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## OPINION

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THE SOAPBOX

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2017

### Diversity without conflict?

#### The Campus on a Hill

BY ISMAEL FAROOQUI | STAFF

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About five years ago, I was seated next to a wispy old man at a communal table. The occasion was the dreaded college interview; it seemed unavoidable and unending. Somewhere between his reminiscing on the integrated crew team and the '50s, my interviewer turned his head to face me directly. "You don't think diversity comes without conflict, do you?"

I didn't drink coffee then, but the question called for a thoughtfully long sip before a baritone "Hmmm." In the 17 years I was around, no one ever bothered to mention that diversity could be anything but good. I was left to jumble together a cogent response, and perhaps I still am wanting in clarity.

I was reminded of this moment after the publication of an anti-Semitic cartoon by The Daily Californian in a city celebrated for its diversity — ironically. The little bits of wisdom I've collected since that college interview have led me to the conclusion that diversity is conflict. And in the case of the cartoon, our diversity seemed to condone open hostility toward an ethnic group. The value of diversity on our campus can be described as a civil state of conflict among different groups of people. If we don't recognize this delicate balance holding our campus up, we may allow the collapse of the very diversity we cherish.

Diversity is an abstraction that is defined as a variety or a range of different things. There are essentially two main ways it becomes operable on campus: in admissions policy and group representation. UC Berkeley's incoming class is one of the most [economically diverse](#) in the country



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and has one of the highest proportions of Asian American students compared to other elite institutions. As for group representation, one can find examples from the diverse list of [elected officials](#) of the ASUC, representing a multitude of ethnic and religious communities, or the endless number of [student organizations](#) on campus celebrating different group identities.

From orientation to graduation, UC Berkeley is a vast and expensive celebration of the diversity of its student body. The Division of Equity and Inclusion has institutionalized the value to the point that there is a [website](#) devoted to diversity.

The diversity of people here is worthy of celebration, but it must be distinguished from diversity of opinion, which is also important but differs in a few fundamental ways. Opinions are not so arbitrary or fixed as the circumstances of an individual's birth. Not all opinions are created equal or deserving of equal representation. Consider the divisions exposed by the anti-Semitic cartoon. The cartoonist's opinion clearly wasn't civil, and instead of a dialogue on Israel and Palestine, it became hostile and regrettable for our campus's diversity.

Why call diversity a civil state of conflict? Diversity is civil in that it's bound by norms and laws. Diversity is a state because it exists in living, breathing and speaking people. Diversity is conflict because the very existence of disparate people and ideas colliding, clashing and interacting but not merging, consolidating or integrating means they are in a state of sustained conflict. In other words, the very existence of a diverse and contrasting community means people, opinions and lifestyles are in conflict with each other.

My formulation of diversity means that not all conflict is bad. When you hold a disagreeing opinion or live a distinct way, the conflict, or contrast, between yourself and another is often enriching. When it breaks out in debate that extends late into the night, it's a praiseworthy process of learning.

But not all conflict is enriching, and when it directs itself against ethnicities at large, it becomes dehumanizing and regrettable. When people direct their anger toward another group at large, ethnic conflict emerges and threatens to destroy the peaceful coexistence it grew out of.

A further danger is when ethnic conflict masquerades as diversity, claiming to be the other side in a debate or an honest representation of a marginalized community's grievance. Here the values of diversity are used in defense of group hostility, which of course undermines diversity. One may aptly think of hate speech masquerading as free speech. The invitation of Milo to campus was frequently defended as providing "the other side" to the liberal perspective on campus. This was a rather dishonest argument, as it implied that Milo's extreme views were representative of conservative opinion.

Diversity can also slide inwardly into a near-exclusive attachment to one's own group. In the name of diversity, we can become infatuated with our identity and begin projecting its boundaries around us. This can engender the kind of commonplace thinking that, for example, one wouldn't understand the Muslim experience if they weren't Muslim. Perhaps unknowingly to the speaker, the claim challenges the very value of diversity: that we can learn and understand each other's ex

Once we erect these ethnic borders through our campus, it becomes terribly difficult to understand them. An observer of the Israel and Palestine divide on our campus may come to believe intractable an issue here as in the Middle East. More than ever then, it's incumbent upon us to consider the barriers we are projecting on our open campus.

Living in the diverse city we do, I ask that we recognize that our diversity is conflict. Curiously enough, by not being afraid to discuss diversity and conflict together, we might make our campus a little more hospitable for everyone.

*Ismael Farooqui writes the Friday blog on campus culture in a time of institutional crisis. Contact him at [ifarooqui@dailycal.org](mailto:ifarooqui@dailycal.org) and follow him on Twitter at [@ishfarooqui](https://twitter.com/ishfarooqui).*

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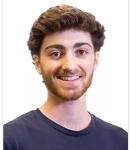


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