



Article I

Celebrating Diversity or Celebrating Commonalities

Most of us have grown up hearing, teaching, and learning to celebrate diversity. This now fashionable conventional wisdom grew out of the rebellious 60's and early 70's. We rebels, myself amongst them, had some good reasons. We joined women and Blacks, although not quite perfectly, who had been rebelling with increased vigor since the empowering World War II in which they and other minorities had played crucial roles. The misguided war in Viet Nam now invigorated another large group – young people. Furthermore, we rebelled against the Great Generation and our parents, who if not rebelling, now just wanted to settle down after the traumas of the back-to-back Great Depression and World War.

That Great Generation had been brought up in a still quite authoritarian manner and in a quite racist, bigoted pre-World War II culture. So we Boomers had to enlighten our parents' generation to be more tolerant of others who were not like ourselves. *Teaching Tolerance*, a periodical of the Southern Poverty Law Center, growing out of the Civil Rights movement took the view that we needed to start with children's minds to eliminate hate in the first place. Winning civil rights cases in court was not solving the root issues.

Understandable and commendable as our motivations might have been, we did not think through possible unintended consequences and implications. In emphasizing, celebrating, or

tolerating, our superficial differences, we neglected to consider our much more important and more profound human *commonalities*. Celebrating diversity, i.e., differences, further separates or segregates us. It hardens our image of others as different and alien from ourselves. We become insiders, and they become outsiders. Diversity celebration is a double edge sword that unwittingly sets us apart.

At best, celebrating our differences of dress, diet, dance, music, or skin color, a "tourist approach," may help our appreciation of soul food, soul music, egg rolls, or tacos – but it does not cut through racism or bigotry. There are many bigots who enjoy soul music, egg rolls, tacos, pizza, Latin dances, or vacations in Cancun.

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At worst, some cultural habits and practices are, by modern standards, despicable. We do not

want to celebrate beheadings, honor killings, slavery, or stoning, just because they are practices of some culture. Even ethnic foods are not all healthy, just because they are ethnic. Even a “Mediterranean” diet, without cherry picking, includes unhealthy Italian white bread, pasta, fat-laden cheeses, salami, and bologna. Rice, a staple in many parts of the world, is now known to have high arsenic levels -- especially dangerous for children. These cultural habits are nothing to celebrate.



Yes, we can all take pride in our beloved cultural cuisine, music, dance, finery, literature, architecture, or customs. But if we look back in history honestly, we also find skeletons in the closets of every ethnic group, race, religion and nation. Those “great” empires that we like to study were “great” on the backs of others who were victims. Most every culture historically practiced slavery, female oppression, child subjugation, human sacrifice, wars of aggression, etc. at times in their history.

In fact, we continue to pack those closets with fresh bones. Celebrating diversity tends to keep our ethnic closet doors locked. Not acknowledging our ethnicity or emphasizing only the more superficial positives is to not understand ourselves or our cultures. We all become rather self-righteous self-promoters. We become the proverbial braggart trying to impress others, but with little credibility and with few admirers. This superficial, cherry-picked tourist approach to bridge building

promotes little understanding of ourselves or others.

Why not then stress the characteristics that will promote understanding of ourselves and of others? Those are the cultural characteristics that *we all share* in common as human beings. *We all* feel pain and joy. *We all* laugh, cry, hurt, feel hungry and need to eat. We also as human beings or groups sometimes feel aggrieved, insulted, disgraced, humiliated, wronged, oppressed, or outraged. These emotions cannot be easily quelled or root problems solved by egg rolls, tacos, or even soul music. They can be solved by more deeply honestly understanding others and ourselves and learning lessons from the past as to how *we, all of us* and our respective ancestors, got ourselves into this predicament.

We all have succumbed to the worst of human emotions. Historically, *we have all* treated women and children horribly, enslaved the weaker or meeker, and made ourselves the center of the universe to the detriment of others. We are *all* vulnerable to COVID and diseases.

Perhaps now we can begin to see a glimmer of empathy and how we can help and support each other. Perhaps now we can guide our own lives and lead our own communities with the empowerment of deeper understanding. Only now can we see clearly that we are not so different from others with the same human enjoyments of life and the same human flaws. Only now can we fully appreciate that we are all of the same human race, with the same needs, the same challenges and all of us needing cooperative positive-sum solutions.



This article is part of an 8 part series by Peter Porr that can be downloaded as an e-book.

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