the idea of civility. In his speech at National Prayer Breakfast in February 2001, President Bush defined civility as “essential to democracy” because “it teaches us not merely to tolerate one another, but to respect one another – to show a regard for different views and the courtesies.”<sup>9</sup> Civility may indeed help to establish a safe climate for the expressions of diverse points of view and prevent people from becoming antagonistic, but it can also discourage honest engagement of racial and ethnic diversity. In her study of community building dialogue project, Simpson (2008) provides accounts of the detrimental role civility can play in dialogue. People of color participants in her study expressed that, at a young age, they were taught to avoid saying things that would make the people in the dominant group uncomfortable. In this case, Simpson observed, civility functions not as an interactional norm that

ensures equal participation but as a tool for further silencing the marginalize voices. Though Simpson presents civility as a form of whiteness (thus a benefit for whites), civility can also hurt whites. As Beverly Tatum (1997), psychologist and now president of Spellman College, powerfully argued, whites, too, are afraid of engaging in interracial dialogue due to fear of being inadequate, uninformed about the reality of racism (though this is a result of white privilege), and possibly offending people of color.

Civility can negatively affect community building. In his brilliant analysis into the city of Greensboro, historian William Chafe (1981) explained that the gap between the city’s progressive appearance and actual progress in race relations exists because of “progressive mystique.” This myth reflects the belief among the progressive whites that “conflict is inherently bad, that disagreement means personal dislike, and that consensus offers the only way to preserve a genteel and civilized way of life” (Chafe, 1981, p. 7). According to Chafe, Greensboro is not unique on this point; it mirrored the working of the progressive myth that pervaded the country. As discussed in the earlier section, this myth continues to live today and manifests itself in the way the city (and the nation as a whole) tries to promote interracial dialogue without challenging the structure itself that keeps the racial divisions intact.

Thus far, I discussed that the dominant discourse of racial and ethnic diversity is characterized by celebration, colorblindness, and civility. None of these characteristics is of course inherently problematic. As Berkowitz, the mother living in New York City, said, people come from all walks of life, and our learning should never ends when our communities are increasingly becoming heterogeneous. We should be accepting and celebrating our rich differences. Colorblindness, too, is a noble concept; it was, after all, Martin Luther King, Jr. who famously declared that we should be judging each other based on the content of character and not by the skin color. But in society where power is still unevenly distributed across racial lines, being celebratory, colorblind, and civil is not likely to bring racially and ethnically diverse populations together. Celebration and civility must occur along with critical examination of and challenge to structural flaws that marginalize some groups and privilege others. Only when such flaws are eliminated, will colorblindness be possible.

## **Contributions of Communication Studies to the Promotion of Inclusive Diversity Policy Process**

Many examples discussed in this paper seem to only point to the difficulty, if not impossibility, of public policies and initiatives in creating communities that affirm racial and ethnic diversity. However, this difficulty is even more a reason that existing policies must be scrutinized and better policies must be developed. Transformative policy must be based on what McLaren (1994) called “resistance multiculturalism” where diversity is “affirmed within the politics of cultural criticism and a commitment to social justice” and where differences are recognized as “a product of history, culture, power, and ideology” (p. 53). There are number of ways in which communication scholarship can contribute toward this end.

First, communication scholars can demonstrate the value of more participatory policy process. Most of the policy initiatives and government-led projects on ethnic and racial diversity are developed without significant input from the people who are affected by the very initiatives and projects. As Cheong et al. (2007) argued, policy initiatives too often are based on the belief that community cohesion is possible by applying the majority agenda to the minority groups. However, a top-down, exclusive policy development and implementation is unlikely to produce transformative effects (Goering, 2001) nor does it create ownership of the policy. Worse yet, it can reinforce the very problem that the policy aims to alleviate. Participatory policy process is critical in creating ownership, particularly among those who are excluded from social citizenship (Vertovec, 1999). Working from social constructionism, communication scholarships recognize the constructive and creative nature of communication; it is through communication that reality is created, negotiated, and transformed. If we take this simple yet powerful idea seriously, it should be also apparent that participation is imperative. Participation, as Jürgen Habermas (1990) made it quite clear, means that people who are affected by the policy are given opportunities to be seriously heard and are required to listen to each other for a common good. Here, Habermas’s claims about dialogue situation must be understood as principles for regulating participatory policy process, and not as unattainable ideals. While people enter into conversations with differential power statuses, the inclusive participatory process serves as a very tool for challenging the unequal power dynamics and institutional praxes that shape the reality that policy aims to transform.

Second, communication scholars can study and demonstrate critical roles that language and other symbolic representations play in the creation, practice, and outcomes of public policy. There are many communicative practices that need critical analyses. For example, as shown in this paper, examining the ways in which ethnic and racial diversity is discourses is important because they frame how such diversity is engaged. Another area is racial and ethnic labels. Take Census 2000, for example. This Census is widely understood as a drastic improvement from the previous ones by allowing individuals multiracial responses. However, it was also problematic. One apparent problem was the conflation of the terms race and ethnicity; race is used to generate categories that are based on ethnicity or country of origin. These categories are artificial constructions created to lump together a divergent set of individuals, and yet they have substantial significance in policy and administrative practice (Yanow, 2003).

Communication research can also scrutinize the language that is adopted in the policy-making process. A compelling example comes from Houston, Texas. In 1997, opponents of affirmative action wrote Proposition A based on the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The proposition stated whether the city “shall not discriminate against or grant preferential treatment” to anyone “on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin.”<sup>10</sup> But the mayor of the city, Bob Lanier – a proponent of affirmative action – revised the wording to ask the voters if the city should “end the use of affirmative action for women and minorities” in employment and contracting, “including ending the current program and any similar programs in the future.” The joint poll conducted by the University of Houston and Rice University showed that the proposition would likely pass with 70% majority with the original wording, while only 47.5% of the voters would support it with the revised one. The election result, which favored the continuation of affirmative action, was later nullified because of the change in the wording (Tummala, 1999). Nonetheless, this example clearly shows that wording determines the passage of initiative. Communication research can show how symbolic representations can have profound material consequences and advocate more voter education and transparency in the whole process of initiatives.

Third, another important communication research program may center on the relationship between policy-making and media. After all, we live in a media saturated culture where our reality is almost always a mediated construction. How we understand various policies on immigration,

employment, education, welfare, and so forth cannot be divorced from how these policies are portrayed and debated in the media. Schwartz-DuPre (2007) provides interesting and timely insights into the relationship between media and policy. In her analysis of *National Geographic's* 2002 film, *The search for the Afghan girl*, Schwartz-DuPre shows how the film's use of biometric technology rhetorically positions the audience as a consenting public. In the film, biometric technology was used to identify an Afghan woman who was the cover of *National Geographic* 15 years ago, while at the same time Congress and the Department of Homeland Security were writing the technology into policy. By using a short segment of video footage from the events of 9/11, the film encourages the audience to see the identification technology as useful and necessary in hunting terrorists; if it can confirm the identity of the Afghan girl from 15 years ago, it is surely helpful in finding terrorists. The issue is not really about whether biometric is good or bad but is about media's ability to reposition the audience who rejected the idea of a biometric-based national ID card as a violation of civil rights and privacy not too long ago. Communication research can illuminate significant ways by which our understanding is shaped by major media and suggest how we may become critical consumers of mediated knowledge.

### **Conclusion: Future for *e pluribus unum***

Now I come back to the idea with which I began this essay. *E pluribus unum*. Out of many, one. Some 220 years after the motto's birth, the nation still struggles to create oneness across differences. On March 28, 2008, then U.S. senator, Barack Obama gave a speech entitled, "A More Perfect Union," in response to the national controversy over the remarks made by his former pastor, Reverend Jeremiah Wright. Throughout his speech, Obama promoted *e pluribus unum* as a fundamental national character for which the United States must continue to strive. In fact, throughout his campaign, he called for unity based on recognizing commonalities across differences. Whether his vision of unity will be realized is yet to be seen. One thing is clear, however; unity cannot be created at the expense of ignoring unequal differences. Toward the unity, policies that affirm racial and ethnic diversity are necessary as long as structural inequalities exist between racial and ethnic groups. Such policies must not unwittingly support the ideologies of assimilationism, color-blindness, uncritical civility, superficial integration, or dialogue inattentive to larger structural contexts. For the policies to be transformative, the ideologies must be challenged and

inclusive policy development and implementation must be sought. Inclusive of those who are affected by the policy, and inclusive of structural changes. Inclusive policy process is extremely difficult, but the process in itself represents a necessary path toward *e pluribus unum*, and communication plays a fundamental role in this path both as a scholarship that question the existing policy praxes and as a critical tool for inclusiveness.

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> On November 3, 1979, white supremacists killed five demonstrators who were part of the "Death to the Klan" rally. The shooters, some of whom were filmed by news cameras as they fired into the crowd, claimed self-defense and were acquitted of all charges by all white-juries. The police was informed about the rally as well as the Klan's intention to confront the demonstrators with physical violence but failed to provide protection. See Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation Commission ([www.greensborotrc.org/index.php](http://www.greensborotrc.org/index.php)) for details.

<sup>2</sup> Mayor Holliday announces launch of Mosaic Program, September, 13, 2004. [www.ci.greensboro.nc.us/mosaic/press/Mosaic091304.pdf](http://www.ci.greensboro.nc.us/mosaic/press/Mosaic091304.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The project was initially designed to engage a wide range of community members over several phases, but it ended after this first phase that involved invited 144 community leaders.

<sup>4</sup> Remarks by the President at University of California at San Diego commencement, June, 1997. [www.ed.gov/PressReleases/06-1997/970614.html](http://www.ed.gov/PressReleases/06-1997/970614.html)

<sup>5</sup> President Bush Discusses Michigan Affirmative Action Case, January 15, 2003. [www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/01/20030115-7.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/01/20030115-7.html)

<sup>6</sup> Remarks by the President on Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, May 17, 2002. [www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/05/20020517-10.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/05/20020517-10.html)

<sup>7</sup> President Bush Discusses Michigan Affirmative Action Case, January 15, 2003. [georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/01/20030115-7.html](http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/01/20030115-7.html)

<sup>8</sup> President Applauds Supreme Court for Recognizing Value of Diversity, June 23, 2003. [www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/06/20030623.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/06/20030623.html)

<sup>9</sup> Remarks by the President at National Prayer Breakfast, February 1, 2001. [www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/20010201.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/20010201.html)

<sup>10</sup> Verhovek, S. H. 1997, November 2. Houston to Vote on Repeal of Affirmative Action, *New York*



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