



American Communication Journal

Volume 6, Issue 4, Summer 2003

Diversity as Liberation

Current Issue

[Rodriguez, Amardo](#)
[Department of Communication and Rhetorical Studies,](#)

Archives

[Syracuse University](#)
[Hampton Press, 2003](#)

Editorial Info

166 pages
Hardcover: US \$45.00

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In *Diversity as Liberation*, Amardo Rodriguez takes the discussion of culture and diversity from product to process. Instead of reducing culture to particular foods, festival, and fun, he shows us the relationships between language, communication, and human beings that pervade all cultures.

Rodriguez reveals the hypocrisy of proponents and opponents of diversity as he examines the public response to the Ebonics resolution in Oakland, California 1996. This groundbreaking resolution recognized “Black English” or Ebonics as a legitimate language and pedagogical tool. Both opponents and proponents of diversity and multiculturalism responded in concert against the resolution. Rodriguez notes that this controversy not only established common ground for both factions, but that it “also reveals the narrowness of dominant discourses of diversity occurring within the United States and how this narrowness serves the status quo” (xviii). He contends the common view of diversity and/or multiculturalism enables a discourse of separation. We fear difference, especially in marginalized groups, and in response, suppress and invalidate other ways of being in the world. He writes, “The belief that our languages reflect significant differences is drawn from the worldview that tells us that race, ethnicity, gender, and other such differences explain the origin of hierarchy” (55). Rodriguez claims that Americans are inclined to think of the world as a hierarchy, a necessary order to things ranked from top to

bottom. Our fear of difference is easily masked by the illusion of a hierarchy. The negative response to the Ebonics resolution is a prime example of this fear. Rodriguez seeks to remedy the problem of hierarchy and separation by respecifying the function of language and explaining how our fear is actually a ‘distrust and suspicion of our humanity’ (55).

In chapter three, he shifts focus from the common perception that language represents social evolution or that it “evolved out of the need to control our striving for strife and aggression” (50). Instead, he suggests that a “universal grammar” indicates that humans are “meant” for liberation. He writes, “It is only human beings who, through communication, have the ability to bring meaning to bear upon the world, and, only through Universal Grammar, the ability to give our world endless expressions” (55). Like John Stewart (*Language as Articulate Contact*) and Dennis Mumby (“Modernism, Postmodernism, and Communication Studies”), Rodriguez rejects the transmission theory of communication, the belief that language is a representation of objective truth. His treatment of language shares similar direction to Hans Georg Gadamer’s discussion of language, world, and experience in *Truth and Method*, who proposes that our experience of the world goes hand-in-hand with language. He writes, “Wherever language and men [sic] exist, there is not only freedom from the pressure of the world, but this freedom from our environment is also freedom in relation to the names that we give things” (444). Thus, through language/communication we express our experience of the world. For Rodriguez, diversity of linguistic expression is the key to liberation and an authentic form of multiculturalism. Because he writes for a general audience, Rodriguez simplifies the ontological relationship between human being, interpretation, and meaning-making by referring to it as “spiritual.” He does not explicitly define his use of the term “spiritual,” which, at times, was problematic in understanding the introductory chapters.

Rodriguez contributes to the conversation on diversity and multiculturalism by clarifying how humanity, communication, and language are relational, and he reminds us that “The responsibility for the condition of the world ultimately belongs to all of us” (138).

Works Cited

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. 2nd ed. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer & Donald G. Marshall. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 2002.

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[Back to Top](#)

[Home](#) | [Current Issue](#) | [Archives](#) | [Editorial Information](#) | [Search](#) | [Interact](#)