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Politics of Respect: religious freedom after Hobby Lobby and Obergefell

The debate over recognition – mainly of minority or subaltern groups - has long been part of the academic and public discussion (Taylor 1994). The centrality of identity to individuals means that misrecognition may inflict self-hatred and lack of self-worth. Thus, equal respect and recognition should be understood as a vital human need. In the previous year, the demand for equal respect has been dominating the public sphere, focusing primarily on the right of religious freedom in the debate over social issues. As in the case of Rowan County Clerk Kim Davis, and the Green family, owners of Hobby Lobby, the opposition to same-sex marriage and abortion is framed as an issue of religious liberty. Specifically, the right to religious liberty is framed as an issue of mutual respect and recognition of diversity. While this use of politics of recognition has little in common with the original call for respect for collective identities of marginalized groups, the framing of this current discourse nevertheless follows the same logic and justifications as the argument for multiculturalism. This paper introduces the use of this discourse by the religious right today, and analyzes it in light of the concept of politics of recognition. This account, we argue, helps explain the public’s support for the current arguments of religious liberty, while also challenging the original meaning and aim of politics of recognition.