

American crucible: race and nation in the twentieth century by gary gerstle

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American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century by Gary Gerstle Discrimination has always represented one of the most serious problems. Even now this problem remains unsolved in the most developed countries despite all the efforts taken by the government. It is possible to trace that discrimination and nationalism have had different manifestations during our history. Sometimes these manifestations were rather unique. The views of Theodore Roosevelt included a unique manifestation of discriminative position. The "Rooseveltian nation" is a term used by Gary Gerstle in his book American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century. The author uses this term to discuss racial hybridity as the strategy of Theodore Roosevelt. Christopher Montel states: "Theodore Roosevelt is according to Gary Gerstle probably the most decisive historical figure of early 20th century America and its later developments. He managed, both through his personal political credentials and the different political platforms and parties he headed as president or presidential candidate, to properly respond to the imperatives of nation-building in America" (Montel). The views of Roosevelt were rather specific because they were democratic and discriminative at the same time. The politician was sure that a perfect nation should be made by merging different nations. This sounded promising; however, not all the nations were considered perfect by Roosevelt - only the Americans, Australians and the British. Moreover, some races were excluded by him from the list of races, the merge of which may form one perfect nation. He preferred to exclude blacks and considered such discrimination to be necessary as blacks cannot build one perfect nation. Roosevelt was sure that his mix should be discriminative to save intelligence, courage, and

principles of perfect nations. According to Gerstle, the Rooseveltian nation was based on nationalism, both civil and racial ones. The nation was made by means of a mix of different nations, and its principles were also mixed and contradictory (Gerstle 45). Notwithstanding that the main principle of the Rooseveltian nation promoters was to provide all the people with equal rights and freedoms, at the same time there was an active promotion of discrimination. It was stated that more rights and freedoms should be provided for “superior” people and less to “inferior.” According to Gerstle, it was done in order to reduce the number of immigrants and punish those who did not support the idea of the Rooseveltian nation, and “Americanize” them (Gerstle 38). Certainly, not all people were inclined to support the views of Roosevelt and it was not possible to make them change their mind. “In practical terms, however, Rooseveltian nationalism had been based on a relatively hazy definition of the American nation and citizenship, oscillating between ‘the hardening of the boundaries of the nation,’ in terms of race, religion and political affiliation, and the necessity to rally and incorporate increasingly wider segments of American immigrants and ethnic minorities, to consolidate and strengthen the political community (as well as the electorate), and more importantly as a policy for mobilization in times of war” (Montel). Speaking about the downfall of the Rooseveltian nation, it is important to notice that Gerstle connects this event to the Vietnam War. The author states that the Rooseveltian nation failed because the war influenced people’s minds and caused much protest. People were under great political pressure that did not allow one to be against the war. Those who were against the war were considered to be anti-American. Many people were

killed during the war, and this made people lose their trust in American government, thus the Rooseveltian ideas of one perfect nation failed. The Vietnam War was not directed to gaining freedoms and rights; on the contrary, imperialistic views prevailed during the war. Moreover, the anti-war movement was supported by the fact that the majority of people, who died during the war, were blacks. Such unfairness brought the Rooseveltian plans of building one perfect culture to the logical end. The views of Roosevelt on justice and human rights aimed at building a perfect nation failed because they were too discriminative. Black people were often excluded from the number of nations a perfect nation could be build of, but when the war started, blacks were the first to be sent to the battlefield. Such discrimination made people go against the government and led to the failure of the Rooseveltian nation. This testifies that despite the fact that discrimination is a big and serious problem, people have never been pleased with it and even supporters of the laws, which promote different forms of discrimination, change their mind at last. Such approach and attitude will definitely help solve the problem of discrimination one day. Works Cited Gerstle, Gary. American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century. New Jersey: Princeton University Press. 2001. Print. Montel, Christopher. " American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century." Sounds Mag. 2002. Web. 24 June 2013.