

DEMOGRAPHICS, DEMOCRACY, AND EDUCATION

by

Robert L. Payton

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There are important changes taking place in American society. We do not face simply the now-familiar syndrome of "future shock" generated by technology and information coming faster than we can handle or absorb it. Nor is it any longer a matter of popular culture imposing constant new challenges to our sensibilities.

The changes of which I speak are demographic, and they reveal the emerging reshaping of American society. The first set of facts is transitory: The Baby Boom of the period from 1946 to 1962 is passing through, and for a very long time we will live in a society that is disproportionately old after decades of being unusually youthful.

The second set of facts is permanent: The ethnic profile of the United States is changing dramatically, and that change will continue. The United States we have known will not be what it was during its first two centuries. We are entering a period of being less Western in our ethnic and cultural makeup. The questions that arise from such changes will force us to think more carefully about the Western values that should be preserved.

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On the demographic changes, let me use the recent excellent study, All One System, compiled and written by Harold L. Hodgkinson and published just a few months ago by the Institute for Educational Leadership. Hodgkinson groups his information into five categories: Births, Age, Family Status, Regions, and Education. I should point out that Hodgkinson is aware of the limitations of his discipline. He first quotes Kenneth Boulding in saying that " 'of all the social sciences, demographics is most like the science of celestial mechanics'-we look for the huge unseen engines that make social systems work in certain ways.")

I. Births. ". . . some groups have a lot more children than others." A group needs a rate of 2.1 children per female to stay even; that is the fertility level of Puerto Rican women in the U.S. at present.

Cubans are at 1.3, however, and whites are at 1.7, while blacks are at 2.4, and Mexican-Americans at 2.9.

2. Age. Differential rates of fertility result in the swelling and contracting of age groups up the bar graphs used to measure such things. The average white American is 31, the average black is 25, the average Hispanic but 22. Such age groupings or cohorts show up in school enrollments: Six states (including California and Texas) now have 35 percent or more minority enrollments, and eleven (including New York, Florida, and Illinois) have between 25 and 35 percent.

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3. Family Status. "In 1955," Hodgkinson writes, "60% of the households in the U.S. consisted of a working father, housewife mother, and two or more school age children. In 1980, that family unit was only 11% of our homes, and in 1985 it is 7%, an astonishing change." Hodgkinson makes a further point:

"The Census tells us that 59% of the children born in 1983 will live with only one parent before reaching age 18--this now becomes the NORMAL childhood experience. Of every 100 children born today:

0 12 will be born out of wedlock

0 40 will be born to parents who will divorce before the child is 18

0 5 will be born to parents who separate

0 2 will be born to parents of whom one will die before the child reaches 18

0 41 will reach age 18 'normally'."

4. Regions. The nation will, despite the shift to the sun belt and other phenomena, remain "eastern-oriented--that is, 80% of the population will live in the Eastern and Central time zones, and only 20% will live in the Mountain and Pacific time zones, at least through the year 2000.

5. Education. The bulk of Hodgkinson's paper is about the consequences for education of these demographic changes. He points out that there is a perceptual change in the way he is trying to look at education here. Rather than talking in terms of elementary and secondary schools and four-year undergraduate colleges, he is defining the school in terms of the people who are moving through it. Here are some of the educational consequences of the demographic changes:

More children entering school from poverty households

More children entering school from single-parent households

More children from minority backgrounds

More "latch-key" children

Fewer white middle-class, suburban children

Hodgkinson gave me a further revealing fact: there are now more Muslims than Episcopalians in the United States. (After learning that, I happened to look at the religious affiliations of the members of Congress: there are 67 Episcopalians, and no Muslims.) Immigrants and refugees are arriving in the United States in the largest numbers in fifty years. For the first time in our history, most of the new arrivals are non-European.

My first point is that there are major demographic changes taking place in the United States. Some of these changes are ethnic in character. As Milton Gordon of the University of Massachusetts has suggested, the Anglo-European dominance of American society may begin to give way to other influences.

My second point will be that these changes are not unique to the United States. The examples I will cite include France, the Soviet Union, the world of Islam, and the African nation of Cameroon.

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A. France

You may have read that the weekly magazine *Le Figaro* (a rough journalistic equivalent to *Li* and the *fi*

Saturday Evening Post) has published a demographic analysis of France carrying the title "Will We Still Be French in 30 Years?" The point of the article—at least in the words of the magazine's editor—is that dramatic changes are taking place in France that must be talked about openly and candidly. The changes are in the demographic profile of France itself. The editor says that the foreign-born population now on French soil is largely of Mediterranean and African origin and is 90 percent Islamic in culture and religion.

The authors of the article and the editors of the journal have been denounced by members of the French cabinet as being racist in intent, and the article as being statistically insupportable in any event. The rates of change have been deliberately exaggerated, these voices say, and other factors, especially poverty and lack of education, are minimized or ignored. The political character of the debate is heightened by the rapid rise to public prominence of Jacques Le Pen, leader of the party called the National Front. Le Pen, a rightist with many qualities reminiscent of the chauvinism of the 1930s, says that France's two most serious problems are crime and immigration—and that the two are related.

Flora Lewis, the New York Times European correspondent, has been writing frequently about this new phenomenon in France and elsewhere; one recent article of hers was entitled "Race Issues in Europe."

Lewis's point is that France and Britain are entering a period of disruptive social change—disruptive largely because of their relative inexperience in dealing with ethnic groups within. "Racism," she writes, "which many Europeans thought was a peculiar fault of Americans, has developed in countries that believed they were above it without noticing that they took national identity as one race for granted." American success in dealing with racial tension is now being looked to by Europeans as a guide to solving Europe's problems.

B. The Soviet Union

The Soviet Union faces a more aggravated version of the same phenomenon that Hodgkinson has described in the U.S. The case of the US S R is of interest to us for several reasons. The United States and the Soviet Union are vast in size, rich in natural resources, and demographically complex. Each is also offered to the world as a model of a philosophy of government.

A recent study published by the Council on Foreign Relations points out that although the 137 million Russians remain by far the largest group in Soviet society, they represent a bare majority. The most rapid growth and continuing high birth rates are to be found among the Muslims of Central Asia, who now constitute 17 percent of the population. There is even further complexity. There are more than a hundred nationalities in the Soviet Union, and most of them still occupy lands that link them directly to a long and—for them, at least—distinguished and honorable

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history. There are twenty-one nationalities in the Soviet Union that number more than a million people, and nineteen of those "speak mainly their mother tongue."

Different societies respond differently to the changes brought about by culture in confrontation with the values of modernization. That problem seems to have been solved by force in the Soviet Union, especially during its early years when it imposed collectivization and industrialization on an underdeveloped agricultural society.

C. Islam

The recent experience of Iran provides the textbook example of an effort to reverse the movement of modernization. The values of culture are seen to override the values of economics. Bernard Lewis, in a brief but illuminating essay in the Washington Quarterly, traces the course of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. To understand the phenomenon of Islamic fundamentalism, Lewis says, there are five points to be gleaned from its view of the world and its recent history. The first is "a total

interpenetration of religion and politics" in Islam. The second is that for many decades there has been a mood of disillusion in the Islamic world as it watched the growing power and influence of the West. The third point is the turnaround that began with the oil crisis little more than a decade ago; the new importance of the Islamic world growing out of that crisis resulted in a "feeling of power and exultation" among Muslims the world over. Lewis's fourth point is that the Iranian revolution led by the Ayatollah Khomeini is a real revolution, having consequences as important for the world as did the French and Russian revolutions. The fifth and final observation is that Islamic fundamentalism began by rejecting Western influences and purging them in favor of a purer and simpler model of Islamic life. That fervor has now turned from external enemies toward internal ones: ". . . what matters," Lewis paraphrases, "is not imperialism and zionism and foreign invasion, and so on, but rather the corruption of our own society, the impiety of our rulers ... [those] who have destroyed Islam from within."

I have included the changes under way in the Islamic world to emphasize the fact that ethnic considerations ignore national boundaries. Ethnic considerations, carried to extremes, as we have seen, put forward a different social and institutional order.

D. The United Republic of Cameroon

Cameroon is an artifact of history. Its people are ethnically diverse. They are, to use outmoded but convenient anthropological categories, a mixture of Bantu peoples who have migrated up from central and south Africa, and Sudanese people who migrated or were driven by slave traders from northwest Africa. Cameroon is divided religiously into a Christian segment in the south and a Muslim segment in the north, with undetermined numbers of people still following indigenous religious practices and beliefs. The large eastern section of the country is French-speaking and the smaller western part of the country is English-speaking-but there are about 60 African languages

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spoken in this nation of less than ten million people who represent some 125 definable ethnic groups or tribes.

Cameroon is a word derived from the Portuguese, and so the new nation owes even its name to Europeans-in this case to slave traders who travelled the west African coast in the sixteenth century. In the late nineteenth century the Germans won a race from the English to colonize the territory, but England and France took over from the Germans after the First World War. A generation grew up under a mandate of the League of Nations and a second generation grew up under a trusteeship of the United Nations. Cameroon won its independence in 1960. The French-speaking eastern part then united with the English-speaking western part and in 1961 Cameroon became a federal republic. The two states of the Cameroon Federal Republic were merged into the United Republic of Cameroon in 1970.

Cameroon is one of Africa's few success stories. Apart from some political unrest and an early rebellion, and in spite of occasional external interference from its Marxist neighbor to the south, Cameroon has been an island of relative stability in a sea of discord and disorder. To study its quarter-century of independence is to study a miracle of ethnic politics at its most effective. While all the ethnic forces in Cameroon work to pull it apart, effective political leadership and management have pulled it together into a state. It has held together long enough, it appears, to have persuaded many people in all parts of the country to realize that the tensions of living in a multicultural society are better than the alternative of violence that accompanies ethnic conflict and social disorder.

There are some who don't accept that analysis, of course. There are some who would prefer to have two Cameroons, or five, or at least to have autonomy for their own ancestral home. However, the fervent nationalism of the past century or more has been based on the conviction that the state is more important by far than any of the discrete ethnic or political elements within it. It is this conviction

that has guided the emergence of Cameroon. But it is also a similar conviction that has sustained Nigeria in crushing-at terrible human cost-the effort of Biafra to secede.

III

The tension between ethnic group and state is the tie that binds the experience of Cameroon to that of the Soviet Union. In a different form, it is the tension that now threatens not the state but French peace of mind. The presence of new and powerful cultural forces within France may change what it means to say that one is "French." For Islamic fundamentalists, there is but one faith and it is coextensive with the state.

What does the new ethnic profile hold out for us? Will the American experience continue to be the beacon for the world? It is reasonable to assume that rapid rates of change--demographic, ethnic, cultural--will test our cohesiveness and that of many other societies in the decades ahead. Such changes in our society as well as others have often resulted in

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ethnic conflict. We have been spared some of the worst consequences of ethnic conflict, in spite of our great ethnic diversity. Much of the rest of the world seems bent on self-destruction by ethnic conflict-as Donald Horowitz has written in his major study of Ethnic Groups in Conflict, "Ethnicity is at the center of politics in country after country, a potent source of challenges to the cohesion of states and of international tension." He then offers this list of connections: "Biafra, Bangladesh, and Burundi, Beirut, Brussels, and Belfast."

Our Anglo-European traditions offer us little comfort. In addition to Brussels and Belfast there are two dozen other persistent centers of ethnic conflict in western Europe.

Michael Walzer, in *Spheres of Justice*, identified membership in a human community as the most important social good. The ways that we permit entry into membership in our own national community express a judgment of ourselves as well as of others who would join us. Our history is a record of efforts to keep ethnic identity subordinate to national identity-and that is exactly the same challenge that faces the Soviet Union on the one hand and Cameroon on the other.

My purpose in discussing this topic is to suggest its importance not just to our society in some large but unspecified political sense, but to our educational system in particular. At one very practical level, the ethnic question reflects concern about bilingualism in instruction; at another very practical level the concern is about the increasingly familiar phenomenon of teachers with different cultural backgrounds from their students, and students with different cultural backgrounds from one another. In Sullivan High School in Chicago, to illustrate the language problem, there are said to be forty-five first languages spoken other than English.

To illustrate the larger educational problem, one merely needs to ask oneself, as I have frequently done as I have tried to consider the ideal of "liberal education": Is it really universally applicable even within the United States-or is it simply "Eurocentric"?

What is often called civic education-the education of the citizen-becomes a particularly important issue for us now, as we educate the teachers who will educate the children who will grow up in a different America. The tradition we pass on, neither as successful nor as romantic as we often pretend that it is, is of an America that is the world's most successful multicultural society, the highest achievement of ethnic accommodation and toleration in history.

If we are to remain a free and open and democratic society, then we must better understand the elements of our tradition that have made that possible. We inherited that tradition, after all; we have modified it, extended it, and broadcast it to the world, but we did not invent it.

The test, as always, is whether we will pass the tradition on, stronger and more unifying than when we received it.