

# B.M.R. COMMENT



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## MULTICULTURALISM IN TORONTO A Review of The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics

A rising tide of ethnic or racial group awareness has been reaching many previously disinterested groups in North America during the last twenty years. In both Canada and the United States a major minority group has achieved a cultural awareness nationwide in its impact on political, social and educational institutions. In both countries a major effect of these awakenings has been the stimulation of self-awareness among other groups, including dominant Anglo-Saxons and other ethnic groups. The desirability of encouraging ethnic or racial assimilation and the gradual erosion of original culture in favour of the dominant culture is being called into question.

Any discussion of awakening of ethnic consciousness and de-emphasis of assimilation assumes a special importance in contemporary Toronto. While the composition of the City's population has been changing dramatically since World War II, cultural outlook, attitudes and politics remain virtually the same as in pre-war years:

The City of Toronto, which as late as 1945 was still a predominantly British Protestant, middle-class city, absorbed large numbers of "New Canadians" -- primarily Catholics from Eastern and Central Europe. By the early 1960s, the City's British Protestant segment has shrunk to a bare majority. The 1961 census revealed that almost one-third of the City's population had immigrated to Canada since 1946.<sup>1</sup>

As of 1972, the immigration is still continuing at a very fast pace. A stimulation of ethnic group awareness in the variety of immigrant groups in Toronto would have major social and political implications for the City.

This COMMENT will review a book which heralds the awakening of ethnic consciousness, The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics by Michael Novak (N.Y.: The MacMillan Company, 1972). The book is set in the U.S. context; this COMMENT will explore some of the implications of the work for Toronto.

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1. Harold Kaplan, Urban Political Systems (N.Y. Columbia University Press 1967), p.42.

In The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics Michael Novak convincingly argues the case for an awakening of ethnic consciousness among largely ignored ethnic groups in the United States -- the Poles, Italians, Greeks and Slavs.<sup>2</sup> According to Novak, the submerged ethnic desire for cultural preservation is making itself heard politically in ways considered reactionary by intellectuals: ethnics are opposing neighbourhood integration, integration of schools, concessions to blacks by society, and big government rationalistic, efficiency-oriented social program approaches to problem-solving.<sup>3</sup> Yet, as Novak says, most of these positions are directed to preventing neighbourhood breakdown through blockbusting and deterioration of local services, which often follows integration; and to the preservation of the last trace of the close-knit ethnic neighbourhood way of life.

Although Novak is over-generous in his position that these stances in no way show racism, his assessment of the political position of these ethnic groups contains much truth and cannot be ignored. A position in favour of maintaining ethnic neighbourhoods is presently the only political position open to expression of ethnic consciousness or culture. The ethnic neighbourhood is already in a tenuous position; to have it intentionally disrupted through urban renewal or other programmes is to hasten the disappearance of remnants of ethnic culture.

If ethnics openly incorporated the need for cultural preservation into their political positions, Novak says, it would result in an "Ethnic Democratic Party" with a new politics based on the neighbourhood, group self-identity and pride, and political realism, whether practiced through conflict, bargaining or cooperation. Certainly it would reveal that ethnics are not inherently racist or politically conservative.<sup>4</sup>

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2. Toronto's population is 10% Italian, 7% Slavic, 2% Greek; its population is only 54% of British origin.
  3. Several of these problems are being experienced in parts of Toronto.
  4. A contemporary social policy debate is focussing on this very issue, i.e. whether or not this is political conservatism. On one side of the debate are Moynihan, Glazer and others; on the other are S. M. Miller and others. The danger in classifying cultural positions as politically liberal or conservative can be seen in the possible reactionary political tag which could be applied to the rural, new generation, communal way of life which rejects modern technology and rational efficiency orientation.

Immigrants realization of factors they thought responsible for less-than-equal treatment -- their different language, alien customs and manners -- made them eager to cast off or at least mask vestiges of an alien culture. They realized that they could not achieve conformity to the mainstream culture themselves, but thought that their children would encounter no discrimination if a strange language or culture were not passed on to them. So, the cause and effect situation went: cause--labour exploitation of and discrimination against lower-class ethnic immigrants; effect--cultural deprivation of immigrants' children. Novak's plea is that the last traces of ethnic cultural richness not be allowed to disappear but be encouraged to reawaken and make more conscious contributions to mainstream culture and politics than they have in the past.

The dilemma of Novak, as it is the dilemma of all who study the situation of North American ethnic minority cultures, comes in the fact that Anglo-Saxon culture, unlike other ethnic cultures, encourages complete individuality. Since individuality encourages upward mobility, which encourages assimilation -- hence loss of perception of fellow ethnics as a common group -- Novak chooses to attack the mainstream Anglo-Saxon individualistic culture in order to help promote other ethnic communal cultures. His attack is wide-ranging and vastly overstated. He appears to hope that ethnic group members will as a result reject Anglo-Saxon individuality and upward mobility in favour of maintaining ethnic culture.

He attacks the Anglo-Saxon psyche, which he finds racist, overly individualistic, tinged by social Darwinism, preoccupied with mastering the world, rejecting communal support in favour of self-help, preoccupied with civic duty, overpowered by super-ego and sexually repressed<sup>5</sup>. He acknowledges that all these facets may contribute to progress, and rejects progress also.

Secondly, he attacks Anglo-Saxon institutions. His attack on institutions has the merit of being an outsider's perception and therefore touching upon many cultural assumptions and quirks so basic that a native holder of culture would be unable to see them; but it is an unrealistically harsh treatment of such institutions as democracy, civic duty, equality of persons, reward for effort and order. He seems unwilling, with the exception of a concession in one footnote, to acknowledge that there is any good in these institutions.

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5. Novak, pp. 89, 93, 94, 96, 99, 102 and 107.

Thus Novak founders in his attempt to substitute an ethnic cultural revival for dominant culture in his argument that the dominant culture is not superior. His picture of dominant culture is imbalanced and unrealistic.

While Novak's section on mainstream culture is merely imbalanced, his final section on use of politics to implement an ethnic awakening is absurd. He himself acknowledges this, in titling one of the final chapters "Political Dreams for Every Finger of My Hand." The essence of what he is saying is that the dominant culture should consciously defer to ethnic or lower-class cultures, through such means as sending children of intellectuals to agricultural schools, having politicians work at mirror polishing or mail delivery, and by having the Teamsters Union run the universities. He suggests that life should become more decentralized, that cottage industry should be revived.

Dismissal of the mainstream culture is implicit in Novak's practical political prescriptions. He places his call for an ethnic cultural awakening within the framework of a national cultural re-beginning, in an effort to insure that all cultures get equal treatment instead of assimilation. The ethnic call is good, but the framework is disastrous. National unity would be non-existent in such a vacuum of complete re-beginning. Novak prefers cultural conflict to early compromise since he believes that fuller discussion would lead to agreement; this, too, could detract from national unity if no agreement resulted. Perhaps a better framework would be a call for overall cultural relativism in which cultures could co-exist and be respected among themselves, a call for education of the mainstream culture to the value of ethnic national cultures. If institutional change is to be effected, it should come as a result of changes made by ethnics rather than through cultural self-renunciation by the dominant group.

Toronto has a large multicultural immigrant population. Its fifty percent non-native-born population is composed roughly of 33% British, 18% Italian, 14% Slavic, 6% German, 4% Greek, 2% Portugese and 23% other<sup>6</sup>. Overall, these percentages make the<sup>7</sup> total population 54% British, 7% Slavic, 10% Italian, 5% Jewish and 24% other. Groups with first languages other than English are concentrated in the City, York, North York and Forest Hill.

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6. Anthony H. Richmond, Ethnic Residential Segregation in Metropolitan Toronto (Toronto: York University Institute for Behavioural Research, 1972), p. 15.

7. Richmond's category; he studies Jews as an ethnic group rather than as members of other ethnic groups.

Canada is probably more receptive to the idea of a multi-cultural mosaic than is the United States, for it has since its beginnings been officially bicultural. Its greatest immigration influx is still ongoing, while that in the United States has greatly slowed. Book IV of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism Report, on the "Cultural Contribution of the Other Ethnic Groups," favoured integration over assimilation and made a large number of recommendations with reference to helping keep other ethnic cultures alive. These included recommendations for classes in languages other than English or French, recommendations for broadcasting in languages other than English or French, and recommendations for financially supporting non-English or French arts and culture.

The multiple cultures of Toronto are still very much alive, as gauged by the use of foreign languages, while those in the United States are much weakened. A recognition by the dominant Anglo-Saxon group that other cultures are valuable, in that they make the city international, cosmopolitan and culturally rich, would help to keep Toronto's vitality alive. On balance, however, it is difficult to assess whether or not the Toronto milieu would make multiple cultures feasible.

A possible general indifference to ethnic groups on the part of the dominant Anglo-Saxon group could, if prodded, lead to hostility, to consideration of the ethnics as a "problem" group. Evidence which seems to indicate latent hostility to the "other ethnics"<sup>8</sup> in Toronto includes early 1960s problems of Italians in construction unions problems with professional licensing of British-licensed Asian doctors,<sup>9</sup> and results of a 1961 sample survey of postwar immigrants in Toronto and nationwide, which showed fewer immigrants in Toronto than immigrants nationwide satisfied with use of their skills, living standard, and committed to life in Canada.<sup>10</sup> Various objective studies have also affirmed that immigrant's skills are used at less than full capacity.<sup>11</sup>

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8. Term adopted by the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism to distinguish from Anglo and Franco groups, see p.9 of Book IV of the Report.

9. Anthony H. Richmond, Immigrants and Ethnic Groups in Metropolitan Toronto (Toronto: York University Institute for Behavioural Research, June 1967), pp. 79-81.

10. Ibid., pp.50-71.

11. Ibid., p. 79.

Alternatively, there has been a widespread positive response in the past few years to multiple cultures in Toronto. Yonge Street, with its mix of languages and ethnic gathering-places, is the most popular street in the City. In its fourth year, the Metro International Caravan sponsors parades and pavilions of forty-two nationalities. The Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism attributes most of the growing interest in classical music, ballet and opera in the City to non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants.<sup>12</sup> Anthony Richmond, a York University Professor of Sociology interested in ethnic analysis finds that:

The ethnic composition of Toronto has changed greatly in recent years as has the climate of opinion with regard to ethnic pluralism. The opportunity and desire to pass on a non-English language and cultural heritage may be much greater in the future than in the past, particularly if current federal and provincial government policies with regard to multiple-culturalism are successful, in the face of evidently strong economic and social pressures toward English language assimilation.<sup>13</sup>

Although there are opposing forces, the balance in Toronto seems to be tipping in favour of multiple culturalism. Ethnic awareness, still fresh from new immigration, will likely receive additional support, and Novak's main cultural prescription of a way of life based on the neighbourhood might then be applied. Increased ethnic awareness would have effects in economic and political spheres. In the U.S. case, Novak is forced to make political prescriptions in order to facilitate ethnic cultural awareness; in the Canadian case, a large increase in ethnic awareness would probably express itself in the political sphere. The difference lies in the fact that Canadian immigration is far more recent and ethnic cultures can be easily stimulated by methods other than political ones.

Harold Kaplan's 1967 study of Toronto politics showed that although much of the postwar immigration had taken place by that date, Toronto politics showed little evidence of new immigration.

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12. Most of the orchestra musicians and conductors nationwide have been non-English or French-speaking Europeans. In Toronto, the first Opera School in Canada was founded in 1946 by an Austrian immigrant. The Canadian Opera Company, another first, became great after 1948 under a German immigrant's leadership. (Royal Commission, Book IV, pp. 208-212.)

13. Richmond, Ethnic Residential Segregation, p. 17.

He listed seven possible reasons why other ethnic groups had not penetrated the political elite, and two reasons why, if they did penetrate the elite, they would not challenge the dominant Anglo-Saxon values. These were:

1. A natural time lag after immigrant arrival before involvement in politics. (suggesting increased involvement)
2. The political culture of Toronto, Canada in general, which involves a tendency to defer to the old order, to allow leaders to make decisions.
3. A possible acceptance by immigrants of middle-class values.
4. Lack of flamboyant ethnic leaders.
5. Unstructured municipal elections, with no party ticket-balancing.
6. Configuration of unwieldy wards.
7. A strong sense of social consensus in the City, which favoured the status quo.<sup>14</sup>

Kaplan suggested that political participation of other ethnics would increase, but that they would not challenge dominant values since the ethnic political leaders would also adopt those values, and since the ethnic issues would not be posed on a liberal-conservative political spectrum but would focus on morality or personal style.<sup>15</sup>

Kaplan's view of the "old order" political elite remains essentially correct; however, his book was written before the growth of the neighbourhood citizen participation movement, which<sup>16</sup> began in the mid-Sixties in Toronto and is presently quite strong.

The movement is stressing citizen participation in government decision-making less through elected representatives than through direct negotiations between neighbourhood groups and government. While the movement is politically directed to involvement in neighbourhood planning and development matters, the interest of participants

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14. Kaplan, Urban Political Systems, p. 204.

15. Ibid., pp. 206-207.

16. Bureau of Municipal Research, Neighbourhood Participation in Local Government, Toronto, January 1970.

extends to other matters, with attitudes transmitted through local neighbourhood newspapers, meetings and other means of communication.

Along with increasing administrative interest in decentralized delivery of social services -- such as in community health centres-- the neighbourhood movement could have important implications for the method of other ethnic group participation. If political participation is limited to the electoral process, it might, as Kaplan suggests, result in the election of other ethnics reflecting the values of the mainstream culture; if it takes the form of neighbourhood involvement, it will probably mean a challenge to the dominant values<sup>17</sup>. Richmond's study of ethnic residential patterns shows a strong ethnic residential settlement pattern in Toronto, and the Royal Commission Report indicates that political activity has been greatest in areas of ethnic group concentration<sup>18</sup>. Therefore, there is a possibility that stimulating ethnic cultural awareness may result in increased political involvement through an ethnic neighbourhood movement<sup>19</sup>.

The Bureau concurs with Novak's suggestion that multi-culturalism provides healthy diversity and variety in city life, and welcomes the signs that this is beginning to be recognized in Toronto.

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17. The Royal Commission Report shows "many immigrants who have arrived in Canada since 1946 have tended to support the N.D.P. (Book IV, p.70). This party has prided itself on challenging mainstream values.

18. Ibid., p. 68

19. The Royal Commission Report indicates that if an ethnic group's press is politically articulate, the group tends to have more political representatives (see pp. 73-74). If the ethnic press is encouraged in Toronto, ethnic political activity may increase.