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Two Takes on Immigration

by Joshua Hackney-Power

In the introduction of *The British Dream*, David Goodhart succinctly and somewhat abrasively defines multiculturalism as “allowing immigrants not to have to adapt beyond a bare minimum” (2013). This is worded differently, but is fundamentally similar to what we have discussed multiculturalism to mean in class. For the purpose of HON-341 and of this paper, multiculturalism is the belief that immigrant groups should hold on to their way of life as their primary identifier; the practical means of this are somewhat isolated communities that can maintain their ethnic and cultural traditions side by side with other members of their own group. This sort of multiculturalism was openly pursued for years in Britain for years before Prime Minister David Cameron publicly declared that it had failed. He says that the nation encouraged “different cultures to live separate lives” and thereby has “failed to provide a vision of society to which they (minorities) want to belong.”

In the 1st century BC, Roman Legionnaires arrived on the British Isles and mingled with the peoples who had been there since prehistory. Then over the course of the 5th century AD, many Germanic peoples migrated to the Isles and became integrated into the (all white) ethnic fabric of the land, forming what is now called the Anglo-Saxon people. For the next 1400 years, there was no significant migration and integration of people into Britain; during the Norman invasion, William the conqueror took control of governing the Isles, but genetic data shows that the Norman influence on the general population is rather small (Li et. Al. 2008). And then, in 1948, the SS Empire Windrush arrived in London carrying 500 Jamaican migrants, beginning a larger wave of migration from other British Commonwealth states. Many were retired members of the British armed forces, and they came to England for work under the British Nationality Act 1948 which granted full British citizenship to all "subjects of the Empire". This was the first time in nearly a millennium and a half that new ethnics arrived in large numbers to England, and the first time ever that they were of a different skin color.

The American story is remarkably different. In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue, and then wave upon wave of European colonists forced the native people of North America onto tiny reservations. However, without millennia to do so, these European colonists, did not and have not mixed together and homogenized the same way that the people of England did. In contrast to the ideal of "Britishness" discussed in "British Dream," the USA has been fairly diverse from early on, as stated in our motto, "E Pluribus Unum," or "From Many, One." Initially this meant that thirteen separate colonies could form a unified country, and the “diversity” was mainly white descendants of Englishmen. Before long however, the ideal of "E Pluribus Unum," along with the need to fill an ever-expanding country led to the formation of a much different national identity from that which exists in Britain. As President Obama said to immigrants at a 2016 Naturalization Ceremony, "We are a nation united not by any one culture or ethnicity or ideology, but by the principles of opportunity, equality, and liberty that are enshrined in our founding documents” (Naturalization Ceremony 2016). The president was right about what does and does not unite us all, however that does not mean that an American culture does not exist; what it means is that the culture unites most, but not all Americans.

The American national identity may not be based on ethnicity, but that does not mean that it is completely compatible with real multiculturalism. The "Unum" in E Pluribus Unum *does* mean one. Whether a new group is accepted or initially rejected and discriminated against, they are expected to eventually become "American." Even if the idea of what it means to be

American has changed over time, the idea of the "melting pot" is that there is an American culture that holds us together. While the traditional idea of assimilation means that $A+B+C=A$, the American idea of the melting pot means, in theory, that $A+B+C=D$. A new culture is formed by the combination of other cultures, but the end result is still one culture. True multiculturalism on the other hand, would look like $A+B+C=A+B+C$. Each culture that makes up the whole must remain distinct, and so one culture that unites everyone cannot really form.

Goodhart states in *The British Dream*, that "a national identity has both a very particular aspect rooted in the customs, language, texture and reference points of everyday life, and a more universal citizenship aspect derived from the political rules and procedures of liberal democracy," however "it is the first that carries most of the emotional charge." (2013) If Goodhart's ideas on national identity are correct, then the American identity as President Obama described it would not be a very strong identity.

While America is indeed a nation of settlers and immigrants, that has not always translated to friendly policies toward and treatment of new immigrants. The first piece of legislature passed in the U.S dealing with the rights of immigrants was the 1790 Naturalization Act. The act stated that only a "free white person" of "good moral character" could apply for naturalization, and it contained a two-year residency requirement. The residency requirement was increased to five years in 1795, and then to fourteen years in 1798, and was finally brought back down to five in 1802. The act was finally amended to include people of African birth or descent in 1870 (Cohn 2015). The first piece of legislation actually regulating immigration (as opposed to naturalization) was the Page Law, which "undesirables" including convicts, forced Asian laborers, and most Asian women; it was passed in 1875 and Cohn states that it was a precursor to the 1882 Chinese exclusion act.

As we've discussed in class, immigration from Europe flowed rather freely until the quota acts of 1921 and 1924, which shut down the vast majority of immigration until the 1965 Hart-Celler Act. Prior to Hart-Celler, a 1943 act repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act, and a 1952 act removed race as a reason for exclusion altogether, which opened the doors for huge numbers of Asian and African immigrants once Hart-Celler was finally passed. Concurrent acts over the following decades removed refugees from the common visa pool, removed hemisphere-based visa caps, provided relief from deportation to young immigrants who arrived as children, and occasionally provided avenues to citizenship for illegal immigrants (Cohn 2015). Despite past racist immigration laws, recent laws up through 2016 have not discriminated in any observable way against immigrants of any particular ethnicity, nationality, or religion. If a foreigner has a citizen family member or job offer, then there is a potential (though still difficult) path to immigration. Whether that will be the case through 2017 remains to be seen.

The history of immigration in Britain is far shorter than in the U.S., but the path that British policy has taken in that short time has been essentially opposite to the American path. While early American policies were restrictive and racist, the British Nationality Act 1948 was very open and progressive. Allowing people from the worldwide British Empire into England itself caused the very homogenous British people to experience diversity for the first time. The catch with this act is that it was not expected to be a means of mass migration, but rather to fill a labor void in post-WWII Britain. The fact that mass migration, especially from colonies such as Jamaica and Trinidad, was unintentional is highlighted by Mr. Andrew Turner's statement that "in June 1950, a Cabinet committee was established with the terms of reference of finding 'ways which might be adopted to check the immigration into this country of coloured people from British colonial territories'" (House of Commons 2003). Whatever the intention of the act, its

effect *was* mass migration. Commonwealth immigration increased from 3,000 in 1953 to over 136,000 in 1961.

Through a series of laws in the late 60s and early seventies, Britain restricted immigration to those who had work permits AND a parent born in the U.K. This cut off the vast majority of commonwealth country natives, while most whites in those countries could return to Britain. Since then, rules were slightly relaxed to include a close relative in the U.K. as a possible sponsor, but then in 2012, legislation was passed that requires a spouse living in Britain to earn at least 18,600 pounds per year to sponsor their foreign spouse; what the person seeking a visa earns is irrelevant (Foreign Spouse Income 2017). This culling of immigration along monetary lines also, likely not coincidentally, falls along racial lines.

Even during that time of high immigration, discrimination and ethnic conflict was common, as evidenced by occurrences such as the Philadelphia nativist riots of 1844 (Feldberg, 1975). Conflict occurred when groups stood out as too different from the norm, like the strong Irish Catholic communities of Philadelphia, and natives felt threatened. According to the Poverty Site, U.K.'s site for statistics on poverty and social exclusion, the percentage of people living in low income households in 2009 was vastly skewed towards racial minorities. In the time before the immigration income law was passed, about 20% of white Britons lived in low income households. That number was about 30% for Indians and Caribbean islanders, 50% for Africans, 60% for Pakistanis, and 70% for Bangladeshis (2010). Due to this skewed income for those already in the nation, the 2012 law is very racist in its effect.

Clearly, many ethnic minorities have not done very well in Britain, but some have, and the same can be said for U.S. immigrants. However, the extent to which some groups in Britain, especially Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, live below their white counterparts is very extreme. It may be possible that this is partially a result of the state multiculturalism that has precluded assimilation. If minority communities remain tight knit groups that do not expand into the mainstream, it will be difficult to escape poverty. The U.S. does have certain areas that are similar, such as Chinatowns and Little Italys, but the public-school system has always served as a rapid assimilator and has precluded the type of multiculturalism that exists in the U.K. In public schools, children of all ethnicities salute the flag, and yet can still go home and speak their parent's language. In U.K. faith schools, as we discussed them in class, students learn little to nothing about the existing culture in England, and patriotism is discouraged. I believe that this issue causes tension between multiculturalism and national identity to be worse in Britain than America. However, if America tried to implement a hard multiculturalism, as Britain did, the results would likely not be much different than what has happened over the pond.

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