

# American Crucible: Race And Nation In The Twentieth Century

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In Gary Gerstle's book, "American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century," Gerstle argues the Rooseveltian Nation collapsed due to the struggle for racial equality and the Vietnam War. Although the Vietnam War allowed blacks in the Army and Marines because of racial discrimination, the black soldiers did fight for America because the white middle class wanted to avoid the violence. More blacks enlisted or were drafted, leading to blacks rising in the ranks. By 1972, one-fourth of the sergeants were black. According to Bob Sanders, a soldier, he and his black buddy worked in harmony as one person. But by the late 1960s to early 1970s, the blacks saw they were fighting without a purpose, as the whites saw earlier when refusing to enter combat. As the war entered the most deadly years, more and more people started to desert the army. The American loss in the war destroyed the concept of having a strong army in the Rooseveltian nation and made the civic nation weak. The soldiers not only refused to fight, but the ones who did fight refused to follow orders and started using drugs, making the military a poor representation of America. The civic and racial nations were breaking down in the military, and the civic nation especially broke down at home.

The civil rights movement turned violent and hatred for America. The blacks reverted to "black power" from the nineteenth-century Black Nationalism idea, refusing to assimilate and identify themselves as black. Black power was seen through afros, name changes, and Kwanzaa. "In either case, we can see here his belief that most white Americans were not yet ready to accept blacks as their equals." (292 Gerstle) The civil rights movement weakened the racial nation to the point where celebrating white supremacy was wrong in the 1960s. The Vietnam War forced American policies on another country, and the new left, people who were antiwar, mainly made of students, protested the war by severing projects contributing to the Cold War. Others, such as Italians, took the idea of black power and used it on themselves as a way of identification by showing their pride through movies such as The Godfather. Identifying oneself by race, ethnicity, religion, etc., is known as "particular" political culture.

Conservatives, however, wanted to keep the nation patriotic by rebuilding the military. The conservatives took an antifeminist stance by supporting strong males. "Sharing a party with Theodore Roosevelt and cultivating a lifelong admiration for Franklin Roosevelt, Reagan adhered to several of Roosevelt's key beliefs." (357 Gerstle). The conservative leader, Ronald Reagan, had the same discomfort with blacks as Roosevelt did, but Reagan had to describe his discomfort by portraying blacks as lazy, violent, and lawless throughout his campaign. (Gerstle, 2001) Reagan also tried to

destroy the government's role in economics by not funding the agencies.

Liberal, however, saw the hard multiculturalism idea as going too far. Soft multiculturalism, supported by white ethnics and liberals, was for racial equality and tolerance for cultural differences. This changed the concept of America being a melting pot of America as a salad bowl, allowing people to be still different but being a cohesive country. Bill Clinton, in the mid-1990s, was the leader of the soft multiculturalist idea when he became president and drew the idea from both the hard multiculturalism and conservative views. But of course, these are only from Gerstle's view of America.

The radicals created the more left-hard multiculturalism, which is rejecting the nation and instead embracing one's own culture within one's race or ethnicity. Hard multiculturalism bloomed in the 1970s. Two types formed because the further left hard multiculturalism believes in purity, such as Afrocentric blacks, while the other believes in hybrids, such as historians and literary scholars. The idea of hard multiculturalism in the 1980s came from the black nationalism of refusing assimilation and developing their communities based on them being blacks. The further left-hard multiculturalism was about purity, while the other celebrated hybridity.

Hard multiculturalism was too contradicted with its own beliefs. First of all, the idea of stopping trying to assimilate because the white's racism towards blacks leads to racism for blacks toward whites and leads to more racism rather than a solution. The hard multiculturalists wanted to destroy the government, but the government was giving hard multiculturalism a boost through its policies, such as making Hispanics an ethnocracy and giving more support to the ghettos in the late 1970s and early 1980s economic crisis. By giving the hard multiculturalists jobs in which they could state their views, the government was allowing an ideological attack on the nation, which it had to defend because of freedom of speech. The hard multiculturalist had to defend the government in its attack on the nation and contradiction its views.

All of these white American views need to be changed in America, and that is why black power started. The Black Panthers that Assata was in was just one of the groups within the black power movement. Assata even names many of the groups she saw in college. Black power activists became associated with other groups, such as the Chicanos and Chinese, all fighting for reform. The hard multiculturalism idea came out of the opinion that America was a sham of a nation, as shown through the justice system, among others, and hard multiculturalism can do it. The justice system allows for prisoners to be used as a slave, and most of the people in the prisons are black. To be black allows for the pigs to put the blacks in jail without good cause, while being white in jail is nothing as long as the whites apologized. Hard multiculturalism would provide minorities with an opportunity to show their talent. "A lot of the black kids had been put into remedial or what we called 'dumb' class." (71 Shakur) Also, minorities could believe in what they wanted to rather than the white opinion on this, such as beauty, blacks hating being in the sun at the beach, communism, hating it because it was what she was taught, and history, the Civil War was due to economic reasons, not slavery. (Roediger, 2005)

Gerstle has also fit in with the general public by being a white, heterosexual male, thus making his view different from Assata's. Assata's view of America is seen from the oppressed point of view. Assata is a hard multiculturalism because America has shown resistance to change. Assata was not a racist because she did not hate the whites, but she hated the whites who were for capitalism and imperialistic oppression, referred to as pigs. Assata wanted black power because, as Gerstle stated about the Vietnam War, America was trying to push their views onto everyone. "I stammered and stuttered and then, with icy bluntness, is said, 'Because you're too black and ugly.'" (72 Shukur) Even her enemies were chosen for her b white Americans even though she does not refer to herself as American and thus calling for change. The whites Assata and Gerstle talked about would not let go of the racial nation, an example of this is COINTEL, an FBI program of trying to divide the radicals.

Assata hated to work for whites because she was the one who her white coworkers attacked. Assata would say that blacks never had job security in which they were the equals of whites, but rather, they had job security in the sense that they would be thrown in jail to work as slaves. Assata never supported the government, which is why she would have said that the government needed to go down because the programs they used to support blacks, such as schools, were leading to more inequality. The supplies at the black schools were the old and worn-out things from the white schools, and when Assata did attend a white school, she and one black classmate were not respected by the teacher. Gerstle argues that the government helped the hard multiculturalists by giving them jobs, but Assata would argue that the jobs they were given were segregated to only their race, which is why hard multiculturalism was needed.

## References

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