

**Chap 15: The New Cultural Politics of Difference. Cornel West**

There is a new cultural terrain. The response is to denigrate monolithic, abstract and general description in favour of specific particularisms - and contextualise and pluralise by stressing the provisional, variable and contingent. Many of these new critics lambaste the institutions they gain their salaries and prestige from; they have been compromised and quietened. This new cultural politics of difference faces three challenges, intellectual,, existential and political.

1. The Intellectual Challenge to the new politics of difference:

Europe 1492-1945 poured out its learning and largesse - including democracy and individuality. But Matthew Arnold noted that whilst religion had tenuously held the old regimes together, it could no longer. Order was required amidst materialism of aristocracy, philistinism of middle class, and latent explosiveness of workers.

Then came emergence of USA as the power. But Jews began to rise through ranks! Leading eventually to mass culture and radical politics, and the decolonisation of world..

1950s, 60s, &70s we witnessed the shattering of the male WASP cultural homogenous hegemony. These intellectual pressures were fanned by philosophies which sought to keep alive radical European intellectual notions: Frankfurt School (Adorno, Marcuse, Horkheimer) Marxisms (Satre, Althusser, lefebvre, Gramsci) Structuralism (foucault, Derrida, Deleuze). Also popular culture was now impacting highbrow culture. Also history of oppression was being rediscovered.

1973 USA enters era of self-doubt after oil crisis, Watergate and slump. Reagan/Bush/Thatcher can therefore dominate.

Black inferiority myth dominant throughout Enlightenment history.

Europeanism contested by blacks at first by questioning myth of own objectism, namelessness and invisibility. Positive images of blackness were proffered.

But this assumed all blacks to be alike and tried simply to prove that blacks were 'as good as whites'.

We have reached the end of the age of innocence with regard to socially loaded images of the black subject. Black is a culturally constructed category.

Black diaspora women (eg Toni Morrison) have blasted old myths and now we need to deconstruct them and construct more multivalent responses that signify the complexity and diversity of Black practices in modern and postmodern world.

Also, what do we mean by whiteness?? We must demystify with 'prophetic criticism'. But be careful of one-factor analysis.

2. The Existential Challenge

How does one survive as a critic or artist?

People of colour are guilty until proven innocent, so are not listened to. So..

- a. Play the white man? But a mental bondage. And most are marginalised.
- b. Arrogant group insularity: It preserves sanity but becomes parochial and reinforces inferiority complexes.

- c. Go-it-alone option. Extreme rejectionist. It helps independence but reduces ability.
- d.. Become a Critical Organic Catalyst. Stay attuned to the best of what mainstream has to offer, yet grounded in cultures of criticism. Networked groups and coalitions. Avoid knee-jerk rejection and uncritical acceptance. Can opt out but then cut off from useful base. So stay within or alongside but stay in touch.

3. The Political Challenge Build networks and alliances.