

The Tension Between Multiculturalism and Nationalism

A Quest Paper by Patrick C. May

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DEDICATED TO TIM BORNE

I would like to dedicate this Quest paper to Tim Borne, a long time Quest Club member and one of my sponsors. Tim welcomed me with open arms to his community and his home and has been like a big brother to my wife Sandi. Today's topic is one that Tim would have relished engaging in, but he is not able to be with us today. The only advice he gave me upon learning about my paper was "Pat, don't go long". And so, with those marching orders, let me proceed.

PCM October 20th, 2017

INTRODUCTION.

Baseball, jazz, and microbreweries of Indiana. Those were the last three topics of the Quest meetings earlier this Spring. As a lover of all three, I left the final meeting feeling pretty relieved knowing that the topic for my first Quest paper would be coming soon. Then I received an email from Connie identifying my topic – “The Tension Between Multiculturalism and Nationalism” and I thought, WOW, where did that come from?

Remarkably, this topic was assigned before Charlottesville, where the building tension related to this topic exploded in the form of riots the weekend of August 12th, 2017. Ostensibly organized as a march to protest the removal of confederate monuments, images of white men marching at night in a torch-lit parade, displaying Nazi salutes and shouting “Jews will not replace us” belie that this was just about confederate monuments. Denouncing such actions and beliefs should not be difficult, but not everyone did. In closing his August 16th MSNBC show after reporting on equivocating remarks about Charlottesville from President Trump the night before, Chris Matthews said, “if you can’t walk away from racism, why do you have feet?”

So how did we get here? Charlottesville is just a small, but extreme, example of the tension that has been building in America (and indeed throughout Europe) between those willing to embrace multiculturalism in their country, versus those concerned that the manifestations of multiculturalism, liberal immigration policies in particular, are undermining the character of their

nation. In its simplest form, that is the tension between multiculturalism and nationalism. In this paper, I will attempt to define these terms and explore how their oppositional forces have been heating the melting pot of America to a boiling point.

DEFINITION OF MULTICULTURALISM

According to the *Merriam-Webster* online dictionary, “multicultural” was first used in 1935, along with words like “Double-agent”, and “direct tax” - words which still resonate today with the current headlines on Russian intrigue in the election and tax reform. Less resonating words like “ding-a-ling” and “smarty pants” also debuted in 1935.

Merriam-Webster defines multicultural as: “of, relating to, reflecting or adapted to diverse cultures.” This simple definition seems innocuous enough, but linked to that definition are recent examples on the use of “multicultural” in sentences that *Merriam-Webster* has taken from the web. These examples illustrate how loaded that term can be. They include a quote from John E. McIntyre, a writer from the *Baltimore Sun*, who wrote “the prospect of a multicultural America cannot mesh with the white Protestant template, and this has many white people atremble with cultural insecurity.” Another example is from an article by Robert King, a reporter for the *Indianapolis Star*, who, in writing about Matthew Heimbach, an Indiana white nationalist characterized as the next David Duke, attributes Heimbach’s vision for America to include “...those from biracial families or interested in multicultural living could have the coastal areas and the big cities.” Heimbach is basically talking about a return to the days of segregation writ large. Both of these examples for the use of the word multicultural are dated late August 2017, right after Charlottesville, so you can see why I started my paper with that event.

The incongruity between the rather anodyne definition of multicultural versus the charged examples of its use by *Merriam-Webster*, led me to seek another definition that focused more on the concepts of multiculturalism rather than a rote definition of the word. The online *Encyclopaedia Britannica*'s entry on Multiculturalism starts with "Multiculturalism, the view that cultures, race, and ethnicities, particularly those of minority groups, deserve special acknowledgement of their differences within the dominant political culture." Special acknowledgement! Now we are getting somewhere with respect to identifying possible sources of tensions arising from multiculturalism, a point I will return to later in this paper.

As noted previously, multiculturalism is a relatively new term in America, although in an interesting take, Eugene Volokh, a current contributor to the *Washington Post*, suggests that the concept arguably goes back to our founding fathers. In his January 2015 *Washington Post* column on "The American tradition of multiculturalism" Volokh writes, "the premise of federalism is precisely that multiple states, which the Framers envisioned as often having substantial differences in culture, should be able to retain their cultures, including the legal rules that flow from those cultures." Now given their tolerance of slavery and the lack of women's rights at the time, I doubt that the Founders would be considered multiculturalists in today's terms, but I understand the point Volokh was making that elements of multiculturalism are invested in our founding documents.

Modern concepts of multiculturalism began to emerge soon after the 2nd world war with increasing immigrant migrations to North America, Western Europe and Australasia. In his book

Theories of Multiculturalism, George Crowder writes that “the new migration came with a change of attitude in the host country where the traditional policies of assimilation – the insistence that immigrants adopt the majority culture - came to be seen as neither necessary nor desirable.” Before that, immigrants were expected to acculturate themselves completely in the American way, adopting our language, our dress and our dominant Protestant and Catholic religions. At least that’s what our collective memory of the past tells us, but I wonder what the presence of a Little Italy or Greektown or similar ethnic enclaves in cities all over America tells us about the absolute requirement for assimilation.

The pace of multiculturalism really picked up in the 1960’s and 1970’s with the added elements of policies and practices promoting equality in race, gender and sexual orientation. Many of these policies were initiated in response to the civil rights movement of the ‘60’s and the feminist movement of the 70’s, which until the last couple of years, I thought had made such progress. More recently, the American Disabilities Act in the ‘90’s and enhanced advocacy by the LGBT community in the 00’s have influenced multicultural policies. Collectively, these have shaped the central themes of modern multiculturalism: those of valuing cultural diversity in balance with equality of opportunity and mutual tolerance.

I think that all of us recognize that we live in a multicultural society – a walk around any major or mid-sized cities, and increasingly small towns, will demonstrate that fact. But acknowledging that fact is different from actively promoting cultural diversity. And for some, the methods and means to promote cultural diversity and assure equal opportunity make them uncomfortable with

multiculturalism. Several objections to multiculturalism arose from my readings. One is that multiculturalism privileges the good of certain groups over the common good, potentially eroding the common good in favor of a minority interest. Another is that multiculturalism undermines the notion of equal individual rights. Indeed, the principal of egalitarian liberalism is that all citizens should be treated equally under the law and thus, special acknowledgement of some minorities would seem to run counter to that. Another prevalent objection to multiculturalism is that it undermines the sense of common citizenship that is essential to social cohesion of a nation. In fact, it is often accused of destroying a shared nationalist identity. Opponents then, are focused on defending the traditional national culture and ethnicity against new immigration, new forms of culture, and new economic patterns, although ironically, as expressed by Anatol Lieven in his book *America: Right or Wrong*, the “traditional” national culture and ethnicity being defended, actually includes a significant residue of the previous generations of immigrants.

For many, the benefits of multiculturalism are obvious. It enriches our arts, our music, our cuisine. Drawing from Eugene Volokh’s *Washington Post* column again, multiculturalism is a source of valuable citizens. He argues that with the decline in American students pursuing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) majors, our work force is packed with immigrants or descendants of immigrants working in high-end technology and innovation companies. But a decline in H-2B work visas, due to heightened concerns over immigration, has threatened the ability of technology employers to hire sufficient numbers of talented foreign-born workers. At the opposite end of the work spectrum, immigrants are often employed in unskilled labor, doing jobs that others don’t want to do. In fact, there are some concerns voiced about the recovery from

the recent hurricanes in Texas and Florida due to the lack of unskilled laborers, often immigrants, some illegal, fearing to show up for work due to crackdown on immigration laws. Another benefit to multiculturalism that may be less appreciated is that it provides a source of knowledge for dealing with the multicultural world we live and work in daily. Many of us who have traveled to international countries for work have been “prepped” by our fellow employees who came from or lived in those countries with respect to how to act, dine and otherwise engage in cultural activities without inadvertently offending our hosts. Fortunately, on my few trips to Japan for Lilly, I managed to avoid a favorite activity of Japanese businessmen while entertaining – that of being taken to a karaoke bar and asked to belt out something like Springsteen’s “Born To Run”. Pound it out on a piano, sure – but sing it? As Sandi knows, that would have been a disaster. So, having a pool of American citizens who know the foreign language and culture eases business negotiations. If you are an advocate for a global economy, this exposure to multiple cultures is an invaluable contribution to business.

DEFINITION OF NATIONALISM

Turning now to nationalism, according to the on-line *Merriam-Webster* dictionary, the term “nationalism” was first used in 1798 along with the debut of “war hawk” and “anti-religion.” I find it interesting that these terms have been around for so long. *Merriam-Webster* defines Nationalism as: “loyalty and devotion to a nation; especially: a sense of national consciousness exalting one nation above all others and placing primary emphasis on promotion of its culture and interests as opposed to those of other nations or supranational groups.” Of note, “nationalism” is in the top 1% of search terms at the *Merriam-Webster* Online Dictionary website, while “multiculturalism” is in the bottom 50%. Perhaps this reflects current trends in

popularity for these opposing viewpoints. Or perhaps it also reflects a reader's definitional issue with nationalism, and one that I too struggle with at times. That is because *Merriam-Webster* lists a number of near-synonyms for nationalism, each of which carries its own distinct meaning. Patriotism is similar to nationalism in so far as it emphasizes strong feelings for one's country, but it does not necessarily imply an attitude of superiority. By this definition, I consider myself a strong patriot but also ascribe to the Albert Camus quote, "I should like to be able to love my country and still love justice." In a different view on patriotism, George Bernard Shaw said, "Patriotism is, fundamentally, a conviction that a particular country is the best in the world because you were born in it...". This quote, while humorous, nonetheless underscores the importance of birthplace to concepts of nationalism. Another synonym, Jingoism, closely resembles nationalism in suggesting a feeling of cultural superiority, but unlike nationalism, it also implies military aggressiveness. Finally – fascism, defined as a political movement, or regime, that exalts nation and often race above the individual and that stands for a centralized autocratic government headed by a dictatorial leader, severe economic and social regimentation, and forcible suppression of opposition. As an example of the use of nationalism, *Merriam-Webster* links this sentence to its definition, - "at its broadest, academics define fascism as an authoritarian regime that puts an emphasis on nationalism." This sentence was taken from an article on fascism that Lily Herman wrote for *Teen Vogue*. Think about that for a second. An article on fascism in *Teen Vogue*. Growing up, I didn't have sisters around, but I seem to recall from the covers at supermarket check-out lanes that *Teen Vogue* in the '60's was concerned about blemish control, or how to carry off wearing flower-power hippie peasant dresses with some semblance of style. But how times have changed and it makes me feel good to know that America's youth are being exposed to important social issues in media targeted specifically to

them. So, grab a copy of your grand-daughter's *Teen Vogue* next time she visits and take a look – you might be surprised.

Searching for a more lyrical description of a nation, I came across this definition by Benedict Anderson, which according to the online website *The Nationalism Project* is one of the most commonly used definitions by scholars in the field. In Anderson's definition, a nation is "an imagined political community - - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." In excerpts from his book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* posted on-line at *The Nationalism Project* web-site, Anderson explains that "it is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, yet in the minds of each, lives the image of their communion." He goes on to write, "the nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them encompassing over a billion living human beings, has finite if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. It is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm. Finally, it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship." This lovely and moving definition first appeared in 1983 and I was drawn to his repetitive use of "imagine" which also immediately brought to my mind, John Lennon's similar repetitive use of the word in a song written a decade earlier, in which he wonders if we can "imagine that there's no country." I don't know, but I wonder if, in a way, this was Anderson's response to Lennon. But I also wonder how compelling Anderson's definition is today; sadly,

given the current state of our nation it seems Anderson's imagined deep horizontal comradeship has turned into an unimaginably deep and bitter partisan divide the last several years.

While some argue that nations have been around for a very long time, and just taken different shapes at different points in history, a current argument, discussed in the online *Encyclopedia Britannica* is that nationalism is a modern movement. While certainly much older than multiculturalism, the idea of nations is still only a couple of hundred years old. For the first 15 centuries of the Christian era, the ideal was a universal world-state, as exemplified by the Roman Empire, rather than loyalty to any separate political entity. During the middle ages, civilization itself was not thought of nationally, but rather characterized religiously with two dominant civilizations – Christian or Muslim- each with their own dominant language of culture – Latin (or Greek) and Arabic (or Persian), respectively. It was only at the end of the 18th century that for the first time, peoples' identity began to be determined by nationality. Prior to that, men gave, or were required to pledge, their loyalty to other forms of political organization: for example, the feudal fiefdom and its lord, or the city-state. Think of the various individual municipalities that populated the 18th century Italian peninsula: Venice, Rome, Florence, Milan, and others, each with their own governance, culture, and language. The nation we know today as Italy only was formed in 1861, and at that time, it is said that only 3% of its citizens could speak the national Italian language; the rest communicated in their own dialects. While the Italian language now dominates, these dialects still exist. Lovers of Donna Leon's crime detective novels centered around Venice will know that the protagonist Brunetti, sometimes slips into a Venetian dialect when he wants to confuse nearby prying ears.

To some, the first powerful manifestations of nationalism are to be seen in the American Revolution where America became a nation engaged in a fight for liberty and individual rights as espoused by Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson. Since that time America has been regarded as the vanguard of mankind on its march to greater liberty, equality, and happiness for all. These ideas found their first political realization in the birth of the American nation. The French Revolution soon followed and is often cited as the beginning of European nationalism. Taking cues from these two revolutions, nationalism became one of the most significant political and social forces in the 19th century. National symbols, anthems, flags and narratives were constructed by nationalists and widely adopted. These symbols obviously still evoke strong emotions today as the properness or improperness of NFL players protesting by kneeling during the national anthem is debated in the newspapers, TV and social media. Moving into the latter part of the 20th century, the term nationalism became increasingly negative in its connotations, as nationalism in its extreme form, fascism and Nazism, were responsible for the two world wars earlier in that century. Disillusionment with nationalism continued and in the late 20th century and early 21st century was countered by the rise of a multicultural globalism with its emphasis on open borders and free trade as highlighted in Thomas Friedman's paean to globalism, *The Earth is Flat*. Even the Harvard neoconservative Nathan Glazer in 1998 concluded that his side had lost and "we are all multiculturalists now"; a conclusion arrived at by citing the ubiquity of multiculturalism taught in the school curricula and the apparent institutionalism of the practice. But like so many things in politics and life, permanence is difficult to attain.

TENSION BETWEEN MULTICULTURALISM AND NATIONALISM

At the start of the 21st century, there has been a resurgence of nationalism and populism pushing back against multiculturalism. This has been reflected in pressures on the European Union, the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom, Russian annexation of Crimea and the Ukraine, and the election of Donald Trump. Michael Murphy in his book *Multiculturalism* notes that much of “this recent animus towards multiculturalism has been focused on immigrant-driven diversity”. In Europe, the largest anxiety had been reserved for Muslim immigrants, but more recently, both Europe and the US have been embroiled over debates about accepting Muslim refugees from war-torn areas. And it is not just Muslim immigrants. In his book *Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity*, Sam Huntington argues that “the vast increases in the numbers of Latinos migrating to the US (both legally and illegally), threatens to undermine the Anglo-Protestant creed upon which America was based, and that the multicultural celebration of linguistic, cultural and identity-based differences serve only to accelerate this process of national disintegration.”

The danger is that multiculturalism can become an easy rhetorical scapegoat for public fear and anxiety when national security is threatened and when economic conditions are bad. And certainly, the economic conditions are bad, at least for a large segment of the American middle and working class. Anatol Lieven in his book *America: Right or Wrong* notes that “over the past 30 years this central part of the American society has seen incomes stagnate or even fall” and that “incomes at the lower end of the scale have been held down by the resumption of mass immigration, both legal and illegal.” In a frightening and prescient conclusion to his book, Lieven warns that “if the middle class continues to crumble, they will take with them one of the essential pillars of American political stability and moderation.” He goes on to warn “as in

European countries in the past, this would be the perfect breeding ground for radical nationalist groups and for even wilder dreams of “taking back” America at home and restoring the old moral, cultural, and possibly racial order.” This was written in 2012, but seems to eerily foreshadow Charlottesville.

“Cities are a sum of its people. Multiculturalism strengthens the sum” is a quote from James Morris Robinson’s military fiction novel, *Genesis: A New World Order*. But this statement pointedly references “cities” as benefiting from multiculturalism. Do other areas also benefit from multiculturalism? Nowhere has the economic downturn been felt greater than in the rural and ex-urban Midwest and a recent (October 5, 2017) opinion piece in the *New York Times* by Thomas Edsall points to demographic changes in these areas as a large contributing factor to Hillary Clinton’s loss of the election. He cites studies that show rural and ex-urban areas in the mid-west have seen a net out-migration of native born residents and an influx of immigrants. The people leaving tend to be younger and more open-minded, many leaving for the big cities, while those left-behind tend to be older and more close-minded. These rural community dwellers feel negatively affected by the influx of immigrants and thus, disproportionately were attracted to Donald Trump and his anti-immigration campaign. And in the article, Edsall quotes Stanley Greenberg, a Democratic pollster and strategist who said that “Immigration is a powerful issue for these Trump voters, representing a demand that citizens come before non-citizens, Americans before foreigners, that we take care of home first before abroad.” The failure to recognize this anger and concern by the Clinton campaign flipped the election. With these diametrically opposed views on the benefits of multiculturalism by Americans living in city versus rural environments, perhaps it is not surprising then, that the Indiana white nationalist mentioned at the beginning of this paper was willing to cede the big cities to the multiculturalists.

So, can nationalism, being comprised by definition of a common and dominant culture, be compatible with the accommodation of multiple cultures? George Crowder in *Theories of Multiculturalism* suggests that this depends upon the type of nationalism. Extreme or totalitarian forms of nationalism like Fascism and Nazism that have done so much to give nationalism a bad name, are clearly not compatible with multiculturalism. In those forms of non-liberal nationalisms, it is the nation that is valuable in and of itself and takes ethical priority over the individual and over other groups. In contrast, I would like to believe that Tocqueville's view of the young American nation remains as accurate today as it was when first expressed in the early 19th century: "Americans are unanimous upon the general principles that ought to rule human society." According to Crowder, a core national identity is positively essential to a multicultural society in order to motivate a shared sense of justice, trust and cooperation across such differences. Crowder notes that "the US has combined a strong sense of nationalism with a capacity to integrate people from different cultures. Many of these retain something of their traditional affiliations, becoming hyphenated Americans: Italian-Americans, Greek-Americans, and so forth." In my view, there's no reason that this hyphenation cannot continue with new and different countries coming before the hyphen.

In the conclusion to his book *Multiculturalism*, Michael Murphy acknowledges that there are limits to what public policy on its own can accomplish with respect to promoting stability and justice in conditions of diversity. Indeed, as an example of these limits, think of the transient nature of presidential directives in support of minority rights: without the rule of law, these can be overturned as soon as a new president is elected. Instead, Murphy emphasizes the importance

of civic multiculturalism which he explains can entail “voluntary norms or standards of conduct that help foster a climate of tolerance and civility in a culturally diverse society. The mantle of civic multiculturalism can be taken up by members of the majority culture through our willingness to educate ourselves with respect to the nature and purpose of multicultural policies, to subject them to reasonable debate and to resist efforts of those whose objective is to sow public hysteria rather than informed debate on the questions of minority difference.” Failure to do so can have disastrous consequences. Gordon Craig, the famous Scottish historian on Germany while later recounting the rise of Nazism in the 1930’s, is reported to have said “when intellectuals abandon liberal principals, disengage from politics and generally abdicate their role as “truth-tellers” for society at large, it is easy for demagogues to play upon human fears and lead a society over the brink to disaster.” Senator John McCain certainly has not abandoned those principals and just this past Monday, as reported in an October 16th *Washington Post* article by Paul Kane, was quoted as saying “To fear the world we have organized and led for three-quarters of a century...to refuse the obligations of international leadership...for the sake of some half-baked, spurious nationalism cooked up by people who would rather find scapegoats than solve problems is as unpatriotic as an attachment to any other tired dogma of the past.” I think Eleanor Roosevelt, who once said, “Pit race against race, religion against religion, prejudice against prejudice. Divide and conquer! We must not let that happen here” would have approved of Senator McCain’s remarks.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the tension between multiculturalism and nationalism is real and not just imagined. It has been simmering for the past couple of decades, but frankly, since the last

presidential election, has come to a full boil. At the extreme ends, advocates for strong nationalism see multiculturalism as threatening to all the things that make America great, at least in their minds, while strong advocates for multiculturalism fear that making America great again means returning back to the 1950's, with its exclusionary practices for women and minorities. The extremists are unlikely to yield their positions, and so the resolution of this tension, if it is to come, will need to come from reasoned debate among those that occupy the middle-ground. Paraphrasing Michael Murphy's view again, one resolution to this tension between multiculturalism and nationalism could arise by members of the majority culture being willing to educate themselves with respect to these issues. I think the Quest Club manifestly exemplifies this civic responsibility for public discourse and debate, and while it might have been easier to talk about booze and blues, I'd like to thank the organizing committee for providing this challenging and important topic.

Finally, because I'm a dreamer, (well, not that kind of Dreamer), I'd like to end this paper with a lovely and affirming quote related to multiculturalism from Helder Camara, a Roman Catholic Arch Bishop from Brazil, who wrote in his book *Spiral of Violence* - "Keep your language. Love its sounds, its modulation, its rhythm. But try to march together with men of different languages, remote from your own, who wish like you, for a more just and human world."

Thank you for your attention and I invite your questions and your own perspectives on this topic.

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“Cities are a sum of its people. Multiculturalism strengthens the sum.”

— James Morris Robinson, Genesis: A New World Order

“Pit race against race, religion against religion, prejudice against prejudice. Divide and conquer! We must not let that happen here.”

— Eleanor Roosevelt

“Keep your language. Love its sounds, its modulation, its rhythm. But try to march together with men of different languages, remote from your own, who wish like you for a more just and human world.”

— Hélder Câmara, Spiral Of Violence

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“I should like to be able to love my country and still love justice.”

— Albert Camus

“Patriotism is, fundamentally, a conviction that a particular country is the best in the world because you were born in it...”

— George Bernard Shaw