



BOOK REVIEWS

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MIGRATIONS, DISCRIMINATION, INTEGRATION

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David FITZGERALD, David COOK-MARTIN, 2014, *Culling the Masses: The Democratic Origins of Racist Immigration Policy in the Americas*, Cambridge (Massachusetts), London, Harvard University Press, 501 p.

Is democracy immune to racism? For many commentators and researchers the answer is a resounding yes: racism and democracy seem – obviously and almost by nature – incompatible, the implicit understanding being that democratic values conflict with racist presuppositions and practices. Upon further reflection, however, the answer is not so obvious: for a considerable part of their history, democratic regimes readily practiced what can only be called racist policies. Liberal thinkers since Tocqueville would have us put this down to historical legacy, temporary loss of the moral compass, or fortuitous coexistence. This study demonstrates instead that not only is democracy not inherently hostile to racism but even constitutes a breeding ground: “The long-term relationship between liberalism and racism is best explained as one of ‘elective affinity’” (p. 7). Symmetrically, neither democracy nor belief in the universal nature of man accounts for the gradual disappearance of racial selection policies over the second half of the twentieth century. In fact it was the result of changes in international power balances: “Finally, we demonstrate that anti-racism is not inherently sustained by liberalism. Anti-racism is found across many different political systems, but it is especially fragile in populist and democratic environments” (p. 46).

To demonstrate this, the authors undertake a remarkably detailed exploration of all race- or ethnicity-related policies in the Americas. Their analytic framework, presented as a three-dimensional model, is based on comparisons over time and space. The first dimension, described as vertical, concerns power balances within countries as determined by struggles between different interest groups to “achieve their preferences.” Predictably, the opposition between capitalists and workers is essential here. But ethnic selection policies cannot be reduced to material national interests; a second, horizontal dimension, defined as international relations or interactions between governments, also plays a key role. Those

interactions can take many forms: “leverage,” i.e., the degree of influence a given country has on others; “cultural emulation,” i.e., “policymakers in one country voluntarily modelling their policies on those of another country or institution”; and “strategic adjustment, which occurs when a given country adjusts its policies to the effects of another country’s policies. Another component that has to be taken into account in this international perspective is the host country’s relations with the relevant departure countries (and with the population from those countries already living in it). Measures for excluding a given ethnic group will be strongly resented not only by the country of emigration but also by members of that group already present in the receiving country. This mechanism is essential to understanding the decline of racial policies in the aftermath of World War II: following decolonization, many immigrants received assistance and even protection from other countries. The third and last dimension of the model is variation in intra- and inter-country power balances over time. The positions of internal groups change, as does their power relative to each other, as do other countries’ policies. Accordingly, the analysis here of relations between political systems and racial selection policies is based on dual comparisons: simultaneous between countries, and over time.

For each country in the region the authors constructed a system for coding immigration and naturalization laws from 1790 to 2010, distinguishing between negative selection (refusal to admit a group) and positive selection (favouring a group), ethnic group selection (Jews, blacks, etc.) and selection of certain nationalities. Above all, they substantiate the coding with case studies so as to differentiate “between the law on the books and the law in action” (p. 34). The considerable amount of qualitative materials collected for the six case studies – government records, legislative debates, secondary literature, etc. – reveal more discreet not to say hidden selection procedures, not authorized by any law. The authors’ detailed study of the six countries – the United States, Canada, Cuba, Mexico, Brazil and Argentina – constitutes the real substance of the book. After a long introduction presenting the entire model and the main study results and a second chapter synthesizing vertical relations, come six chapters presenting policy history in each of the six countries over the more than 200-year period.

Each in its own way, these studies raise and provide answers to the book’s central question, which is whether or not racial selection policies developed in the country and if so whether they were maintained over time. One crucial factor in answering those questions is domestic actors’ ability to influence their country’s migration and citizenship policies – meaning in most cases to limit or curb migration and naturalization. It is here that the distinction between democracies (or populist regimes) and autocracies comes into play, as democracies are shown to be more likely to develop restrictive migration policies formulated in terms of race or ethnicity. The second important factor is the clash between horizontal and vertical dimensions: “horizontal conditions matter most” when a country is trying to improve its international position for strategic, military, business or

other reasons. One of the work's strengths is its demonstration that diplomatic issues play a major role in whether or not a given policy is adopted or abolished. The United States offers a perfect illustration of this mechanism: in expansionist periods, US governments moved to soften and later to abolish racial selection policies despite internal opposition. The disappearance of racial selection in the United States is shown to be due almost entirely to the country's foreign policy: "Even a superpower like the United States finds it in its interest to avoid antagonizing governments abroad by overtly excluding their co-ethnics" (p. 85). The book convincingly shows that migration and citizenship policies are the result of internal and international power balances and that policy "racialization" and "de-racialization" alike have more to do with *realpolitik* than ideological or humanist positions. Among the internal factors of democracies' vulnerability to racism is that democratic leaders are more concerned about winning elections than projecting a perspective of ideological tolerance. Among external factors is the fact that in a multipolar world, countries that exclude certain ethnic groups are in danger of weakening their own international position.

The book's power and quality derive from its in-depth analyses and fine comparisons, the authors' ability to combine detailed assessments of the situations in different countries with an overall explanatory scheme, and to discover underlying consistencies in disparate and even seemingly contradictory materials as they take into account specific country realities, interactions between countries, and developments over time. By focusing on interactions and influences between countries, they steer clear of linear explanations of history, while only precise analysis of individual countries can reveal the more or less unspeakable aspects of migration and naturalization policies. By combining the two and temporally contextualizing them, the authors have produced an exemplary study of the genesis of public policy.

Lastly, the book makes it clear that policies of this sort cannot be studied by way of a few hollow, monolithic, linearly applied concepts like "institutions" or "path dependency." It is crucial to develop the right tools for observing and analyzing the complex interplay between actors at different levels whose power and interests vary over time. Dense but extremely well written and easy to read, this work is essential for anyone studying past or current migration policies in the Americas or elsewhere. And it will be of considerable value to all researchers interested in immigration issues.

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