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John Stuart Mill said: “Free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities. Among a people without fellow-feeling, especially if they read and speak different languages, the united public opinion necessary to the working of representative government cannot exist” (*Considerations on Representative Government*, 1861). His adage appears more relevant today than ever before. Increasing rates of immigration are leading pundits, politicians, and scholars to claim that precisely such “fellow-feeling” is necessary for a free, secure, and prosperous society. Students of public opinion likewise attempt to identify the nature and character of Mill’s “fellow-feeling” and determine whether it is in fact essential for attaining such goods. The contribution that Schildkraut’s book, *Americanism in the Twenty-First Century: Public Opinion in the Age of Immigration*, makes to this question manifests itself on two primary levels. First, it examines whether the diversity engendered by immigration undermines the sense of “fellow-feeling” among the majority as well as the immigrants themselves. This issue is relevant not only to the United States but also to other traditional immigrant-destination countries, as well as to those in which the phenomenon is relatively new. Second, it focuses attention on the meaning of “Americanism” in a country that contravenes Mill’s contention that “Free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities.”

Schildkraut’s book comprises one of the most successful attempts to date to empirically address these two issues. Although numerous public-opinion studies have been conducted into the meaning of Americanism and attitudes...
toward immigrant and immigration, *Americanism in the Twenty-First Century* pushes empirical investigation beyond the majority-minority distinction. Using an original national survey, Schildkraut’s sample includes 1,633 whites, 300 blacks, 441 Latinos, and 299 Asians—an oversampling of minorities that facilitates a comprehensive and wide-ranging investigation into the understanding of American national identity. The book likewise analyzes the perception of discrimination among whites, demonstrating that when the latter regard themselves as having been mistreated or discriminated against in schools or the workplace, they are more likely to hold nationalistic views and develop negative attitudes toward immigrants. Schildkraut thus evinces the fact that even the majority can perceive discrimination.

As a short review precludes presentation of all the findings of the study, I shall relate herein to those specifically relevant to the fears held by John Stuart Mill (and many others). As already noted, Schildkraut’s analysis revolves around an understanding of the concept of “fellow-feeling.” As the book’s title indicates, its focus lies on the meaning of American identity in the twenty-first century, the survey being conducted in 2004. In line with the multidimensional approach to American national identity that Schildkraut employs, the findings reveal several dimensions of identity (see Chapter 3, “Defining American Identity in the Twenty-First Century”). Employing insights from focus groups, Schildkraut transcends the more conventional distinction between liberalism and ethnoculturalism to reveal—on the basis of an exploratory factor analysis—that civic republicanism consists of two distinct components: identity (feeling American, regarding oneself as American, and possessing American citizenship) and action (being informed about and involved in local and national politics and volunteering in the community). She also finds that a high level of support exists for “incorporationism”—“the idea that the United States is a nation of immigrants”—a notion which, she argues, “belies complex beliefs about the balance between unity and diversity” (p. 41).

Schildkraut’s examination of the various dimensions among the various groups included in her survey leads her to conclude that “I find little support for concerns that different ethnic and immigrant groups define what being American means differently” (p. 55). The study goes beyond a simple mapping of “fellow-feeling” among the different subgroups in today’s America. Chapter 5 (“The Myths and Realities of Identity Prioritization”) discusses the question of whether people’s attachment to their country of origin or panethnic identity contradicts their sense of identification as American. Here too, the results indicate that although, over the course of time, immigrants and their descendants come to consider themselves as American, people from ethnic groups who feel that they are mistreated and discriminated against are less likely to identify themselves as American.

The following chapter (“Does ‘Becoming American’ Create a ‘Better’ American?”) moves from an investigation of identity to the links between the
latter and the prerequisites for the “united public opinion necessary to the working of a representative government.” Distinguishing these as political trust, a sense of obligation, and political participation (voting), Schildkraut’s findings present a more complex picture. Although identity choices *per se* are not problematic with respect to trust and obligation, their panethnic identity means that Latinos and Asians put less trust in the government and that blacks feel less obligation to serve in the military. Here again, when perceptions of discrimination are taken into account, the sense of trust and obligation decreases among minority groups.

The book also devotes two chapters to responses to immigration and diversity. Chapter 4 (“Policy Implications of Multidimensional Americanism”) examines the way in which the dimensions of national identity are related to policy; the findings indicate that, with regard to language (support for English-only ballots, English signs, and English as the official language), civic republicanism as identity serves as a more important explanation than the ethnocultural factor. “Americans see language conflict as primarily being about the challenges of finding unity in the face of diversity…What people seem to want is a common American identity, not necessarily a white, Christian identity” (p. 93). These findings are important for comprehending the fact that the debate over common language carries not merely cultural but also political significance, in the sense of ensuring the civic functions of the collective.

Chapter 7 (“Immigrant Resentment: When the Work Ethic Backfires”) applies the racial resentment framework to attitudes displayed toward immigrants, focusing on the question of whether immigrants are perceived as violating American norms or whether negative attitudes toward immigrants are generated by racial or ethnocultural resentments. In line with the findings of chapter 4, identity-oriented civic republicanism appears to constitute a powerful predictor of immigrant resentment, a strong sense existing among people today that immigrants violate civic republican and incorporationist norms. As with language policy, these perceptions reflect not only an ethnocultural understanding of what it means to be an American but also civic elements.

The book adduces solid empirical facts to address Mill’s concerns and their echoes in twenty-first-century America—as, for example, in the work of Samuel P. Huntington or in the commentary of Patrick J. Buchanan. Although most of the findings seem to contradict this apprehension, the extensive analysis offers “findings that people on all sides of immigration debates can point to in support of their claims” (p. 200). Schildkraut also indicates that the functions played by multidimensional national identity and ethnic identities in shaping the conditions necessary for “free institutions” are complex. Her clearest conclusion in this regard, supported throughout the analysis, is that perceptions of discrimination play an important role in complicating the picture. Since it should be recalled in this context that perceptions of discrimination can also be found—at least to a certain degree—among the majority, we may wonder what implications these results carry for other countries facing the challenge
of balancing unity and diversity, given the uniqueness of American national identity. Would conducting a similar study across the northern border in bilingual multicultural Canada provide a similar picture, for example?

Americanism in the Twenty-First Century exemplifies the way in which, when properly used, public-opinion research can contribute to the theoretical discussion and political debate on important subjects. The book will be of significance both for scholars interested in these issues and for students of American politics. Its reference to the psychological framework in relation to immigration will also make it suitable for students of political psychology, immigration, and ethnic identities, the meticulous empirical research epitomizing the approach best adopted in an investigation of the issues under discussion. Beyond the scholarly realm, the book is also likely to make a fruitful contribution to the debate over the way(s) in which America should address its increasing diversity. The volume’s most significant practical ramification relates to the negative effect exercised by perceptions of discrimination, Schildkraut implying that, were such feelings less common—including among whites—“we would have good reason to be much less preoccupied with the politics of identity prioritization and attachment in the first place” (p. 200). The question of how such feelings may be diminished remains, of course, the subject of a different study.

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