Justice for All: Multiculturalism over Assimilation (NEG)

By “Coach Vance” Trefethen

***Resolved: Culture ought to value assimilation over multiculturalism.”***

**EDITOR'S NOTE: This is a change to how we typically write our Lincoln-Douglas cases. With the new rules passed down from Stoa, our writers were forced to tighten up their citation methods. Rather than resembling a classroom paper with footnotes and extrapolations on research, Stoa cases need to conform to stricter evidence standards reminiscent of policy debate cases. This week we will release value cases written in the same format as Monument's policy cases. This is a higher standard that Monument is embracing, and though it is not required in other leagues, Monument will be enforcing them in Season 21 in all its releases (NSDA and NCFCA included).**

Case Summary: Overvaluing assimilation results in a society that tells large numbers of people that we won’t treat them fairly until they reach the standards of assimilation the dominant culture sets. But when is “enough” assimilation “enough”? And why would we wait until people reach such a standard (often a moving goalpost that is never “enough”) to treat them fairly and with dignity? We shouldn’t, and demanding assimilation over multiculturalism violates justice and mistreats minorities.

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Prof. Sahar Aziz at the Texas A&M School of Law tells a story that explains why I’m denying that “Culture ought to value assimilation over multiculturalism.” She writes in 2014 QUOTE:

Prof. Sahar Aziz 2014. (Associate Professor, Texas A&M School of Law; J.D. Univ. of Texas School of Law; M.A. Middle East Studies, Univ of Texas) COERCIVE ASSIMILATIONISM: THE PERILS OF MUSLIM WOMEN’S IDENTITY PERFORMANCE IN THE WORKPLACE, MICHIGAN JOURNAL OF RACE & LAW <https://repository.law.umich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1035&context=mjrl>

As soon as Sarah Maher walked into the room, their body language became noticeably tense. She was not what they expected to see when they spoke to her on the phone. Dressed in an ornate long-sleeve top extending to her knees with hand stitched colorful Palestinian embroidery, loose black plants, and a matching headscarf, Sarah was identifiably Muslim. Her dark olive complexion, long slender nose, and high cheek bones revealed her Arab roots. And yet, she had no foreign accent, she wore makeup, and exhibited a strength of personality and selfconfidence that contradicted her conservative dress. Within a matter of minutes, she had lost her audience. Despite having been raised in the United States, her headscarf quickly marked her as an outsider. Her Arab features betrayed her seemingly Anglo sounding name. And her assertive personality came across as pushy with a tinge of self-entitlement. Sarah had failed to assimilate her religious, ethnic, and gender identity in accordance with the predominant social groups’ norms. Although the company boasted women, Muslims, and racial minorities among their employees, Sarah was not the “right kind” of minority employee. Unlike the other Muslim and minority employees, Sarah openly expressed her identity through her dress rather than attempt to cover it. Her strong personality and unabashed self-confidence was off putting for the women and men in the room whose expectations of professional women included deference, discreteness, and humility. Although the interviewers included a woman, a Muslim, and white Christian male, they each followed and expected others to follow assimilationist demands, as had they. In the end, they agreed that though Sarah Maher was well qualified on paper, she just was not the right fit for the company’s culture.

END QUOTE. This debate would be over quickly if you, Judge, answered in your conscience one question: If you had been sitting in that office interviewing Sarah, would you have joined the others in valuing assimilation over multiculturalism when they refused to consider Sarah for the job? If you say yes, I’d urge you to re-examine your conscience. If you say no, then you have to vote Negative.

OBSERVATION 1. DEFINITIONS

Assimilation

Britannica 2019. “Assimilation” last updated 21 Aug 2019 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/assimilation-society>

**Assimilation**, in [anthropology](https://www.britannica.com/science/anthropology) and [sociology](https://www.britannica.com/topic/sociology), the process whereby individuals or groups of differing ethnic heritage are absorbed into the dominant [culture](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture) of a society. The process of [assimilating](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/assimilating) involves taking on the traits of the dominant culture to such a degree that the assimilating group becomes socially indistinguishable from other members of the society.

Multiculturialism

Oxford Reference, copyright 2019. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110810105436897>

As a descriptive term, multiculturalism refers to the coexistence of people with many cultural identities in a common state, society, or community.

OBSERVATION 2. THE VALUE OF JUSTICE

Subpoint A. Justice means fairness as determined by the social contract and its terms of basic cooperation

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, first published in 1996, substantially revised in 2019. “Original Position” <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/original-position/>

Rawls’s idea of the original position, as initially conceived, is his account of the moral point of view with regard to matters of justice. The original position is a hypothetical perspective that we can adopt in our moral reasoning about the most basic principles of social and political justice. What primarily distinguishes Rawls’s impartial perspective from its antecedents (in Hume, Smith, Kant, etc.) is that, rather than representing the judgment of one person, it is conceived socially, as a general agreement by (representatives of all adult) members of an ongoing society. The point of view of justice is then represented as a general social “contract” or agreement by free and equal persons on the basic terms of cooperation for their society.
**END QUOTE. They then go on to conclude later in the same context QUOTE:**Why does Rawls represent principles of justice as originating in a kind of social contract? Rawls says that “justice as fairness assigns a certain primacy to the social” (CP 339).

Subpoint B. The value of justice requires a criterion of fair treatment for all

It’s in our “Pledge of Allegiance” that we as a country have a social contract promising “liberty and justice for all.” Not just for folks who look like us, or have no accent, or dress like us, or like the same kind of food. The extent to which a culture treats all of its law-abiding citizens equally is a good measure of how well we uphold the value of Justice. Another way to look at it is the ancient moral value fundamental to Judaeo-Christian beliefs: How would you want to be treated if you were on the receiving end of the treatment?

OBSERVATION 3. IMPLICIT THREATS AND INJUSTICE

Who decides when “enough” assimilation has occurred? And what will be done to them if they don’t? This implicit threat of injustice – that society will “do something” to you if you don’t assimilate “enough” -- plays out in several ways, as we see in 3 subpoints:

Subpoint A. Denial of Employment

In Sarah’s case, speaking perfect English, having a good education, and striving hard to better herself weren’t “enough” assimilation to please the culture. And so the punishment was denial of employment. She’s not a unique case, it happens all the time:

Prof. Sahar Aziz 2014. (Associate Professor, Texas A&M School of Law; J.D. Univ. of Texas School of Law; M.A. Middle East Studies, Univ of Texas) COERCIVE ASSIMILATIONISM: THE PERILS OF MUSLIM WOMEN’S IDENTITY PERFORMANCE IN THE WORKPLACE, MICHIGAN JOURNAL OF RACE & LAW <https://repository.law.umich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1035&context=mjrl>

Minority employees find themselves expected to behave, talk, and dress in ways that emulate the dominant group, or at the very least do not threaten their power to define professional norms. By the same token, subjective aesthetic values determine who and what is valued and entitled to control the workplace, and by extension the distribution of wealth. Racial or ethnic minorities who engage in cultural displays and exhibit behaviors disfavored or out of sync with the dominant white, Protestant, heterosexual male culture find themselves deemed unprofessional or incompetent, resulting in their exclusion or marginalization in the workplace.

Subpoint B. Social conflict and violence

Agitating for “more assimilation” because minorities haven’t assimilated “enough” inevitably leads to social conflict. However much they assimilate, it’s never “enough” for the dominant group, and conflict emerges. In fact, as assimilation proceeds, and the majority culture sees these minorities in closer proximity mingling with themselves, resentment grows.

Peter Skerry 2000 (teaches political science at Claremont McKenna College) 1 Mar 2000 “Do We Really Want Immigrants to Assimilate?” <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/do-we-really-want-immigrants-to-assimilate/>

The third and final point I wish to make about assimilation is that it is fraught with tension, competition, and conflict. I offered a glimpse of this when I earlier focused on the emergence of ethnic groups as part of the assimilation process. Whether we’re talking about Italians yesterday or Hispanics today, such group identities in part signal the efforts of immigrants and their offspring to secure their place in America. Such efforts have in our history almost always been contentious. It is difficult to imagine that they could be otherwise. Stanford sociologist Susan Olzak provides systematic evidence for this assertion. Based on her study of 77 immigrant-impacted American cities from 1877 to 1914, Olzak rejects the conventional view that intergroup conflict is caused by segregation. Instead, she argues that intergroup competition and conflict resulted from occupational desegregation. In other words, tensions are caused not by the isolation of ethnic groups but by the weakening of boundaries and barriers between groups. Olzak’s perspective is consistent with the findings of Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab in The Politics of Unreason. In that study of right-wing extremism, Lipset and Raab report that anti-immigrant nativism in the United States has had as much to do with the social strains of urbanization and industrialization as with anxieties associated with economic contraction.

Subpoint C. Unjust double standards and hurdles

Who decides how fast minorities assimilate? If you said “the minorities themselves,” think again. Dominant cultures filter which individuals they will allow to join, selecting for high-skilled individuals and filtering out the rest. While demanding that minorities must “do more” to assimilate, they at the same time make it harder for some of them to do just that.

Dr. Jon Eguia 2015 (PhD; professor of economics at Michigan State Univ. ) 21 July 2015 “Discrimination and Assimilation” <https://msu.edu/~eguia/DnAJul2015.pdf>

Advantaged agents choose how difficult it is to assimilate and join their group. I find that agents with an advantaged background optimally screen those who seek to assimilate by choosing a difficulty of assimilation such that the agents who assimilate are precisely those whose skills are sufficiently high so that they improve the group. In order to screen optimally so that only the more able individuals assimilate, acceptance into the advantaged group must be based on malleable individual traits and behaviors that correlate with ability, and not on immutable characteristics that are uncorrelated with talent, such as skin color or place of birth.

END QUOTE. How would you want to be treated if you were the immigrant or the minority group member being told you must assimilate to someone else’s satisfaction, or else you will be treated with contempt and inferiority? Increased emphasis on assimilation means we will refuse to treat people fairly until everyone looks like the dominant group, and then stops some of them from even trying. America’s social contract of justice for all demands that we deny that and I urge you to do that with a Negative ballot.