

Comments

FURUYA Jun

UNIVERSITY OF TOKYO

Twice in the course of the last decade the contours of Americanism have changed dramatically. On the first occasion, arriving in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, Americanism changed from pluralism and tolerance to conformism and coercion. On the second, after the election of Barack Obama, it reverted to its earlier form, but with some alterations. Accordingly, the notion of social justice has also been greatly altered. From a strictly binary opposition between good and evil it has become more nuanced and pluralistic. All three papers under review directly or indirectly refer to these changes, which may also be described as the tension between pluralism and unity in American society.

Professor Sollors's paper addresses the problems and possibilities of a multilingual United States. Professor Muller's contribution seeks to "complicate the prevailing narrative about the government's approach to Americanism" through a revision of the Japanese-American experience in WWII. Professor Gottschalk's study reveals that the prison system, which ostensibly serves as a means for promoting social stability and social justice, in fact heightens social tension, and promotes or even solidifies racial and ethnic discrimination.

It seems to me that the three authors share the ideals of pluralism and tolerance regarding the ethnic constitution of American society. These ideals include a respect for cultural differences and ethnic heritages, the defense of the right to dissent, and the freedom to lead a decent life. In the past eight years, such ideals have been almost silenced by the post-9/11 jingoistic nationalism. The same ideals, however, harmonize well with the results of the 2008 election and the birth of the first African-American President, a man who stresses dialogue and mutual understanding between various social groups.

Against this backdrop Professor Sollors develops his idea of a multilingual society. He persuasively argues that in order to understand the current diversity of American society in terms of language it is necessary to awaken many memories of its multilingual past. The main assumptions of Sollors's paper remind me of the American Socialist Party during the Progressive period, which was organized along ethnic lines and whose unity was based on a common socialist ideology. The organizational structure of the American Socialist Party was thus radically distinct from that of its counterparts in Europe. The party consisted of countless chapters, each of which maintained its own linguistic

identity. Each chapter published its printed materials in its own language. But the content of such publications, which argued for socialism as the sole means for achieving a just and equal society, was fundamentally identical. Through such means the party respected ethnic diversity based on language while achieving ideological harmony. The success of this type of compromise relied on the socio-economic reality of American society during this era. In major urban areas laborers belonging to various ethnic groups lived in their own mutually segregated enclaves and could hope to achieve some degree of class solidarity only on the basis of a shared political ideology.

The American Socialist Party, however, declined very quickly after the US entry into WWI. Wartime nationalists suppressed multilingualism as well as oppositional socialism. The immigration restriction measures introduced in the twenties virtually stopped the influx of immigrants from various countries and effectively dried the pool of multilingualism.

After WWII and particularly after the immigration law of 1965 the trend reversed again and the number of immigrants has dramatically increased. Today, however, the situation is somewhat different from that of the Progressive era. It seems to me that it is not particularly propitious for multilingualism. To be sure, immigrants, now usually from Latin America and Asia rather than Europe, still come to the United States for economic reasons, but the pressure of the international market place forces them to speak English. Mainstream Americans are suspect of the so-called illegals and the communities of new immigrants are constantly threatened by the raids of the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, as Gottschalk's paper indicates. Not only is English necessary for surviving in this situation in the United States but also for competing in the global market. Increased mobility, both nationally and internationally, also fosters the use of English throughout the nation and even abroad. These factors constantly erode the class basis of multilingualism, which existed during the Progressive period. On the other hand, political ideology, far from unifying a large number of discrete linguistic groups has come to emphasize cultural identity and with it, linguistic abilities.

I would like to ask Prof. Sollors how he conceives of the link of multilingualism to the socio-economic realities that confront linguistic minority groups in the United States. And it seems to me that the main target of the recent "English Only" movement is not multilingualism but bilingualism of English and Hispanic. If so, could I suppose that multilingualism is today basically an elite phenomenon?

Professor Muller suggests that it is necessary to distinguish between the military and civilian (i.e. the WRA staff) views of loyalty of Japanese American internees during WWII. While the former believed the allegiances of the internees was highly dubious, the latter exhibited far more faith in the loyalty of

those interned. These two positions reflect two very different views of the nature of Americanism. The military's position resembled that of the Bush administration's attitude toward Islamic American citizens, whereas the civilian staff of the WRA is closer to the standpoint of the Obama administration. Of course Obama is far more tolerant than the WRA ever was. But if I read Muller correctly, the position taken by the civilian staff of the WRA can be connected to the old cosmopolitan progressive Americanism, which, in turn, feeds into Obama's vision of the American future.

Professor Muller's exposition of these two lines of Americanism seems to me tenable. But I would like to suggest the situation might be complicated even further. What seems to be missing to me is the perspective of the relationship between the Japanese government and Japanese Americans before and during the war. Before coming to the United States, most Japanese Issei (the first generation of Japanese immigrants) underwent a compulsory elementary education in Imperial Japan, which was highly centralized and nationalistic. They brought that ethnocentric national ideology into their social life in the United States. In the early 20th century the US Immigration Commission recognized the effect of their education in their home country. As a Congressional Report to that era states:

[T]he Japanese are greatly interested in political matters, are intelligent, quick to absorb new ideas, and progressive, but have been accustomed to a somewhat different forms of government and have exhibited a strength of feeling for and loyalty to their country and its Government and the Mikado, seldom, if ever, found among other people.¹

In spite of this kind of American view of Japanese immigrants, we should not forget that many homeland Japanese considered pre-war emigrants from the land of the rising sun to be akin to traitors. Such people were always suspected of disloyalty towards the emperor and the mother country. As one Japanese diplomat had already averred in the late 19th century, "The Japanese law does not suppose that the subjects can cut their ties with the Emperor at will and be naturalized in foreign countries."² Following this traditional interpretation, the Japanese government counseled all emigrants to remain faithful to the imperial cause. To such advice, some Japanese Americans responded enthusiastically. Before the outbreak of the war a small number of them even returned to the land of their birth to fight for national glory. The addition of their perspective to the argument would, I believe, lead to a more complete view of the situation, one that takes into account that the ethnic racial and cultural and political ideology espoused by the Japanese government constituted an important element in the thinking and behavior of Japanese Americans before and during the war. John Dower, in his book, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*, has already analyzed the influence of racial ideologies on both sides of the Pacific on the pursuit of the war. It would be interesting to see what effect such ideologies on the Japanese side had on the internment issue.

In her study, Professor Gottschalk depicts the effect on American civic life of mass incarceration by what she terms “the carceral state.” Her very informative paper reveals in detail the exceptional features of the American penal system. The problems of prisons contain serious issues concerning race and ethnicity, and are therefore closely linked to the debates regarding social justice and Americanism. The sheer number of people in jail or prison itself is staggering. One in a hundred Americans is incarcerated at any given time. Three million people, with an 8- to 1 black-to-white ratio, are robbed of voting rights and made invisible in the American labor market, thereby greatly distorting political and economic justice. This presents a new type of discrimination chiefly against Afro-Americans and Hispanic immigrants, a discrimination of the kind that the Great Society programs promised to abolish. Both public spending on prison construction and maintenance and the bureaucracy of the Justice Department have become swollen despite the Bush administration’s stated aim of shrinking government. Even the improvement of the public education system has come to be seen as mostly a matter of controlling crime in schools.

In addition mass imprisonment is becoming a major women’s issue, by leaving millions of women without any breadwinners, while ironically many men are incarcerated for domestic violence.

According to Professor Gottschalk the reason for the rise of the “carceral state” since the 1960s has been political. Experts on crime do not necessarily agree with the common sense view that in the time of economic distress people tend to turn crime to survive. Economic crises instead stimulate social uprisings and heighten the general feeling of social angst. In this situation some conservative politicians, who fear increased social protests, strikes, and civil unrest, conflate such social action with crime. This explains why the “carceral state” began to take shape during the decade of the civil rights movement and the Vietnam war and have continued growing in the age of Reagan (as defined by Sean Wilentz).

I learned much from Gottschalk’s paper and agree that without taking “the carceral state” into account, any depiction of Americanism and social justice today is incomplete. Nonetheless, I would like to ask the author about her conclusion that the carceral state is fundamentally “a political problem, not a crime and punishment problem.” In order to solve the penal problems today, she argues, the “root causes” approach is useless. The carceral state cannot be dissolved by “focusing on ameliorating structural problems like widespread poverty, high unemployment, dysfunctional schools, an ineffective health-care system, and outcomes dramatically stratified by race.”

I would agree that the problem of the “carceral state” has a kind of autonomy or logic of its own, similar to that of the “military-industrial complex,” which also did not simply disappear once the “root cause” of the Cold War had vanished. Yet it also seems to me that the issue of crime and punishment itself also contains an important political dimension that, though perhaps not derivable from, is

nevertheless closely associated with economic factors. Although Gottschalk's paper analyzes in detail the economics of the prison system and the politics of punishment, it does not clearly acknowledge the fact that the basis of crime is also both economic and political. I would thus like to know how Professor Gottschalk would propose to address the political and economic dimensions of the problem of crime, a problem that Bush failed so miserably to solve, and which his administration in fact exacerbated. The answer to this question is for me of personal importance, for I have often argued, and frequently teach my students, that a fundamental solution to the problem of crime in the United States depends on the solution of precisely such "root causes." After reading this paper I am a little bewildered about what I should now teach.

For Obama, too, an acknowledgement of the politics of crime and punishment seems uncircumventable if he wishes to gain sufficient public support for beginning to dismantle the "carceral state." Although it is impossible to overestimate the significance of Obama's election as a milestone for a better integrated multicultural society, Obama has not yet begun to overcome the socio-economic barrier defined by race. His victory in that sense does not mean the end of racial segregation and the establishment of socio-racial justice in the United States. Immediately after the November elections, one political commentator wrote that during the campaign Obama called for freeing ourselves from the paralyzing racial stalemate, but that the most urgent and acute racial issue of "crime and public safety" had been totally ignored in the campaign. Even half a year later since his inauguration, President Obama has not touched upon the politics of crime and punishment and it remains unclear whether or how he can begin to gather the political momentum necessary that would allow him to begin to dismantle the problem of the "carceral state."

Notes

1. U.S., Congress, Senate, *Report of the Immigration Commission*, S. Doc. 633, 61st Cong., 2d sess., 1911, 23: 160.
2. Kaikoku hyakunen kinen bunka jigyō dan, ed., *Nichi-bei bunka kōshō shi* (The history of cultural relations between Japan and America), 6 vols. (Tokyo: Yōyōsha, 1955) vol. 5: *Ijū hen* (The volume on emigration), ed., Nagai Matsuzō, p. 65.