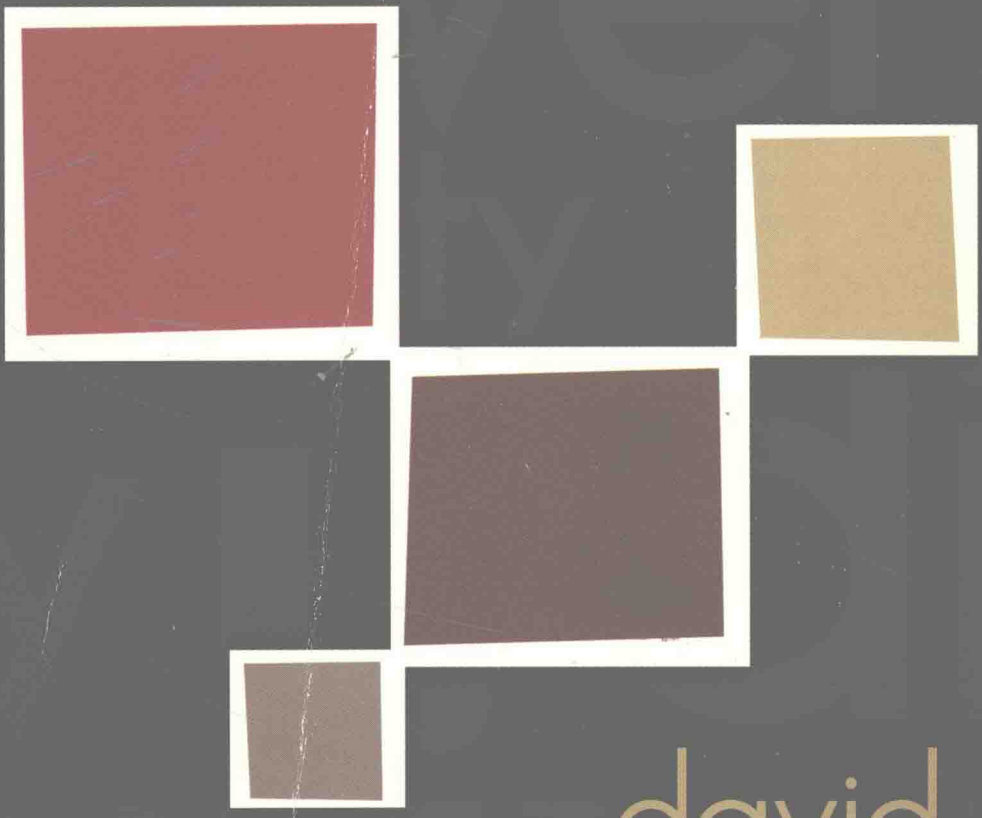
diversity on campus

second edition



david schuman

with tuesday l. cooper & carolyn m. pillow

Diversity On Campus

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With

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As an exercise, pretend you are from another planet and you want an example of a typical human being for your photo album. Having never heard of racism, you'd probably pick someone who represents the majority of the people on the planet—an Asian person.

- Amoja Three Rivers

It is part of growing up that one gives up a simple and single view of the world; one suffers the loss of illusions. At the time, it is painful. But beyond it one discovers a richer complexity, and one has gained strength in the process. One acquires courage for the next phase of life.

- Jacqueline Smutherst

What I propose . . . is a reconsideration of the human condition from the vantage point of our newest experiences and our most recent fears. This, obviously, is a matter of thought, and thoughtlessness—the heedless recklessness or hopeless confusion or complacent repetition of "truths" which have become trivial and empty—seems to me among the outstanding characteristics of our time. What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing.

- Hannah Arendt

PREFACE

The seeds of this book were planted when Johnstone Campbell asked me to join him in teaching a diversity course. Right away, it was apparent that there was just too much to cover and not enough material organized in a way that helps teachers with such courses. We have taught different versions of the course, and many of the ideas in this book come from those classes and discussions about them. In a sense, the book arose backward.

Teach, think it through, then write. Not long after the book project was underway, our son Ben, went away to school. Not far, thirty miles away, but it was overnight, and for a fourteen-year-old those thirty miles sometimes seemed like a million. His roommate was from Japan; a very nice guy who was only a twenty-four-hour flight from his home.

Shin, the roommate, rarely spoke about home or his parents. He enjoyed school, kept his half of the room neat, and worked hard.

One afternoon, during the first week of school, Ben called home. He sounded tired. When asked to explain, he said he had gotten up in the middle of the night. Shin, he said, had a nightmare. Shin was yelling, in a panicked voice, in Japanese. Poor Ben was scared to death. He was half awake and did not quite know where he was—and he was in a dark room with somebody yelling in Japanese.

That seemed just about right. It seems that just about everyone who goes to college has, at least metaphorically, the same emotional experience—of either Shin or of Ben. Higher education can give you nightmares or make you panic. We are in a new environment, asked to learn new things, and surrounded by people who are not always like us. That is one of the emotional undertones of this book.

More Than That

The book, of course, is more than that. The basic idea is that diversity is a broad and inclusive concept. Race, gender, and class are the commonly cited features of diversity. There is more to diversity than that. Color, sex, and class matter. So do religion, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. Even where we were born, where we live, and where we attend college matters. Each of us grows up with a set of beliefs about many things. Each of these things must be part of how we think about diversity.

The book is meant to be read and talked about. It is an array of ideas and facts that lead to an array of emotions. There are arguments in the book. We don't present perfectly even-handed treatments of all the issues. We do try to explain what is at stake in thinking about issues in different ways and to identify the stakes of choosing one way or another. This book was written to inform and to provoke.

Diversity, at least diversity at the beginning of the twenty-first century in the United States, is full of ambiguities and conflicts. Trying to paper-over problems using the style of a standard textbook seems to miss the point. Feelings and positions are closely connected to reasoning. This is a place where David Hume's claim that reason is a slave to the passions seems to be true. Our feelings are in turmoil about diversity, and that is why our culture is having such a difficult time discussing it.

This Book

Begin with this fact: Human beings are complex creatures. We are made up of an enormous number of traits. Each of us is a unique collection of objective and subjective realities.

Imagine that there are twenty identical people standing in a circle. Each represents just one part of a single person's identity. Make this your identity. There are twenty of you standing in a circle. Each self is one aspect of you—one is your color, one is your height, one is your religion, and so on. There are many parts to your identity.

And what if someone were to see you, were to meet you? That person would break into the circle.

Where that person broke into the circle would matter. Maybe that person would see you as a sexual object, and would see you according to the things that add up to physical attractiveness. Maybe that person would see you as a color, or as a fellow sports fan. The point is that some of the different traits would be clear and close, while other traits would simply not matter to the other person. Some parts of you would matter to that person, and other parts would not.

Also, as the circle is broken, all of the circle would readjust itself.

And every time a person sees you—tries to know you by entering the circle that is you—nothing is quite the same as the time before. The parts rearrange and readjust themselves with each new person and each new situation.

To make things worse, who you think you are is probably not who the person entering the circle thinks you are. For example, the color of your skin may be very important to you, but at that moment the person who is defining you might be interested only in your religion.

The mosaic of the ways in which you are categorized keeps changing. If everyone who met you saw just one part of the circle—say, your color—they would know so little about you. This, in turn, would also limit what you could be with those other people.

But we are more than simply who others think we are. Certainly we have our own ideas about our identity. Molly Mead put the idea very clearly. Molly read the rough draft of the manuscript and wrote this:

> *All the categories we use . . . are imperfect categories which change their meaning depending on who is seeing me. The categories are not meaningless—in fact they are packed with meanings—but those meanings shift and change. Thus we have to be more thoughtful when we use the categories in reference to ourselves and others. People have killed each other over these categories (and over less), so we can't dismiss them or wish them away. However, who I understand myself to be when I call myself a lesbian, and who you understand me to be when you call me a lesbian are two distinctly different things. In other words, this is all very complicated, so pay attention and be thoughtful.*

The situation, then, is remarkably complex. First, others see what they are looking for. When they see us, they may see hair color or social class or whatever. They may look at sexual orientation. And what they see, and how they define sexual orientation, may be different from how we define it for ourselves.

Diversity, in many ways, is about all the things people see, all the ways they might define them, and all the ways we define them for ourselves.

The ideas about identity are understood through different themes and in different settings. For example, we explore the traditional American tension between individualism and group identity. This tension is one of the classic American political and social tensions, and we will return to it over and over. We will see it begin with the second-generation Puritans, and continue to the separatist politics of some contemporary groups.

The setting for much of the material is college. We believe that the examples we find on campus are a good way to begin to understand what it means to live in a diverse culture.

Finally, we explore some of the context of campus issues by taking examples from the wider culture. We give a historical perspective, both on and off campus, in order to show how the problems of diversity began and have developed. We also discuss the philosophical strands at the center of some of the controversies.

One of the themes of the book is how one's identity is affected by diversity. We will show that it is an ongoing issue, both on campus and in society. But our world is more than simply the sum of so many individuals. We are connected in many ways, and the politics of individuation that has dominated during the past decades has been particularly divisive. For example, to concentrate on color and ignore socio-economic class is to simply miss important social ties. While individualism is one of the great underlying premises of our society, it is dangerous to focus wholly on those things that divide us.

When thinking about the topics that make up the book, it is in everyone's interest to make certain to remember those things we have in common as well as those things that make us unique.

The book is meant to be discussed. Each of us, ultimately, must reach her or his own solutions, but those solutions will be played out in relationship with others. Living in a diverse world is not a matter

of merely making up your mind about what to think and how to act, it is a matter of genuinely understanding differences.

We hope this book helps that learning. We are interested in your response.

Thank You

First, I want to thank God for the spiritual guidance given to me through this process. Second, I need to thank my family and friends for their support, the Victoria's for their patience, and "The Bishop" for his strength. Lastly, I want to thank Carolyn and Landon Pillow for their endurance and support. When I couldn't, they did.

Tuesday Cooper

Landon and Debbie, you tolerated my obsession with completing this book with grace and humor. You gave me your support when I was not able to *be there* for you. Thank you.

Carolyn Pillow

A great many people helped us. Special thanks are due to Johnstone Campbell, Michael Ford, Michael Fried, Larry Friedman, Marion Hoar, Beth Craig, Lisa Markowitz, Molly Mead, John Moritsugu, Alana Mueller, Dani Newland, Jacqueline Smethurst, Lee and Chris Totten, Robert Waterman, Jill Whitman, Leo Wiegman, and Pat and Steve Zwerling. Paul Shang, Colorado State University; Karl Taeuber, University of Wisconsin, Madison; Donald C. Smith, University of New Haven; and Trudie O. Coker of Florida International University read the entire manuscript, made helpful suggestions, and pointed out numerous errors. Some ideas need to be talked about. They have to go through many heads before they make sense.

Dick Olufs was responsible for several chapters in the book.

Sweetie and Ben were always willing to talk about ideas and examples, and their insights were always interesting. I am indebted to them for their aid and understanding.

Finally, a special thanks to the scores of TA's who have been wonderful teachers over the past many years. This second edition reflects their good work.

David Schuman
A cold, bright spring day
2001

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INTRODUCTION

The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge.

Jeremiah 31:29

This book is about differences and similarities. It is a collection of facts, questions, and genuine problems that need to be thought about and talked about.

This chapter introduces you to diversity on campus and asks you to consider the idea that we never know exactly what others think of us. It is a general introduction to the differences you encounter in your immediate surroundings. Who, for example, is the teacher, and who are the other students, what are their ages, colors, educational backgrounds, personal likes and dislikes, socioeconomic class, and so on?

In this chapter, we begin to see how we differ from those around us.

This chapter also asks that you think about the fact that we never know how others understand us. Although each of us has a sense of who we are, and has an opinion of those around us, we can never know exactly how others see us and judge us.

These points are introduced in the context of college life. College is as real as any other part of life. The things that happen off campus are just different versions of the things that happen on campus. Each college is a special place, with its own calendar and rhythm, but it is also subject to the problems found in the surrounding society. Chapter 1, then, is about coming to college. It is about the differences you

encounter, and the problems you have understanding who you are and where you fit.

So, you're sitting there in class looking at your teacher. The Professor. A person who, for the next quarter or semester, will tell you things, read what you write, and grade what you do. Have you ever given that person much of a thought—outside of grades, work assigned, and the like? What is that person going to teach and tell you, and what does that have to do with his or her personal life? The professor's color and age, tastes and preferences, and even sexual orientation may make a difference. That is not the myth. The myth is that all professors are involved in the impartial pursuit of knowledge—which is just like the myth that the highest priority for all college students is to get the best possible education.

Who is the person in front of the class? Funny? Well-dressed? Articulate? Bisexual? Homophobic? Married with children? Would that person make a good friend? Drive a Porsche or ride a bicycle? Rather be a lawyer?

Did you know that men, on average, think about sex once every ten minutes? If the person in front of the class is a man, do you think he thinks about sex once every ten minutes?

Maybe this professor will introduce himself or herself—give a little autobiography—the first day of class. The autobiography might be witty and charming, but what will you really know about this professor?

In truth, not much.

Many underlying themes of this book—of diversity—have to do with who we think we are and who others think we are—the stuff of our identities. We define ourselves, and we define those around us, and everyone else is doing the same thing. There is a tension between our own self-definitions and how each of us gets defined by those around us. What others think about us limits what we can become.

The person you are looking at can never see what you see. Each of us has an internal life: emotions and thoughts, a particular past, and wonderful plans for the future. There are fierce loyalties and loves and maybe a rich fantasy life. All of those things are both real and invisible. There is an enormous amount of stuff that you cannot see when you look at another person. Does that person love Indiana bas-

ketball? Wear silk underpants? Go to church twice a week? Watch the soaps? Attend opera? Who can tell? And so what if they do?

One way to think about this side of identity is to take a test about who you are. It is called the truly disgusting joke test.

For one of the authors, the test might involve being told four truly insulting and disgusting jokes about divorced people, bald people, Jews, stepfathers, and anything else that might apply. The jokes that offended us most would suggest which of those traits were most important to our identity. Make your own test. Does it have to do with religion, weight, color, sex, height, pimples?

What a way to begin to sort out who you are.

The point that is important to remember is this: The who we are can only be judged by others. It is impossible to know how others see and judge us. No matter how hard we try to control what we do, we still are powerless over what people see. We do our best, but others are our judges.

As we are judged, so too do we make judgments about others. We have our own reasons to decide as we do.

The bottom line is that each of you comes into a class, or a dorm, or anywhere else with a sense of who you are. You identify yourself by all of the things that you learned at home, or at school, or in Sunday school, or on the corner. Other people may be looking at those things, but it is entirely possible that they are looking at entirely different things. They may well be judging you and acting in ways toward you that make no sense to you.

You might think you're too thin; they might think you're too loud. You might worry that you're gay; they might not like people your color.

And, of course, you look around and make all kinds of decisions about others.

This book and the class discussions will begin to sort out what you think about yourself and others, and why. They will begin to get at why some of the things you do seem natural but are, in fact, deeply rooted in how you see yourself and others, and how others see you. The book has to do with how each of us has an identity based on things that may be offensive to someone else. We believe that attention to these ideas is important because of changes going on in this country and the world, changes that are going on right now: The

nation is moving toward an ethic of greater access to employment and public places for groups that formerly were not fully welcome. Whether it is the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, setting standards for employment of handicapped people; state or local government sexual orientation anti-discrimination ordinances; affirmative action programs for women and minorities; or the fact that in most states most of the labor force growth will come from groups other than White males, or even White females; or the idea that English is not the only language spoken in the United States, it is clear that changes are a part of our lives. More of you will have to know about diversity because it is a growing fact in the workplace and where you might live.

This book is about who we are in the context of genuine and difficult changes. It is about how we define ourselves and others during a time in which our culture gives us too few—or maybe too many—clues.

Coming to College

Imagine that you are the traditional college student—young, living on campus, and new to this.

Think about that first day at college. It was all about leaving home and coming to college. Serious nervous-time for most. Many of you lived through the agreed-upon American rhythm: First there was high school, a time that seemed would never end but finally did, and then you put your family through the post-high school/pre-college summer that was full of anxiety and tension. During that transition summer, the idea of no parental authority was exciting. Also, admit it or not, there were the vestiges of childhood terror about leaving home. You got to college and, at least metaphorically, unloaded the old family station wagon. All that stuff went right to your room. What went? It was much more than your stereo, clothes, and toothbrush; *what really went was your identity.*

All of the family biases were carried directly to your dorm room. You brought in your whole past, you brought up what you believed as well as what your parents believed. Up went your religion, social class, parents' prejudices, and personal prejudices about sexual orientation and color and which baseball team to follow.

But the traditional world has shattered. Maybe you are in your mid-twenties, live at home, and come to college on the subway; maybe you are in your mid-thirties, divorced, and drop the kids off at day care on your way to class. Whoever you are, identity is still in play.

The other side of the identity equation is there too. Others have seen you, and judged you, and you have learned to live with that. You may not think of yourself as Protestant first, a baseball player second, and a pianist third, but others may have told you, in subtle ways, that is who you are.

All of that baggage you brought was your self-definition. Those biases and beliefs formed the basis of how you looked at and judged the world. Don't be put off by this; it is not intended to make you feel guilty or silly. The simple truth of the matter is that, more often than not, when we get to school, we are a collection of the things we have been taught. The world of home and neighborhood high school are the places in which we begin to define ourselves and others.

The world of home and high school makes an effort to solidify certain parts of your life. If you grow up Black, in a Black family, then it seems obvious that, in no small measure, you understand yourself as Black. And that goes for Catholics and Japanese Americans and Mormons. During those years you are being taught something much more than how to take tests, program the VCR, and do your own laundry.

But it is very hard to know all of the things that get solidified these days. There are those of us with different sets of parents, and different sets of siblings. Your parents may be remarrying, so you are in the position of going to different weddings and "giving away" your mom or your dad or both. You may live in one of those families that have four grandmothers, three religions, two houses, and no peace. A surprisingly large number of people come from homes with a parent or parents who are alcoholic. Or Dad beats Mom. Or Aunt Mary did too much dope. Or a big brother molested a little sister.

The point is that from the station wagon to the dorm room, from the subway to your first-year English course, the first thing you bring in is your identity, with its ways of seeing, with its biases and prejudices.

And then you are left alone. The traditional first-year student (the innocent metaphor of this section) is left with a roommate whom you

might know, and a whole floor of people you don't know. There are others who seem to be everything you are not. Islamic, rural, brown, lesbian, smart. They like different music, clothes, teams, food. Where everybody was the same in your old house, everybody is different now. What to do? How to judge? Who are they? Who are you?

Diversity, indeed.

High School

There are about 13,000,000 students in college. That's counting undergraduates in four-year schools and community colleges, professional school students, and graduate students. The majority of them lived at home, went to high school, and then to college. Most of them went to a public high school, fewer to a parochial school, fewer still to a private boarding school. Many of us live at home, get restless by our junior year, and are more than ready for college by the time we're 18. Many of us graduate from high school and wait before we begin college. Whether you're 18 or 28, college is new and scary.

We know that in the United States, local districts, with the help of the states, finance public high schools. We are, in no small way, at the will of where we live. When we unload the metaphoric station wagon, we unload just what our towns and cities think about education. To be more specific, we reflect what our neighbors were willing to pay for our education.

Now here is the part that should come as no surprise: Public education has nothing to do with justice or equality. It might not even have much to do with education. All too often, public education is a reflection of how much money your part of town is willing to spend on schooling. The rich have better public schools than the poor.

Of course, private education is an entirely different enterprise. The first difference is money. If you lived in Los Angeles and attended Catholic schools, the cost of your kindergarten through high school education was one third what it cost to send the average child through the same grades in the public schools. And you probably did much better on the tests you took to get into college. Of course, someone, probably your parents, paid the private school costs plus the taxes to support the public schools. It cost less to educate you, but your family paid more. If you went to a good private boarding school,