A Response to Clifton

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Probably I should have made explicit the way in which I was using the term *myth*. I do not, however, admit having misused the concept. Nor do I agree that myth is generally defined as Professor Clifton says it is, unless he and I also differ concerning the meaning of the word in general.

I derived the title of my paper from the working title of a paper by S. D. Clark, "The Myth of Multiculturalism." More recently, Karl Peter presented a paper at the conference of the Canadian Ethnic Studies Association entitled "The Myth of Multiculturalism and Other Political Fables." Both Clark, who discarded the word *myth* before presenting his paper, and Peter, who retained the word and did not define it, were clearly using the term *myth* in the same sense as I. Rodney Clifton found that sense to be implied in my paper: a widely accepted but unsubstantiated belief. Such a belief is not necessarily false, much less intentionally false as is a lie: It has some basis of fact, but it has not been systematically checked against available facts. It may or may not have been invented or created for specific purposes, but once invented or created it may be employed for any number of purposes.

To define the term *myth* in this way is not to misuse it, but to give it its generally accepted meaning. The word *myth* is, after all, part of popular speech. Social anthropologists — whose "very long time" is but a small portion of the lifetime of the word — have made it one of their technical terms, as they have made such terms as *culture*, *caste*, *class*, and *kinship*. They may even have reached consensus or near consensus about its meaning, as Clifton claims, although it is rare that any group of social scientists is so agreeable. But social anthropologists are a small band, however valiant for truth. They have hardly established majority rights, not to speak of monopoly rights, to the term *myth*. Their technical definition, cleaner and more precise than the popular definition though it be, cannot be said to be the generally accepted definition, nor the only admissible definition. Using the word in its popular sense, I omitted to define it: If I had used it in a technical sense, I would certainly have done so.

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