In this reading Arturo Madrid sets the tone for the readings that are to follow in this volume. At the time this speech was originally delivered, Madrid, who was trained as an analyst of literary texts, served as President of the Tomas Rivera Center, a national institute for policy studies on Hispanic issues. In the speech he describes the conflicting experiences of those who see themselves as different from what has stereotypically been described as “American.” Experiencing oneself and being perceived as “other” and experiencing oneself and being perceived as “invisible” are powerful determinants of one’s self-concept and form a very special filter through which one communicates with others. In the article, the author also debunks the myth that “quality” must be associated with homogeneity and by definition limited in quantity. Rather, he argues, quality exists in many diverse forms and is demonstrated by people regardless of their cultural group. It is by recognizing the strength in the diverse forms of quality that exist here that we as a nation will be able to forge a better future for all of our citizens.

Diversity and Its Discontents

Arturo Madrid

My name is Arturo Madrid. I am a citizen of the United States, as are my parents and as were my grandparents, and my great-grandparents. My ancestors’ presence in what is now the United States antedates Plymouth Rock, even without taking into account any American Indian heritage I might have.

I do not, however, fit those mental sets that define America and Americans. My physical appearance, my speech patterns, my name, my profession (a professor of Spanish) create a text that confuses the reader. My normal experience is to be asked: And where are YOU from?

My response depends on my mood. Passive-aggressive I answer: “From here.” Aggressive-passive I ask: “Do you mean where am I originally from?” But ultimately my answer to those follow-up questions that will ask about origins will be that we have always been from here.

Overcoming my resentment I will try to educate, knowing that nine times out of ten my words fall on inattentive ears. I have spent most of my adult life explaining who I am not.

I am, however, very clearly the other, if only your everyday, garden-variety, domestic other. I’ve always known that I was the other, even before I knew the vocabulary or understood the significance of otherness.

I grew up in an isolated and historically marginal part of the United States, a small mountain village in the state of New Mexico, the eldest child of parents native to that region and whose ances-
tors had always lived there. In those vast and empty spaces people who look like me, speak as I do, and have names like mine predominate. But the *americanos* lived among us: the descendants of those nineteenth century immigrants who dispossessed us of our lands; missionaries who came to convert us and stayed to live among us; artists who became enchanted with our land and humanscape; refugees from unhealthy climes, crowded spaces, unpleasant circumstances; and of course, the inhabitants of Los Alamos. More importantly, however, they—*los americanos*—were omnipresent in newspapers, news-magazines, books, on radio, in movies and ultimately, on television.

Despite the operating myth of the day, school did not erase my otherness. It did try to deny it, and in doing so only accentuated it. To this day what takes place in schools is more socialization than education, but when I was in elementary school and given where I was, socialization was everything. School was where one became an American. Because there was a pervasive and systematic denial by the society that surrounded us that we were Americans. That denial was both explicit and implicit. I remember the implicit denial, our absence from the larger cultural, economic, and social spaces; the one that reminded us constantly that we were the other. And school was where we felt it most acutely.

Quite beyond saluting the flag and pledging allegiance to it, becoming American was learning English . . . and its corollary: not speaking Spanish. I do not argue that learning English was not appropriate. On the contrary. Like it or not, and we had no basis to make any judgments on that matter, we were Americans by virtue of having been born Americans, and English was the common language of Americans. And there was a myth, a pervasive myth, to the effect that if we only learned to speak English well and particularly without an accent—we would be welcomed into the American fellowship.

The official English movement folks notwithstanding, the true test was not our speech, but rather our names and our appearance, for we would always have an accent, however perfect our pronunciation, however excellent our enunciation, however divine our diction. That accent would be heard in our pigmentation, our physiognomy, our names. We were, in short, the other.

Being the other is feeling different; it is awareness of being distinct; it is consciousness of being dissimilar. Otherness results in feeling excluded, closed out, precluded, even disdained and scorned.

Being the other involves a contradictory phenomenon. On the one hand being the other frequently means being invisible. On the other hand, being the other sometimes involves sticking out like a sore thumb. What is she/he doing here?

If one is the other, one will inevitably be seen stereotypically; will be defined and limited by mental sets that may not bear much relation to existing realities.

There is sometimes a darker side to otherness as well. The other disturbs, disquiets, discomforts. It provokes distrust and suspicion. The other frightens, scares.

For some of us being the other is only annoying; for others it is debilitating; for still others it is damning. For the majority otherness is permanently sealed by physical appearance. For the rest otherness is betrayed by ways of being, speaking, or of doing.

The first half of my life I spent down-playing the significance and consequences of otherness. The second half has seen me wrestling to understand its complex and deeply ingrained realities; striving to fathom why otherness denies us a voice or visibility or validity in American society and its institutions; struggling to make otherness familiar, reasonable, even normal to my fellow Americans.

Yet I also have experienced another phenomenon; that of being a missing person. Growing up in Northern New Mexico I had only a slight sense of us being missing persons. Hispanos, as we called (and call) ourselves in New Mexico, were very much a part of the fabric of the society and
there were Hispano professionals everywhere about me: doctors, lawyers, schoolteachers, and administrators. My people owned businesses, ran organizations, and were both appointed and elected public officials.

My awareness of our absence from the larger institutional life of the society became sharper when I went off to college, but even then it was attenuated by the circumstances of history and geography. The demography of Albuquerque still strongly reflected its historical and cultural origins, despite the influx of Midwesterners and Easterners. Moreover, many of my classmates at the University of New Mexico were Hispanos, and even some of my professors. I thought that would also be true at U.C.L.A., where I began graduate studies in 1960. Los Angeles already had a very large Mexican population, and that population was visible even in and around Westwood and on the campus. But Mexican American students were few and mostly invisible and I do not recall seeing or knowing a single Mexican American (or for that matter Black, Asian, or American Indian) professional on the staff or faculty of that institution during the five years I was there.

Needless to say persons like me were not present in any capacity at Dartmouth College, the site of my first teaching appointment, and of course were not even part of the institutional or individual mindset. I knew then that we—a we that had come to encompass American Indians, Asian Americans, Black Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Women—were truly missing persons in American institutional life.

Over the past three decades the de jure and de facto segregation that have historically characterized American institutions have been under assault. As a consequence minorities and women have become part of American institutional life, and although there are still many areas where we are not to be found, the missing persons phenomenon is not as pervasive as it once was. However, the presence of the other, particularly minorities, in institutions and in institutional life is, as we say in Spanish, a flor de tierra: spare plants whose roots do not go deep, a surface phenomenon vulnerable to inclemencies of an economic, or political or social nature.

Some of us entered institutional life through the front door; others through the back door; and still others through side doors. Many, if not most of us, came in through windows, and continue to come in through windows. Of those who entered through the front door, some never made it past the lobby; others were ushered into corners and niches. Those who entered through back and side doors inevitably have remained in back and side rooms. And those who entered through windows found enclosures built around them. For despite the lip service given to the goal of the integration of minorities into institutional life, what has frequently occurred instead is ghettoization, marginalization, isolation.

Not only have the entry points been limited, but in addition the dynamics have been singularly conflictive. Rather than entering institutions more or less passively, minorities have of necessity entered them actively, even aggressively. Rather than taking, they have demanded. Institutional relations have thus been adversarial, infused with specific and generalized tensions.

The nature of the entrance and the nature of the space occupied have greatly influenced the view and attitudes of the majority population within those institutions. All of us are put into the same box; that is, no matter what the individual reality, the assessment of the individual is inevitably conditioned by a perception that is held of the class. Whatever our history, whatever our record, whatever our validations, whatever our accomplishments, by and large we are perceived unidimensionally and dealt with accordingly.

Over the past four decades America's demography has undergone significant changes. Since 1965 the principal demographic growth we have experienced in the United States has been of peoples whose national origins are non-European. This population growth has occurred both
through births and through immigration. Conversely, as a consequence of careful tracking by government agencies, we now know that the birth rate of the majority population has decreased.

There are some additional demographic changes which should give us something to think about. Black Americans are now to be found in significant numbers in every major urban center in the nation. Hispanic Americans now number over 15,000,000 persons, and American Indians, heretofore a small and rural population, are increasingly more numerous and urban. The Asian American population, which has historically consisted of small and concentrated communities of Chinese, Filipino, and Japanese Americans, has doubled over the past decade, its complexion changed by the addition of Cambodians, Koreans, Hmongs, Vietnamese, et al.

Thus for the next few decades we will continue to see a growth in the percentage of non-European origin Americans as compared to Euro-Americans. To sum up, we now live in the most demographically diverse nation in the world and one that is growing increasingly more so.

One of my purposes here today is to address the question of whether a goal (quality) and a reality (demographic diversity) present a dilemma to one of the most important of American institutions: higher education.

Quality, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, has multiple meanings. One set defines quality as being an essential character, a distinctive and inherent feature. A second describes it as a degree of excellence, of conformity to standards, as superiority in kind. A third makes reference to social status, particularly to persons of high social status. A fourth talks about quality as being a special or distinguishing attribute, as being a desirable trait. Quality is highly desirable in both principle and practice. We all aspire to it in our own person, in our experiences, and of course we all want to be associated with people and operations of quality.

But let us move away from the various dictionary meanings of the word and to our own sense of what it represents and of how we feel about it. First of all we consider quality to be finite; that is, it is limited with respect to quantity; it has very few manifestations; it is not widely distributed. I have it and you have it, but they don't. We associate quality with homogeneity, with uniformity, with standardization, with order, regularity, neatness. Certainly it's always expensive. We tend to identify it with those who lead, with the rich and the famous. And, when you come right down to it, it's inherent. Either you've got it or you ain't.

Diversity, from the Latin *divertere*, meaning to turn aside, to differ, is the condition of being different or having differences, is an instance of being different. Its companion word, *diverse*, means differing, unlike, distinct; having or capable of having various forms; composed of unlike or distinct elements.

Diversity is lack of standardization, of orderliness, homogeneity. Diversity introduces complications, is difficult to organize, is troublesome to manage, is problematical. The way we use the word gives us away. Something is too diverse, is extremely diverse. We want a little diversity.

When we talk about diversity we are talking about the other, whatever that other might be: someone of a different gender, race, class, national origin; somebody at a greater or lesser distance from the norm; someone outside the set; someone who doesn't fit into the mental configurations that give our lives order and meaning.

In short, diversity is desirable only in principle, not in practice. Long live diversity, . . . as long as it conforms to my standards, to my mind set, to my view of life, to my sense of order.

The United States, by its very nature, by its very development, is the essence of diversity. It is diverse in its geography, population, institutions, technology, its social, cultural, and intellectual modes. It is a society that at its best does not consider quality to be monolithic in form, finite in quantity, or to reside inherently in class. Quality in our society proceeds in large measure out of the stimulus of diverse modes of thinking and acting;
out of the creativity made possible by the different ways in which we approach things.

One of the principal strengths of our society is its ability to address on a continuing and substantive basis the real economic, political, and social problems that have faced and continue to face us. What makes the United States so attractive to immigrants are the protections and opportunities it offers; what keeps our society together is tolerance for cultural, religious, social, political, and even linguistic difference; what makes us a unique, dynamic, and extraordinary nation are the power and creativity of our diversity.

The true history of the U.S. is the one of struggle against intolerance, against oppression, against xenophobia, against those forces that have prohibited persons from participating in the larger life of the society on the basis of their race, their gender, their religion, their national origin, their linguistic, and cultural background. These phenomena are not only consigned to the past. They remain with us and frequently take on virulent dimensions.

If you believe, as I do, that the well-being of a society is directly related to the degree and extent to which all of its citizens participate in its institutions, then you will have to agree that we have a challenge before us. In view of the extraordinary changes that are taking place in our society we need to take up the struggle again, unpleasant as it is. As educated and educator members of this society we have a special responsibility for assuring that all American institutions, not just our elementary and secondary schools, our juvenile halls, or our jails, reflect the diversity of our society. Not to do so is to risk greater alienation on the part of a growing segment of our society; is to risk increased social tension in an already conflictive world; and, ultimately, is to risk the survival of a range of institutions that for all their defects and deficiencies, provide us the opportunity and the freedom to improve our individual and collective lot.

Let me urge you, as you return to your professional responsibilities and to your personal spaces, to reflect on these two words—quality and diversity—and on the mental sets and behaviors that flow out of them. And let me urge you further to struggle against the notion that quality is finite in quantity, limited in its manifestations, or is restricted by considerations of class, gender, race, or national origin; or that quality manifests itself only in leaders and not in followers, in managers and not in workers; or that it has to be associated with verbal agility or elegance of personal style; or that it cannot be seeded, or nurtured, or developed.

Questions for Reflection

1. Describe an experience that you have had in which you felt other.
2. Describe a situation in which you have perceived some part of your cultural heritage as being invisible.