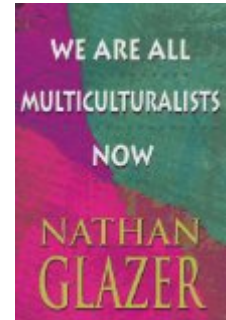


Nathan Glazer. *We Are All Multiculturalists Now*. Cambridge, Mass. and London England: Harvard University Press, 1997. 179 pp. \$19.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-674-94851-8.



Reviewed by Richard Williams

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Prior to reading Nathan Glazer's *We Are All Multiculturalists Now*, I had heard from a variety of public and individual sources that it was a move by Glazer towards a rapprochement with multiculturalism. After having reviewed this book, my conclusion is that a rapprochement is quite far from the point Glazer has in mind. It is indeed the case that Glazer expresses support for multiculturalists principles, but it is more accurate to say that this work is an emotional expression of support for pre-1960s variants of multiculturalism and a less than wholehearted support for contemporary multiculturalism. This work does not then represent a new departure in Glazer's position on the subject of multiculturalism.

His arrival at this unchanged position is far from straightforward, however, and that is undoubtedly why some have been led to believe that he has changed his position on multiculturalism. But ultimately Glazer identifies the pre-1960s variants of multiculturalism with the ideals of American society and its contemporary variant as critical of and a danger to those ideals. The strong emotions of this book are based upon the tensions

Glazer generates by relying upon those opposing views of multiculturalism.

However, when a discussion involves emotional issues, it can be difficult to grasp the strategies that are being used to build the argument. Nonetheless, an understanding of the strategies used to present even an emotionally charged argument is important because it is only by backing away from the emotions of the issue and towards the structure of the argument that space can be found here for evaluating the argument itself.

An added difficulty in grasping the argument is the fact that Glazer is not systematic in structuring it. For example, he gives widely differing notions of the meaning of the book's title in different parts of the text. Those differences are intentional on Glazer's part, but he does not systematically structure his argument so as to provide readers with sufficient cues that his evidence should be judged based upon his shift between those meanings. One then does not immediately get the sense that he moves logically when, in one instance, he interprets "we are all multiculturalists" now to mean that the ideals of the society have been ful-

filled because the educational system now provides greater treatment of women and minorities, while in another instance he asserts that the phrase is being used wryly about something that is unpleasant although it must be accepted.

But there is a structure to Glazer's work that allows the reader to account for a large number of apparently contradictory statements such as that related to its title. This is true despite the fact that he does not clearly delineate the elements of that structure by discussing each in turn. It is also true despite the fact that he does not explicitly relate the elements of the structure he relies upon to each other as he builds his argument.

Glazer structures his argument by initially relying upon three distinct categories of multiculturalism. One image is of multiculturalism as at the center of the American system of ideals. Early in the book he asserts: "Many terms have thus arisen to encompass the reality that groups of different origin all form part of the American population. Multiculturalism is just the latest in this sequence of terms describing how American society, particularly American education, should respond to its diversity" (p. 8). Glazer associates this type of multiculturalism with terms such as "cultural pluralism" and "intercultural education" that were in wide use prior to the 1960s. He indicates that the concerns of the earlier terms were with groups such as Catholic children, Japanese children, and Jews in higher education. The outcome of this type of multiculturalist approach has been the successful economic and cultural assimilation of those groups into society.

Glazer positions a second type of multiculturalism as arising out of shifts in the society during the 1960s. He characterizes it as concerned with identifying holes in the ideals of the American system. Despite that concern, however, Glazer portrays those operating from this perspective as primarily interested in justice and recognition. In addition, he indicates that justice and recognition have been occurring for this group at a reason-

able pace in the society. Glazer identifies women and racial and ethnic minorities other than African Americans and gays and lesbians as the key actors in this category. He further concludes that multiculturalism for them is a voluntary rather than a necessary behavior.

It is in regard to this second type of multiculturalism that Glazer professes faith that it will not undermine the basic belief that American society has been a success story in world history. He tells the reader that he has come to that position because the basic demand of the multiculturalists is for inclusion in American society rather than separation from it. Glazer pushes the positive image of this type of multiculturalism further when he asserts that multiculturalists are playing by the same rules that well intentioned social actors have always played by in American history. He labels this type "additive multiculturalism," because although it is critical of the past its solution to problems is to make additions to, rather than change, the cultural norms.

Glazer labels another 1960s-generated form of multiculturalism "militant multiculturalism" and "transformative multiculturalism" (p. 11). He asserts that this type is concerned with the "transformation of the entire history and culture of the United States" (p. 11). It has arisen, he asserts, from those who have yet to gain the status that the ideals of the society would lead one to believe they should have already achieved. Those operating from this perspective, Glazer further states, have rejected assimilation. In addition, he asserts that they have rejected the traditions of society. Glazer's identification of this type of multiculturalism with the rejection of assimilation and of societal traditions thus puts those holding this third position in direct opposition with, although in differing degrees, those holding the other two positions.

According to Glazer, African Americans are the dominant social group operating from this perspective. It is within this context that Glazer

makes one of the two shifts that are important for understanding how he eventually utilizes the term multiculturalism. Here he identifies contemporary multiculturalism as primarily concerned with African American students. He also makes reference to Afrocentrism as the African American version of multiculturalism and eventually identifies the multiculturalism curriculum as a process that has been initiated by African Americans. Glazer is explicit about this point, asserting that the movement is given its force and vigor by our greatest domestic problem, the situation of African Americans (p. 10).

In a second maneuver, Glazer explicitly merges the first two categories of multiculturalism into a single category. This is indicated by his creation of the identity category "non-blacks" to designate those in the merged category. Glazer then structures the book around the following contrasts he has established between versions of multiculturalism: the temporal (early versus late), the social group (non-blacks versus blacks), and the ideological (the acceptance of the ideals of society versus the rejection of the ideals of society). It is in his reliance upon these differences between the newly formed category and militant multiculturalism that Glazer is able to generate such an emotionally charged text.

It is also through the use of the contrast between the non-black and the black categories of multiculturalism that Glazer gains his voice in this text. It is that contrast he relies upon in order to claim the right to speak for the "we" of his title. When he uses "we" he thus manages to claim that he speaks in defense of the history of the society, the ideals of the society, and the vast majority of the society's population. In weaving his "we" Glazer has then brilliantly generated an emotional relationship such that a critique or attack on one strand is easily construed as a critique or attack upon all of the strands.

Glazer's reliance upon a "we" curiously lacks an explicit "they," but that is implicitly supplied by

the negation of each of the strains of his "we." Glazer can thus be seen as operating with a civil discourse that structures categories of persons into the included and the excluded. Alexander provides the following insight about that structuring process, however: The basic elements of this structure can be understood semiotically—they are sets of homologies, which create likenesses between various terms of social description and prescription, and antipathies, which establish antagonisms between these terms and other sets of symbols (p. 291). Glazer's reliance upon a "we" and an implied "they" is thus an act that fits neatly into the codes reflecting the ideals of purity and problems of impurity that are quite familiar in the culture.

It is indeed the case that Glazer bases an important part of his discussion around a failure of the ideals of American society. He asserts that the ideals of the society have not been fully extended to African Americans. He also asserts that insisting more strongly upon those ideals in the face of its failure is not the appropriate method by which to address the problems that contemporary multiculturalism is a reflection of.

However, even here it is important to look closely at what Glazer does with these assessments. Glazer portrays the failure of the ideals of society in relationship to African Americans as the exception to the rule and thus as an affirmation of those ideals. Thus Glazer begins with the observation of differential levels of integration for segments of the society but then turns towards praising the society for what it has accomplished. He then asserts that the society should be judged by its successes rather than by its sole failure. The type of multiculturalism that Glazer is dissatisfied with is precisely that type which he perceives as bent on having it the other way around. Glazer therefore assesses the different types of multiculturalism by their impact upon his feelings about the ideals of the society.

Potential readers should therefore not be misled by the title of the book into thinking that it is a call for a rapprochement with multiculturalism in its contemporary guise. Nor should they think that it is an objective look at the pros and cons of multiculturalism. It is rather the case that Glazer is here engaged in a twofold task. On the one hand, he is making a moral case against a type of multiculturalist position that he identifies with an attack on the ideals of society and with blacks. On the other hand, he is supportive of a type of multiculturalism that he identifies with the ideals of society and non-blacks. In sketching that dichotomy he has done an effective job, but it is most definitely not a call for a rapprochement.

Glazer's position is thus a defense of his image of American society and of American history. He feels that the contemporary multiculturalist approach to education is putting that image in jeopardy. To some extent, he is quite accurate on this specific point. The pre-1960s image of the society has most certainly been under attack. However, Glazer proceeds in this book as if having his image of American society in jeopardy is the same as putting America itself in jeopardy. On this last matter he may or may not be right. The problem with this book is that having deliberately conflated his image and the society, he then treats it as an objective reality rather than as the hypothesis it is.

If Glazer had made a basic shift in his thinking from seeing his worldview as an objective reality to seeing it as an ideology, in Mannheim's sense of that term, this book could truly have been for all Americans. As it stands, however, this book is primarily for those who agree both with Glazer's image of the ideals of American society and with his belief that if that image is in jeopardy it is tantamount to putting the society itself in jeopardy. But it is because of the strong emotions generated around the latter point that I also recommend this book. It should also be read by those who are serious about understanding some

of the deep moral underpinnings of the belief structure of a segment of the contemporary anti-multiculturalist position.

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