

Introduction: Ethnicity and Justice

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The ideal of social justice in the United States has its roots in both the Judeo-Christian and ancient Greek traditions. From the latter our notion of democracy as a just institution is derived. At the theoretical level, Plato attempted to define ideal justice in his *Republic*, but here we are not concerned with ideal justice. At the practical level, the Hebrew prophet Amos urged public officials to practice justice as enjoined by Moses and his predecessors. Some 2700 years later Martin Luther King, Jr., sought to combine these two senses of justice when he insisted that America can satisfy its democratic creed—that all men are created equal—only when it “allows justice to roll like water and righteousness like a mighty stream.” Like the lonely prophet Amos, King was a voice for the toiling masses.

This special issue of *Explorations in Ethnic Studies* is concerned with what may be called “ethnic justice,” by which we have in mind the combination of the above two traditions, understood within the context of ethnic minorities in the United States. Thus, justice may be defined as the practices and policies that prohibit unequal treatment of people based on race, ethnicity, or color of skin. Ethnic justice in the modern sense is often mistakenly associated with Affirmative Action, which many opponents call “reverse justice,” i.e. reverse discrimination.

Noel J. Kent’s “A Stacked Deck: Minorities, Social Justice and the New American Political Economy,” is a neat point of departure. He examines justice within the context of the American economy. The cards are stacked in favor of the larger society which denies equal opportunity to its ethnic minorities. Within the past decade, America adopted a new economic policy that shifted from a production to a service economy. This has, in Kent’s analysis, created a hardship for many minorities, especially African Americans and Hispanics, many of whom are ill-prepared to obtain employment in this service-oriented economy that relies heavily on highly skilled workers.

If Kent blames the United States government for being the source of injustice, Alberto L. Pulido, in his “Are You An Emissary of Jesus Christ?: Justice, The Catholic Church, and the Chicano Movement” regards the Catholic

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Church as the perpetrator of ethnic injustice. His analysis focuses on the *Catolicos Por La Raza (CPLR)* movement that emerged in San Diego and Los Angeles, California, in 1969. Spokespersons for the *CPLR* maintain that the Catholic Church has failed to fulfill its earthly mission in as much as the Church has turned its back on the needs of the poor farm workers. As in the views of Amos, the *CPLR* in effect maintained that the Church needed to widen its channels, so that the streams of justice might flow more freely.

Like Kent, Ann Rayson in her, *Obasan: The Politics of the Japanese-Canadian Internment* returns attention to the State, which she regards as the source of injustice; however, here, she is concerned not with the American government but with the Canadian government's mistreatment of its Japanese citizens during World War II. Treated as "enemy aliens," Japanese-Canadians were stripped of all their rights and properties by the Canadian government. *Obasan* is a novel that focuses on the internment and resulting injustice that the Japanese-Canadians suffered. As Rayson states: "The results of this policy of internment and dispersal were the death of a viable culture." She adds, "Many Canadians have likened their wartime experience to rape." This was a form of social rape, comparable to the injustice that African Americans and other ethnic minorities have suffered in the U.S.

It is quite likely that any perceptive child, whether European American or African American, who is familiar with television, has formed the impression of African Americans (especially males) as criminals. This impression is largely shaped by the media and other sources. African Americans, more so than their European American counterparts, are often portrayed as criminals or potential criminals. Such a perception seems to be deeply ingrained in the American mind. Not only does the "average person" carry this "negative image" or bias of African Americans, but this is also true of the many people who run the criminal justice system—judges, lawyers, social-workers, among others. Such ethnic bias, according to David L. Hood and Jon R. Harlan, is the source of sentencing disparity affecting certain ethnic minorities in the U.S. The two authors provide evidence for this in their "Ethnic Disparities in Sentencing and The Washington Sentencing Reform Act: The Case of Yakima County."

Many people are of the opinion that the most effective way to rout biased attitudes about ethnic minorities is through education. Through this institution people are provided the opportunity to debate such issues as affirmative action, racial prejudice, and quotas, to arrive at an open, balanced understanding of the experience of ethnic minorities in the U.S. This view is shared by Le Von E. Wilson and George Steven Swan. In "The Law and Policy of Civil Rights: A Tactical Perspective for Educators," they offer a pedagogical tool that allows for a careful analysis of the above mentioned issues. This is made possible by providing a "hands-on study of actually-litigated minority set-aside/affirmative action controversies before the U.S. Supreme Court, with every student utilizing the primary documents (the litigants' briefs) used by the Supreme Court Justices themselves. These briefs provide readymade resources fueling policy debate on either side of each case."

For the past few centuries, America has, in the views of Martin Luther King, Jr., issued its ethnic minorities a “bad check,” which suggests that the system of justice is bankrupt. One wonders how much longer will the **Bank of Justice** remain “in the red”? This is an important question, because by the year 2020, ethnic minorities will be in the majority. To what extent will this demography shift affect our sense of justice in the future. And, more importantly, what are we doing to achieve justice in the present?