War on Terror Paper

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Post 9/11: War on Terror or War on Immigrants?

The United States of America and Australia are often seen as analogous, especially in their cultural, racial, and economical aspects. As nations built from the intrusion of white Europeans on a native people by means of mistreatment and the forced evacuation of native homelands, the two countries also share a common history. The historical wrongdoings on the records of both nations brought about their similar, contemporary views on terrorism and immigration as the ideas of foreign “others” persist. Notions of sovereignty and nationalism in both countries have influenced their thoughts on and actions towards the war on terror in response to the terrorist attack of September 11th 2001. To further explore the similarities and differences in immigration policies and attitudes between America and Australia, this paper will discuss the climate of immigration discussions in both countries before, during, and after 9/11.

It is important to acknowledge the history of Australian immigration prior to 9/11 to understand how it has changed since then. The British were the first Europeans to arrive in Australia. They literally formed a white community from the inside out as the Aboriginal population was pushed to the outskirts of white societies to areas with impossible living conditions (Jayaraman 138). After its declaration as an independent country in 1901, the Immigration Restriction Act, also known as the White Australia Policy, was quickly instituted as a way to control the non-European populations entering Australia (Jayaraman 141). The nearly impossible task that limited non-European immigration without explicitly stating so was a dictation test; the task of writing out a fifty-word passage in any European language as directed by the questioning immigration officer (Jayaraman 142). Needless to say, this was an effective way to rid Australia of non-Europeans as many Europeans themselves were unlikely to be able to do this, and it continued until 1972.

After World War II, immigration on a whole increased, so Australia was becoming a more culturally diverse country, but it responded with pushes for assimilation rather than the preservation of cultures. In 1972, Australia declared itself a multicultural society on the merits of cultural identity, social justice, and economic efficiency which made it appear as a more attractive destination for migrants, but the actuality of this multicultural claim has been controversial (Jayaraman 146). All of these events and the general attitude of the Australian government towards the non-white “other”, including aboriginal people and non-European migrants, set the stage for how they would address 9/11.

A comparative look at the history of American immigration highlights views of whiteness. “White” served as a distinction between the “red” others that were present upon European arrival and later the “black” slaves that were brought to the country for their forced labor. This terminology worked to build the American national identity on the basis of skin color which “reinforced ‘white possession’ of the American territory” (Shiells 793). Eventually, even white ethnic groups received ridicule for not being “white enough” including Irish, Italian, and Jewish immigrants. White was no longer was a physical trait, but encompassed lifestyles and political opinions (Shiells 793). Even today, there is an inherent value put on whiteness in America.

America has a history of keeping out the “undesirables” with policies such as the Immigration Act of 1882 to keep out convicts and mentally ill people, followed by the Chinese Exclusion Act to deter Chinese immigration (Laque 29). However, Post-Cold War the Immigration and Nationality Act was created and disallowed the use of “race, national origin, or ethnicity” for acceptance into the country of those fleeing Communism (Laque 31). Soon after, there was an influx of immigrants from Mexico. The flawed, so-called “patriotic” view commonly shared by Americans was that Mexicans were going to come and steal jobs, ruining the economy. After 1965, restrictions were actually put on Mexican immigration, including a limit on the number of visas that the US was willing to provide in response to American public opinion (Laque 27).

Moving on to the conditions of immigration amidst the time of 9/11’s occurrence, the most prominent immigration event of the time was the Pacific Solution. This was an agreement between Australia and both Nauru and Papua New Guinea (Manus Island) to deal with incoming asylum seekers. The asylum seekers arriving by boat that were intercepted by the Australian Navy were to be rerouted to these two locations as a means of offshore processing that mainland Australia would not have to deal with. Most of the asylum seekers that were received from this plan’s institution to 2003 were from Afghanistan and Iraq, understandably seeking refuge from their war-stricken countries (Phillips 3). Also at this time, the Prime Minister of Australia was Liberal party leader John Howard, a known adversary to Asian immigration which had become the leading continent of origin for Australia’s immigrants (Jayaraman 151). An ally of Howard’s also relevant during the time of attack was seat holder Pauline Hanson, known for running on a platform of anti-immigration and racism. Hansonism was a term coined in 1996 after the outrageous sentiments of Hanson on anti-Aboriginal, anti-Asian, and anti-multiculturalism ideas (Jayaraman 152). The Prime Minister never opposed Hanson’s unbelievably offensive claims, thus the country was being led by a leader accepting these ideas.

In the US prior to the attacks, there was nearly complete agreement and bipartisan support of an immigration reform, but this completely halted upon President Bush’s declaration of the war on terror. In Bush’s address to the American people and Congress the day following the attack he announced, “Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated” (“Text of”). Quickly, borders became of high concern for law-makers and national security was paramount.

As referenced earlier in the paper, Australia and America are similar in many ways, so an attack on one led to worry and offense by the other. By Australia’s logic: if one developed country of majorly white citizens is attacked, what is to stop an attack on another similar country? Immigration became unequivocally linked to terrorism in both countries, so not only have Muslims become targets for greater suspicion upon entry to the US and Australia, but other ethnic groups are becoming the focus of resentment by citizens. In Australia, a continued fear is that of the northern threat of the highly populated countries of Asia, while America looks south to the economic suffering of Latin American countries pushing people north for work and financial opportunity.

Prime Minister Howard was in direct contact with President Bush after the events of 9/11, and as a form of international support and national protection he immediately agreed to joining the fight in the war on terror by pledging military support against Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Howard went so far as to consider Australia “a terrorist target before the 11th of September 2001”, and pushed the idea of sovereignty, emphasizing that Australia was going to be in control of who came into their country (Jupp 701). However, under the Migration Program of Australia the planned intake of immigrants for 2001-2002 was surpassed, and many were asylum seekers fleeing war-torn Afghanistan (Spinks 3). Post-White Australia policy, the number of Muslim immigrants had grown significantly, but as reinforced by the Cronulla Race Riots of 2005, Muslim populations were being targeted and generalized as terrorists without warrant (Jupp 703). This isolated event of one group of Muslim terrorists caused a lot of hostility between the non-Muslim Australians and Muslim immigrants already settled in Sydney.

In response to 9/11 and the push for higher security, Australia increased funding of the Australian Intelligence Security Organization to prompt changes in their staffing. The nature of immigration issues had changed from the fear of post World War II Communism to that of Islamic extremism and terror attacks, so those previously competent in surveying immigrant’s visa applications needed a different set of skills to address the new “threats” (Jupp 705). Additionally, a list of new control tactics was passed by the Council of Australian Governments as part of the Antiterrorism Bill of 2005 (Jupp 706). Such new practices included the ability of police to impose preventative detention and obtain flight information and warrants for electronic equipment under any suspicion of terrorism. This makes it a much more intimidating experience for those to immigrate to Australia as privacy has become legally able to be encroached upon.

As an island, Australia is theoretically penetrable at all sides. With ocean access on all borders of the continent, there is an underlying fear by for uncontrollable invasion, especially by the intimidatingly highly-populated Asian continent to the north. Boat entry by asylum seekers makes some nervous because Australia is a relatively small nation, and there are remaining undertones of valuing a white nation by leaders such as Pauline Hanson, left over from the White Nation Policy that once existed. This threat of the non-white “other” has become even more severe since the war on terror has begun because media coverage has associated terrorists with Islam and Western Asian countries. This type-casting has made immigration by boat legally impossible in Australia, so many looking for asylum due to unrest or lack of economic opportunity in their home countries are unable to find refuge in “multicultural” Australia.

After a major terror event carried out by legal immigrants in its most highly populated city, America enacted policies criminalizing immigration. The PATRIOT Act of October of 2001 stands for “Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism” (Coleman 60). It allowed the arrest and imprisonment of non-citizens on the grounds of national security risk, making it extremely easy for innocent immigrants to be treated as criminals, as they are excluded from applications of judicial law. This act does not require reasonable cause, public disclosure of charges, or other rights given to an America-born convict, and allows for typecasting based on physical appearance. Less severe offenses had become considered grounds enough for deportation. In addition, the access to legal procedures that would potentially help an immigrant refute deportation was stripped, making the deportation process more immediate for undocumented aliens (Coleman 59). This and other acts also highlight the new move of immigrant investigations to the interior to the country. Rather than typical border control, people already within the country could be easily questioned and in turn deported. This obviously works to not only avoid further immigration, but rid the country of those immigrants who although illegal may have found a life for themselves within America.

The pre-existing fear of undocumented Mexican immigrants taking jobs in the US was supplemented by the fear of terror events, so the geopolitical issue of borders became of even more concern. The Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform (EBSVERA) made it more difficult to apply for and receive a visa, so processes in the actual travel of immigrants had become even more demanding and strict (Laque 32). During personal interviews of Mexican immigrants, they admitted that “it was harder to obtain a green card… and more difficult to cross the border now than it was prior to 9/11” (Laque 29). Also influencing immigration processes was the newly formed Department of Homeland Security (DHS). It was made to oversee the responsibilities of multiple other preexisting organizations including Border Patrol, Coast Guard, and Transportation Security Administration (Laque 32). The DHS acquired conflicting tasks: immigration enforcement and provision of immigrant services (naturalization, asylum) (Tumlin 1179). Today separate organizations carry out each duty, but while run by the DHS, it became more difficult for people to work through immigration since those evaluating their eligibility were the same people helping them settle.

With a xenophobic focus apparent now more than ever, the United States has become a place of hostility rather than a land of opportunity where people could pursue the American Dream. Continued even today, 17 years post- 9/11, America’s leader President Trump accentuates the country’s distrust and unwelcome towards immigrants in building a wall that embodies physical and metaphorical boundaries to building healthy relationships with those around the world. In addition, anti-Muslim sentiments and non-acceptance of others have been exemplified by Trump’s country-specific immigration ban targeting Muslims as wells as the deterioration of policies such as DACA. 9/11 served as a basis that continues to be built upon by subsequent terror events such as the Boston Marathon bombing and the Orlando nightclub shooting. The piling up of incidents allows the US to justify its stricter immigration policies and discriminating perspective towards other ethnicities, especially Muslims.

In reflection of the immigration related policies in place before and after 9/11, it seems that both America and Australia had critical views on immigration even before the largest terror attack in the world. The events of September 11th did not commence nationalistic, anti-immigration ideas, rather it intensified these opinions that were already present in each country. International relationships are being negatively impacted as the US and Australia have become engulfed in internal welfare as opposed to foreign issues that may be forcing immigrants to the US in the first place. Moving forward, both countries should reevaluate their opinions of the relationship between immigrants and terror, and realize the benefits that accepting immigrants can have in a truly multicultural country.

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