RACE AND NATION IN THE UNITED STATES

There are no peoples in the United States in the sense in which there are peoples in the British Empire or in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The Americans are not one race divided into many peoples, but one people made up of many races. Or shall we say being made; for the American Republic is still young? We and our parents and grandparents have lived through the period when there passed through its open doors the great majority of the men and women who will be the ancestors of the American nation.

Under the old régime France colonised Louisiana as well as Quebec; but it is on the St Lawrence, and not the Mississippi, that there is a French people to-day. At the time of its conquest in 1664, the New Netherlands contained about 7000 Dutch inhabitants, while at the Cape of Good Hope in that year, there were not as many hundreds; but in South Africa, and not in New York, a Dutch people took root and flourished. The circumstances and policy of the British Empire have tended to pre-

serve nationality; the circumstances and policy of the United States to absorb it. Thus, while the British Empire resolves itself into a Commonwealth of Nations, the United States pursues the goal of national unity.

More remarkable still is the fact that Irish, Germans, Scandinavians, Poles, Italians, and indeed a dozen different races, have entered the country in numbers sufficient to form separate peoples, had they and the Americans so desired. Neither so desired. Thus, in the New World we do not see the diversity of Europe reproduced in a federation of peoples, but a new nation.

All Americans, except the Indians, are recent immigrants. The great majority crossed the ocean of their own will, to find freedom or betterment. They adventured because the New World seemed to them to offer better prospects than the Old. To them America was the land of hope. This prevailing motive governed their behaviour in their adopted country, their expectations and their reception. The national psychology early exhibited a confidence that the New World can offer something better than the Old. The relations of the different peoples with each other have been shaped by the task and the hope that they shared—to establish in a new nation a new order for mankind.

The nineteenth century was the great age of movement. Or, to be more exact, the century between 1820 and 1920. In those years more than thirty million people crossed the ocean from Europe to the United States. The development of steam transport made it physically easier and so cheaper to move than it had ever been before. The telegraph and the newspaper spread ever more widely a knowledge of the conditions and opportunities of America. Population was growing fast in Europe. Over-peopled lands saw far off a relatively empty continent. In Europe, at different times, in different places, in different degrees, were unemployment, poverty, famine, racial, political and religious discrimination and persecution: in America were employment, freedom, and opportunity. The inducement to move, the means to move, the willingness to receive, all coincided.

So the stream began to flow, fed from an ever-widening watershed—from the British Isles, from North and Western Europe, from South and Eastern Europe, and from the eastern shores of Asia, increasing the population of the United States by immense numbers of a great diversity of races. It swelled at times to a torrential invasion. It was the greatest migration of recorded history. At last the golden door was closed and the 'general

invitation to the people of the world' withdrawn. The vacant lands were taken up, the field of employment ceased to be unlimited, the continent had passed beyond the initial stage of its development.

Such was the coming of the peoples whose assimilation and amalgamation are to form the American nation. As they distributed themselves over the continental space and became absorbed in the activities of American life, the country seemed a graveyard of European nationality.

When Jefferson addressed a famous declaration to 'a candid world', he wrote of 'our British brethren' and of 'the ties of our common kindred'. In 1776 this was no doubt true. Careful enquiries into the national origins of the American people have shown that the colonial population, excepting the negro, was substantially of British stock. Yet already many other races were represented. The first census, taken in 1790, did not distinguish native-born and foreign-born; nor was this done until the census of 1850, of so little importance seemed the question of the intermixture of races. Later calculation based upon it distributes the colonial population according to country of origin as follows: Great Britain and Northern Ireland 77%, Germany 7·4, Irish Free State 4·4, Nether-

lands 3·3; of the other nationalities represented, French, Canadians, and Belgians were the most important.[1] The total population in 1790 was about four million, of whom the negroes numbered three-quarters of a million.

In the seventeenth century the immigrants had been mainly English, but Swedes and Dutch had planted commercial settlements on the Atlantic seaboard. In 1680 a stream of persecuted sects began to flow from Germany, and, a little later, other Germans emigrated from regions devastated by war. The Scotch-Irish who came from Ulster—for British policy in Ireland pressed hard on Protestant as well as Catholic—were the largest group of immigrants in the eighteenth century, perhaps 200,000 in all, and, with the Germans, made up as large a number as the English immigrants of the preceding century. Scotland, too, was contributing. Boswell, travelling with Johnson in the Western Highlands in 1773, found a 'rage for emigration'. In Skye, a dance called 'America' had been introduced, apparently to show 'how emigration catches, till a whole neighbourhood is set afloat'.[2]

These eighteenth-century immigrants went

[1] Davie, M. R., *World Immigration*, p. 44.
[2] Boswell, *Johnson* (ed. Croker 1831), II, p. 502.

largely to the frontier districts, particularly of Pennsylvania and New York, where the fusion of races began. So the western halves of the colonies, from Massachusetts to North Carolina, tended to show some difference of race and character from the tide-water. The religious exclusiveness of the New Englanders kept them from mixing freely with the new-comers far into the nineteenth century. But elsewhere there was intermixture, especially in the middle colonies. To South Carolina had come West Indian planters and Huguenot merchants; Georgia had received Oglethorpe's immigrants. South of Pennsylvania the plantation system rested on slavery, and here were most of the negroes. In Georgia there were Indians. But, in general, the Indians retired before the white man and there was little intermixture. Disraeli wished that the republic of the Puritans had blended with the tribes of the wilderness. Raleigh, and, later, Colonel Byrd of Virginia (1674–1744), advocated intermarriage with the Indians. But this was uncommon in the East. It was the *coureurs des bois* on the St Lawrence and the Mississippi who brought in the Indian blood. A writer of 1810 remarks that 'only a few Americans have ever seen a native redskin'.[1]

[1] Brown, R. H., *Mirror of America*, p. 26.

The diversity of the population had resulted from circumstances. It was neither promoted nor prevented on theory. The colonists needed labour, and welcomed the kind of immigration that supplied it, whether British, European or African. They were not more, perhaps less, hospitable than their descendants. In small communities dissidents are more trouble than in large. The religious persecutions of Europe, however, taught the duty and showed the advantage of hospitality, and the English colonies became places of reception, though they showed different degrees of liberality in their treatment of aliens. At the Philadelphia Convention (1787) James Wilson, a Scot of Pennsylvania, mentioned that, when in Maryland, he had found certain disabilities there a continual vexation; he would feel it absurd to frame a constitution under which he himself could not hold office.

Thus colonial experience contributed to the making of the American nation. It produced a civilisation substantially British. The institutions and habit of self-government and religious freedom were planted in favourable and stimulating surroundings. The American too learned to welcome the immigrant. The intermixture of races began, and in the slave population the chief race problem of the future appeared. But we must remember

that the colonies had not in mind an American nation. Great Britain could not persuade them to unite for defence against Indians or France. Local feeling was very strong, distances were great and means of communication lacking, and the manner of life was different in New England, the Middle Colonies and the South. As yet, the concept of America did not exist among these separated, diverse and mutually suspicious communities. But the conditions were favourable for national development and events brought it about. In the quarrel with England the idea of American unity and an American nation was born. At the Stamp Act Congress of 1765 a delegate said: 'There ought to be no New Englander, no New Yorker, known on this continent, but all of us Americans.' Then followed, step by step, the making of the Union—the Continental Congress (1774) brought the leading minds together, the Declaration of Independence (1776) set a goal, the Continental Army associated men in action and danger, the Articles of Confederation (1781) started them on the road to political union, the Federal Convention at Philadelphia (1787) produced the Constitution of the United States. So the political mould of the American nation was formed.

At the Philadelphia Convention the question of

the foreign immigrant was discussed.[1] The discussion revealed different points of view. It was clear that the proposed federal government must be empowered to establish a uniform rule of naturalisation; for citizens of one state of the Union must automatically become citizens of other states. But fear was expressed concerning a too free admission of foreigners. The fear was of their political opinions. Foreigners, said Gouverneur Morris, cannot learn our laws and understand our constitution under fourteen years; it will require time to eradicate native attachment and the affections of education. We should not be polite at the expense of prudence. As to those philosophical gentlemen, those citizens of the world, as they called themselves, he did not wish to see any of them in our public councils. Men who can shake off their attachments to their own country can never love any other. Nor could the legislatures be trusted never to choose improper persons—there was no knowing what legislatures would do. Others, however, stressed the economic advantage of admitting immigrants and the American tradition of liberality. Madison believed that great numbers of respectable Europeans, men who loved liberty,

[1] *Documents illustrative of the formation of the Union of the American States*, selected, arranged and indexed by C. C. Tansill, see pp. 505–6, 512, 524, 876.

would be ready to transfer their fortunes thither. He did not want anything illiberal in the constitution. America was indebted to immigration for her settlement and prosperity. Those parts which had encouraged it most had advanced most rapidly in population, education and the arts. Mr Wilson, of Pennsylvania, cited his own state in proof of this, and pointed out that three of its deputies at the Convention were not natives of America. The travelled Franklin sought to reassure the assembly. The people in Europe, he said, are friendly to this country. He would not discourage the common people in Europe from emigrating to America. The Convention saw the future as they saw the past; they could not foresee the multitude of emigrants. So the liberal view prevailed. The door was opened and Congress was left to regulate the matter.[1]

But, following the French Revolution, Gouverneur Morris had the satisfaction of seeing his prophetic fears realised. A good many philosophical gentlemen came and many good American citizens were alarmed. The Federalist party legislated to protect the rights of mankind from their French champions. A Naturalisation Act of 1798

[1] Viz. empowered 'to establish an uniform rule of naturalisation'. *Constitution of United States.*