Becoming US

By

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I was born in October 1952 just a coupe of weeks after the *Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* made its debut on television. It became the longest running live-action sit-com in U.S. television history. Preparing this essay, I found plenty that fit with its idealized picture of life in America.

- It was in 1953 that the Buckeye was designated as the official state tree
- and in 1954 they started ringing the bell in Ohio Stadium after Buckeye victories.
- In 1959, the Ohio Legislature adopted a new state motto, one proposed by a 12-year-old boy in a statewide competition. It was "With God All Things are Possible." And what do you know; Ohio State's men's basketball team won the national championship in 1960, and Jack Nicklaus the NCAA golf title the following year.

Of course, not everything was idyllic. Maybe part of the reason the idealized portrait seemed so important to people was their fear that forces of change were brewing.

- Starting in 1951 the Ohio Un-American Activities Committee went after 40 people seriously and named 1,300 others as communists. Governor Frank

Lausche called the committee, "a grave danger" worrying that it threatened the reputation of innocent people on the basis of accusations based on rumor or malice. He vetoed the bill that would assign jail time to anyone with communist leanings. Led by the Chair of Un-American activities, Samuel Devine, the General Assembly, however, overrode the veto.

- In the same month as Ozzie and Harriet, and I, got started, there was a "Halloween" riot at the Ohio Penitentiary. It overwhelmed the police and took the National Guard to contain.
- And in 1959 the worst flood in Ohio history, maybe second only to the one in 1913, hit Columbus hardest of anywhere in Ohio.

Looking back, the development that had the most lasting and significant impact on me was the 7 million dollar gift to Ohio State left by Ralph D. Mershon when he died in 1952. An auditorium on the campus was dedicated to him in 1957 and a Center to pursue his substantive interests in national security in a global context, ten years later.

When I started reading Kit Katt essays from the period, I expected to see all sorts of topics discussed and I was not disappointed. I was surprised, however, at how long essays used to be, on average 40-45 pages. Although I am used to giving 90-minute lectures, I figured one of those was not on anybody's wish list this season, so I'll abbreviate that tradition.

There were essays on Bullfighting, Newspapering, Astronomy, Mental Health, and Painting Portraits of Birds. When the club celebrated its Fiftieth anniversary, it heard essays on its history as we are now. As it entered the 1960s, there were three essays that raised the issues I'll discuss tonight. Ray Bowen wrote the first of these. It was on avant-garde theater and the work of Thorton Wilder exploring change in America. J. D. Folkman delivered the second in 1963. He presented the Book of Ecclesiastes reading this passage "two are better than one because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up." The third was given a year later by Charles Lazarus who took the opposite tact reading to the club what he called "Dean Fullington's wonderful statement." It went "all that is virtue belongs to the individual and all that is bad is communal."

I want to think about communities and individuals tonight and about change in America. In a nutshell, I am going to ask if people living in the United States are likely to share a common sense of nationhood as we go forward and likely to feel any obligation to help each other. I realize there is much to be said for individualism. Just the same, Rupert Emerson (1960, 384-85), from his perch at Harvard in 1960 recognized something I think is correct. He wrote "*It has been wisely said that the price of nationality is war: and yet what is bought at the price is also of great value. The brotherhood of man finds much of this working expression within the nation."*

The value of nationhood is perhaps most evident in places where it never took hold, like the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Who knows about Iraq? In the United States, it seems to be taken for granted, although I admit I do not study the United States and have simply taken my communal obligation to Kit Katt as a chance to think about it harder. It is my sense though that there is an inclination to believe that America's history is one of nation building. *E Pluribus Unum* is its motto, after all. Isn't a melting pot part of its DNA? Well, I'm not so sure.

Samuel Huntington (2004) in his book *Who Are We* argues the United States was never an immigrant country. It was a settler country founded by Anglo-Saxons and built on their Creed. All who followed assimilated, he argued. This eventually included South and East Europeans, and, just in my father's lifetime, Catholics. The story for Africans, Asians and recently Hispanics is still unfolding. How it will go is not so clear.

Brown v. the Board of Education (Topeka, Kansas) brought desegregation into focus in 1954. The Ohio Civil Rights Act created the Ohio Civil Rights Commission in 1959. Restrictive covenants preventing African-Americans and Jews from buying property were still common in Upper Arlington and even as late as 1968, there were zero African-Americans in U.A. schools and fewer than 1% in Bexley or Westerville schools. At that time (1968), African-American students accounted for 26% of students in Columbus schools. By 2000, African-Americans accounted for nearly 60% of the students in Columbus while the suburbs remained

overwhelmingly white: less than 1% of the students in U.A. were Black, around 2% in Dublin, and 4% in Bexley, in Westerville, the situation was changing with 11% African-American.

Officially, the United States is a civic nation. Cultural roots, ethnic backgrounds, and religious beliefs to say nothing of race do not determine citizenship. That is based on allegiance to common principles and the fulfillment of obligations to the state. However, as Martin Luther King so famously put it in 1963, this civic ideal remained largely a dream. In the minds of many, there was a cultural prototype that defined who the real Americans were. That WASP prototype affected whom they felt deserved the benefits of membership and the positions of power.

At that time, the African, Hispanic, and Asian communities were small. Even thirty years ago, in 1980, they all together accounted for barely twenty percent of the population. Between 2000 and 2008 the increase in the foreign born, however, accounted for more than 30% of the growth in the United States. If we include their offspring, they account for roughly fifty percent (48%) of the growth. They account for the entire increase in California's population.

Today, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, Whites account for 66% of America's population, African-Americans 13% and Hispanics 15%. The Bureau forecasts that Whites will account for less than half by 2040. By then, 16% will be African-American, 23% Hispanics, and 10% Asian.

The change is fastest among young people. Census data released just a week ago (December 14, 2010), show 48% of newborns in 2009 were to minority parents. Only 20% of people over 65 are minorities. How this disparity will affect the social programs like social security and Medicare that depend on cross-generational subsidies is a question being asked more than answered.

Although in California, minorities are already the majority with according to the Census Bureau 40% speaking a language other than English at home, Ohio is still somewhat insulated from these trends. In the last census, 85% of Ohioans were White, 12% African-American, around 2% Hispanic and just under 2% were Asian. Only 10% spoke a language other than English at home and while more than a quarter of the population in California is foreign born only 4% in Ohio is. However, the number of foreign born in Ohio rose more than 25% between 2000 and 2008. Economic recovery would accelerate that trend.

In the face of the changes I'm describing some people want to close the door on immigrants. For the sake of drawing attention to what I am most interested in, which is building a sense of nationhood, I will simply acknowledge that trends could be stalled, at least in theory. This would not be possible by concentrating on the undocumented immigrants, however. Their number has been declining since 2007, now hovers around 11 million, which is less than 4% of the population. To have impact, legal immigration would need to be curtailed. That topic is too big to take

on here so I will simply note that even if we stopped it completely right now the minorities I have been discussing would account for more a third of the county. That alone merits our attention.

It is this 100 million that relegate most white populist arguments to the fringe of society. The sort of discrimination that would be required to disenfranchise them is not only morally repugnant but also politically impractical and economically ruinous. I suppose we could imagine a multinational United States in which the minorities evolve into nations of their own. This would require a different form of federalism resembling Belgium or Lebanon, maybe Canada. Those countries, however, do not enjoy the benefits of a strong sense of nationhood and instead perennially wrestle with secessionist movements and inter-ethnic conflict.

So, while I suppose there are theoretical alternatives to developing an overarching nationhood that is inclusive, the real question before the country is not whether to do this but how.

The traditional strategy imagined people becoming American and relegating their cultural attachments be they Irish, Italian, or Greek to festivals and family. It worked for much of the Twentieth Century to produce the melting pot among whites but according to prominent African-American scholars had more limited success among minorities. They describe three problems.

First, too many Whites assumed American meant White, European, and for plenty, Christian. In this mindset the nation is seen as a family with WASPs defining the nuclear core. As in most families, as you move away from that nucleus, the inclination to share resources and leadership positions declines. This cultural corruption of the civic notion of the nation fueled discrimination against minorities.

Second, as Harvard professor Michael Dawson (2009; 1994) finds, because of persistent discrimination most African-Americans did not enjoy the fruits of the broader country nor feel welcome as equal members. They came to see their fate as more linked to the fate of their ethnic group than to the fate of the United States.

Finally, Jim Sidanius (Sidanius and Petrocik 2001), who made his career at UCLA but is now at Harvard, finds that among whites, their ethnic and national identities are positively related. The prouder someone is of being white and European, the more proud they are of being American. He says it is often the opposite for African-Americans. For them, being more American is often seen as coming at the expense of their attachment to the African-American community. This asymmetry, Sidanius explains, undermines the notion of any melting pot and works against even the metaphor of a salad bowl in which the parts may stay distinct but, nevertheless, cohere as a whole.

The recognition of these problems prompted the turn to multiculturalism some time ago. The idea was to remind people that the nation was civic by

recognizing that it is comprised of people from multiple cultures, none of which have a claim to higher status (Kymlicka 1995; Taylor 1994). Several studies have found this can have a positive effect.

For instance, a team of social psychologists at the University of Illinois found that when they primed white Americans to think of themselves as European-Americans, and not simply as Americans, whites were more likely to help African-Americans in New Orleans after Katrina (Dach-Gruschow and Hong 2006). Their explanation for this was that when whites were thinking simply of Americans, they left Blacks out. On the other hand, when whites were reminded they too were only one type of American, this reminded them, however subtly, that there were other kinds of Americans too. That led them to think about America in a way that defined African-Americans as compatriots and to help them.

In a similar vein, albeit from the opposite direction, Claude Steele (Purdie-Vaughns, Davies, Steele, and Ditlmann 2008) now the provost at Columbia University found that African-Americans are not reassured by corporate claims to be colorblind. Rather, when interviewers made that promise, Blacks were inclined to suspect that a pro-White bias would prevail. More direct discussion of diversity and open recognition of difference, according to Steele, had more positive impact on Black expectations of being included as equals.

As if often the case with public policies, the benefits of multiculturalism do not come free. With regard to building a sense of common nationhood, the strategy can have quite counter-productive consequences as well.

- For instance, one common source of trust among people is a perception of similarity, emphasizing difference undermines this.

- Additionally, making ethnic differences salient moves those who might otherwise support integration and inclusion to oppose them. It is the erosion of support among the center and center left in Europe, for example, that has changed the political landscape there regarding immigration.

- And talking about groups instead of individuals, can lead people to attribute the inequalities that persist between groups to the intrinsic qualities of the groups. In other words, it may reinforce bigotry and divert attention from continuing discrimination and the unfair distribution of opportunities.

- In a parallel way, celebrating the importance of ethnic groups can lead young people to act in ways that fulfill group stereotypes.

- Political scientists, like Robert Putnam (Putnam 2007), and many economists are now reporting in study after study that in

> neighborhoods and cities where cultural heterogeneity is high, inter-personal trust and cooperative efforts to help one another are low.

So we are left with a dilemma. We need to embrace diversity and the civic notion of the nation for compelling moral reasons and for pragmatic reasons too. At the same time, most experts agree that for democracy to work we need a sense of community. Without it, the readiness to comprise and give ground for the greater good is too thin and comity across ideological differences too fragile. So, as we embrace multicultural strategies, how do we find a sense of similarity and commonness?

In Europe, they encouraged immigration to substitute for a shrinking local labor force. Uncomfortable with the cultural and political change this produced, governments there are re-emphasizing assimilation. Many European pundits say multiculturalism is dead. I do not think we can reach that conclusion in the United States. Our demographic and economic realities, to say nothing of our political ones, are different.

We will need to embrace multiculturalism and find a way to overcome its pitfalls by identifying things that pull us together. This is not likely to be easy as ethnic diversity and economic inequality grow. I wish I could rely on a cosmopolitan universalism to carry us home. It's a very tempting way to close four days before Christmas, but, alas, as Rupert Emerson found in the 1960s, nations

need to define not only what makes their member alike but also what makes them distinctive. Why else should they bother being self-determining?

Before he died, Samuel Huntington wrote that America is led by people with dead souls, an elite so uncomfortable with being different that on the right they are determined to make the rest of the world look like America, and on the left they are determined to incorporate into America all the diversity of the world. Huntington preferred to recognize that what makes America distinctive is its Creed, which he claimed, was the special heritage of the WASPs -- a position not so surprising given his status as a Boston Brahmin.

I value much of what he said is part of the Creed, but feel that many other people from all sorts of ethnic and religious backgrounds do too. What will make us distinctive in the future are not the values of hard work or even the dignity of the individual. Those are popular many places. If we can pull it off, what will make us distinct is becoming one from many when the many are celebrated rather than forgotten.

I do not know if the cultural gap between the groups I've been talking about tonight are any wider than once existed between Anglos and the Irish. Some say yes, others no. What is clear is in that experience, assimilation was the dominant policy agenda and multiculturalism is today. In the past, difference was minimized and the common emphasized. Because what was presumably common was claimed to be

the special preserve of one sub-group, it undermined equality. Today, to promote equality, diversity is center stage and what unites us less prominent.

A week ago on December 14th, the U.S. Census Bureau released an analysis of their latest data by professors at Brown University and Florida State. They found that the decline in segregation characterizing the close of the last Century ground to a halt in this one. They concluded, and I quote, "a handful of very large metropolitan areas in the Northeast and Midwest formed a 'ghetto belt' of extremely high and fairly constant levels of segregation." What little change they saw was in the direction of segregation not integration. My sense is that for the health of American nationhood we need to work harder than that at becoming us.

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