



REFLECTIONS ON TERRORISM AND IMMIGRATION IN ARIZONA AND UNITED STATES

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Abstract

Recent discussions about race, immigration and health care illustrate the process. Take race: Europeans assumed for hundreds of years that there were distinct races and that whites were simply superior to all others, and should therefore have more rights and social influence than others. Indeed, they even argued this was part of God's plan! Those beliefs were shared by most Americans well into the 20th century; even the deadly Civil War did not dispel many of these beliefs and values. Research shows that a minority of U. S. citizens continue to hold negative and "old" views of racial inequality. Those views were no longer supported in most of public life, although they remained very much alive culturally through language and other symbols. And remedies consistent with the "old" reality are offered, including less support for poor people, many of whom are racial or ethnic minorities. This is elastic citizenship. The same can be said about immigration and poverty. In the late 19th and early 20th century most Americans still accepted the notion that immigrants—with some exceptions—were just inferior, including their languages, food, religions, and social behavior.

Key Words: Fear; poverty; Exclusion

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REFLEXIONS SUR LE TERRORISME ET L'IMMIGRATION EN ARIZONA ET AUX ÉTATS-UNIS

Résumé

De récentes discussions sur la race, l'immigration et les soins de santé illustrent le processus. Prenez la race: les Européens ont présumé pendant des siècles qu'il y avait des races distinctes et que les blancs étaient tout simplement supérieurs à tous les autres et devraient donc avoir plus de droits et plus d'influence que les autres. En vérité, ils ont toujours argué que ceci faisait partie d'un plan divin! Ces croyances ont été partagées par la plupart des Américains pendant une bonne partie du XXe siècle; même la guerre civile mortifère n'a pas dissipé ces croyances et ces valeurs. Des recherches montrent qu'une minorité de citoyens américains continue d'avoir des vues négatives et "passéistes" sur l'inégalité raciale. Ces opinions ne sont plus appuyées au sein de la vie publique, mais elles restent très sensibles sur le plan culturel, dans le langage et dans d'autres symboles. Et, sont offerts des remèdes compatibles avec la "vieille" réalité, incluant moins d'aides pour les pauvres dont beaucoup appartiennent aux minorités ethniques ou raciales. C'est de la citoyenneté élastique. On peut en dire de même de l'immigration et de la pauvreté. À la fin du XIXe siècle et au début du XXe, la plupart des Américains acceptaient encore comme une vérité que les immigrants- à quelques exceptions près - étaient tout simplement inférieurs, dans leur langage, leur alimentation, leur religion et leur conduite sociale.

Mots clé: peur; pauvreté; exclusion

Introduction

Popular culture promotes fear as entertainment. Whether crime, disasters, or wars, popular culture formats promote evocative feelings over reflective analysis. Aiming to please the audiences and key political leaders, news media, and especially major TV networks, embraced the emotional sweep of 9/11. Forty years of crime coverage helped promote the discourse of fear, which may be defined as the pervasive communication, symbolic awareness, and expectation that danger and risk are a central feature of everyday life. Notwithstanding the long relationship in the United States between fear and crime, the role of the mass media in promoting fear has become more pronounced since the United States "discovered" international terrorism on September 11, 2001. Politicians used the attacks to pursue the politics of fear to promote and use audience beliefs and assumptions about danger, risk and fear in order to achieve certain goals. The fear of terrorism was easily expanded to also include fear of drugs and immigration, while expanding surveillance and social control. I offer some reflections on how this pervasive fear has played out in the United States, with emphasis on my state of Arizona, which has proposed extreme measures to deal with illegal immigration. A key part of the discourse of fear is to demonize and stigmatize the "other"—terrorists or immigrants.

Let there be no mistake: Fear is driving the legislation and emotions in Arizona and throughout much of the United States these days. I shall focus on Arizona, a state I know best. I am interested in how this fear is being manipulated through the mass media to provoke a moral panic by constructing a crisis from inaccurate information. But the fear is

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real, and the creators of this panic are quite proud of it. About one year ago an elected supporter of Arizona's new immigration law said that the main goal is about creating so much fear that undocumented people will leave on their own: "...our intention is to make Arizona a very uncomfortable place for them to be so they leave or never come here in the first place." (The Arizona Republic, Apr. 28, 2010, p. A11). Years of conducting research on propaganda and the politics of fear convinces me that Pogo, a famous comic book character, had it right when he proclaimed, "We have met the enemy and it is us." Welcome to Arizona, Pogo, where I have studied the culture and the mass media for some 37 years. I know the cast of characters, the issues, and the unique political culture of Arizona that permits people who rally against "big government" to embrace a policy that requires police officers to zero in on any potentially undocumented person—thirty percent of Arizona's population.

Call it the Arizona Syndrome, which includes: 1. Promote fear at every turn. Arizona has a long tradition of claiming to have more crime than it has, and politicians court voters by promoting numerous threats from "outsiders," be they "new comers," politicians in Washington, and new ideas. Maricopa County Sheriff Arpaio raids Mesa City Hall in the middle of the night and arrests a janitor, while feasting on sound bites about toughness and his "tent city jail." The man credited with ramming the bill through Arizona's legislature boasts about being one of Sheriff Joe's former deputies, and of being shot. Arizona politics embraces the symbol of the gun, the individual's defense against bad things. Recent legal changes permit loaded guns to be carried into bars, and even concealed weapons can now be carried without a permit. The border is said to be 'less secure' despite a drastic reduction in the number of people who cross it. Fear of the "other" gets stronger in bad economic times as compliant news media carry sound bites of politicians blaming immigrants for taking "our jobs."

2. Believing the opposite of what is true as long as it fits the prevailing narrative about fear, threats and enemies. The news media have carried reports for months suggesting that undocumented people commit more crime, do not pay taxes, use excessive social services, and are an economic drain. None of this is true, according to research by the National Research Council and the President's Council of Economic Advisors, but it does not matter because long-held beliefs and prejudices are impervious to evidence. Unlike New Mexico, which has embraced Hispanic culture and people, Arizona's political culture has erected many "borders" to restrict full participation in the civic and political life.

3. Have one common and very visible enemy. This is all about identity politics. Popular people wrap themselves in the flag; those opposed to the new immigration law are said to be unpatriotic and unwilling to 'project our borders.' Arizona has very few black people, but a lot of Hispanics. Despite many claims by the architects of fear that they 'love the Hispanic people,' the focus is on what the "immigrants" lack and their backwardness, including not speaking English. (Indeed, some Hispanics will support anti-immigration legislation, against recent legal and illegal immigrants.) Many problems, e.g., gangs, associated with poverty are attributed to "race" and ethnicity. Consider that Arizona's funding for education is one of the lowest in the nation, especially for very poor school districts, which have successfully sued the State of Arizona. Indeed, architects of the

Arizona immigration law make it very clear that crime and taxes will go down as fear drives out many Arizona residents.

4. Connect the problem with immigrants with a strong anti-government narrative of “big government,” while also wanting the “government” to do something about the problems. Part of this is due to simplistic thinking that all problems can be solved in ways that will appeal to most people, including passing and enforcing laws. But any social services that help undeserving poor people are unacceptable. And virtually all social service programs are unacceptable.

5. The final part of the syndrome is to remain silent about points 1-4.

The syndrome becomes part of a local, regional, and even national script and identity the more that it is repeated, and especially as sound bites showing the conflict to be between “two sides,” one proclaiming patriotism and self defense, while the “other” is cast as defending unwanted invaders. Arizona and national politics have become joined, especially in those states where Hispanics lack political influence. Now there is a national enemy, conveniently demonized along with the Taliban and al Qaida. But as Pogo always knew, we didn’t really need those “outside” enemies; we had the real one all along—us.

Fear and Terrorism Redux

Just when we thought that fear of domestic terrorism had leveled off, a young Nigerian tried to blow up an airliner on Christmas day in 2009. He had explosives in his underwear. Nonstop TV news coverage, complete with animation of the attempt, instilled reinforced more fear. Within a matter of months airport security included groping passengers and scanning our bodies with ‘see through clothes’ cameras, searching for the elusive explosives that we might be concealing. Even babies were frisked and patted down! News coverage has transformed 9/11 from an event into a terrorism narrative based on fear. The Nigerian’s failed attempt was interpreted by government officials and countless news reports as a security failure, a reminder of the terrorist threat, and above all, renewed fear. The responses and proposed solutions to the “breach” provide some insight into the emergent meanings of “terrorism” and what it means for U. S. citizens. The result was to reenergize the fear narrative and expand the rhetoric of security and safety over individual freedoms and dignity. The power of terrorism has been to create its own narrative: Terrorism has joined crime as a master narrative of fear that justifies all kinds of social actions, policies, and even wars. Analysis of news reports and entertainment programs suggests that fear expanded greatly with the use of terrorism and moved from being an emotion to a communication style, or discourse of fear that may be defined as the pervasive communication, symbolic awareness, and expectation that danger and risk are a central feature of our lives.

The governmental response was to query “what went wrong,” with the well-publicized aim to fix the problem, mainly through better organizational communication and sharing of information, as well as enhanced security efforts, including clothes penetrating visuals that would expose all passengers to skin-tight scrutiny. Indeed, wouldn’t we all be safer if passenger movements were more restricted on board aircraft, such as not using the restroom, showing one’s hands at all times, etc.? Even though no Americans in recent years

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have been harmed in our homeland by individuals clearly associated with terrorist organizations, recent opinion polls suggest that more Americans are willing to give up more freedom for enhanced security and protection from terrorists. The news coverage linked this event to our expanding war in Afghanistan amid calls for stepped up involvement in Yemen and elsewhere.

Terrorism has become a discourse and justification, on the one hand, while also serving as a rationale for revenge and counter-attacks, on the other hand. Indeed, 9/11 is now used throughout the world, but especially North America, as a symbolic vessel that is only partly full; it contains some basic meanings, (e.g., crashing airliners into buildings), but it is a space for the interpretation of new events and for any speaker (or writer) to associate themselves (or their project) with some unspecified values and concerns. To share 9/11 integrates and legitimizes individual behavior, social policies, and institutional practices. A systematic searching of news information bases such as Lexis/Nexis and Westlaw shows that 9/11 routinely is associated with fear and terrorism, and is invoked in a kind of global justification for certain policies and practices. Even the carnage in Gaza during the Israeli invasion in 2008 was repeatedly justified as fighting terrorism. Fear has continued to be linked with terrorism, but the targets have varied. For example, fear was closely associated with crime, drugs, gangs, immigrants, and, after the horrendous “Columbine” school shootings, fear and terrorism became even more closely linked with schools and children. This is very apparent with public discussion about immigration.

Public policy, conflict and war are more likely to invoke the terrorism narrative, and restrict our choices about social action. There was war before terrorism became so closely linked with the discourse of fear, but terrorism war is grounded in an insatiable attraction to identifying and validating sources of fear with the commitment to attacking them. Like a Fresnel lens that magnifies light, terrorism has become a signpost that policy makers exploring global crises seem bound to follow. Let’s hope that clarity of meaning can chart a different course.

F. B. I. Stings and the Politics of Fear

Recent F. B. I. terrorist sting operations suggest that Superman’s adaptable archenemy Lex Luthor had it right when he said, “the more fear you make, the more loot you take.” The audience’s fear of terrorism is cultivated with entertaining popular culture and mass media reports about terrorism threats. Pew opinion surveys show that terrorism continues to be one of the U.S.A.’ top 3 priorities—much higher than reducing crime, providing health insurance, or protecting the environment. Sting operations help with the programming. Stings have become popular in the United States over the last 35 years or so as the F. B. I. became more oriented to popular culture and media logic. Improved and smaller audio and video recording technology has helped provide “evidence” for legal proceedings as well as news and other entertainment shows. One of the first F. B. I. stings was “Abscam,” (short for Arab Scam) in 1980. Video clips of government officials accepting bribes were shown on news reports 4 months after the initial trial. The courts, for the most part, condoned stings. Many local police departments followed the feds’ lead, including one in Arizona (“Azscam”) in May, 1991, which involved video recordings of legislators being bribed by a stooge hired by the Maricopa County Attorney and the Phoenix Police Department. These tapes were the talk of the town when broadcast one day

after the indictments. Expanded surveillance is now part of everyday life and entertainment. Audiences nurtured with decades of fear of crime and now, terrorism, are also familiar with the sting genre of reality TV shows such as “To Catch a Predator.”

The F. B. I. has become skilled at recording the planning, carrying out and prevention of would-be terrorist acts. The general approach is to assist people who make verbal threats to actually do something more “operational” (their word). A recent episode in November, 2010 starred Mohamed Osman Mohamud, a 19 year old jihadist wannabe in Portland, Oregon. After being alerted by his parents, F. B.I. surveillance identified suspicious discussions with potential enemies in Pakistan, and then devoted months in bringing their scripted procedures and undercover roles into play. The aim was not to stop Mr. Mohamud or bring charges against him; there was already probable cause to detain and arrest when he took initial steps toward committing a terrorist act to harm people. According to the Center for Law and Security’s “Terrorist Trial Report Card,” 57% of convictions in the U. S. are for “general criminal conspiracy.” But putting even a fake bomb into play permits a heavier charge involving “attempted use of a weapon of mass destruction,” which brings a much longer potential prison sentence as well as more mass media attention to the threat.

The F.B.I. produced a dramatic performance of a bomb threat for media publicity purposes and to promote a sense of imminent danger and fear. The F.B.I.’s affidavit makes it clear that this individual had neither the means nor opportunity to blow up anybody. The federal agents provided the knowledge, means, technology, organization and money for rent and to purchase bomb supplies. The FBI did more than engage in a conventional sting operation by assisting a wannabe terrorist from moving beyond ‘talk’ and ‘bluster’ to actually putting together bomb materials, Stings are intended to demonstrate that a person is guilty of a crime. Yet, the drama of simply taking a threatening person out of circulation was not sufficient when an actual performance of capturing a staged bomb attack in real time in a real place would obtain extensive media coverage. News reports about another terrorist plot thwarted adds to the public fear of terrorism and this has consequences. One irony is that people reacting to the publicity of this sting operation committed a terrorist act by burning a mosque in Corvallis, Oregon. Another irony is that knowledgeable criminals adapt to sting operations. Even the hapless Antonio Martinez, who was similarly busted with a fake bomb in Baltimore, wondered if he was being set up. How the F. B. I. programming will inform the actions of real terrorists in the future remains uncertain.

Nice Words and Nasty Deeds

It seems that we’re more worried about words than deeds, more concerned with law than justice in Arizona. Nobel Laureate George Wald suggested that a good measure of any policy or program was whether it was good for children. Our attention turned to children after nine-year Christina Green was murdered on January 8 by a gunman using a legally obtained Glock handgun with an extended magazine; he shot down nineteen people in a Tucson, Arizona Safeway store, including Congresswoman Giffords. Apparently, he did not say a nasty word; he just opened fire and didn’t stop until his extended 33 cartridge magazine ran dry, and was then tackled. Christina’s murder helped galvanize a feeling that we should be kinder to one another and that political discussions should be less toxic and more helpful. President Obama challenged the nation in a moving memorial service to be

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worthy of Christina's hope and dreams: "All of us—we should do everything we can to make sure this country lives up to our children's expectations." Pundits immediately argued that nasty rhetoric did not contribute to the killings, nor was a cultural climate of fear related to policies that enabled a mentally ill young man to purchase a weapon and ammo. It was all quite legal. Apparently, there was nothing that could have been done to prevent this mass murder, the ones that preceded it, and those to follow, although some politicians argued that not enough people were armed. Accordingly, hundreds of Arizonans and other Americans bought Glocks and extended magazines as soon as stores opened on Monday. It was all quite legal. A few days later some Tucson citizens had a 'peace' march to show support for the victims, but no mention was made of U.S. soldiers and Iraqi and Afghanistan men, women, and children—like Christina—who were dying in two wars. The focus was on Arizona's massacre. Arizona politicians assured us that it will be a kinder, gentler state, committed to the kind of civil discourse that produced policies that have received national attention:

-Arizona's laws permit gun purchases with minimal background checks, no restrictions on extended magazine size, as well as carrying concealed weapons practically anywhere, including bars and restaurants. Bills to permit faculty and students to carry weapons on college campuses were passed by the legislature but vetoed by the governor. This has been justified in quiet and even teary voices about Constitutional and God given rights for freedom.

- Nice legal language was used in promoting policies and law enforcement practices that terrorized families and separated children from their parents, like nine-year old Katherine Figueroa—a U. S. citizen, who watched Sheriff's deputies take away her undocumented parents, even though they had lived in the United States for many years. Katherine would be targeted a short time later when civil language was used in spear-heading a constitutional change to the 14th Amendment that would deny citizenship to children like her, a so-called "anchor baby." As Arizona representative John Kavanaugh put it during a trip to Washington, DC: "This is not a far-out, extremist position...Only a handful of countries in the world grant citizenship based on the GPS location of the birth." Apparently, the Constitution can be changed when it comes to children but not guns. Nice words and nasty deeds: Are these good for children? Are these worthy of Christina Green? Can we do better?

Arizona Reflections: Elastic citizenship and the Challenge of the Future

William Wordsworth's poem, *The Prelude*, concludes with

"what we have loved,

Others will love, and we will teach them how"

What do Arizonans—and Americans-- love or value, and what are we teaching each other, our children, the nation, the world? I think I know. I call it "elastic citizenship." I offer some modest reflections about my experience in the hope that others might help redirect our current suicidal course from fear and hate toward compassion and hope. The dominant discourse in Arizona these days is about fear, arrests, immigration, guns, corruption, and budget cuts for almost everything except prisons. This is what I've learned from Arizona: 1. *There is a constant struggle to maintain progress and human dignity. Social change is fickle, but often quite predictable. A powerful minority will constantly challenge compassion and caring for others as a way to promote the Public Good.* 2.

Values do not fundamentally change for many citizens, but rather, are stretched or compressed to accommodate mass media reports about crises and fear. 3. The propaganda of fear can change almost everything; we can 'bounce back' to previous deeply held beliefs and old stories or narratives are dusted off and retold. The most positive and negative values and feelings throughout history never really go away; many negative values and sentiments—such as hate and racism-- get pushed in the background, off the public stage, sort of corralled, while values such as tolerance and compassion make brief appearances and rule the day—for a while. This is part of what is going on with the hateful statements and laws about immigration, even to the point of breaking up families, separating mothers from their babies, and sewing a fabric of fear around social life. This is the elastic citizenship.

Conclusion

Recent discussions about race, immigration and health care illustrate the process. Take race: Europeans assumed for hundreds of years that there were distinct races and that whites were simply superior to all others, and should therefore have more rights and social influence than others. Indeed, they even argued this was part of God's plan! Those beliefs were shared by most Americans well into the 20th century; even the deadly Civil War did not dispel many of these beliefs and values. Research shows that a minority of U. S. citizens continue to hold negative and "old" views of racial inequality. Those views were no longer supported in most of public life, although they remained very much alive culturally through language and other symbols. And remedies consistent with the "old" reality are offered, including less support for poor people, many of whom are racial or ethnic minorities. This is elastic citizenship.

The same can be said about immigration and poverty. In the late 19th and early 20th century most Americans still accepted the notion that immigrants—with some exceptions—were just inferior, including their languages, food, religions, and social behavior. Reading newspapers of the day makes it very clear that the disdain was not only for racial minorities; religious minorities, such as Catholics and Jews, were ill-treated. This was a standard story for many Americans. However, tolerance was nurtured through political action and economic necessity—workers were needed—and diversity or cultural and ethnic differences came to be more accepted as a "nation of immigrants," the common new story. Yet, many of the prejudices of the old story were sustained, and would periodically snap back into play with wars—such as the Japanese internment in W. W. II—and economic crises.

Then there is health. It was not so long ago that an early and painful death was simply accepted as a fact of life, especially for poor people. There was not much that could be done. Medical science and technological innovations have changed the situation. The notion of public health and providing subsidized care for lower income—and often elderly people—is fairly new, but was embraced as a humane way of assisting people, and promoting national health as a Public Good, even though health care in the U.S. lags far behind most industrialized countries. Basic medical care became part of a national story about what Americans value. As with race and immigration, humane care as a Public Good would be challenged during tough economic times as being too expensive. Indeed, Arizona, like many other parts of the United States, has drastically trimmed health care for poor

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people, and even delayed funding life-saving organ transplants. This is all justified in order to keep taxes low. The snap back is apparent. This elastic citizenship will continue as long as alternative views remain in circulation, always ready to be resurrected for the next crisis. This is what political actions are teaching. We can do better. We can recognize the propaganda of fear and provide alternatives to the distorting frames that distort reality and promote more social control.

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