

Diversity in America: Keeping Government at a Safe Distance
Peter Schuck

Diversity is a vaporous concept, widely embraced because it sounds good, seldom defined and used as a stalking horse for a vast multitude of ends. Some such ends are achievable and others not. Many are not worth the financial and costs of achieving them, and some ends are not even honorable.

Schuck performs the great service of offering definitions of the diverse collection of societal objects that comprise diversity itself. From the top, there is observed diversity. America has always been a diverse country, made up of different peoples, languages, religions and customs. In our sometimes ignoble past we attempted to limit that diversity by immigration laws, Jim Crow and other means. Nevertheless, the founders recognized the diversity that existed and seemed to promote it as an antidote to any specific group's ability to amass excessive power.

The metric of diversity means different things to different groups. It most often means visible diversity by skin color, the "ethno-racial pentagram" of Caucasian, African, Native American, Asian and Latin American peoples. Crudely put, white, black, red, yellow and brown. Schuck points out that this photographically demonstrable diversity along the single axis of ethnic origins often hides a stunning uniformity of political liberalism and religious (un)belief. Diversity in schools has to be taken to mean a diversities in ability to learn and therefore the amount of resources needed to enable a student to realize a given level of achievement. And, for that matter, just to maintain order.

Diversity as a starry-eyed ideal is peculiar to 20th century America and Canada. That is to say, one never saw "Celebrate Diversity" bumper stickers on Conastoga wagons. The particulars of timing are different depending on whether one is talking about religious or racial diversity or multiculturalism. Since before the Revolution many elements of our diverse society had been revulsed by the exclusion of African Americans from education and mainstream society. With the civil rights movement diversity came to be seen not only as an indication of legal equity in society but as a desirable end in itself. A norm of society.

Our society has used many devices to advance the cause of racial diversity. Conscience is one. Universities and corporations adopted diversity programs because their (liberal) leadership deemed it the right thing to do. Guilt is another, remedying past discrimination. A third is common business sense. A company that sells to a diverse clientele should present a diverse face to the public. Schuck gives greatest attention to a fourth, legislative and judicial efforts to force diversity in the realms of educational and corporate affirmative action, immigration, multiculturalism and housing. He follows the legal proceedings in exhaustive detail.

Schuck's bottom line is that "government... should use its bully pulpit to praise diversity in general and even particular diversities...But it should not try to create or promote any particular kind of diversity." His reasons are pragmatic. Forcing diversity goes against other widely held cultural values, such as the belief that people should achieve their place in society by merit and that they should be free to associate with people of their choosing. Court mandated residential integration, affirmative action and busing have created great resentment. While it is easy to ascertain that segregation was enforced by the law, it is impossible to know whether the continued separation of races by neighborhoods is a matter of discrimination or simple personal preference. It was easy in the days of "separate but equal" to ascribe poor academic performance to poor schools. The reasons why minority students perform a full grade point beneath Asians and whites in elite universities are harder to fix. Even worse, when government is confronted by inconvenient facts, as the University of California was with its diversity program, it is inclined to dissimulate, as UC did, about the outcomes of its diversity program.

If the government's attempts to force integration in education and housing are often tragic, immigration has been a comedy. "Diversity" is written into immigration law as a good to be achieved by admitting "new seed" from countries that have no history of immigration to the U.S. Ideals aside, however, immigration is shot full of pork-barrel politics. Most amusing are Ted Kennedy's labors to favor the Irish over all other Europeans.

This is a dense and difficult book for the layman to read. Unless your working vocabulary includes words like monism, anodyne, normative, and ex ante you will want to keep your dictionary at hand. I like it because Shuck is not afraid to write his own views in the first person. He is especially eloquent on the subject of the government's inability to find a focus or a common policy to unite its diverse and contradictory policies. His subtitle is "Keeping government at a safe distance." Despite the fact that he includes a section with just that title, Shuck is notably incurious about the "root causes" inequities in society, ascribing them all to past inequalities in social station and education even while acknowledging that different minorities have shown markedly different success in overcoming these handicaps they had in common. His arguments have everything to do with law and politics, nothing to do with those threads of contemporary thought dealing with heredity.

Lastly, he offers an encyclopedic wealth of footnotes that will be very useful to scholars who succeed him. His publisher should only have done so well with the index.