

You Have No Right to Your Culture

Most complaints about immigration are declarative: “Immigrants take our jobs.” “Immigrants abuse the welfare state.” “Immigrants won’t learn English.” “Immigrants will vote for Sharia.” One complaint, however, is usually phrased as a question: “*But don’t people have a right to their culture?*” When people so inquire, their tone is usually conciliatory, as if to say, “Surely, even *you* will accept *this*.” My considered judgment, however, is that this challenge is a true Trojan Horse. No one, *no one*, has “a right to their culture.”

Why not? Because culture is... other people! Culture is who other people want to date and marry. Culture is how other people raise their kids. Culture is the movies other people want to see. Culture is the hobbies other people value. Culture is the sports other people play. Culture is the food other people cook and eat. Culture is the religion other people choose to practice. To have a “right to your culture” is to have a right to rule all of these choices – and more. Though I dread hyperbole, the “right to your culture” is literally totalitarian, because you can’t ensure the preservation of your culture without totalitarian rule over the very fabric of life in your society.

Consider my parents. They were both born in the 1930s. During their 80+ years of life, American culture has mutated beyond recognition. The world they remember is all but gone. Just compare movies of the 1940s to movies today; they’re from two different planets. Or consider the change in gender relations, the raising of children, religion, or diet. Question: Do my parents have a right to get their culture *back*? The only sensible answer is: Absolutely not. They’re free to keep living the Old Ways, but have no right to make anyone else follow in their footsteps. If younger cohorts make radically different choices – as they have – then my parents are obliged to allow their beloved culture to vanish. Sure, they’re free to complain. They’re free to try to persuade us that we’re making a terrible mistake. But if they turn to the government for cultural regulation, they aren’t “defending their rights”; they’re violating the rights of others.

Isn’t there a fundamental difference between the *evolution* of a culture over time and the *destruction* of a culture via immigration? That sounds plausible, until you actually look at the last hundred years of cultural history. Question: Do you have more cultural ground in common with your grandparents – or with foreigners of your own generation? As long as you have to *think* about your answer, you already accept that these two paths of culture change are at least comparably dramatic.

Of course, “You have no right to your culture” does not mean that you’re obliged to sit back and watch your culture slip away. You have every right to *compete* in the cultural marketplace, to *sell* others on the value of your way of life. And so does everyone else who

keeps the peace.

Can we trust this cultural tournament to yield good cultural results? Any student of history knows that it's complicated. As a fanboy of cosmopolitan Western culture, however, I have to declare the overall cultural track record of the last century to be relatively tremendous. While our culture could be far better, smart money says that progress will continue. I fear, however, that the doom-saying will persist no matter how glorious our global culture becomes. They're wrong, but they're masters of marketing.