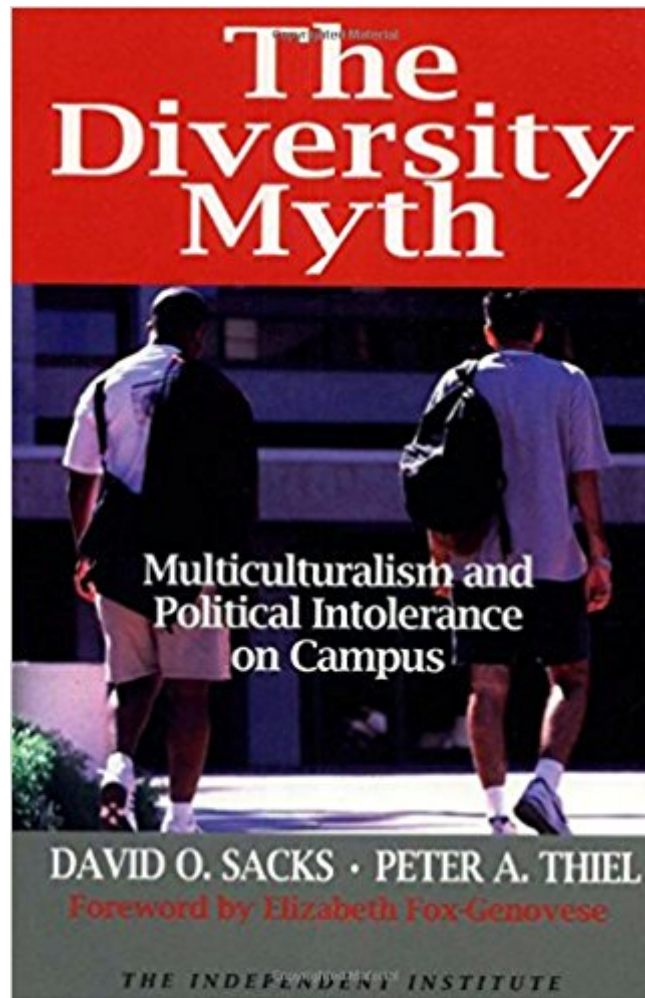




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# The Diversity Myth : Multiculturalism And Political Intolerance On Campus



## Synopsis

This is a powerful exploration of the debilitating impact that politically-correct multiculturalism has had upon higher education and academic freedom in the United States. In the name of diversity, many leading academic and cultural institutions are working to silence dissent and stifle intellectual life. This book exposes the real impact of multiculturalism on the institution most closely identified with the politically correct decline of higher education—Stanford University. Authored by two Stanford graduates, this book is a compelling insider's tour of a world of speech codes, dumbed-down admissions standards and curricula, campus witch hunts, and anti-Western zealotry that masquerades as legitimate scholarly inquiry. Sacks and Thiel use numerous primary sources—the Stanford Daily, class readings, official university publications—to reveal a pattern of politicized classes, housing, budget priorities, and more. They trace the connections between such disparate trends as political correctness, the gender wars, Generation X nihilism, and culture wars, showing how these have played a role in shaping multiculturalism at institutions like Stanford. The authors convincingly show that multiculturalism is not about learning more; it is actually about learning less. They end their comprehensive study by detailing the changes necessary to reverse the tragic disintegration of American universities and restore true academic excellence.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"This engaging saga of Stanford's experiment in multiculturalism compellingly draws readers into the nightmare world of social engineering in practice."—Elizabeth Fox-Geovese,

professor of humanities, Emory University" . . . . [A]uthors David Sacks and Peter Thiel show how Stanford University has incorporated the multicultural agenda into its undergraduate curriculum. The authors note that Stanford's undergraduates can now get credit for such courses as "Creation/Procreation," which looks into "the gendered aspects of cosmological or religious systems," and "Gender and Science," which purports to study science free of outdated assumptions. There is also a feminist studies course titled "How Tasty Were my French Sisters," about which I dare not speculate." "Wall Street Journal" "The Diversity Myth is a carefully documented and sensitively recorded historical account of the whole tragic saga, together with keen analysis of how all this could have happened. Future historians will find this book indispensable." "National Review" "A great read and an important story, this book will not just cause alarm about our educational institutions. It will inspire renewal." "William Kristol, editor and publisher, the Weekly Standard" "There is no higher duty for intellectuals than to denounce incipient totalitarianism wherever they observe it. Some of its symptoms are present at Stanford. In The Diversity Myth, two recent Stanford graduates document the situation there with a thoroughness and depth of analysis that should help stiffen the spine of university administrators." "Renée N. T. Girard, Andrew B. Hammond Professor Emeritus of French Language, Literature, and Civilization, Stanford University" "If you want to find out what went wrong at Stanford University, read The Diversity Myth. There's hardly a better source than this book for learning why multiculturalism on campus cannot work." "Linda L. Chavez, former Director, U. S. Commission on Civil Rights; Chairman, Center for Equal Opportunity" "Written by two recent Stanford Graduates, The Diversity Myth says the campus was divided, and the curriculum destroyed, by the multicultural movement. The authors, David O. Sacks and Peter A. Thiel, bemoan the offering of a history course in the spring of 1992 that focused entirely on black hair styles as a political and cultural statement . . . . Their book also discusses censorship, speech codes, and date rape." "the Chronicle of Higher Education" "Two former Stanford students, who lived through the 'culture wars'; there, have written the most thorough and detailed account yet available of what 'multiculturalism' has meant at a major American university. With fascinating and often disheartening detail, The Diversity Myth will certainly lead readers to question what is happening today in American higher education." "Nathan Glazer, Professor of Education and Social Structure, Emeritus, Harvard University" "The Diversity Myth charges that 'politicized' classes and student activities have led to an ironic intolerance on campus 'intolerance of all things Western.'" "Newsweek

David O. Sacks is a research fellow at The Independent Institute and is vice president of product strategy at PayPal, Inc. He has worked as a legislative aide to U. S. Representative Christopher Cox and received his A.B. in economics (1994) from Stanford University. His articles have appeared in The Wall Street Journal, National Review, Policy Review, and Academic Questions. Peter A. Thiel is a research fellow at The Independent Institute and is chairman and CEO at PayPal, Inc. He has worked as a derivatives trader at Credit Suisse Financial Products, a securities lawyer for Sullivan & Cromwell, and a speechwriter for former Education Secretary William J. Bennett. He received his A.B. in philosophy (1989) and J.D. (1992) from Stanford University. They both live in Palo Alto, California.

“The Diversity Myth” is a twenty-year-old book that nobody would remember, despite its many virtues, were it not for that its authors (and many of the young figures in its pages) have since then become highly-visible billionaires, and, in the case of Peter Thiel, prominent public intellectuals. None of them knew that then, though (presumably!), which makes the book even more interesting. And everything old is new again. This book has, since I started writing this review, taken on new relevancy, with the puerile and ignorant, yet vicious, happenings at the University of Missouri, Dartmouth, Yale, Oberlin and other colleges last fall (2015). But let’s take the book as it is. It’s possible, and instructive, to draw a line from William F. Buckley’s “God And Man At Yale,” published in 1951, through this book (published in 1999) to today. A descending line, showing the cratering of the American academy. The declined Yale of the late 1940s and early 1950s criticized by Buckley was a paragon of excellence compared to Stanford in the 1990s, much less compared to universities today. As with any book that deals with political conflicts of the past, it is easy to see where the authors were right and where the authors were wrong. Unfortunately, they were right about the problem and wrong that it was on the way to being fixed. In fact, the problem of enforced leftist ideological conformity escaped the confines of Stanford and similar universities long ago, mutating and growing along the way, until now it not only suffocates all university discourse, but infects the entire nation’s discourse. So, for example, a few months ago (November 2015), Obama’s Department of Justice announced that an Illinois school district would be punished by the federal government if they did not let a boy teenager with a mental illness, believing himself to be a girl, use the girl’s locker room with no restrictions. (Of course, they don’t call it a mental illness—they say he “identifies as a girl,” and therefore is one.) If, in 1995, someone had suggested that any of this could ever happen, he would have been treated as unbalanced at best. Similarly, Thiel

and Sacks identified lots of problems with what in the 1990s was called multiculturalism, but they could not have seen the inversions of logic and reality to come. Although the book's title mentions "diversity," that word did not have exactly the same meaning in 1995 as it does today, and Thiel and Sacks actually focus almost exclusively on "multiculturalism," which was the watchword of the coercive Left in the 1990s. Today, "diversity" has taken center-stage. Today, diversity means, in the academic or workplace context, the granting of unearned rewards to the unqualified, under the guise of remedying past or present discrimination, bolstered by (always totally unsupported) claims that selecting awardees to favor chosen racial or other groups creates its own fantastic value, and of course has zero costs. Shrill demands for diversity today are everywhere in life. But "Multiculturalism" today is an also-ran, essentially folded into diversity, perhaps because multiculturalism as practiced wasn't multicultural at all, in the sense of wanting to create an environment of cultural openness, but rather a mechanism for creating a united, interlocking front to benefit the political causes of the Left (and to denigrate the superior accomplishments of the West, which denigration is a core political cause of Left). This is the core point of the book, and perhaps the term "multiculturalism" itself has largely disappeared because it lost its propaganda value when the immediate political goals were achieved and it became apparent that the term itself was a lie. So what was the norm at Stanford is now the norm nationwide. And at universities now, what we have is a bizarre environment consisting of, among other dubious accomplishments of Western civilization, "trigger warnings," demands to end "cultural appropriation," tearing down Cecil Rhodes' statue, and attempting to ban the wheat sheaves on the Harvard seal because the family they represent, who gave money to found Harvard, owned slaves. Thiel's and Sacks' story and analysis is narrowly focused on Stanford. The first part of the book says what diversity/multiculturalism is not (or was not); the second says what it is (or was). In brief, what it is not is the West, which it defines itself in antithesis to. What it is a new, alien culture, based on (largely fake) victim status, but to its proponents the New Jerusalem. (Like all ideological leftist movements, diversity/multiculturalism is largely a religion substitute, in which the proponents achieve redemption and transcendence through their rituals.) Much of the book is taken up with a catalog of anecdotal horrors (many of which seem mild by comparison to today's behavior), organized by topic. Apparently some people think this undercuts the probative value of the book—"looking at other reviews, accusations of cherry-picking seem pretty common. But anecdotes buttressed by statements and actions by all those in power supporting the behavior in

the anecdotes is pretty much the only way to prove behavior. Those who suggest that the anecdotes give a false picture seem unlikely to be convinced by any evidence. There are quite a few funny lines in the book. Noting the attack by a legal "scholar" on the West, exalting native Hawaiian culture as superior because there was "no money, no idea or practice of surplus appropriation," Thiel and Sacks note that "Only Western societies have a problem with the exploitation of surplus value because such societies are the only ones that produce much surplus value to be exploited. Digging for taro roots and fishing for seafood [activities praised by the speaker] are quite different from the kind of work one imagines people do at the Center for Hawaiian Studies—a center whose very existence requires more surplus value than Native Hawaiian culture ever generated." Ha ha. Similarly, they explicitly compare the multicultural to primitive societies, "with its hunger fasts, expulsions and ritual scapegoatings." And there are also keen insights. "Multicultural victimology is so powerful because it taps into two base emotions that are not often found together—self-pity and self-importance." Although the authors don't mention it, perhaps the best lens for evaluating the inception and metastasizing of diversity/multiculturalism is the "repressive tolerance" of Herbert Marcuse, a leading member of the poisonous Frankfurt School (composed of German refugees who created the philosophical backbone of the New Left, which is now dominant). Marcuse's 1965 polemic against freedom, contained in the book "A Critique Of Pure Tolerance," introduced the Orwellian idea that real tolerance consisted of intolerance. Or, as Wikipedia summarizes the idea, "Revolutionary minorities hold the truth and the majority has to be liberated from error by being re-educated in the truth by this minority. The revolutionary minority are entitled, Marcuse claims, to suppress rival and harmful opinions." The Marcusean lens explains WHY proponents of diversity/multiculturalism push their ideology. It has nothing to do with justice, the righting of wrongs, or the spread of forgotten or suppressed ideas. Instead, it is purely a mechanism for the totalitarian Left to gain total power, or as close to it as possible. The paths to this are several. The main theme is the self-admitted goal of total destruction of existing cultural values and their replacement by new values—being, as the authors note that Lenin said, "the engineers of souls." And the immediate 1990s goal (successfully achieved nationwide in educational institutions) was the total replacement of the culture that is the common inheritance of the West with a mishmash of relativism, ignorance and idiocy. Too bad. Thiel and Sacks point out that multiculturalism is the polar opposite of universalism. In a universalist approach to learning, the goal is to understand and communicate universal, objective truths that are available to everyone. In the multiculturalist approach, there are no

universal truths, only ideas available only to victims, and subordinated in service to the achievement of power in a zero-sum game, using the all-purpose victim card. Fortunately, perhaps, this suggests the solution to the cancer of diversity/multiculturalism—“a return to universal principles, and in application of those principles, a focus on competition for excellence and productivity. (It’s a logical conclusion that members of ethnic groups that push diversity/multiculturalism do so in large part because they fear or know that they can’t compete with the ethnic groups, such as Asians, that don’t spend their time shrieking demands for more diversity.) But that solution is not likely in the current environment. Thiel and Sacks end on an optimistic note, claiming that the “fall of Stanford” had begun. Unfortunately not—“not only has the rot spread nationwide, and mutated into something much worse, but its effects are greater. This is because the role of universities today is no longer to educate (except in technical fields), but to act as filter for entrance into the ruling class, the “cognitive elite” of Charles Murray. The authors do seem to be correct in that Stanford, while still certainly narrowly and nastily ideologically conformist, is no longer a leader, and in fact has moved in a technocratic direction since the book was written—a direction that 1990s university leaders sneeringly denigrated as beneath the role of a great university. Of course, even some liberals, such as Jonhan Haidt, have realized that this will end very badly. To his credit, Obama has also recently been speaking out, even if softly, about the pernicious effects of the more extreme versions of diversity/multiculturalism. (Of course, becoming more extreme is a necessary consequence of any revolutionary movement, which inevitably eat their own until the collapse comes.) Either it will corrode society so badly that we will become a third-rate country, or there will be a vicious backlash. Perhaps after the backlash, the academy can be reformed on principles pre-dating the current decline (i.e., sometime before 1950). And then everything old will really be new again. Sounds good to me. Sadly, Thiel and especially Sacks now appear to have backed somewhat off their views in this book. (It is amusing, though, that the book contains negative attention to “early” gay rights initiatives, and yet Thiel and at least one major conservative character in the book have since come out as gay themselves. Nothing is ever as simple as it seems.) In part this is because it is clearly written by very smart, yet very young, men. In places, it is florid, and uses the metaphors and tropes of immature writers. But mostly it is because Thiel and Sacks now live in the tech world, which while it has libertarian elements, is strongly dominated by hardcore leftists, and there is no room at all for traditional conservatives. I guess none of this is surprising, though. While the focus here is on the then-current complaints of the proponents of diversity/multiculturalism, today’s major areas of focus are nearly all seen in embryo. (One exception is the accusation of creation of stigma, the modern darling of the totalitarian

left, which is used as an all-purpose weapon once leftist aggressors realized that it required no victim at all, just a feeling that others didn't approve of what you were doing. Nor are bizarre inversions of reality like claims of gender fluidity seen here.) Microaggressions are seen in passing where a student complains of "all the very small daily daggers one feels in the environment." Puritanic regulation of sexual conduct while at the same time demanding total sexual freedom. Institutional racism as an unwashable Original Sin. This makes for interesting, if depressing, hindsight reading. Now, like the Stay-Puft Man in Ghostbusters, these embryonic ideas have assumed monstrous proportions. I'm not sure what to do about that. There is probably little to actively do, except wait and see whether there will be an opportunity to reclaim the culture, or whether all that's left to do is wait, on dune and headland, for the fire to sink. The arc of our culture since this book was written suggests the latter.

This is an interesting and informative book on an important subject. It concerns multiculturalism and political intolerance at Stanford in the 1980's. The authors (both now lawyers/businessmen/non-academics) were Stanford undergraduates. Thiel took his J.D. at Stanford; Sacks took his at the University of Chicago. If nothing else, the book demonstrates the quality of the Stanford experience and/or the ability of the admissions office to select students of quality because the book is well-researched, well-argued and well-written. It is a partisan book in the sense that it adduces evidence to support a particular point of view, one wholly inimical to the multiculture (as they term it). It is not, however, a flailing, mindless screed. It points to a multiplicity of events, interactions and facts. It names names and it provides a great many of the specifics germane to the case(s). Its arguments and narratives cannot simply be dismissed as reactionary or studiously partial. If the authors have misused evidence or conveniently forgotten counter examples they should be challenged on the facts, not criticized, e.g., because of their later business success or their extensive use of campus journalistic records. Their frame of reference is far broader than that. To say that they were too involved in the issues and those issues' initial reportage is also to acknowledge that they were involved, personally and directly. Reporters are among our society's most notable writers of 'instant history'. The degree to which that instant history will stand the test of time will ultimately be decided on the actual facts of the case(s). There is a great deal of analysis in addition to the reportage. They examine, e.g., the contradictions of the multiculture. For example, if that multiculture turns on the notion of victimology and individuals take their identity from their oppression, what happens when they are vindicated or receive power? Do they lose their identity? If that identity is dependent on their victimhood, what happens when that victimhood is ameliorated or



even reversed? Are they dependent on the sustained allegations of oppression because its absence or mitigation would reduce their claims to moral authority? Their final argument is thoughtful and interesting. Essentially it is something like the following: the multicultural's grievances are with bad elements of European/American cultures. In addition to those separate cultures (with both good and bad elements) there is something that is better termed 'civilization'--the distillation of the positive elements of those separate cultures, best encapsulated in our country's founding documents in the phrase 'natural rights.' (We would now say 'human rights.') Those rights focus upon the individual. They privilege the individual over the desires of the collective. They are principles rather than shifting cultural practices. Sometimes we are faithful to them and sometimes not. They are a product of the enlightenment, but purged of some of the enlightenment's more negative impulses. Those principles should transcend the urgings of partial cultures, including the multicultural. All in all, this is a very engaging book. It is not one that will be enjoyed by former Stanford president, Donald Kennedy. In addition to looking at cultural/political issues the book offers a mini- case study that highlights some of the problems with contemporary higher education. In support of the multicultural, Kennedy expanded dramatically the administration and staff of Stanford (though not the faculty) and then fell victim to a financial scandal/fiasco. Using an indirect cost recovery rate far higher than, e.g., Berkeley's (which also does very big science in an expensive geographical area), it was discovered that a number of inappropriate items were funded through the overhead on federal grants (university yacht maintenance, antique furniture for the president's house, a wedding reception for the president and his new wife--an attorney working at the university, who replaced his wife of 34 years a scant 2 months after the divorce, and so on). The inference, of course, is that utopian collectivism often fails to live up to its promises, but the elites always manage to acquire an impressive number of perquisites and benefits along the way. The bottom line: this is a passionately argued book, replete with facts and incidents. The authors do infer that Stanford represents something of a special case here and that the majority of higher education institutions have not suffered from the extremes visited upon it. That is hopeful.

I recommend one read Stephen C. Hicks' book "Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault" before reading this book to understand where the multicultural changes came from and how quickly they were able to be implemented at Stanford. Having done previous work in the field of inclusion and diversity, I can attest that most current higher educational and governmental attempts are in serious theoretical error and implementation and result in the same "fixes that fail" as elaborated by Thiel in this book. It is amusing to read some

of the earlier reviews accusing Thiel of right-wing propaganda when one only has to look at current examples like Evergreen to know how prescient his insights were/are.

Far too much focus on the late 80's and early 90's at Stanford without generalized application to most campuses in the the US.

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