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Multicultural, Intersectional, Intersectoral: Knowledge Production in and Beyond the University

This presentation charts shifts in discussions of multiculturalism in the United States, beginning with the battles over (multi)cultural literary and cultural canons in the 1980s, moving through the engagement with intersectional forms of critical and activist work in gender, ethnic, and queer studies in the 1980s and 1990s, and concluding with the current potential for inter- and cross-sectoral engagements among campuses, communities, and governmental organizations invested (multi)culture as a means and method of attaining social justice. The argument is that the exhaustion of multiculturalism – the eclipse of the language of multiculturalism by alternatives such as interculturalism, hybridity, cosmopolitanism, transnationalism, and diaspora – has produced some very useful insights into the nationalist framings of earlier paradigms. But this theoretical step forward has not adequately engaged with the position of the university – and cultural studies as one of its disciplines or sub-sectors – within the larger network of academic and non-academic knowledge-making about (multiple) culture(s). Evidence of a critical and engaged model of (multi)cultural studies is drawn from the development of a community-based Master of Arts of Cultural Studies and Graduate Certificate in Public Scholarship at the University of Washington.