

The unity of the people, and immigration in liberal political theory

Abstract: The unity of the people and migration in liberal democracies

What unites political associations? And what are fair criteria for conceding or denying access to citizenship to potential immigrants? This article argues that the socio-political conditions for the unity of political associations should be distinguished from the merely institutional functions of statehood. Focusing on conditions for the unity of political association, the article critically examines traditional and contemporary ideas about the unity of the people in liberal political theory. Starting with a brief historical sketch of Hobbes' (states make peoples) and Rousseau's (the people *is* the state) accounts of the unity of the people, the major argument examines the conditions of democratic unity, and especially conditions for the acceptance of majority rule. It will be claimed that democratic unity requires neither cultural nor moral homogeneity, but first and foremost compatibility of political attitudes and continuous political dependency. Criteria for access to citizenship, accordingly, should focus on residence requirements and political attitudes, unless preferential treatment of particular groups of immigrants is recommended for other reasons such as history of colonialism or past injustice.

KEYWORDS

Unity of the people; statehood; political virtue; social citizenship; Carens.