

Torching Utopia

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In the face of this litany of crimes, Swedes have developed a deep sense of collective guilt and consequently lack the cultural self-confidence to integrate immigrants. The former leader of the Social Democratic opposition famously stated: "I believe that this is why Swedes are jealous of immigrants. You have a culture, an identity, a history, something that binds you together. What do we have? We have Midsummer's Eve and other lame things." Not to be outdone in the department of self-abasement, the current right-of-center prime minister added: "The fundamentally Swedish is merely barbarism. The rest of development has come from outside." Note that this fierce hostility toward Swedish culture does not originate with Muslim immigrants; it comes from Swedish elites, including liberals to the left and libertarians to the right (there are no conservatives in Sweden). Swedish libertarians are, if possible, even more militantly hostile toward Sweden as a nation-state and to the very notion of patriotism.

Cultural self-confidence is essential for integration, since integrating immigrants inevitably involves some willingness to assert majority culture. Furthermore, the gravitational force of a strong and identifiable national identity in fact facilitates integration, since no one can integrate into nothingness. In Sweden today, there is no roadmap to integration for immigrants, no social contract wherein Swedes accept immigrants as one of their own once certain obligations are fulfilled.

It is this contradiction between reality and elite ideology that is tearing Sweden apart. The political and media elites may love or at least pretend to love the new multiculturalist society, but polls show that the Swedish public was never particularly enthusiastic about it. A recent study found that most native Swedes never socialize with immigrants or do so only rarely. Elites can dictate policy, but they cannot force ordinary Swedes to accept immigrants who have not integrated into their culture.

From the point of view of immigrants, therefore, the Swedish state is warm and generous, but Swedish society is cold and distant. The more Sweden spends on "integrationspolitik," the worse things appear to become. Sweden takes in more immigrants than almost any other country, but immigrants do not feel welcome here. In response to failed integration, the establishment has redoubled its efforts to push multiculturalism down Sweden's throat, blaming the Swedish people for the failure of integrationist policies.

Keep in mind that Sweden was never an easy country to integrate into culturally. Swedes tend to be reticent, solitary, and reserved. There is a complex culture, full of subtle rules and opaque codes of conduct. Lutheran Sweden is defined by strong behavioral norms enforced through social pressure. Swedes are conformist and quite intolerant of deviation from group norms, whether it's immigrants or Swedes who break with protocol. Immigrants who do not conform to expected behaviors are looked down upon and often sense low-level hostility in their private encounters with Swedes. Icy Scandinavia was never a particularly well-chosen testing ground for the multiculturalist experiment.

As a Kurd from Iran, I felt more accepted in American society as a foreign student in Chicago than I ever did growing up in Sweden from the age of nine. I quite enjoy being a Kurd and have little desire to become a Swede, so this was not a problem for me. But the feeling of permanent exclusion can be a serious problem for those without the luxury of developing a more cosmopolitan identity. Many are born and raised in Sweden but lack a clear path to integrate into their new country. The resentment fueling the riots is not material poverty, which is limited in Sweden. The underlying cause is social inequality. Those who look distinctly foreign remain second-class citizens in Sweden, especially if they live in Husby and speak with a ghetto accent.

The state can hand out welfare benefits and iPads, but it cannot force Swedes to treat foreigners as equals in daily interaction. The rioting youths may not be able to articulate the cause of their anger, but no one is fooled about their place in the social hierarchy. Immigrants will never achieve social equality as long as official policy is based on cultural segregation, which means that the next round of riots is only a matter of time.

Conservative Americans might experience *schadenfreude* when they witness recent events in Sweden. Ever since the days of Gunnar Myrdal, Swedes have been lecturing Americans that social democracy offers the optimal path to integrating minorities (Sweden at the time conveniently had no minorities to integrate).

Swedish arrogance is temporarily checked, at least until the smoke over Stockholm clears. Still, Americans should temper their urge toward self-congratulation. The problems Sweden faces in trying to integrate immigrants also exist in the U.S. In both countries, the multicultural ethic means that people are scolded for highlighting any facts that might be perceived as unflattering to minorities.

When we look at the U.S, we see, for example, that many Hispanic immigrants are not integrating successfully. The income gap between whites and Hispanics has grown since the 1970s. According to the Census Bureau, 18 percent of Hispanics are long-term recipients of means-tested welfare programs, compared with 6 percent of whites. The 2009 book *Generations of Exclusion*, by researchers Edward Telles and Vilma Ortiz, found that even by the fourth generation, Mexican Americans have not integrated in terms of educational attainment. Worst of all, a significant share of Hispanics born in the U.S. do not identify with America. In 2003, Hamilton College conducted a poll to assess the patriotic sentiments of recently graduated high-school students and found that 61 percent of non-Hispanic white high-school seniors rated themselves extremely or very patriotic, but only 38 percent of Hispanics did so.

In the wake of the riots, Sweden is engaging in overdue self-examination about the problem of integrating immigrants. American conservatives are well advised to do the same.

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