

Briefing of 10/17/2001

Global Ethnicity and Race in U.S. Perspective

by

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### 1. Ethnicity and Race in Global Perspective

In *Global Perspectives*, Kelleher and Klein attempt to give the reader a historical and analytical overview about the importance of ethnicity and how we should learn to deal with diversity. Kelleher/Klein argue that for a better understanding of global issues, we need to realize that differences of race, ethnicity, gender, and class define who we are and what decisions people make.

### 2. Human Commonalities and Differences

According to Kelleher/Klein, all humans share basic human needs regardless of their different cultures. The latter developed as a human reaction to different environments. Compare, for example, Americans and Thais. But Kelleher/Klein oppose the theory of Social Darwinism according to which cultures progress from primitive to advanced ones. Whether societies are technologically advanced or not, they adapt to different environments and succeed or fail according to their adaptation capacity. Cultural change is inevitable and can happen *internally* (Example: innovations), or *externally*, i.e., change can be voluntary imported from the outside (new music styles, fast-food restaurants, fashions, different foods) or involuntary imposed (Example: Christian crusades/missions, British and Spanish colonization of India/Latin America).

### 3. History of Cultural and Economic Adaptation

Kelleher/Klein divide societies into four categories: *gathering/hunting*, *agriculturalist*, *pastoralist*, and *state organized*. Each of them is based on different survival and reproduction strategies: *Gatherer and hunter societies* are based on a system of general reciprocity where people in small bands share with one another. *Agriculturalism* depends on domesticated plants for food and wealth, and gives way to balanced reciprocity (trade) and the development of class distinctions. *Pastoralism* uses the means of domesticated animals and develops a ranking based on status, prestige and power. In societies characterized by *state organizations*, political organization takes precedence over class and economic organization. Economic specialization and intricate market exchanges develop far more advanced than in the previously mentioned social organizations. Tribal affiliations become unimportant and are replaced by political and legal citizenship rights.

### 4. Classification of Cultures and its Reactions

Cultures are stratified into subcultures. Various social identities form a national culture, ranging from ethnic groups (including indigenous people) to "races", genders, and classes. Reactions to cultural diversity within a society exist in form of ethnocentrism, patriotism, racism, sexism, and other forms of stereotyping and prejudice.

### 5. Case Study - Nunavut

Kelleher/Klein close their chapter with a case study about the Inuit culture in the

Canadian Arctic. Originally gatherers and hunterers, the Inuit resisted Canadian attempts to "civilize" them to our supposedly culturally superior values and ways of life. As a result of Inuit pressure to not only preach but also practice Canadian multiculturalism, the Inuit nation now has their own territory called Nunavut where they experiment with cooperative living and efforts to maintain tribal traditions.

## **6. Will America Break Apart?**

In his article "*One Nation. Indivisible: Is it History?*" William Booth explores how the U.S. deals with its current wave of immigration. In contrast to the period between 1850 and 1920 when mostly Irish, Germans, Italians, and East Europeans arrived in the U.S., the great majority of immigrants today are from Asia and Latin America. This development tests the "melting pot" ideology and creates various new problems.

Some social scientists prognosticate that "the nation will continue to fracture into many separate, disconnected communities with no shared commonality or purpose. Or it may evolve into something in between, a pluralistic society that will hold on to some core ideas about citizenship and capitalism, but with little meaningful interaction among groups" (Booth, p.2). Booth claims that in contrast to the yearning for commonality and integration during earlier waves of immigration, immigrants now put emphasis on preserving their cultural roots, identity, culture, and language. Even among second and third generation immigrant children one can observe ethnoracial "clustering." For example, school cliques meeting in cafeterias are still defined by the origins of their parents or grandparents.

Finally, we are faced with demographic trends of a "browning" of the U.S. In some states the formerly White majority is or will soon become a minority, for example, in CA, NM, HI, NV, TX. MD.

## **7. Effects of the 1965 Family Reunification Law**

Congress granted immigrants already in the US the right to bring over relatives, who in turn would bring more relatives. As a result, the U.S. is absorbing as many as one million newcomers each year, to the point that now almost one in every ten residents is foreign born.

The integration capacity of new immigrants depends primarily on their education (unskilled versus highly specialized) and on their English language proficiency.

White U.S. native-born react to the immigrant influx by leaving their residences, cities, and regions in search of more ethnoracial homogeneous locations with the effect of creating separate Americas. "One America will care deeply about English as the official language and about preserving Social Security. The other will care about things like retaining affirmative action and bilingual education" (Booth, p. 6).

## **8. Deepening Ethnic Segregation in the U.S.?**

Ethnic segregation also exists in the job market. Mexican immigrants are employed as gardeners and domestic workers, in apparel and furniture manufacturing, and as cooks and food preparing. Koreans are tending small businesses, Filipinos become nurses and medical technicians, and African Americans take governmental jobs. Overall, there exist

fewer “transitional” jobs for new immigrants, jobs that once helped Italian and Irish immigrants to assimilate into the mainstream. And mobility ladders are blocked for ethnic groups in areas of high immigration. In addition, in some areas like Miami, Blacks and Hispanics compete for the same jobs and power positions, creating conflicts among minorities.

In public discourse immigrants are often lumped into single groups so that very diverse groups such as Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese become "Asians." Or Cubans, El Salvadoreans, Haitians, and Brazilians become "Hispanics". At the same time, many immigrants desire for their children to advance economically but they do not want their children to become too “American,” keeping them immersed in ethnic enclaves in order to preserve some of their heritage. Is it therefore surprising that immigrants maintain their separateness and reject the melting pot or reject U.S. claims of superiority? For example, in a recent study most of the youngsters answered with no when asked if they believe in the U.S. as the "best country in the world" (Booth, p. 9).

### **9. Minority Rights as a Means to Preserve Democracy?**

In his article *Citizenship in Multicultural Societies*, Kymlicka traces the history of the contemporary liberal debate on minority rights in the West. It goes back to the struggle for national self-determination/self-governance/cultural autonomy of minorities living in multinational European empires in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century (British Empire, Tsarist Russia, Hapsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire, Ottoman Empire).

Interestingly much of the weighty arguments of early supporters of minority rights (John Stewart Mills) have been forgotten nowadays. Even liberals see collective cultural minority rights as incompatible with civil rights and universalist values. In the U.S. today, rights of minorities are treated by many liberal supporters with "benign neglect." This is, according to Kymlicka, a result of the perceived failure of minority treaties after WWI, the U.S. focus on racial desegregation interpreted as granting equal but not separate rights, and a liberal backlash against the perceived Balkanization effects of "ethnic revival" movements since the 1970's. Kymlicka however, thinks it is important for a healthy and liberal democratic society to respect minorities and grant them minority rights. He believes this will prevent ethnoracial conflict and hold multiethnic, multinational, and multicultural societies together.

### **10. Questions for Class Discussion**

- 1) Will the world under the pressure of globalization continue to maintain as many different ethnic groups and national (sub)cultures as in the past? Or are we, regardless of widespread resistance, headed towards the extinction of cultures and separate ethnic groups?
- 2) What ethnic groups have a good chance of to survive the onslaught of global standardization? Is the example of Nunavut an exception or a typical case of maintenance of native traditions?
- 3) Is the future of the U.S. bleak if current immigrants are not assimilated in the same fashion as immigrants one hundred years ago? What attitudes, values, and practices hold people in the U.S. together regardless of ethnoracial separation and segregation tendencies? Is patriotism an alternative to minority rights?