

Intermarriage: A solution — or a problem?

Book Review by Paul Gottfried

Nathan Glazer's newest book may be described as a defense of multiculturalism written with second thoughts. On the one hand, Glazer agonizes at length over the exclusion of blacks from the American melting pot. He notes that even certified liberal pluralists Louis Brandeis and John Dewey did not include blacks in their celebrations of a pluralist America. Even now an overwhelming percentage of American blacks live with and marry others of their race. Multiculturalism, contends Glazer, has been made inevitable because blacks have been kept out of the American social mainstream. It is a form of recognition for those who have not been allowed to participate in the American success story. Whereas women, Hispanics, and gays have taken advantage of the media-approved drive for inclusiveness in educational curricula and public life, Glazer treats these other minority demands as passing signs of the time: "Despite all these participants in the campaign for multiculturalism, the movement is given its force and vigor by our greatest democratic problem, the situation of African Americans."

Now when Glazer asserts that "multiculturalism has won" and that "we are all multiculturalists" he is making, whatever else he's doing, a moral judgment. He believes that all reasonable people would agree that blacks in the U.S. have been given a bad deal; and that making a place for their history and customs in educational and public life is the very least we can do for these socially

unacknowledged Americans. Such a measure, according to Glazer, has nothing to do with minority quotas which are about "jobs and admission."

What he hopes multiculturalism will do is describe "the reality of ethnic and minority diversity in this country" without glorifying or demeaning any group. And he considers this fair not only because of African-American marginalizations but because he and the members of other white minorities were also once excluded from the received American culture and history. Jewish immigrants and their families had been forced to listen to WASP accounts of the American past which minimized their own contributions to civilization. This had created among Glazer and his peers a sense of exclusion, which they should not have been forced to suffer.

On the other hand, Glazer is troubled that multiculturalism in practice has taken "upsetting" forms, from Afrocentrism and the insistence on "African and Negro primacy in technological achievements" to having multiculturalists impose "strenuous quotas in admission offices and faculty hiring." Glazer also indicates that he enjoys the study of European Christian societies to which he had been exposed in school, and he asks whether blacks will benefit more from learning about Martin Luther King and Malcolm X than from reading about Washington and Lincoln. Again and again he treats multiculturalism less as an attempted expansion of consciousness for nonblacks than as a sop to a group that remains behind. Presumably such a program would not be necessary if the race problems did not persist.

Despite the interesting stretches of American cultural and social history, Glazer's book is gravely marred by questionable assumptions. It treats multiculturalism in almost total isolation from the political context out of which it developed — not only in the U.S. but throughout the Western world. It is modern public administration in its social

We Are All Multiculturalists Now

by Nathan Glazer
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engineering mode that has imposed this policy upon often-grumbling subjects. It has had assistance, needless to say, from the verbalizing class and from disgruntled or vindictive ethnic minorities, but much of what the state has done to change culture it has carried out against the popular will, as in the obvious case of the immigration policies pursued by almost all Western countries since the 1960s. Glazer talks earnestly of how “we Americans” began to think differently about pluralism during the struggle against Hitler. Such language, however, is misleading for two reasons: (1) government propaganda and academic tracts are not the same as what most

people believe even in a most putative democracy; and (2) the multicultural initiatives and often deliberate flooding of the U.S. and Western Europe with non-Westerners as a result of an altered immigration policy go back to the 1960s, not to 1941.

It is furthermore doubtful that black multiculturalists are generally as moderate as Glazer suggests. Unlike Quebec separatists and Corsican nationalists, he assures us, black and other multiculturalists “seek inclusion and equality in a common society.” Glazer cites no hard evidence for this problematic contention. Moreover, the kind of anti-white anti-male propaganda that he himself criticizes in proposed multicultural curricula suggests something very different from his statement of faith. Though Glazer may be right about the multicultural quest for a “common society”, it is doubtful that that society will bear much resemblance to the American past. More likely, it will be invented through a collaboration of government social engineers, multinationals in search of cheap labor, and assorted minority spokespersons. Most of the Hispanic boosters of multicultural America were of course not victims of racial segregation but those recently arrived in the U.S.

The most bizarre argument made in Glazer’s book is that blacks continue to be disadvantaged

inasmuch as they have little opportunity to marry out. Outmarriage seems to be the solution he has in mind for America’s racial problem, particularly in Chapter Seven entitled, “Can We Be Brought Together?”. Glazer is genuinely bothered that the very low rates of intermarriage between blacks and whites, about two percent, is “rising only slowly”.

Blacks themselves appear most comfortable living among and marrying other blacks. Glazer accounts for this by pointing to their forced exclusion from white society. There is nothing abnormal in racial and ethnic minorities preferring endogamous and ingroup relations to other kinds, though, like

Jews and blacks, they may also blame this situation on prejudice.

Glazer contrasts blacks to the U.S.’s predominantly Eastern European Jewish minority, apparently believing that blacks would be more like Jews if they were subject to less prejudice. When he and Daniel P. Moynihan wrote *Beyond the Melting Pot* in the 1960s, Glazer reminds us, Jews were intermarrying at about the same rate as blacks are doing now. Thirty years later, however, the intermarriage rate for Jews has risen to over 50 percent, while the rate for blacks, according to him, has moved very little. But such a comparison has nothing to teach us. The fact that Jews are intermarrying in large numbers has not made them friendlier to Western Christian society. Indeed, their high rate of intermarriage has not prevented open hostility, at least as represented by Jewish organizations and self-identified Jewish authors. Christian civilization now seems as inherently anti-Semitic and implicated in the Holocaust as ever. Though not all American Jews may believe this, the point being made is that a high rate of Jewish intermarriage has not produced published evidence of greater Jewish goodwill toward the Christian other. As long as twentieth-century American Jews lived apart, they did not feel compelled to reconstruct the surrounding society or to vent atavistic hostilities.

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Correspondingly, there is no reason to think that if blacks and whites rush to intermarry, the blacks will come to respect whites and white culture. Such a relation may well create insecurity and bitterness rather than lead to interracial good feelings. Nor will blacks necessarily improve their social positions through intermarriage. Socially mobile blacks have moved up by the time they marry out, a fact that intermarriage simply underscores. Underclass blacks who choose white mates are most likely to pick and certainly to obtain someone of their own status.

Moreover, Jews as a rule, did not rise professionally or economically by marrying gentiles. They intermarried once they had risen; and they rose, as Glazer shows in his earlier, less utopian writings, by building on ingroup strengths and associations. The same was true of other white ethnic groups and, more recently, of Asian Americans. Glazer's obsession with the curative power of interracial marriage is precisely that: an unseemly quirk that gets in the way of honest thought. One can only hope that this distinguished sociologist gets over his particular hangup. **TSC**