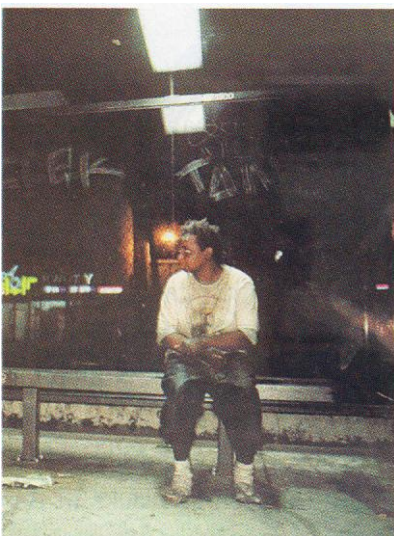


MULTICULTURALISM



1. Sources of Harmony and Conflict

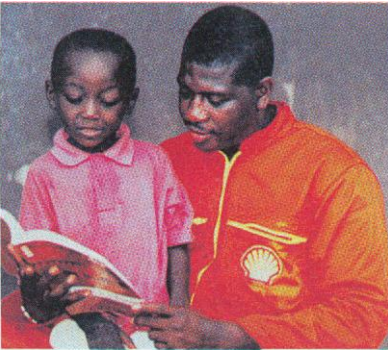
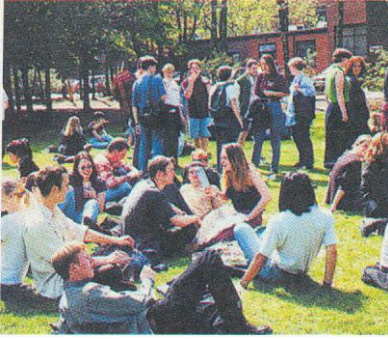
Living in a multicultural community was never easy. There are many aspects that keep people closer like language, race, culture, religion or myths; the same aspects, however, can be sources of conflict when extremism, antagonism or even beliefs are at stake. What brings people together may also lead to extreme situations of conflict, war or hate.



A. 1. What factors may lead societies to extreme situations of conflict?

2. Why do some minorities keep on struggling for their traditions and beliefs?

3. How do the most powerful groups try to impose their laws?



B. 1. Name the main causes of racism and discrimination.

2. Do people easily admit they are racist? Why?

3. What can one do to prevent demonstrations of hate and racism?

In modern societies, be it in Europe or America, full integration becomes extremely difficult - especially when people suffer discrimination for religious, racist, cultural or sexist reasons. All too often in the name of integration minorities are required to deny their entire way of life and conform to the majority culture. They are told to fit into a society that may be openly hostile to them. If we are to talk of integration we must recognise that the problem is created and maintained by the privileged. The challenge then is to make the effort to understand how it affects people across the divides of colour, culture, language and religion.

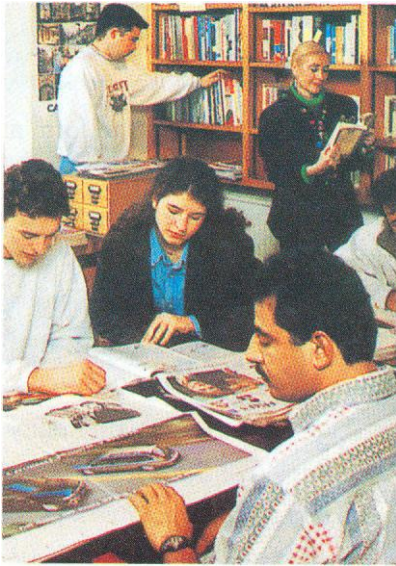
Every society has its tradition, beliefs and myths; those who defy the old system are often treated as outsiders. American Indians were gradually chased and slaughtered as white men went west. Finally they were forced to live in reservations where they could hardly survive. Black people have suffered the stigmas of colour and they have often expressed their anger through crime, hate or prejudice; Jews have been persecuted for religious reasons and theirs has been a constant struggle to retain their own culture and religion. Mexicans have had difficulty in integrating into American society although they are now one of the most colourful ethnic groups there.

In the American system competition and conflict among ethnic groups has never been eradicated. Intergroup frictions have existed from the beginning. In politics, housing, religion, education, unionism and business, ethnic groups in the past have struggled to obtain more power or to preserve the power they had - and they still do today.

2. Race

The causes of race conflict are complex and cannot be reduced to a single factor. Its rise and fall are often linked with real conflicts of interest and competition for scarce resources.

It has commonly accompanied slavery, colonialism and other forms of exploitation and inequality. In other cases relatively powerless groups that have felt threatened by social and economic instability have blamed other powerless groups for their predicament. The insecure white working class and lower middle class of industrial societies have often expressed racist attitudes toward defenseless minorities, such as blacks in the United States or Commonwealth immigrants in Great Britain.



Rapid social change often fosters discrimination. Examples are the sudden immigration of highly visible groups of foreigners, quick changes in the ethnic composition of a neighbourhood or the threat of political change brought on by a nationalist movement. Racism, in short, is frequently an irrational reaction to a real or perceived threat to the *status quo*.

No one considers himself personally to be prejudiced.

But prejudice is about much more than personalities; it is about privilege. All our social structures are built around competition rather than co-operation. Discrimination is a consequence of dominant groups trying to keep their privileges at the expense of all others.

People must fight against any kind of discrimination not only on the streets but also involving themselves in political action, reporting in the papers we read, protesting against culturally insensitive education, helping to improve the atmosphere at our workplace, supporting local campaigns against racial injustice.

3. Language



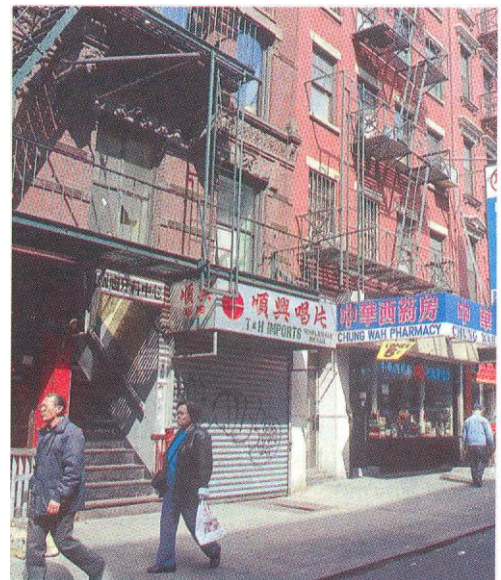
Language is one of the most difficult barriers to full integration. The older generations of immigrants have often felt that so deeply that they made their children learn the native language of the country they were living in, even if this meant forgetting the language of their ancestors.

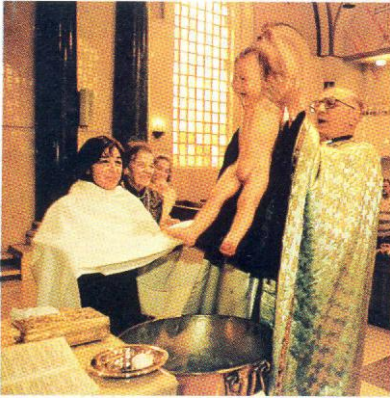
Using the same language links people from different worlds or races and it should be an element of union rather than of conflict.

Ethnic cultures, however, where the language is an essential linking feature and plays an important role - like Welsh or Gaelic or Spanish for example - may become very intolerant towards language unification.

C. 1. Older and younger generations show different approaches towards learning a new language. How do you account for that?

2. Some national languages play an important role. Give some examples.





4. Religious Groups Within The Community

Religion has a social aspect that leads its adherents to form a community, which may be more or less tightly organised.

In earlier times the religious community could scarcely be distinguished from the community at large; all professed the same faith, and the ruler was both a political and a religious leader. In the course of time, however, religious and civil societies have become distinct and may come into conflict.

In modern states - the United States, for example, a plurality of creeds coexist peacefully within a single political entity.

Each religious community has its organised structure.

The US is a nation which was, in effect, religiously pluralistic before it became politically pluralistic. Americans early had to learn a sufficient amount of tolerance for religious diversity merely to survive. It was necessary only to expand that tolerance when the new immigrant groups arrived on the scene with their own peculiar kinds of religious difference. The American ideal that all men are created equal forced society to tolerate religious and ethnic diversity. Under such circumstances it was possible for members of an ethnic group to continue and develop an ideology that could be Irish, German, Polish, or Jewish.

D. 1. What is the prevailing attitude towards the various religions and beliefs inside a community?

2. The USA are proud of their religious tolerance. Explain why.

Sources: *America in Close-Up;*
We Americans;
A Nation of Nations;
Time