
Mosaics and Melting Pots

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DEBATES ABOUT ethnic diversity are now a common feature of the political landscape. The term "multiculturalism" enjoys currency among those who welcome, or are resigned to, a decline in the type of cultural homogeneity usually associated with the classic nation-state. The fashionable American conception of multiculturalism emphasizes fluid identities and boundaries. In the Fall 1998 issue of *Dissent*, Will Kymlicka ("American Multiculturalism in the International Arena") argues that this American notion does not travel well to countries with large, territorially based "national minorities"—groups that have, usually by conquest, been incorporated against their will into a multinational state. Even the United States, he points out here and in his book *Multicultural Citizenship*, has national minorities and has acknowledged their limited sovereignty with collective rights unavailable to immigrants—in effect, firming up their identities and boundaries.

Kymlicka is correct to point out that the United States is, despite itself and contrary to its self-conception, a multinational state. The inhabitants of Puerto Rico, Guam, and American Samoa, as well as Native Americans living on reservations and the Inuit of Alaska, have special claims to territory and self-government. A burgeoning movement among native Hawaiians is demanding similar recognition and a land base to go with it. But the cultural distinctiveness, remoteness, and relatively small populations of such groups have left them out of most discussions of American pluralism. In the nineteenth century, to be sure, there was an effort at what amounted to the forced assimilation of Native Americans.

But by the early twentieth century this dream faded, both because Indians themselves refused to commit cultural suicide and because the rise of scientific racism among whites concerned with Indian affairs encouraged a belief that Indians, like blacks and Asians, were unassimilable for genetic reasons.

Multiculturalists usually include Native Americans among the groups whose distinctive cultures deserve to be respected and preserved. But the fact that Indian tribes do have territorial bases, inadequate though they may be, and a special legal and constitutional status based on treaties with the U. S. government makes their situation and prospects quite different from those of immigrants from Asia and Latin America. Immigrants, Kymlicka points out, have made a voluntary decision to move from one nation to another. National minorities, on the other hand, have been forced to accept alien rule. Consequently, justice for them may require, as it does not for voluntary immigrants, the right to special forms of communal self-government and group representation.

CANADA, unlike the United States, has a large territorially based national minority—the French speakers of Quebec. Hence its fundamental political arrangements require a special status for one of its provinces if Canada is to remain one nation. The closest American analog is New Mexico, with a substantial Spanish-speaking population that was supposedly guaranteed full American citizenship by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 but often saw its rights trampled by the Anglo settlers who eventually became a majority. The state constitution continues to prescribe bilingualism for some limited purposes, but visitors to that state will see little evidence of it. Justice for U.S. national minorities and indigenous populations is a moral

imperative, but it is not a requirement for the survival of the Union itself, as is the case in Canada.

Multicultural Models

Civic cohesiveness in the United States depends primarily on adjusting successfully to the diversity that has been created by past and present immigration, voluntary in the case of Asians and Mexicans and involuntary in the case of African Americans. Can one model of multiculturalism work both for non-European immigrants who have come recently and voluntarily and also for those who were brought much earlier in chains for forced labor? A few cross-national examples may help to answer this question.

The United States shares with several other industrialized countries the question of how to manage the diversity created by immigration from what used to be called the third world and whether or not an increase in cultural heterogeneity can be reconciled with national self-images inherited from the past. Debates over the meaning, desirability, and legal or political implications of "multiculturalism" are common to the nations of Western Europe, and to the British Commonwealth countries of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Based on recent developments in some of these countries, one may detect a spectrum of responses to multiculturalism, ranging from Canada on one extreme to France and Germany on the other.

The Canadian government has officially endorsed multiculturalism to the extent of directly subsidizing institutions and organizations devoted to "cultural retention" and maintaining communal solidarity among immigrant groups. This policy is not, as is often supposed, the result of more egalitarian attitudes among white Canadians than can be found among whites in the United States. According to a recent study by two Canadian sociologists—*The Illusion of Difference: Realities of Ethnicity in Canada and the United States*, by Jeffrey G. Reitz and Raymond Breton—extensive survey data show surprisingly little difference between the basic attitudes of the white citizens of these two North American nations toward immigrants of color. Despite the myths that

Canada is a "mosaic" and the United States a "melting pot," racial prejudice and xenophobia exist to about the same extent in both countries. Differences in public policy and discourse between Canada and the United States hinge on the ethnoracial climate *before* the large-scale nonwhite immigration of recent years. In Canada, the special status of Quebec has compelled a recognition of polyethnicity that sets a precedent for the toleration and even encouragement of the cultural diversity resulting from immigration. It is no accident, therefore, that the characteristic Canadian response to immigrant disadvantage is to promote the cultural autonomy and solidarity of ethnic groups.

In the United States, the volatile history of black-white relations tends to influence policy and attitudes toward Latino and Asian immigrants. Affirmative action, originally conceived as a response to the special disadvantages of African Americans, has been extended to some predominantly immigrant minorities. The current debate over the legitimacy of affirmative action is fueled in part by growing hostility to non-European immigration. If the current assault on affirmative action is successful, the United States will rely simply on the "free market" to provide the kind of opportunities for self-help that earlier European and some contemporary Asian immigrant groups have found sufficient for economic success and social mobility—if not for the immigrants themselves, at least for their children and grandchildren.

It is mostly the persistence of palpable black disadvantage that makes a majority of Americans continue to favor some form of "affirmative action," even if they are uneasy about straightforward "racial preferences." English-speaking Canadians, on the other hand, do not see why other minorities should not have the linguistic and cultural rights traditionally accorded to the *Québécois* even as they resist Quebec's demands for greater political autonomy.

"No Black in the Union Jack"

Since the 1950s, almost all Western European nations have received large numbers of immigrants from outside of Europe—in the case of

the former imperial powers, mainly from their own former colonies. In the period of economic expansion and low unemployment between the mid-fifties and the late sixties, newcomers were welcomed as a necessary supplement to the domestic labor force, or more specifically as people to do the menial work that natives would no longer undertake. But the economic slowdown that began in the late sixties created tighter labor markets and a movement toward the restriction of immigration. This has stemmed the flow but left open the question of how to deal with the substantial numbers who were already there and wished to remain.

Anti-immigrant racism rose first in Britain in the heyday of Enoch Powell in the 1960s. During that decade Britain drastically restricted nonwhite immigration, but also passed new anti-discrimination laws to encourage the fair treatment of immigrants of color who were already resident in the United Kingdom.

THE AFRO-BRITISH sociologist and cultural critic Paul Gilroy, in his classic work *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, has traced the race problem in the United Kingdom to an insular nationalism that identifies Britishness with a distinctive physical type and way of life. The British have never been noted for receiving foreigners into their national community with open arms, and they have reserved their greatest revulsion for those who seemed to deviate most from the physical and cultural norms of the island's historic populations. Unlike American proponents of the "melting pot" or French advocates of total assimilation into the universal republic, they have rarely proclaimed or celebrated their capacity to "Anglicize" ethnic strangers. Thus prejudice based squarely on pigmentation appears to be stronger in Britain than in other Western European countries and has inhibited official recognition of ethnic differences among non-European immigrants. Popular racial terminology often designates both Afro-West Indians and South Asians as "blacks," thereby ignoring the cultural gulf between these two immigrant communities. A shared experience of discrimination has at times created a tenuous solidarity among people of

color, and the egalitarian white left has generally endorsed this black-white view of British race relations.

Recently, however, a serious debate has developed about whether an American-style civil rights approach really makes sense for Britain. Representatives of the substantial Muslim minority from Pakistan and India have objected to being lumped together with West Indians as victims of prejudice based on skin color. They contend that religion rather than race is central to their identity and the main source of their disadvantage. They have therefore argued that Islam should be accorded the same legal status as Christianity. This is a thorny problem for British education, which requires some form of religious instruction in state-supported schools.

France and Germany

For reasons that are radically different in each case, Germany and France have provided relatively barren ground for the growth of any kind of multiculturalism. German identity and citizenship have traditionally been rooted in a relatively pure form of ethnic nationalism. Immigrants of remote German ancestry—for example the Volga Germans of Russia who left their German-speaking homelands in the eighteenth century—have been eligible for instant citizenship. On the other hand, the children and grandchildren of Turks who came as guest workers thirty or forty years ago are still regarded as foreigners and face many obstacles if they wish to become German nationals. The new social democratic government has made it somewhat easier for Turks born in Germany to become citizens, but its proposal to grant dual citizenship was withdrawn in the face of public disapproval. Up to now, German multiculturalism has taken the form of encouraging Turks to organize themselves as a "national minority" in order to bargain more effectively with the German state. Turkish leaders and anti-racist Germans have also advocated limited political rights for resident aliens, such as access to the municipal franchise.

Of course the United States long had a racial qualification for citizenship through naturalization. According to the Immigration and Naturalization Law of 1790, only free

white immigrants were eligible for citizenship. As part of the post-emancipation reforms of the Reconstruction era, the privilege was extended to black newcomers, but it was not until World War II that Asians became eligible for naturalization. The Fourteenth Amendment made citizens of all persons born in the United States (except Indians on reservations, who had to wait until 1924). Since 1868, therefore, the rights of American nationality have been conferred automatically on the children of all immigrants, whatever their race or ethnicity. Recent proposals to deny citizenship to the children of illegal immigrants would break a long tradition and might require a constitutional amendment. America may have once had what amounted to a white racial nationalism that contradicted its founders' professions of civic nationalism. But it has never had, at least officially, a culturally based ethnic nationalism like the Germans.

FRENCH NATIONALISM, like the American, is professedly of the "civic" as opposed to the "ethnic" variety. Indeed, the French virtually invented the idea that a nation could be based on the equal rights and general will of all of its loyal inhabitants. Unlike Germany, France has long been an immigrant-receiving society. What has limited French toleration of other cultures is a powerful ethnocentrism that tends to regard French culture as a universal norm to which all immigrants, whatever their origin, should be able and willing to conform, at least in public. French policy and traditions make no distinction among immigrant groups. The only categories that matter are French citizens and foreigners. The rationalistic universalism of the republican left lacks respect for cultural particularity, especially if it takes a religious form, and the intolerance of the right extends to anything that is not traditionally French and Christian, preferably Catholic. The French left's state-supported universalist republicanism and the French right's unofficial cultural chauvinism are equally inhospitable to the idea of France as a multicultural nation.

The French government has nevertheless made some pragmatic adjustments to ethnic diversity. In 1981 the ban on cultural associa-

tions based on national origins was lifted, and these ethnic organizations have subsequently received public subsidies for activities that seem likely to facilitate the integration of their members into French society. But such policies have had the unintended effect of intensifying ethnic identities and thus impeding assimilation. The furor in 1989 over the Moroccan girls who wore head scarves to school brought out the hostility of much of the republican left to any expression of religious commitment in the public sphere and the nativist right's intolerance of Islam and prejudice against former colonial subjects. Eventually the government reluctantly granted the girls permission to wear the *chador* to school, and the nativist right promptly capitalized politically on what it described as an ignoble surrender to the Islamic assault on French culture and identity.

In his recent essay *On Toleration*, Michael Walzer argued that American liberalism is traditionally more tolerant of cultural diversity than French republicanism. The French have developed, he contends, a more powerful and coercive concept of assimilation than have the Americans. Although France has received many immigrants, it could never be described as "a nation of immigrants." Newcomers have been expected to become thoroughly French in their public personae, and most of them have. In America, according to Walzer, "children are taught that they are citizens of a plural and tolerant society—where what is tolerated is their own choice of cultural membership and identity."¹ European immigrants have of course been the main beneficiaries of this cultural toleration. At least in recent times, no price has had to be paid for celebrating one's Irishness, Italianness, Jewishness, or Polishness—in fact vote-seeking politicians from other ethnic groups customarily join in the festivities.

But before glorifying American tolerance and condemning the French, we need to recall the American color line, which has denigrated people not so much because of culture but because of the racist belief that nonwhite ancestry endows differing degrees of intelligence, character, and capability. Racism in the American sense has had its adherents in

France, especially on the far right, but their views have been less influential than the opinions of those who have defined human diversity primarily in terms of cultural differences. Sociological surveys suggest that the French are significantly less prejudiced against black Africans or West Indians than against Muslim North Africans who are as light-skinned as many French, but who are considered a cultural threat.²

The French may need multiculturalism more than the Americans, but Americans need what the African National Congress of South Africa calls "non-racialism" more than the French. A confusion between the need to overcome phenotypic racism, which remains a more basic problem for the United States than for France, and the need for cultural toleration, which is not so difficult a challenge for Americans, has at times muddied debates over multiculturalism in both countries.

Walzer provides some grounds for optimism that non-European immigrants will receive a full acknowledgment of their cultural rights. But one cultural issue has come to the fore that has provoked a resurgence of nativist sentiment—the question of language retention and bilingual education. Several state legislatures have recently passed laws recognizing English as an official language. Controversies concerning the linguistic rights of immigrants are not without precedent in American history. The issue of whether immigrants have the right to be instructed in their own language arose in the late nineteenth century in the case of German-language schools in the Midwest. Today the language in question is Spanish, and programs in the public schools that begin instruction in Spanish and then gradually move to English have come under intense attack. Bilingual education, the printing of electoral ballots in various languages, and the conduct of public business in Spanish in some localities has led to a movement to amend state and federal constitutions to mandate the use of English in all government functions.

Language and Rights

Comparatively speaking, however, the United States does not yet face a serious problem of linguistic diversity. The world is filled with

countries that are deeply divided among language groups that claim equal rights with others—from South Africa with its eleven official languages to Canada and Belgium with two each. As the Spanish-speaking population of the United States continues to grow, demands for official bilingualism will be made on the state level. The experience of other countries suggests to me that such a policy would not be disastrous, so long as many people can be induced to learn and use more than one language, as is currently the case in such polyglot nations as Belgium, South Africa, Canada, Switzerland, and India. It would enrich the culture of the border states of California, Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico—to say nothing of improving intergroup and international relations—if all students in these states were required to learn Spanish in public schools, just as English-speaking Canadians and Flemish-speaking Belgians must take some French.

Walzer prescribes "state neutrality" as a basis for ethnic toleration, but this may not be adequate, given the current situation of increasing diversity. Political philosophers Jürgen Habermas and Amy Gutmann argued in a recent symposium on multiculturalism that achieving individual rights in an ethnically diverse democratic society requires (in the words of Gutmann) not only "respect for the unique identities of each individual, regardless of gender, race, or ethnicity," but also "respect for those activities, practices, and ways of viewing the world that are particularly valued by, or associated with, members of disadvantaged groups, including women, Asian-Americans, African-Americans, Native Americans, and a multitude of other groups in the United States." According to Habermas, "A correctly understood theory of rights requires a politics of recognition that protects the integrity of the individual in the life context in which his or her identity is formed."³

Critics of multiculturalism might at this point predict the "disuniting of America." What kind of consensus can we hope for if cultural differences are accorded this level of official protection and recognition, even if it is done on the liberal basis of an extension of individual rather than group rights? "Complex societies," Habermas argues in response, "can

no longer be held together by a substantive consensus on values but only by a consensus on the procedures for the legitimate enactment of laws and the legitimate exercise of power."⁴ American national unity is supposedly premised on the commitment to democratic institutions and procedures and not on an officially sanctioned set of cultural values, so we should be in a better position to accept such a conception of what holds us together than nations, such as Habermas's Germany, that have traditionally affirmed an ethnocultural nationalism.

The United States, however, may not be as "complex" as the plural societies to which Habermas's formula would obviously apply. Political scientist Jennifer Hochschild contends that U.S. citizens, with few exceptions, affirm "the American dream" of material success through individual effort. Her study *Facing Up to the American Dream* shows that even the most underprivileged tend to accept this ideal in principle even if they are unable to live up to it in practice.

Most voluntary immigrants, from whatever source, have come to America primarily with the aim of improving their material circumstances. Traditionalist Native Americans and Hawaiians, and some religious communities like the Amish and Hutterites, do not share this ideal of America as a land of economic opportunity for individuals and nuclear families. Their historically sanctioned rights to practice a communalism contrary to American individualist norms must be respected. But most Americans, of whatever ethno-racial background, place a high value on individual opportunity to prosper and attain a decent standard of living. From this perspective, our challenge is to make life chances for material betterment equally available to everyone regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender. The debate on affirmative action centers on the question of whether historically disadvantaged groups need special consideration to "level the playing field." (I happen to think that they do, but I will not argue the case here.) America therefore shares with many other nations the challenge of how to accommodate increasing ethnic diversity through immigration from non-European sources. But our basic values

and democratic principles may permit us to cope with this mixing of populations more effectively than the principal nations of Western Europe.

America's Color Line

What is truly unique about America's diversity, at least compared to other modern industrialized nations in which multiculturalism has become an issue, has been the continuous presence of a substantial and radically disadvantaged minority descended from the *involuntary* immigrants that the slave trade brought from Africa during the colonial period and for a short time thereafter. As a result, most white Americans, past or present, have had some direct experience of racial advantage signifying that their status was higher than that of African Americans. The American liberal tolerance for ethnic diversity praised by Michael Walzer has traditionally stopped at the color line.

Will Kymlicka's distinction between national minorities and immigrant minorities leaves unresolved questions concerning the rights and status of African Americans, who are neither a national nor a voluntary immigrant minority. They were incorporated by force like indigenous peoples but, like free immigrants, they came from elsewhere and lack a territorial base. The perennial debate among African Americans between separatists and integrationists can be seen as an effort to situate the black American experience in relation to Kymlicka's dichotomy. Nationalists have in effect argued that blacks are the equivalent of a national minority that deserves communal autonomy and group representation, while integrationists have in effect accepted the immigrant analogy, if not as a current reality at least as an ideal to be pursued. The caste-like character of black status, especially in the South, had no real parallel in British, French, Canadian, or even German domestic society (despite rising anti-Semitism) during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—although of course one can find some equivalency in the colonies of the European nations. The anthropologist John Ogbu suggested in *Minority Education and Caste* that the best analogies for understand-

ing the African-American situation are not ethnic minorities of the usual sort but rather lower castes like the Burakumin of Japan and the untouchables of India—groups that have traditionally been relegated to menial roles, socially segregated, and prohibited from intermarrying with the upper caste or castes.

But the caste analogy, while useful as a corrective to simply considering African Americans another minority, is not perfect either. It suggests a permanence of status that is belied by the history of black-white relations in the United States. Blacks in the South of the Jim Crow era may have been very like a caste, but the civil rights movement destroyed the legal basis for such a status. Currently, I would suggest, African Americans are caught between the legacy of caste and the possibility of being included as another ethnic group in a multicultural America. To me, this means that black-specific and not just race-specific policies may be necessary. Affirmative action, which does not usually apply to Asians, may become unnecessary for Latinos, or at least some Latino groups, at some point in the near future and yet remain a justifiable policy for blacks so long as extralegal racism perpetuates aspects of color caste.

It is highly significant, I think, that intermarriage between African Americans and whites, although increasing, is much lower than that between Asian and Euro-Americans or between Latinos and Anglos. Furthermore, recent polls reveal that a majority of whites continue to oppose black-white marriages on principle.⁵ Such data might be taken as evidence of the survival of caste consciousness among a significant proportion of the American population. A multiculturalism that treats all people of color as equally disadvantaged will not, in all probability, suffice to bring full justice and equality to African Americans. To repair the damage done by almost four centuries of enslavement, segregation, white-on-black violence, and pervasive caste discrimination, we will have to go beyond the toleration of differences and reach for the higher ground of interracial and intercultural democracy. ●

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1. Michael Walzer, *On Toleration* (Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 73-74.

2. "Asked in a survey which category of immigrants poses the greatest difficulty for integration, 50 percent of French respondents identified North Africans, far more than the 19 percent who named Black Africans. . . ." Donald L. Horowitz, "Immigration and Group Relations in France and America," in *Immigrants in Two Democracies: French and American Experience*, eds. Donald L. Horowitz and Gerard Noriel (New York University Press, 1992), p. 19.

3. Charles Taylor et al., *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, edited and introduced by Amy Gutmann, ed. (Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 8, 113.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 135

5. According to calculations based on population table 62 of *The Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1997* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997), p. 57, 9.6 percent of marital unions involving blacks were interracial, and 8.6 percent resulted from blacks having married whites. This contrasts with the 27.4 percent of all existing marital unions involving Hispanics that represent outmarriages. The outmarriage rates of Asian Americans, especially Japanese, have been even higher than those of Hispanics. A majority of whites remain opposed to marriage across the color line. In 1994, polls revealed that only 45 percent of whites approved of marriages between blacks and whites and 16 percent thought they should be made illegal. See table 2 of Stephan Thernstrom and Abigail Thernstrom, *America in Black and White: One Nation Indivisible* (Simon and Schuster, 1997), p. 524.