

# THE STUDY OF ETHNIC RELATIONS

EVERETT C. HUGHES\*

SINCE so many people are making a desperate effort (perhaps the last before they meet their Maker) to understand and modify the relations between peoples, ethnic groups and races, it is appropriate to note some of the biases and false assumptions that vitiate well-intentioned study and discussion of these relations. The relations between French and other Canadians are not one of the desperate cases. Quite the contrary. The points I have to make, however, apply to the Canadian case as well as to those that threaten the peace of the world.

I have already used the term *ethnic group*, a colorless catch-all much used by anthropologists and sociologists; it is a term likely to be taken up by a larger public, and consequently likely to take on color that will compel the sociologists to get a new one, for it is one of the risks of our trade that our words lose the scientifically essential virtue of neutrality as they acquire the highly desirable virtue of being commonly used. The anthropologists probably will not have to change, since they study people who cannot read. To return from this digression, which does have a point for the subject in hand, what is an ethnic group? Almost anyone who uses the term would say that it is a group distinguishable from others by one, or some combination of the following: physical characteristics, language, religion, customs, institutions, or "cultural traits." This definition is, however, exactly wrong-end to. Its wrongness has important consequences, not only for study of inter-group relations, but for the relations themselves. An ethnic group is not one because of the degree of measurable or observable difference from other groups; it is an ethnic group, on the contrary, because the people in it and the people out of it know that it is one; because both the *ins* and the *outs* talk, feel and act as if it were a separate group. This is possible only if there are ways of telling who belongs to the group and who does not, and if a person learns early, deeply, and usually irrevocably to what group he belongs. If it is easy to resign from the group, it is not truly an ethnic group.

These points should be clear and dear to any English-speaking Canadian. By the kind of measures usually used, the English-speaking part of the Canadian people would be

considered a colony of Great Britain or a part of the United States. About all the evidence to prove that Canadians are a separate ethnic group is a little extra virtue and the fact that they export their Aimee Semple McPhersons, Tex Guinans, Norma Shearers, Pidgeons and Masseys—and buy them back at the box-office. Yet Canadians are Canadians just as naturally as Englishmen are Englishmen, and they never yield to the temptation to belong to other nations. Well, hardly ever.

To be sure, the living of a common life and the facing of common problems—conditions that lead to the growth of an ethnic group, nationality and even a race—will almost certainly encourage the development of a peculiar language, at least of peculiar turns of expression and meaning, and of some unique customs and institutions. Some of these peculiar traits will become the dear symbols of the group's distinction from others; their value for group solidarity may exceed their measurable degree of uniqueness. The essential fact remains, however, that the cultural traits are attributes of the group, and not that the group is the synthesis of its traits.

What difference does this error make? It warps study both of groups and also of the relations between them. When I first went from Chicago to McGill University, I took with me the conventional notions of studying the assimilation and acculturation (to use both the sociologists' and the anthropologists' lingo) of European immigrants in North America. I looked up all the studies I could find of what was happening to the French Canadians. In the census I sought figures on the number of French Canadians who speak English. Now the assumption was that French Canadians are being gradually assimilated to the English-Canadian culture and world, and that the trait of language was the index thereof. If a French Canadian spoke English, he was presumably less French. It took me a long time to discover that the French Canadian who speaks English best is generally pretty stoutly French in sentiment and way of living, and that sometimes one who speaks but little English has often suffered severe lesions in the integrity of his French culture and loyalty. Eventually I learned that one of the commonest errors of English Canadians is to take the use of English, a tweed coat, or something else considered an expression of Englishness, as evidence that some French Canadian they meet is about to resign from his group. Later, when they discover that he is more French than they have thought, they decide he has reverted. In fact, the English

Canadians have simply learned more about him. A certain withdrawal of cordiality often results. The misunderstanding arises from the error of considering that individual cultural traits are the measure of a man's belonging to an ethnic group, and of the solidarity of the group itself. This error is usually accompanied by the hidden assumption that the individual traits are, or ought to be, disappearing and that one fine day they will be gone—and the French-Canadian people will no longer exist. This is misjudgment, of course, in line with the common tendency to regard one's own group as immortal and the other as relatively a passing thing. It might, incidentally, be interesting to speculate upon what will have become of English-Canadians as an ethnic entity by the time French-Canadians have disappeared as one.

An additional consequence or expression (I will not try to be too nice about deciding which) of this point of view is the judging of a group's right to exist on the basis of the quality of its cultural peculiarities, called for this purpose "cultural contributions." An English-Canadian teacher of French in a Canadian university used to maintain—in a stout Ontario twang—that since French-Canadians had corrupted the French language into a "patois" and since they had made no worthy contributions to French literature and culture, they had no right to hold out from the English-Canadian language and culture. This argument could cut both ways. Whether in the Canadian case it cuts either way is not at issue. Before deciding the case of any people, one would have to agree upon some canons of linguistic and literary aesthetics and upon some standards by which to determine when a contribution to culture has been made. Need I dwell upon the difficulty of getting such agreement from people of two cultures?

Thus far I have myself contributed to another and graver error, that of implying that one can study the relations between groups by analyzing only one of the groups concerned. It takes more than one ethnic group to make ethnic relations. The relations can be no more understood by studying one or the other of the groups than can a chemical combination by study of one element only, or a boxing bout by observation of only one of the fighters. Yet it is common to study ethnic relations as if one had to know only one party to them. Generally the person who studies such relations is a member of one of the groups involved. One might suppose that he would assume that he knows his own group and would therefore study the other.

That is not quite what happens. Most studies turn out to deal mainly with whichever of the groups is considered the minority. The student who is himself of the minority wants to make his group known and appreciated by the dominant group; one who is of the dominant group is likely to assume that he knows his own and that the problem is, after all, one of how the minority will adjust to the dominant group. In conducting a seminar on race and cultural contacts, I have found that the majority of students propose projects that are simply studies of some minority group, with the word *problem* attached: the Nisei problem, the Flemish problem, the French-Canadian problem. In the resulting reports, the dominant group gets off with a drubbing because of its prejudices, although it may be shown that there is hope of a more "liberal" attitude's arising in some hearts. The wounds and virtues of the minority are exposed to view and their relics to veneration. The *relations*, however, are never studied. Since it is generally true that members of a minority have a more lively experience of the dominant group than members of the latter have of the minority, more can perhaps be learned about the inter-group relations by studying the minority than by studying the dominant group. This might give some justification for starting with the minority, but not for leaving the matter there, as is often done. Even that would not be so bad, if the study were pushed into all realms of life and experience, and not limited to political and economic relations. Much is to be learned about inter-group relations by probing to the depths of personal experience, by discovering through what experiences the individual learns both the realities and the fictions of his position as a member of an ethnic group. To what literature can one turn to study this aspect of French-English relations in Canada?

But whether a student studies one or all the groups in a situation—and he should study all—he must study *relations* if that is what he claims he wants to know. If he puts the emphasis on relations, he will find out fairly easily what kind of things he will have to know about the groups themselves in order to understand the relations. He will learn, for instance, that study of folklore, as such, is not study of inter-group relations; but he will also become sensitive to the hints of group loyalty and aggression in tales and songs. He will sit up and listen to a French-Canadian folksong in which, long ago, the rich old man whom the pretty young maid does not want to marry was turned into a *maudit anglais*. He will turn to the

folklorist, who will be able to tell him more of the history of the song and who will correct his impressions—as one of the several excellent French-Canadian folklorists will probably do to my interpretation of the above song. He will also learn, however, to discipline his own passion for curio and antique hunting by keeping his eye firmly on the objective of studying relations. He will find his curiosity about both groups greatly enlivened and his eye sharpened, but he will not try to be a specialist in all matters concerning the group and will turn willingly to others for their specialized knowledge.

Now the way to keep this disciplining objective in mind is to start quite consciously with an assumption; namely, that if the groups in question have enough relations to be a nuisance to each other it is because they form a part of a whole, that they are in some sense and in some measure members of the same body. With this idea firmly in mind, one can set about finding out what the whole is and what is the part of each in the whole. In doing this, one will almost certainly not fall into the errors so far considered, and will avoid another one: that of studying only the conscious surface of the relations between groups—their quarrels, opinions, propoganda and counter-propoganda. Among the respects in which the two groups are parts of a larger whole may be some of which people are not ordinarily aware and of which, if they are aware of them, they do not ordinarily think in ethnic terms at all. This conception will also keep one from thinking that either of the groups has so independent an existence that it could be studied without reference to other groups around it.

Almost anyone will agree that the French-Canadian people has become what it is, not merely by virtue of what its ancestors brought with them from France, but also because of its long contact with Anglo-American life and civilization. I refer not to anglicisms in its speech, its love of baseball, or other English or North American customs which it may have adopted, but to its very peculiarities. French Canada has never had to swallow its own spit. Its balance of population has long been maintained by spilling the excess into a continent until recently thirsty for settlers and industrial labor. Its malcontents and heretics have been able to find companions and a place to exercise their peculiar talents somewhere in North America. How much relief from inner pressure of number and of psychological and social tension French Canada has been afforded by being part of something much larger than herself, no one

can say. Nor can I prove, although I think it is so, that the failure of the continent to continue this function of absorption for French Canada is partly responsible for the current brand of more bitter nationalism and nationalist in Quebec.

I stress the functions that the rest of Canada and North America perform for Quebec, not to reinforce any feelings that other Canadians may have about French Canada's debt to the English-speaking world, but to prepare for the kill. There has been some study of the economic, demographic, and political functions of French Canada in the development of Canada as a whole, but not much of her cultural and deeper psychological functions in the development of the rest of the Canadian people. During the war, the two-thirds vote of French-Canadians against conscription served beautifully to obscure the one-third vote of other Canadians against it. In those years, I frequently heard my United States compatriots most unjustly and ignorantly criticize the magnificent Canadian war effort. How often I heard English-Canadians, instead of answering with the eloquent facts, defensively impugn the patriotism of their French-Canadian fellow citizens! The temptation was great. Indeed, the critic often suggested this way out himself, since he usually wanted to think well of the Canadian. Proving oneself a good fellow on the other fellow's terms, however, does not generally increase the other fellow's respect for the group to which one belongs; and in this case it may be doubted whether Canada was well served. The presence of a minority whose sentiments vary from one's own, either in direction or intensity, is a wonderful salve to the conscience. If one wear the salve thickly and conspicuously enough, who shall dare question whether there is really a wound under it? Just what the fact of having always had a minority in its bosom has done to the national conscience and self-consciousness of English-Canadians is worth study. I offer this very controversial point, like others in this paper, as bait to those who would explore the full depth and subtlety of the effects upon each other, of two ethnic groups who are parts of a larger whole. Note, too, that in pushing the conception of the relations between two groups so far, we have gone beyond the effort to be merely impartial and just. Impartial judgment implies a standard of justice, legal and moral. This is precisely what two groups are least likely to agree upon, especially in a crisis.

I plead, however, not for less justice of word and action between ethnic groups, races and peoples, but for a more drastically objective, a broader and more penetrating, analysis with which to work.

# YIN AND YANG

HILDA M. RIDLEY\*

CLIFFORD BAX, in *Ideas and People*, has a most provocative chapter on "Sex in Art." In our Anglo-Saxon civilization, he points out, the words "masculine" and "feminine" connote physical sex, but in Latin and Oriental countries these words relate to principles that are recognized as permeating all life. In China, for instance, these principles are termed "Yin" and "Yang."

As a rule, says Mr. Bax, those qualities that relate in people to strength, aloofness and unconformity, and in things to hardness, straightness and fixity, are termed "Yin," and those that relate to gentleness and passivity in people, and to softness, fluctuation, and wavering in things, are called "Yang." Yet, he warns, "we must not think of a wave (which is fluctuating) or of a vase (which is curved) or of a still lake (which is passive) as things which are feminine, but rather of whatever is really feminine as being like the wave or the calm of the lake, a manifestation of Yang."

Throughout the past, Yin has been in the ascendancy, and, although Yang has been implicit in many men, we find that it has usually been suppressed by the dominant Yin. Modern scientific opinion stresses the fact that there is no such thing as undiluted masculinity or femininity. "In every male lurks a female, and in every female a male," says Maranon. Yet it is a fact that Yin has been sedulously cultivated in most men, to the detriment of Yang. The feminine principle, which finds a natural abiding place in the normal woman and in many men of the artistic, creative type, has had to yield place, for the most part, to the dictates of Yin.

In the East, where women have been most subjected, we should expect to find the dominance of Yin. And we do find in the Orient one element of Yin, that of aloofness, very much in evidence. In Asia we discover qualities of thought extremely remote from practical human life—abstract and mystical in the extreme. Man, left largely to follow his own devices, seems inclined to take things easily and to indulge in abstractions. In our Anglo-Saxon civilization, on the other hand, another phase of Yin manifests itself, apparently antithetical to the Oriental attitude, the hardness and unconformity of the Man of Action, intent upon imposing his will on circumstances.

\*Resident of Ottawa, Ont.

How can we reconcile these apparent contradictions? By remembering that they are both aspects of Yin, which is cultivated in men at the expense of Yang. In the Orient, due probably to climatic conditions, the abstract or aloof aspect of Yin is most evident. In the West, due again perhaps to the effects of climate, the active principle, arising out of strength, is predominant. European history has largely to do with the achievements of the Man of Action, who owes his ascendancy to force.

With the Man of Action in the saddle, we find Yin playing true to form. Yin is not concerned with the gentleness and softness characteristic of Yang. The hardness and the uncomformity that it inculcates are often as remote as the abstract from humane application. Yang is the cry of the human heart. Yin is the head, divorced from consideration of that cry. So in the West we often find the making of money, or profits, carried on to such an excess that those who devote themselves to this pursuit actually become dehumanized. It is significant that the big money-making industries of our Western civilization are associated with occupations often detrimental to vital human welfare—with armaments, alcoholic beverages, soft drinks, drugs, tobacco, confectionery, yellow journalism and the stimulation of other artificial appetites.

The abstract and the materialistic tend alike to be separated from vital human well being. The suppression of women in the Orient and for long periods in our Anglo-Saxon civilizations, has contributed to the minimizing of the human factor in favour of abstract conceptions of life, whether expressed in terms of futile speculation or in the making of money.

With this thought in mind, we can see good reason why, in the face of persistent protests during the last hundred or more years, two abuses are still flagrant: war and poverty. The abolition of these are the concern of Yang, with its sensitivity and gentleness, and Yang, whether expressed in women or in artistic, creative types of men, is still under the heel of Yin. When one considers the long and conscientious labours of women in the cause of peace (the annals of which may be found in the literature of the innumerable clubs through which they have tried to work) and of the passionate pleas for social justice made by poets and men of letters like Shelley, Ruskin, Carlyle, Kingsley, and other Victorians; down to Wells, Galsworthy, and their American and European contemporaries and succes-



sors, one mourns the defeat of Yang in directions so vital to basic human well being.

The consummation desired is not the unqualified ascendancy of either Yin or Yang, but the control of our destinies by a fusion of the two elements. Fortunately, there are intimations in our improved social conditions that such a consummation may be considered a not unreasonable hope. Yes, one is justified in believing that the day may come when those set in authority may be men and women strong and yet gentle, prudent and yet altruistic, compassionate but not sentimental, hard-headed and yet tender-hearted, virile and yet artistic—in short, men and women in whom Yin and Yang exist in equal quantities.

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