

“What, Then, Is the American, This New Man?”

This publication was made possible by a grant from
the John M. Olin Foundation.

July 1998

Center for Immigration Studies

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ISBN 1-881-290-10-7

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Is There an American People?

Nathan Glazer

Respondents: Orlando Patterson and Noah Pickus

Nathan Glazer is Professor of Education and Sociology, Emeritus at Harvard University, and co-editor of *The Public Interest*. A native New Yorker, he attended the City College of New York, the University of Pennsylvania, and Columbia University. He has authored, among other books, *Beyond the Melting Pot* (with Daniel P. Moynihan), *Affirmative Discrimination*, *Ethnic Dilemmas*, *The Limits of Social Policy*, and most recently, *We Are All Multiculturalists Now*. He also edited *Clamor at the Gates: The New American Immigration*.

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Is America Too White?

John Isbister

Respondents: Linda Chavez and Peter Brimelow

John Isbister immigrated to the United States from Canada in 1968 to join the Economics faculty at the University of California at Santa Cruz, where he is now Professor and Provost of Merrill College. He earned a Ph.D. in economics at Princeton in 1969. His latest book, *The Immigration Debate: Remaking America*, was published last year. His is also author of *Promises Not Kept: The Betrayal of Social Change in the Third World*, which is in its third edition.

Linda Chavez is President of the Center for Equal Opportunity, and has written *Out of the Barrio: Toward a New Politics of Hispanic Assimilation*. She is a syndicated columnist, appearing in newspapers nationwide. She is a familiar face on television's "The McLaughlin Group," "CNN & Co.," "Equal Time," and "The News Hour with Jim Lehrer" and has served as White House Director of Public Liaison and Director of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

Peter Brimelow is a senior editor at *Forbes*. Among his books are *The Wall Street Gurus: How You Can Profit From Investment Newsletters*, *The Patriot Game: Canada and the Canadian Question Revisited*, and most recently *Alien Nation: Common Sense About America's Immigration Disaster*. A native of Britain, he received an M.B.A. from Stanford University Graduate School of Business.

Do We Really Want Immigrants to Assimilate?

Peter Skerry

Respondents: Lawrence Fuchs and John Fonte

Peter Skerry is Non-Resident Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, and an Associate Professor of Political Science at Claremont McKenna College. Having earned his Ph.D. in politics from Harvard, he has held positions at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, UCLA's Center for American Politics and Public Policy, and the American Enterprise Institute. His writings on politics, racial and ethnic issues, and social policy have appeared in a variety of publications. In 1993, his book *Mexican Americans: The Ambivalent Minority* was awarded the Los Angeles Times Book Prize.

Lawrence Fuchs is Meyer and Walter Jaffe Professor of American Civilization and Politics at Brandeis University. He is Vice Chairman of the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform and Staff Director for the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy from 1979-1981. Five of his seven books deal with race and ethnicity, including his latest book, *The American Kaleidoscope: Race, Ethnicity and the Civic Culture*, winner of three national prizes, which has just been released in a second edition.

John Fonte is an adjunct scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. He received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Chicago and co-edited *Education for America's Role in World Affairs*, a book used in international education classes. He has written for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *National Review*, and other publications. From 1984-1993 he served as a senior research associate at the United States Department of Education, and has served as a humanities administrator at the National Endowment for the Humanities.

FOREWORD

MARK KRIKORIAN, Executive Director, Center for Immigration Studies

Much of the recent debate over immigration has focused on fiscal costs, job competition and population growth. But disagreement over immigration is driven by more than economics and demography — the subtext of much of the discussion over sustained high immigration is how we define ourselves as a nation and a people.

The limited public discussion of this pressing matter has too often been dominated by cranks and demagogues. To help foster a more serious and careful national conversation on these issues, the Center for Immigration Studies hosted a conference in April 1997, using as its title Crevecoeur's famous question, "What, Then, Is the American, This New Man?" The conference sought insight into this question by posing three other, admittedly provocative, questions surrounding the issue of immigration and American identity: 1) Is There an American People? 2) Is America Too White? and 3) Do We Really Want Immigrants to Assimilate?

Renowned scholar Nathan Glazer tackles the first question by tracing the "double vision" that has marked historical views of American nationhood; namely the combination of a purely ideological conception of American-ness with an ethno-cultural one. As Glazer describes this double vision: "Everyone can be an American; but some people, it seems, can be better Americans than others, and they have been defined through most of our history by race, or religion, or ethnicity." Though he concludes that we have finally agreed upon an idea-based definition of American-ness, he also examines today's controversies relating to citizenship, driven, in his view, by public concern that the millions of immigrants seeking naturalization are doing so for the wrong (i.e., instrumental as opposed to ideological) reasons. Orlando Patterson and Noah Pickus respond with their own meditations on the nature of American citizenship.

John Isbister, Canadian-born author of the most thoroughgoing liberal defense of high immigration, *The Immigration Debate: Remaking America*, answers the second question, the most provocative of the three, with a provocative answer: Yes. His answer is based on his ideal of a truly multi-cultural society; in Isbister's words,

"[T]he decline in the white proportion is a healthy development for the country, since it will gradually replace a majority-minority confrontation with interactions between groups of more equal size and influence." America has insufficient ethnic diversity, he asserts, and immigration is one way to remedy that situation. Peter Brimelow and Linda Chavez disagree, each in their own way.

Political scientist Peter Skerry tells us that assimilation is not what we think it is. Rather than a seamless whole, assimilation has many facets; rather than one-directional, it is dialectical; rather than tranquil, it gives rise to conflict. "Indeed," he writes, "if Americans better understood the process of assimilation, they might well ask for something else." His point is not that assimilation should be avoided, since it cannot and should not, but that we must be more realistic in our expectations of it. Lawrence Fuchs and John Fonte respond by reflecting on the meaning and implications of assimilation.

The papers have just scratched the surface of this broad issue. Questions for future research and discussion might include: What are the implications for the United States of the spread of dual citizenship legislation among immigrant-sending countries? Does a purely ideological definition of American peoplehood leave any room for a strong cultural component (other than knowledge of English)? If so, should prospective citizens be examined on that basis? Does the phenomenon of segmented assimilation, in which some children of immigrants join the middle class while other join the underclass, have any immigration policy implications? As intermarriage becomes increasingly prevalent, is there any validity to the concept of an emerging American *ethnos*? The Center for Immigration Studies hopes to participate in the exploration of these and other related questions as America goes through a period of re-examination of the nature of our nationhood.

We would like to thank all the contributors for their efforts, especially Peter Skerry, who helped conceive the idea of the conference. Special thanks go to the John M. Olin Foundation, whose generous grant made this project possible.

NATHAN GLAZER

IS THERE AN AMERICAN PEOPLE?

In one sense, the answer to the question, “What then is the American, This New Man?” — Crèvecoeur’s question, one which “has probably been quoted more than any other in the history of immigration”¹ — is simple and direct. One can resort to the laws and regulations that define who is an American, how to become an American, in the sense of being or becoming a citizen of the United States. (I take it for granted that is what we are talking about when we ask these questions, despite the multiple meanings of the term “American”.) One becomes an American by being born on the soil of the United States, or by being naturalized. As the Fourteenth Amendment has it, “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States, and of the state wherein they reside.” Ad-

mittedly there are thousands of pages of laws, regulations, and judicial interpretations required to settle every specific case, but we have legal and administrative mechanisms for doing so.

But that is not quite what we are talking about when we raise these questions: The questions’ subtext is really, Can we continue to be one American people when we are from so many diverse sources? If so, what kind of people does that make us? We can sharpen the question to get closer to what we are really after when we raise such questions as, are we still the same American people, as it has existed for the past 225 years or so (though one can date the American people in formation to well before the Declaration of Independence and the Revolution), when the racial and ethnic composition of our new immigrants is so markedly different from the racial and ethnic composition of the American people, as it has existed, and as it has changed, over these past 225 years?

Why should the changing ethnic and racial composition matter in answering the question, Is there an American people? Does not the legal answer referred to at the beginning suffice? It does not because there is an argument running throughout American history as to just what makes an American. Is the American, as so many statesmen and scholars have asserted, defined only by a certain set of ideas and commitments, a political ideology, the ideas set forth in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, and developed through American history? Now anyone can adopt ideas, regardless of ethnicity, race, religion, or culture. Anyone thus can be an American. The American people does not change as persons of the most diverse race, religion, culture, become Americans by law. That is one answer. But alternately, do we not deceive ourselves in asserting that the American, properly understood, is divorced, should be divorced, from any distinctive ethnicity, race, religion, culture? That he (and she) is universal man (woman), to whom any issue of ethnicity, race, culture, in defining his or her Americanness is irrelevant ?

So there is an alternative answer, in conflict with the answer that the American is defined by ideas and commitments available universally to anyone. It is that there is something else that properly makes an American, and that is incorporation into an America that indeed includes the Declaration and the Constitution but is much wider than that. The American is not so different from what makes the Englishman or the Frenchman, and that is a culture, both in its grander and more humble senses, formed over a long period of time, shaping a people subject to its influences, and that cannot be summed up by a few political principles. We are a nation too that has been made up through most of its history almost entirely of one race, with a small minority of another, bound up with the first from our origins, all observing the variants of one religion, speaking one language. If we now add to that an increasing number of Asians and Latin Americans, of different races, coming from dif-

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ferent political systems, speaking different languages, espousing in many cases different religions never before present in any significant way on our soil, what does that do to the meaning of being American?

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That is our problem. These questions are for the most part today only discussed *sub rosa*. They are very different questions from the kinds that are being debated in the rising tide of discussion and argument and new legislation, implemented and proposed, over immigration and illegal immigrants and the naturalization process of recent years. That discussion we know will only become more intense in future years, as immigration remains at a high level, higher than public opinion thinks is tolerable, and one that the prevailing laws, even after recent modifications, make it impossible to reduce.

Concerning immigration, the current discussion centers overwhelmingly on economic issues, and they are not unimportant. Is immigration increasing inequality in wages and income in the United States by adding to the supply of workers willing to take low-paying jobs? Is it worsening the condition of minorities by this process? Is immigration worsening the conditions of earlier immigrants who still work disproportionately at low-paid jobs? Even when immigrants are well-trained in a profession, are they not having an adverse impact on our own (that is, native American) doctors and engineers and mathematicians?

But there are other than economic issues that concern us, and they are in some ways more difficult. We now see a lively discussion, not as yet much noticed by the public, on the question of whether the Fourteenth Amendment should be interpreted to give citizenship on the basis of birth in the United States to children born to illegal immigrants.² We have had hearings in Congress on the naturalization process, activated by the huge rise in those applying for, and getting, citizenship. We are now making more than a million new citizens a year — a few years ago it was 200,000. These hearings were clearly motivated in part by partisan fears and concerns that naturalization was being made too easy in order to increase the number of Democratic voters for the 1996 election, and by scandals

over some number of not-yet citizens who voted in a closely contested Congressional election in California, pitting a Democratic Hispanic contender against a Republican incumbent opponent. The issues raised in these hearings gets closer to heart of our present topic — is there an American people? — but still does not speak, I believe, to the worries and concerns of many Americans learning about this enormous increase in those applying for citizenship, and getting citizenship, and of the numbers of voters who may not be citizens.

The hearings in Congress focused on such matters as whether the administration was improperly involved in pressing the Immigration and Naturalization Service to make the process of naturalization easier, and whether this pressure meant that many not checked for criminal records were becoming citizens. They asked whether the law on how one becomes a citizen was being properly administered. But underlying these concerns — reasonable enough, since we all believe that on the whole the laws should be observed and enforced — is a larger uneasiness. Who are all these people becoming citizens, what are their motives in becoming citizens, do they really have a “right” — without at this point trying to specify what this may mean — to become American citizens, are they the citizens we want?

It returns us to the question, what is the American? Or, in the formulation of Michael Walzer, what does it mean to be an American?³ The underlying issue, as I have indicated above, is whether the American is defined in some important measure by a distinctive ethnicity, religion, culture, or alternatively by political principles alone, to which anyone can adhere, regardless of race, religion, or culture.

To this question we have had two large and contrasting answers in our history. The first is that principles alone define the American — anyone, of any nation, race, religion, can become an American by adhering to these principles. But there has been another answer, raised again and again in the course of American history, that is quite different. The American, according to this second answer, is formed by a distinctive culture. He comes initially from England, Scotland or Wales, or from a northern European Protestant country, one which has experience of free political institutions. With proper socialization into American culture and values, we can possibly add some others to this central core, and the

common understanding of who can so be added (reflected in the laws) has expanded over time. Europeans from Catholic countries, Jews, Asians have aroused anxiety and resistance among those who give this answer. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, some American scholars believed that the origins of these free institutions were to be found in the German tribes of antiquity, and there was some essential link between these early origins and the people who made the best Americans. Henry Adams and Henry James, among other classic observers of a changing America, were greatly disturbed by the kind of people they saw entering the United States and becoming Americans early in the century, during the period of the greatest wave of immigration in American history.

Undermining the noble position that adherence to principles alone define the American, there is the fact that there were racial restrictions on who could become a citizen through most of our history. In our first law of naturalization, in 1790, only the white man was declared eligible to become a citizen. After the Civil War, we added the Africans, but continued to exclude those who were neither. It was not until 1952 that all racial restrictions on naturalization were lifted.

That, it is true, was 45 years ago, and should have settled the question, at least as to the eligibility of all races to become Americans, and yet the question does not die. It is raised in Pat Buchanan's famous comment, to the effect that a million Englishmen would undoubtedly become better Americans than a million Zulus. It is raised in Peter Brimelow's book, *Alien Nation*.⁴ I do not expect we will ever have racial restrictions on citizenship again. I believe our culture has changed too radically to make that possible. But it would be naive to believe that racial and ethnic and religious and cultural considerations, while they are openly voiced only by such outrageously contentious persons as Buchanan and Brimelow, do not play a role in how we modify or administer our laws of naturalization. This is certainly a fear among many recent nonwhite Americans.

In our origins as a nation, in revolution against England and the English king and parliament, we clearly emphasized universal principles, in theory available to all men (and women), and adherence to these principles made the American. Indeed, any resort to ethnicity as the basis of Americanness was not easily available, be-

cause a large number of those settled in these colonies at the time did not accept these principles, and continued their loyalty to the British King. They suffered because of this loss of property, persecution, and exile. There was no difference in ethnic background or religion between those who claimed the new status of Americans, as citizens of an independent nation, and those who rejected it, though our energetic colonial historians may have found some subtle distinction, not yet noted, between the loyalists and the revolutionaries who became the Americans.

So in the beginning, we cannot find a basis in ethnicity or religion on which we can define the American. Two authorities write: "After the Revolutionary war, U. S. citizenship was offered to those in the liberated colonies who sided with the revolutionaries. In 1783, the Paris Peace Treaty established an adherence test, requiring that 'those who adhered to England remained British subjects, and those who adhered to the cause of separation, liberty, and independence were to be considered citizens of the United States.'"⁵ That would seem to be excellent evidence for the importance of the principles in the making of Americans, at least at the beginning.

One could quote chapter and verse from the founding fathers emphasizing this theme of adherence to the principles of liberty and republicanism and free government as being decisive, exclusive even, in the definition of the American. Our key founding document, the Constitution, excludes racial and ethnic categories and considerations (except for the Indians). Twice I have had occasion, in previous writing, to rehearse the various declarations and sentiments that make this the clear orientation of the founding fathers and the leading Americans of later times. So, in *Affirmative Discrimination*, in 1975,⁶ I recorded the agreement of three scholars exploring the character and significance of American identity and nationality that in its essence it was independent of any specific ethnic group or culture or religion: Seymour Martin Lipset, in *The First New Nation*, Hans Kohn in *American Nationalism: An Interpretive Essay*, Yehoshua Arieli in *Individualism and Nationalism in American Ideology*, all made this

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point. While there were contrary views, even among the founding fathers, they all seemed to come to agreement that the American nation was a new kind of formation, not based on a primordial group, not dependant on long-established customs and habits reaching into the distant past. It was a community based on principles. To give just one of these quotations, from Hans Kohn:

Whites and blacks could become naturalized citizens, but the black population was excluded from benefits that were extended to white Americans, native and immigrant.

“Thomas Jefferson, who as a young man had opposed immigration, wished in 1817 to keep the doors of America open, ‘to consecrate a sanctuary for those whom the misrule of Europe may compel to seek happiness in our climes.’... This...was in keeping with Jefferson’s faith in America’s national mission as mankind’s vanguard in the fight for individual liberty, the embodiment of the rational and humanitarian ideals of eighteenth century man.”

“The American nation was to be a universal nation — not only in the sense that the idea which it pursued was believed to be universal and valid for the whole of mankind, but also in the sense that it was a nation composed of many ethnic strains. Such a nation, held together by liberty and diversity, had to be firmly integrated around allegiance to the American idea, an idea to which everyone could be assimilated for the very reason that it was a universal idea.”⁷

In these latter days, when we are scarcely left unaware for a moment of the negative side of the founding fathers, and every new publication on them searches for their flaws, we will not fail to notice (as Kohn did not, in 1957, quoting this passage) that Jefferson refers to the “misrule of *Europe*.” Many would seize on that limitation with suspicion. Now it is true that was the place from which the immigrants of Jefferson’s time, as in Hans Kohn’s, were coming. I doubt that there was any conscious effort on Jefferson’s part to exclude the rest of the world, or on Kohn’s part to ignore this limitation. But today we would inevitably note that there was then also, from Jefferson’s point of view, or indeed from any point of view, misrule in Asia and Latin America and Africa, and we would ask whether Jefferson

would have been as welcoming to persons escaping from such misrule. And of course we would be much more actively aware than Kohn was in 1957 or I was in 1975 of Jefferson as a slave-owner whose ringing declarations contrasted oddly with holding men and women in perpetual bondage.

Kohn had no reason to mark the reference to Europe — that was the place from which he and other refugees were escaping. He did not note that despite his repeated reference to American ideas as “universal” one would have to question whether the people of the whole universe were welcome in the America of Jefferson’s day. They were not even equally welcome in the America of Kohn’s day. (The very restrictive immigration laws of the 1920’s, sharply discriminating against Southern and Eastern Europeans, and banning all Asians, were still in force.) It is true in Jefferson’s time (and for many decades later) there was no exclusion of any immigrant, but as I have pointed out naturalization was indeed limited to white persons.

Twenty years after I reviewed these views on what it is that makes an American, and applauded them as having become the common wisdom and discourse of the day, I had reason to review the writing on Americanism of a later period, the period of Americanization during and after the First World War, the last period of mass naturalization before the present one.⁸ I could not help but notice that during this period of intense efforts to assimilate immigrants, to teach them the English language and American ideals, and to make them citizens, a period in which leading Americans praised our nation as a “universal” nation, welcoming all, there was oddly no note taken of what a large part of the universe was precisely not included in the universal nation. By then, Chinese and Japanese were excluded as immigrants and denied the right to become citizens, soon a good part of Europe was also to be excluded too. Whites and blacks could become naturalized citizens, but the black population was excluded from benefits that were extended to white Americans, native and immigrant.

For example, Woodrow Wilson, addressing a huge throng of 5,000 newly naturalized citizens in Philadelphia, along with 8,000 previously naturalized, and many thousands of others, in 1915, said: “This is the only country which experiences this constant and repeated rebirth. Other countries depend on the multiplication of

their own native people. This country is constantly drinking out of new sources by the voluntary association with it of great bodies of strong men and forward-looking women out of other lands.... It is as if humanity had determined to see to it that this great Nation, founded for the benefit of humankind, would not lack for the allegiance of the people of the world.”

Mark the phrase, “*the people of the world.*” I have indicated what a large part of the people of the world were excluded, as immigrants and citizens. At the same time, through the action of the same president, a good part of the people of the United States, blacks, were being excluded from public jobs and being segregated in workplaces. (But I note the he presciently did refer to women, and not long after this speech the right to vote was extended to women, so in some respects access to the full benefits of being an American was being extended in Wilson’s day.)

There was a similar naturalization ceremony shortly after this huge gathering addressed by Wilson, on Independence Day 1915 in Faneuil Hall in Boston, addressed by Justice Louis Brandeis. He said that what was distinctly American was “universal brotherhood” and that America, as against other nations, “has always declared herself for equality of nationalities as an essential of full human liberty and true brotherhood.... It has, therefore, given like welcome to all the peoples of Europe.”⁹

Today, one cannot help noticing, again, the reference to *Europe*.

So we have had this double vision. Everyone can be an American; but some people, it seems, can be better Americans than others, and they have been defined through most of our history by race, religion, or ethnicity. And even among those who were most expansive in their vision of this universal nation, there were some reservations based on race, religion, or distant origin.

Today the great majority of our new citizens are not white, not English-speaking, and many are of religions new to us. These characteristics have been irrelevant to becoming a citizen since 1952, irrelevant to becoming an immigrant since 1965. The result is that the population of the United States is changing, and the United States Census and the media report regularly on the change, and try to project a time in the not-so-distant future when less than half the popula-

tion will be white, and by that token less than half of European origin. That is a cause of concern to only a few. Or if a cause of concern, is not much heard. But as the recent Congressional hearings suggested, another and related concern is voiced. Are these great numbers becoming Americans for the right reasons? And what are the right reasons?

Many people believe these questions are not raised in good faith but are raised because of the racial and ethnic and religious composition of the new immigrants. I think there is a connection, that there is some discomfort among many at this change which they cannot easily voice. Overtly, the concern is that in the process of becoming naturalized, the guarantees that one will become a good American citizen are being short-changed. The Congressional hearings made the most of the fact that FBI checks were not completed on many new American citizens. I think this is not what most troubles us. Few Americans were aware that the prospective citizen is checked by the FBI — I know I was not. I assume this check is conducted because the prospective citizens must be of good character, and whether he has been convicted of crimes is one way, perhaps the only easily available way, to find out. But I think what causes the most uneasiness to Americans as they see this huge throng flocking to naturalization is the larger question, do new citizens know what they should about America, do they come with the right attitude of mind in renouncing previous loyalties and accepting American loyalty? The prospective American citizen by law is expected to know something about the Constitution, to know something of American history and politics, to know English, to be a law-abiding citizen.

The statutory process of becoming a citizen, now fully divorced from any ethnic or racial qualification, formally aligns itself with the understanding that American citizenship is a matter of adherence to principles. Indeed, the very first law governing naturalization, as far back as 1790, already made this clear, particularly with its requirement that the prospective citizen take an oath to defend and support the Constitution of the United States. The oath prescribed today, some of whose

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elements go back more than 200 years, reads: "I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure any allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear arms in behalf of the United States when required by law..." The oath goes on to list alternative service required if one has conscientious objections

to the bearing of arms.

The oath is taken at an impressive ceremony, in properly dignified surroundings, administered by a judge.

I would emphasize how long we have been committed to roughly the same assumptions and the same process in the making of a new American citizen.

The ceremony says nothing, obviously, about welfare benefits. Through the greater part of our history, there were no welfare benefits or any other kind of practical benefit that could come into play in encouraging a person to become a citizen. Today, as we have become all too aware, with the flood of articles on immigrants rushing to naturalization, and to speedier naturalization through marriage, that the possible withdrawal of such benefits as a result of recent legislation is pretty clearly a central reason for the great increase in naturalization. However, as a leading scholar of immigration has put it, we want naturalization to have an "expressive" character, not an "instrumental" one. We want people to become Americans, in other words, out of love, not calculation. We are all aware that there are mixed motives in any decision, and none of us are so purist or idealistic as to insist that the only legitimate reason for becoming an American citizen is because of the desire to uphold the principles of the Declaration and the Constitution, to participate fully in the political life of this universal nation. Yet anyone attending a naturalization ceremony, listening to the speech of the judge (who almost always refers to his own immigrant background, since it is a rare judge whose parents or grandparents were not immigrants), and noting that many taking the

oath must be refugees, will easily believe that deep affection is also playing a role in the process of becoming an American. The whole history of immigrant writing on America attests to it. And one will be saddened that so many must be becoming Americans to save the food stamps, or SSI, or other benefits they have received as noncitizen immigrants. Possibly positive affection plays a larger role in characterizing the connection of new Americans to this country than it does for natives – many do not find America so lovable today. Yet overall, as we examine the present process, the present rush, there is considerable uneasiness that the instrumental motives for citizenship too much outweigh the expressive.

As Americans, that troubles us, and should trouble us. But we also question ourselves and ask if is this a legitimate concern. Is it a cover for racism? If we are legitimately concerned, and adhere to the position that principles alone define the American, how can we explicate the basis of our concern? What process for becoming a citizen would truly satisfy those critical of the INS and its role in the present increase in naturalization? Today the INS is being criticized because in its effort to reduce the backlog of those applying for citizenship, it has contracted out part of the process to check on whether prospective citizens know enough about America and enough English to become citizens. The contractors are themselves organizations representative of the new immigrants, eager to protect their interests, and in doing so they place less effort on the substance of the basic ideological assumptions that define the American, than on what is enough to get through a test. The process becomes not very different from taking a test to get a drivers license. As in any test-driven process, what the test is "really" after is short-changed. Most Americans, new and old, take citizenship very seriously. They are upset when they see a rush to citizenship that seems motivated primarily by the desire to retain monetary benefits.

But there is also today a very different attack on the present processes, one which emphasizes its antiquity, its outmodedness, its unreality in confronting the immediacy of the welfare state that encompasses all of us. This attack points to the hardships the withdrawal of benefits will undoubtedly impose on many immigrants. It points to the restriction of present-day legal rights in fighting deportation for illegal entry. But motivating this attack is not only compassion, and

Most Americans, new and old, take citizenship very seriously. They are upset when they see a rush to citizenship that seems motivated primarily by the desire to retain monetary benefits.

there are many good grounds for compassion, as we see in the many stories in the media on the impact of the new welfare and immigration laws, particularly on aged immigrants. It also reflects distaste at the unquestioned assumption of the superiority of American ways of government, American principles, to be found in the requirement that new citizens know American history and government, swear to uphold the Constitution against all its enemies, foreign and domestic. Indeed, there is some contradiction between the process and the oath and the liberal principles dominant today among progressive Americans. Where are our obligations to the world in this process, why is it so exclusive in a transnational age? The word “transnational”, increasingly popular in discussions of migration, is a vague one with a large sweep. It refers to the ease of movement between countries, the growing numbers with connections and interests in two or more countries, to the “globalization” of the world economy, to the increasing number of transnational organizations with varied powers. It challenges the idea of the strongly bounded community, delivering rights and benefits to its citizens, and denying them to all others, demanding full allegiance and loyalty from its citizens, and refusing to recognize they have legitimate ties to other countries.

We do soften in practice the apparent rigor of the oath. A legal authority writes, “It is generally agreed that sentimental fondness for his or her homeland is not inconsistent with ...attachment to the United States [required for naturalization]. Nor does a person lack attachment to the principles of the Constitution if he or she believes it can be improved.”¹⁰ It is a reality that more and more of the new citizens become dual citizens, maintaining not only “sentimental fondness” but legal status as citizens of their homelands. The United States apparently has no legal bar to dual citizenship (which seems to contradict the oath), and many new citizens retain their former passports out of convenience or attachment or because of certain benefits it may offer, as in acquiring or inheriting property. Recent changes in the Mexican constitution allow Mexicans becoming American citizens to retain Mexican citizenship, with what rights is apparently unclear, even among Mexican-American scholars.¹¹

In countries that maintain the principle of *jus sanguinis* — citizenship by blood connection to the community of citizens — even those born in the United States, and thus citizens by birth,

may have certain rights of citizenship in the country of their parents, or grandparents, or even more distant forebears who come from that country. (Note the rights of the descendants of Germans who left German lands centuries ago to live in Russia or Transylvania to resettle in Germany, with the full rights of German citizens.) This may apparently be the case with the children of Mexicans resident in this country, whether they are citizens of the United States or not. We have recently become acquainted with the oddity of Dominican candidates for President campaigning among the large and growing community of Dominicans in New York City, though I do not know whether Dominicans who become American citizens — who may not yet be very numerous in this recently established but rapidly growing immigrant group — can vote in Dominican elections. These developments — and many others — all muddy the bright clear line that ideally, and in our naturalization process, separates the American from all others, cuts him off, as a “new man”, from his past.

There are also deeper criticisms, as yet to be found only among academics, which challenge on liberal principles (principles which most of us accept) the exclusive character of the naturalization process — its ideological qualifications, the English language requirement, the renunciation of former allegiance.¹² But both in the call for more compassion and in the critique of the ideological character of the present requirements for naturalization, critics underrate the significance of the principled character of American citizenship, its commitment to adherence to the Constitution as the bedrock contract of the American people, and the hold this has among most Americans. I suspect the only consensus available at the moment, in the light of the present mood of the American people as expressed by their representatives, is rather a tightening of the present process. We are in the midst of a reaction to the liberal loosening of the distinctions among citizens, non-citizen immigrants, and undocumented immigrants that took place in the 1960s and 1970s.

We are in the midst of a reaction to the liberal loosening of the distinctions among citizens, non-citizen immigrants, and undocumented immigrants that took place in the 1960s and 1970s.

During the first half of the 20th century, we tightened requirements for American citizenship, by imposing in effect stricter loyalty tests. “The 1906 Naturalization Act disqualified believers in anarchism or polygamy or advocates of political assassination. In 1940, these

Even with our best efforts, the ideal candidate for naturalization will always be something of a rarity (as is the ideal native-born American).

grounds were expanded to include those who were affiliated with organizations advocating these proscribed ideals. The internal Security Act of 1950 added the even more specific designation of support for the

Communist Party and the ‘...doctrines of world communism’.... [T]hese provisions were included in the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952.” Recently, and particularly in the Immigration Act of 1990, we have cut back sharply on ideological grounds for exclusion and deportations from the United States. In effect, our close examination of the politics of persons desiring to become American immigrants or citizens, at least as required by law, has been steadily losing its urgency over the past thirty years or so. Our patriotism, or if you wish chauvinism, has declined since the Vietnam War, and with the end of the Cold War the need for such ideological defenses of the naturalization process — assuming they were ever justified — has lost its urgency. Further, during the 1960s and 1970s, a period in which American culture and politics were transformed, the meaning of citizenship also changed. The benefits of citizenship declined as liberal courts struck down limitations on non-citizens. As Schuck and Smith wrote:

“A line of judicial decisions significantly lowered the political and economic value of citizenship by prohibiting government, particularly the states, from allocating certain legal rights and economic advantages on the basis of that status. In the most important of these decisions, *Graham v. Richardson*, the Supreme Court invalidated statutes that restricted welfare benefits to United States citizens and legal resident aliens who had resided in the United States for 15 years.... Generally speaking, [this decision] has been extended to invalidate citizenship requirements for some, but not all, professions and occupations.”¹³

Clearly this is no longer the way things are going. A period of loosening is being replaced by a period of tightening. It has been motivated in part by the changing ethnic and racial character of the new citizens, but in larger part, I believe, by the feeling of many Americans that new Americans are choosing that status for the wrong reasons. It was inevitable that the reasons for naturalization would change as the benefits were redefined as dependant on the status of citizenship. Ironically, the recent changes in the welfare and immigration laws promote the rush to citizenship and thus increase the number of persons becoming citizens for the wrong reasons. Consequences quite unexpected by those who promoted these changes follow — for example, the increase not only in the number of new citizens, but in the number of new Democratic voters.

These developments should also lead us to examine more closely the proposals to deny citizenship to the children of the illegal and undocumented immigrants. The numbers of these children is very large, since we undoubtedly now have as many illegals as we had when we passed the Immigration Restriction and Control Act in 1986, which was supposed to eliminate the backlog of illegals, and which resulted in the legalization of the status of three million undocumented immigrants — many of whom are now contributing to the huge increase in the numbers seeking naturalization. While there might be good grounds, in constitutional law, in denying such children citizenship, the consequences of increasing the numbers denied full status as American citizens would not be good. Germany, tied to its *jus sanguinis* principle for citizenship, now struggles with the problems caused by its huge noncitizen population, and by the further problems portended by the fact that one-fifth of the children being born in Germany today are without citizenship rights.¹⁴

We have succeeded in establishing the principle that the American is defined by commitment to ideas, principles, not by race or ethnicity or religion. I believe that is firm. We are simultaneously shaken by the huge increase in those seeking to become citizens, and troubled by the fact that so many our new fellow-citizens may know little of these principles that ideally define the American, may be merely mouthing an oath, are simply driven by the need or desire to maintain benefits to which they were entitled by previous law. There is an ideal solution to these concerns: Better education of the prospec-

tive citizens who now crowd classes on the American constitution, American history, and English. That is something we can all agree on. How to do it is, of course, a problem.

Even with our best efforts, the ideal candidate for naturalization will always be something of a rarity (as is the ideal native-born American). We live in a complicated world, made more complicated by the presence of poor countries to our south. It is also made more complicated by the fact that in the advanced and developed part of the world, including the United States, we see a sharp decline in the sense of exclusiveness and superiority of one's nation or nationality. That is on the whole a good thing. The process of becoming American is assaulted

now from many sides, from conservatives who decry this change to liberals and cosmopolitans who see no function to the attachment to a distinctive country, defined by a distinctive history, culture, and political system. We will have to maneuver between both these criticisms of our naturalization process and requirements. For the moment, the best we can do is to maintain this process which has served us well for so long, and to debate the issues while we hold in abeyance any radical change. We have become truly a universal people, as defined by the rules that enable people to become Americans. Now new developments push us to consider what the further implications of being a universal people are.

NOTES

¹ Philip Gleason, "American Identity and Americanization," *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, Harvard University Press, 1980, p. 33.

² The key document on this issue is Peter Schuck and Rogers M. Smith, *Citizenship Without Consent: Illegal Aliens in the American Polity*, Yale University Press, 1985, but see Douglas B. Klusmeyer, *Between Consent and Descent: Conceptions of Democratic Citizenship*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: International Migration Policy Program, Washington, D.C., Brookings, 1996, and Dan Stein and John Bauer, "Interpreting the 14th Amendment: Automatic Citizenship for Children of Illegal Immigrants?," *Stanford Law and Policy Review*, 7:2, Summer 1996, pp. 127-131.

³ *What it Means to be an American*, Michael Walzer, New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1992.

⁴ *Alien Nation: Common Sense About America's Immigration Disaster*, Random House, 1995.

⁵ Stein and Bauer, op. cit., p. 128. They are quoting from John Cable, *Decisive Decisions of United States Citizenship*, 1967, p. 6. I do not know whose language this is, but from its tone it seems to be the language of the period.

⁶ *Affirmative Discrimination*, Basic Books, 1975; Harvard University Press, 1987.

⁷ Hans Kohn, *American Nationalism: An Interpretive Essay*, Macmillan, 1957 (Collier Books edition, 1961, p. 144), quoted in *Affirmative Discrimination*, op. cit., p. 11.

⁸ *We Are All Multiculturalists Now*, Harvard University Press, 1997, Chapter 6.

⁹ Quotations, and sources, in Nathan Glazer, *We Are All Multiculturalists Now*, Harvard, 1997, p. 104.

¹⁰ From a standard treatise on naturalization law; the specific reference has been misplaced.

¹¹ So I noted to Mexican and Mexican American scholars at a conference at Harvard, April 12-13, 1997.

¹² See Gerald L. Neuman, "Justifying U.S. Naturalization Policies," *Virginia Journal of International Law* 35:1, Fall 1994, pp. 237-278, and comments on it in the same issue by Stephen H. Legomsky, David A. Martin, Peter H. Schuck.

¹³ Schuck and Smith, op. cit. p. 107.

¹⁴ "Redefining German Citizenship," Editorial, *The New York Times*, p. A32 (New England edition).

Response to *Is There an American People?*

ORLANDO PATTERSON

As I listened to Professor Glazer, it struck me that, after being colleagues for 27 years together, this is the first time I'm commenting on his work. I guess one's definition of what it is to be an American is the pleasure of commenting on one's colleague's work several hundred miles away in another city over breakfast of lox and bagels whatever

Everyone came and comes almost entirely for instrumental reasons, but most tend to stay for others.

one's religion. But I'll get back to that later on.

To the question "Is there an American people?" Professor Glazer responds that

there is a narrow answer given by the Constitution, namely, a group of persons who are born or naturalized American citizens and who abide by its laws and political Constitution.

He rightly contends that this political/legal answer is too narrow and then examines alternate responses. He raises the issues of "race," ethnicity and culture — Are Americans people of a certain race and ethnic cultural heritage? And he claims, oddly I think, that these questions are now only discussed *sub rosa*.

More broadly, the question essentially becomes whether Americans have a distinct culture and, further, whether immigrants wanting to be naturalized should be required to assimilate into this culture. He suggests that traditionally it has been assumed that this culture was derived from Europe and that European immigrants had special access to it. All this generates what he calls a "double vision." Anyone can become an American, especially when one uses the narrow conception of what that is, but it is felt by many that some people — those who are of European ancestry — make better Americans. The problem today, for people holding this view, is that the vast majority of newcomers are not from Europe.

Professor Glazer is clearly uneasy with this line of questioning. He notes America's age-old rejection of the principle of citizenship by blood, as in Germany — *jus sanguinis* — and he applauds, as I do, this traditional view that becoming an American is a matter of political commitment and culture. However, he is bothered by the fact that recent developments have muddied the line, as he puts it, that defines and separates the American as a "new person."

There are two muddying of the line, so to speak. First, transnationalism, the problem of dual citizenship, would suggest the possible weakening of loyalties to whatever it is that we define as an American. And secondly, there's the fact that new Americans are believed to be choosing their status for the wrong reasons, emphasizing instrumental, economic, reasons rather than the more expressive, cultural ones.

Now I agree with much of what Professor Glazer has to say up to this point. These two recent developments are where we part company. I do not believe that transnationalism and dual citizenship necessarily undermine loyalties or undermine commitment to whatever it is that an American is, and for purely historical reasons. Contrary to what Professor Glazer seems to imply, it has always been the case that a substantial majority of persons who came here and became citizens did so for primarily instrumental reasons — and indeed had dual citizenship — most notably those from England. The great majority of persons who came here before the Revolution were indentured servants from England, who hardly came for anything but instrumental reasons. The vast majority of the Irish who came here in the post-famine period clearly came for instrumental reasons — they had no choice.

But this does not mean that one cannot stay, once having come, for non-instrumental reasons. It should be noted, too, that the majority of the British who came here, not just people from Mexico and so on, enjoy dual citizenship — always have, still do. Coming for instrumental reasons does not mean that

one cannot stay for non-instrumental ones. Indeed, this is precisely what happened in the past and what continues to happen now.

I want to suggest in the few minutes I have left, a broader perspective from which one might answer the question, “What, then, is the American, this new man?”

The first point I want to note for discussion is the fact that the question of what constitutes an American, and American culture, has always been a contested one, from the very earliest times. Thus, during the Colonial period it was really a hotly debated matter, whether the real or true “New Man” was that of the New Jerusalem of the Puritans, the theocratic, rather authoritarian Puritan North, based on small, independent farming with its highly introspective, angst-ridden individualism, constantly preoccupied with sin; or the more politically democratic, religiously plural, more tolerant Middle Colonies, with their essentially Anglo-Germanic Pietistic traditions and more equalitarian gender relations; or, thirdly, the autocratic slave systems of the South, with their cavalier conception of an honorific man recreating not a new, theocratic, Jerusalem but a new feudal order.

These are three well-defined notions of what constituted a true American, all contested, coming from the Colonial period.

In more recent times, this cultural contestation of what it is that defines the American — as Professor Glazer himself has well documented in an earlier work, along with Senator Moynihan — revolved around the issue of whether American-ness meant conformity with its melting-pot hegemonic myth, if you like; or a hyphenated ethnic potpourri, held together by a common political Constitution, a commitment to a common political culture.

The contestation continues, of what it is that defines an American, in true American fashion, but has become more complex; instead of two contested visions, there are now three. There’s a conservative conception of what it is that defines this “New Man,” new person,

and new culture. And essentially it’s the idea of America as a traditional Protestant society, with English as its base, of course. We associate it with middle-American individualism, with an open society, a competitive order, but one which limits the free-wheeling market economy with notions of religious piety.

The second version of what constitutes this new person, and culture, we may call the traditional liberal idea, the pluralistic vision. This is a vision, which Professor Glazer himself well-articulated in his earlier work, of an America in which there is a solid core of constitutional principles and political culture which is unique, and within the framework of which people are allowed to live by traditional ethnic norms — essentially, an American kind of hyphenated ethnicity, in which people have been here so long that their whole way of being ethnic in itself is American. That’s the second conception of what constitutes an American, the pluralist, liberal vision.

What has emerged recently is a third conception — something new has been thrown into the contested terrain. And this is the multicultural vision, which differs from the second in the sense that it encompasses the idea of transnationalism, the notion that people continue not only to maintain political loyalties, in the sense of dual citizenship — which is really not new, as I pointed out earlier — but, because of modern transportation and communication, continue literally to live in their former cultures in a manner which they were not able to in the old days. So that a new kind of ethnicity emerges, in which the new American continues, as do the Columbians, as do the Mexicans, as do many West Indians, to live in both cultures and feel equally at home. That is new: transnational communities, going along with a strong commitment to the American political system.

Now, let me say finally, that overarching these contested, and essentially ideological visions of America, is a slow but relentless and certain emergence of something else and it is this something else that, I think, defines genuine American culture, expressed through a universalizing process which draws from all the available cultures but does more than that. It reinterprets and recasts them into something new.

The American culture is alive and well, at both the popular and elite levels.

This American culture is alive and well, at both the popular and elite levels. On the popular levels, it is the America of baseball and basketball, hot dogs, hamburgers and McDonald's and American-style pop music, TV shows, the Oprah Winfrey show, talk shows. At the elite levels, it is the America of our great institutions of learning, our great museums, our great think tanks, this one not excluded, our great artistic and literary traditions which are all quite unique, and very, very American. This, I submit, is the culture that really seduces nearly all who migrate here at whatever level and for whatever reason. This is what makes those who come here for Professor Glazer's instrumental reasons want to stay. People love this culture. Whether it's the explicit vulgarity of our TV talk shows or radio shows, the throbbing vitality of our popular music and sports systems, or the triumphant spectacle of our architecture or great symphonies, the unrivaled quality of our institutions of science and learning. This is America. This is what defines the "New Man," the person who really believes, whether assimilating at the mass level or at the elite level.

The only danger I see here is that of too great a success of this triumphant American culture. For the culture is so desired, so seductive, that it is rapidly becoming the culture of the world. It is becoming the core of an emerging global culture. So in addition to those who come for instrumental reasons, and stay for the expressive one of committed to this overarching culture, there's the fact that many are being seduced to this culture by institutions of communications, CNN and so on, and the global reach of our economy, consumer culture, and other institutions.

So, to the question, "Is there an American culture?", the answer is a resounding yes. Is it alive and well? Yes. Is there any danger which it faces? The answer, too, is yes — the only one is the danger of too great a success.

The only danger I see here is that of too great a success of this triumphant American culture.

Response to *Is There an American People?*

NOAH M. J. PICKUS

Nathan Glazer's paper is a rich and balanced account of how arguments over what it means to be an American inform current controversies over immigration and naturalization. He demonstrates that American identity has always been more complex than simply allegiance to a universal set of political principles. The rules governing our immigration and naturalization laws, in particular, have reflected a contest between a commitment to those principles and cultural definitions of nationhood. Glazer also strikes a balanced pose by contrasting conservative concerns over citizenship and naturalization with

Is it conceptually possible, or politically desirable, to emphasize individual identity and attachment to political principles to one group while stressing ethnic and racial identity to a second?

liberal, cosmopolitan ones. Conservatives, he argues, worry that our naturalization process no longer stresses a sense of exclusiveness and superiority over other nations. Liberal cosmopolitans, by contrast, regard the naturalization process as outdated in an increasingly transnational

and multicultural world.

Where does Glazer stand in these debates? He doesn't quite say. While acknowledging the role cultural conceptions of identity have played in American immigration and citizenship law, Glazer contends that those conceptions are far less prevalent today. Americans' concern over immigrants' rush to naturalization, he posits, is driven by doubts over whether newcomers actually are committed to sharing American political values. He concludes that we are witnessing a tightening of the naturalization process and requirements, but he offers few guidelines for revising how we make new citizens.

This absence of guidance seems odd given Glazer's extensive analysis of what it means to be, and hence to become, an American. Let me ask a few questions about his conception of American identity and then suggest that our naturalization process should reflect an ideologi-

cal, emotional and interpretive conception of citizenship.

I begin with two questions about culture. Glazer is a principal in two different debates today: controversies over immigration and naturalization and conflicts over multicultural education. In the first debate, he urges us to re-emphasize adherence to the political principles of liberal democracy as the core of what it means to be an American. At the heart of this definition is an understanding of political identity as individual membership in a single nation-state. The nation represents a people whose shared identity serves as the basis for the legitimate authority of the state.

In the second debate, Glazer suggests that multiculturalism is now a reality and that it is therefore appropriate for educators to emphasize the importance of sub-national ethnic and racial identity. Some advocates of multiculturalism challenge the notion that the way one belongs to a political community is solely as an individual. They suggest that members of minority groups must possess special group representation and cultural rights. This understanding of multiculturalism severs the link between the nation and the state because it depends on the state to protect rights and provide benefits, but is dubious about the notion of a common national identity.

Whatever might be said about Glazer's views in each debate, the question here is whether he can coherently hold both of them. Is it conceptually possible, or politically desirable, to emphasize individual identity and attachment to political principles to one group while stressing ethnic and racial identity to a second?

A second question about culture relates not to sub-group racial or ethnic identity but to the link between political principles and national culture. Glazer suggests that we have, finally and belatedly, come to truly emphasize attachment to political principles as the proper definition of American identity. But doesn't national identity require more than just a commitment to abstract and general principles? Doesn't it also require some felt sense of communal obligation, some feeling of responsibility derived in part

from a perception of shared history and fate? If so, then national identity includes a reverential element. A commitment to abstract principles must be supplemented by emotional attachment to the polity.

A shared identity worthy of respect needs a lively deliberation over the nature of its political principles and their relation to culture if that identity is to remain vital.

That noise you hear in the background is the sound of traditional patriots cheering my comments about reverence and emotional attachment. Yet even they should be made nervous by my invocation of national culture. Our

commitment to the principles of liberal democracy can be lost under the weight of a cultural definition of identity. Indeed, Glazer's paper is replete with evidence of how cultural definitions of identity undermined America's capacity to make any claims to be a truly universal nation. Racial restrictions on who could become a citizen, for instance, characterized American laws from 1790 until 1952.

Political ideology and emotional attachment must both be supplemented by an interpretive conception of citizenship, by an emphasis on deliberating over the nature and purpose of a people's commitments. This notion of American identity as more than an amalgam of political ideology and emotional attachment is reflected in the oath of allegiance taken by new citizens. The applicant who swears "true faith and allegiance" to the Constitution does not become the subject of a government, an ideology, a nation or a flag. Rather, the applicant becomes, as the constitutional scholar William F. Harris II said at a naturalization ceremony in Independence Hall, "a citizen of the text." New citizens who try to understand what "true faith and allegiance" means explore fundamental questions about what binds a people. The oath of allegiance thus commits new citizens to a continual process of constructing a political community, or, as Federalist No. 1 puts it, to maintaining a vital sense of self-government through "reflection and choice."

I don't mean that new citizens will suddenly all become constitutional theorists. The difficulty of that enterprise is precisely why inculcating an emotional attachment to a shared political identity is important. But a constitutional conception of citizenship must also emphasize

the importance of offering public justifications. After all, the membership problems raised by immigration are a subset of a larger problem: a polity dominated by a fragile sense of public commitment and a weakened set of political institutions. American citizens themselves often act as if they were "alienated residents" who have lost confidence in the political arena. A shared identity worthy of respect needs a lively deliberation over the nature of its political principles and their relation to culture if that identity is to remain vital.

There are obvious tensions among ideology, emotion and interpretation as components of American citizenship. But they are tensions that appropriately reflect the delicate balance between creating a shared sensibility, sustaining democratic principles, preserving self-governance, and protecting rights. By contrast, some advocates of expanded rights for all persons, whether citizens or not, as well as some proponents of greater restrictions on immigration, would do away with this balance. Many restrictionists stress an unchanging cultural or political homogeneity, while the advocates of personhood emphasize a pre-existing set of universal rights. The latter insists that a culture of rights is sufficient to undergird democracy; the former believes that a democratic polity can only be sustained by a relatively homogeneous community. Neither perspective addresses the need to create a sense of affinity and mutual responsibility among newcomers and native-born citizens that is appropriate to changing circumstances.

This emphasis on creating citizens brings us back to Glazer's analysis of American identity and its implications for the naturalization process. Until Doris Meissner became Commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service in 1992 and immediately began to emphasize citizenship, the "N" in INS was woefully neglected; the INS was far more concerned with keeping immigrants out than with welcoming those already here.

Yet if naturalization was once largely ignored, all that has now changed. Some commentators have criticized welfare legislation that strips legal immigrants of benefits, for instance, suggesting that it contributes to the devaluation of citizenship by inducing newcomers to naturalize for purely material reasons. Rep. Lamar Smith (R-TX), chairman of the House immigration subcommittee, has charged that Vice President Al Gore pressured the INS to lower its standards for naturalization, enabling more new citizens

to participate in the recent elections. “This is the first time . . . to my knowledge that politics has ever been mixed with this sort of sacrosanct procedure that we call naturalization or becoming a citizen,” he asserted.

Smith’s historical claim is wrong. Politics has often been part of the naturalization process. When my grandfather arrived in Kansas City in the 1920s, the local political boss took him off the train, into the voting booth, and through the naturalization process, in that order. The administration of naturalization exams has been neither uniform nor sacrosanct. In some cases, educated native-born citizens might have failed the exams; in other cases, applicants who simply showed up became citizens.

Smith’s concern that naturalization should not be cheapened does, however, offer the right framework for building a citizenship process worthy of the name. The fact that citizenship and naturalization haven’t always been treated as sacrosanct doesn’t mean that many immigrants and Americans haven’t regarded them as such. Indeed, the ambivalence of becoming American that many immigrants have felt is testimony to their sense that such a change should have significance, one that entails a transformation in their sense of self and membership. The naturalization process should offer an approach that emphasizes that transformation, one that stresses the new and complex identity of being an American, not one that strips legal immigrants of benefits or simply makes it easier to naturalize.

This process should emphasize that citizenship demands reverence and reason, it requires an

habitual sense of belonging and a willingness to actively re-consider what it means to belong. It requires an understanding of concepts fundamental to American political life, a sense of commitment to the broader community, and a willingness to deliberate with fellow citizens about the public good. By telling a complex tale of the relation between American identity and U.S. citizenship and immigration laws, Glazer makes an important contribution to building a naturalization process worthy of the name. But a truly robust effort to “make citizens” must do more than “maneuver between both [liberal and conservative] criticisms of our naturalization process and requirements.” It must actively explore the full complexity of American identity, especially the possibility that what makes America distinct is not an identity based on adherence to political principles, but, rather, a complex combination of ideological, emotional and interpretive elements.

Glazer’s conclusion that “new developments push us to consider what the further implications of being a universal people are” is exactly right. American Citizenship in the 21st century is not likely to look just like citizenship in the 20th century, which, after all, is significantly different from citizenship in the 19th century. We need new ways of weaving together our multiple identities, ways that draw on central traditions in American life even as they re-interpret those traditions for a new age.

The fact that citizenship and naturalization haven’t always been treated as sacrosanct doesn’t mean that many immigrants and Americans haven’t regarded them as such.

JOHN ISBISTER

IS AMERICA TOO WHITE?

Is America too white? Well, yes. Not everyone agrees, though. Peter Brimelow, for example, thinks the country is not white enough:

“The onus is on those who favor the major change in the ethnic balance entailed by current immigration levels to explain exactly what they have against the American nation as it had evolved by 1965 (90 percent white, primarily from Italy, Germany, Ireland and Britain). While they’re at it, they can explain just what makes them think that multi-racial societies work.”¹

The decline in the white proportion is a healthy development . . . since it will gradually replace a majority-minority confrontation with interactions between groups of more equal size and influence.

As one of “those who favor the major change in the ethnic balance,” I will try to answer Brimelow’s questions. First, whites are declining as a proportion of the American population, inevitably and independently of the country’s immigration policy. The Immigration Act of 1965 is a less important cause of this change

than are the underlying demographic and sociological factors. The “golden age” of 1965 cannot be restored. Second, while it is correct that the United States population was (almost) 90 percent white in the middle of the 20th century, this high proportion was an anomaly in American history. America has always been a multi-racial society, since the first English settlers and the first African slaves encountered the first natives on the eastern shores. Third, the decline in the white proportion is a healthy development for the country, since it will gradually replace a majority-minority confrontation with interactions between groups of more equal size and influence. And fourth, America in the late 20th century is doing a pretty good job of showing how a collection of people representing the variety of world cultures can live peacefully and profitably with each other. Those, at least, are my contentions.

First, the basic demography. The racial composition of the United States population, both historical and projected, as compiled by the Census Bureau, is shown in Table 1. In keeping with normal Census Bureau practice, Table 1 does not show Hispanics as a separate race.

Table 1²
United States Population, by Race, 1790-2050
in percentages

Date	White	Black	Native	Asian/Pac. Islander
1790	80.7	19.3	NA	---
1850	84.3	15.7	NA	---
1900	87.9	11.6	0.3	0.2
1950	89.5	10.0	0.2	0.2
1965 ³	88.1	10.8	0.3	0.8
1995	83.0	12.6	0.9	3.5
		2050 (projection)		
-no immigration	77.6	16.6	1.3	4.5
-low immigration	75.8	16.1	1.2	6.9
-medium immigration	74.8	15.4	1.1	8.7
-high immigration	73.9	14.8	1.1	10.3

The first American census in 1790 counted four fifths of the population as white. The proportion rose steadily over the next century and a half, mostly because of a preponderance of whites among the country's immigrants, reaching a peak between 1920 and 1950 when roughly nine of every ten enumerated residents were white. By 1965, the year of the major change in the immigration law, the white proportion had begun to fall. It was down to 83 percent in 1995, and will doubtless be lower by the end of the current decade.

The immigration debate . . . is concerned, realistically, with numbers between the "low" and the "medium" lines, that is, between 300,000 and 820,000 net immigrants annually.

Jennifer Cheeseman Day of the Census Bureau has projected the U.S. population to the year 2050. The figures shown in Table 1 are based on her "medium" assumptions about future fertility and mortality, and four different assumptions about annual net

immigration (that is, immigrants minus emigrants): (1) zero net immigrants, (2) Low immigration: 300,000, (3) medium immigration: 820,000, and (4) high immigration: 1,370,000.⁴ The racial composition of the immigrant flow is assumed, in the projections, to be roughly the same as in the early 1990s. The projections show that the white proportion of the population will continue to decline in the first half of the 21st century. Moreover, no magic attaches to the date 2050; the demographic dynamics leading to a decline in the white proportion will likely continue well after that date.

The most striking feature of Table 1 is that the white proportion would continue to fall even if net immigration into the country were zero. It would do so principally because of differential fertility; the birth rates of the non-white groups in the United States exceed that of whites. The difference is so marked that, in the absence of any net immigration, the white population would eventually begin to decline in absolute numbers, not just proportionately, while the other groups would grow.⁵

Immigration, coming as it does predominantly from non-white source countries, will hasten the decline in the white proportion. Note, however, that the effect of immigration is not expected to be overwhelming. The most relevant comparison is between the "low immigration"

and the "medium immigration" lines. The line labeled "zero immigration" is perhaps interesting, but it is completely unattainable, even should Americans favor it; illegal immigration would surely push the numbers up to at least the "low" figures.⁶ And the "high" line envisions net immigration more than 65 percent above its current level, a future which is imaginable but not likely. The immigration debate in which the country is currently engaged is concerned, realistically, with numbers between the "low" and the "medium" lines, that is, between 300,000 and 820,000 net immigrants annually. And here we learn that the alternative estimates for the white proportion in 2050 are 75.8 versus 74.8 percent, not much of a difference.

The figures in Table 1 are misleading, however, in ways that are understandable but not entirely correctable. The problem is that "white" is an ambiguous term, as are all racial labels. Biologists and anthropologists have no fixed definition of race. Certainly American history provides ample evidence that whiteness is a social construct, not a fixed point. A remarkable passage written by Benjamin Franklin in 1775 is illustrative.

"[T]he number of purely white people in the world is proportionably very small. All *Africa* is black or tawny. *Asia* chiefly tawny. *America* (exclusive of the newcomers) wholly so. And in *Europe*, the *Spaniards*, *Italians*, *French*, *Russians* and *Swedes*, are generally of what we call swarthy complexion, as are the *Germans* also, the *Saxons* only excepted, who with the *English* make the principal body of white people on the face of the earth. I could wish their numbers were increased."⁷

In the mid-nineteenth century, the poor Irish immigrants were initially regarded by their betters as, if not exactly black, then certainly not white — and their eventual success in their adopted country was marked by their assimilation into the white race.⁸ The same has been true of the Italians, the Greeks, the Armenians and many other national groups.⁹ One of the factors hindering Americans' ability to respond to the Holocaust of the Second World War was their unwillingness to think of Jews as white; the objects of the refugee program established at the end of that conflict were called "displaced persons," with no mention of the Jewishness of many of them, out of regard for the racial sensibilities of most Americans (and Canadians).

On the other hand, one sometimes hears today that Asian Americans, or certain groups of them, are “honorary whites.”

One could be forgiven for concluding, therefore, that whiteness, as the term is actually used, has only a tangential relationship to skin pigmentation, and is instead a synonym for “us.”

There is no way that the official data can be adequately adjusted to take account of these complexities. At the very least, however, one should acknowledge that the early American censuses did not even attempt to count the native population and that, as a consequence, we do not know how large that population was. A great deal of inventive scholarship has been devoted to the question. Perhaps the pre-1492

degree of non-white ancestry places one in a non-white category, but it has not yet arrived at an alternative solution — and may never be able to, in view of the difficulty of the problem.

On the second issue, the Census Bureau takes the position that “Hispanic” is not a race, and that Hispanics may be of any race, that is, according to the Bureau’s current categories, white, black, native or Asian. While the Census Bureau is doubtless correct in this assertion, most Americans in fact regard “Hispanic” (or “Latino”) as a race. In view of this, the Census Bureau offers compilations in which the Hispanic and non-Hispanic populations are separated. Table 2 shows how the bottom part of Table 1 looks, when this division is made.

Table 2¹²
United States Population, by Race and Hispanic Origin, 1995-2050
in percentages

Date	-----Non-Hispanic-----				
	Hispanic	White	Black	Native	Asian/Pac. Islander
1995	10.3	73.7	12.0	0.7	3.3
2050 (projection)					
-no immigration	18.7	60.6	15.4	1.1	4.2
-low immigration	22.1	55.9	14.6	1.0	6.5
-medium immigration	24.5	52.8	13.6	0.9	8.2
-high immigration	26.4	50.2	12.8	0.8	9.7

population of the eastern coastal plain, from Massachusetts to Florida, was about 2,000,000,¹⁰ falling to 500,000 in 1790.¹¹ If so, natives would have constituted 12 percent of the population at the time of the first census, and the other two groups in Table 1 would have fallen proportionately, whites to 71 percent and blacks to 17. In the century following the first arrival of the Irish in large numbers in the 1840s, if we were able to separate out in our figures those regarded as genuinely white from the others, the white figures would be much lower than shown in Table 1. The figure of almost 90 percent in the middle of the twentieth century, therefore, is overstated on the one hand, and atypical of the American experience, not a norm, on the other.

Among the current problems in presenting a clear statistical picture are how to represent the growing number of people of mixed races and of Latin American descent. On the first issue, the Census Bureau is attempting to move away from the historical American position that any

With this adjustment, Table 2 shows that non-Hispanic whites (a group for whom I hesitantly advance the term “Anglo”) are currently less than three quarters of the American population, while Hispanics are almost as numerous as blacks. With no immigration at all, these proportions will change considerably in the 21st century, again because of fertility differences. Anglos will decline as a proportion of the population, while all the other groups will grow. With higher and higher levels of immigration, the Anglo, black, and native proportions will fall, while the Hispanic and Asian proportions will grow.

Several things impress one about Table 2. First, even without immigration, Hispanics are likely to displace blacks as the country’s largest minority group in the 21st century; immigration will hasten this trend. Second, Anglos themselves are heading toward minority status: faster or slower depending upon the rate of immigration, but inexorably. And third, any realistic variation in the rate of immigration will have

some effect upon the Anglo proportion — a greater effect than was indicated in Table 1— but not a huge effect. The difference between the low and medium immigration lines in 2050, for non-Hispanic whites, is 3.1 percentage points, noticeable but not enormous.

The precise rate of decline of the Anglo population is not one of the great issues facing our nation. That the fall is happening is to be welcomed, however, and on the whole a little faster is probably better than a little slower.

Could the decline in the white proportion be attenuated by changes in the immigration law, restoring something like the pre-1965 regime that discriminated in favor of Europeans? No doubt such a change would have some effect, but it would not fundamentally alter the picture shown in Table 2. Few western

Europeans want to immigrate to the United States these days; they are happy to visit in increasing numbers, because of the favorable exchange rate, but they would not want to live here. The principal potential immigrants among white people are residents of the former Soviet bloc — and they are massively outnumbered by Latin Americans and Asians who want to immigrate. None but the most draconian measures, highly unlikely in a free, democratic country such as the United States, could reverse the sources of the current immigrant flows.

One should not make the mistake of thinking that the 1965 immigration act is the principal cause of the changing ethnic composition of the United States. Similar racial changes are occurring throughout western Europe and the other predominantly white countries of British settlement. It is a global phenomenon; the races are getting mixed up.

The big question about the projections in Table 2 is not how precisely accurate the estimates are — they are fuzzy, but about the best we can come up with. Rather it is whether the racial categories that seem so important to us at the end of the 20th century will have anything like the same relevance several generations from now. Will anyone care what the numbers are in those particular columns? Perhaps not. Perhaps intermarriage will blur the racial boundaries so much that they become indistinguishable. Perhaps Latinos will “become white,” just as the Irish, Armenians and Jews did before them. Per-

haps Asians’ success in this country, and Asian economic preeminence in the world, will remove any sociological reason for thinking of that group as “other.” Perhaps Americans of African and non-African descent really will overcome their poisonous history. Perhaps the differences within the groups will become much more compelling than the differences among them. Were I a betting person, I would put a little money on all these propositions, at least in the long run.

But, as John Maynard Keynes said in his most enduring contribution to modern discourse, “in the long run we are all dead.” We live our lives in the short run. Let me interpret the short run here: as long as the racial categories in Table 2 remain vitally important to Americans. That they are now is hardly debatable. As a Californian who has recently lived through the debates on Proposition 187 (on illegal immigration) and Proposition 209 (on affirmative action), to say nothing of the O. J. Simpson trials, I have no doubt that racial identity is at the center of many, perhaps most, Californians’ consciousness — and I doubt that California is any different from the rest of the country in this respect. Moreover the graveyard of social science dicta is filled with predictions that racial identities would soon be seen by people as false, to be replaced by truer understandings of their real interests, based perhaps on class or ideology. It has not happened yet. At the end of the 20th century, racial and national identities — and animosities — are growing, not receding.

So what about our future as previewed in Table 2? Anglos are falling as a proportion of the American population; there is no stopping that. Is this good or bad for America?

Good, I think, although I would not want to overstate the argument. The precise rate of decline of the Anglo population is not one of the great issues facing our nation. That the fall is happening is to be welcomed, however, and on the whole a little faster is probably better than a little slower.

Americans are a varied people, who have come together from all over the world, not just from a few relatively homogeneous countries. Their relationships have been complex, to understate the point. To some extent, they have shaken off their differences and mixed together, developing a shared culture, including a common language, holidays, clothing styles, media images,

and much more.¹³ The melting pot is not a vacuous image. It is an image of particular relevance to white Americans, however. The melting pot brought together English, Irish, Swedes, Italians, Hungarians, Russians, and other European groups and made a functional, if not a completely homogenized, entity of them. In the first part of the 20th century this seemed a remarkable achievement, because the history of immigration to that time had been so fraught with suspicion, disdain, and discrimination.

If the melting pot is valid for some Irish and Poles, however, it is not for Africans and natives. One can take the melting pot seriously as the central process of American civilization only if one thinks that non-white groups were not really part of that civilization. The majority of Latinos and Asians in the United States are the descendants of fairly recent immigrants, or immigrants themselves, so it is early to judge how those groups will assimilate into mainstream culture, or if mainstream culture will be there when they do. So far, however, they are not melting with other Americans nearly as completely as the different European groups did.

The melting pot is still simmering, but it is mixing its brew only imperfectly. Large chunks remain undissolved. This, it seems to me, is the principal theme of America's history, its present and its future: how to make a nation out of such diverse ethnic parts. Certainly the process has been attended by hostility, violence, oppression, and bad will, as well as by common endeavors and achievements. This process of nation building cannot be rejected, however; it is the country's destiny. In the Civil War era, some abolitionist voices called for the return of the newly freed slaves to Africa. Some former slaves did return, but this vision of ethnic cleansing was impossible for the country as a whole. The blacks, it turned out, were Americans, not Africans, here to stay just as much as were the descendants of the Pilgrims. The hundred year gap between the Civil War and the Civil Rights movement marred the relationship between the country's majority and its principal minority almost irreparably, but eventually the time came to address the question of how Americans could turn oppression into mutual-ity and respect. If we have not yet found the perfect answer to that question, we have at least been working on it for a generation.

That is our common project. The implication of Brimelow's statement at the beginning of this

essay is that the United States can somehow choose not to be multi-racial. We cannot. We cannot avoid the challenge of trying to develop a society in which people of different backgrounds work constructively with each other. The critical American question is Rodney King's: "Can't we all get along?"

The principal case for a falling white proportion is simply this: it will be easier for us to transform a society of hostility and oppression into one of cooperation if we are dealing not with a majority versus several small minorities, but with groups of roughly equivalent size. Numbers matter. In order for the different groups to relate to each other on an equal basis, without the members of one group feeling that they have to suppress their values and their interests, all the groups need to be, not equal in size, but well represented. As Anglos move toward minority status, and as Latinos and Asian-Americans grow proportionately, while African-Americans retain about their current relative representation, the interactions among the different groups may become more direct, clearer, more reciprocal, more equal. The United States will not become multi-racial because it always has been, but it will become healthier, its citizens less constrained by structures of discrimination.

Some hold the opposite view. The "liberal-nationalist" Michael Lind, for example, argues that Americans have been most connected to each other when immigration has been lowest, and that this is no coincidence. "The most generous and egalitarian countries in modern times," he writes, "have been culturally homogeneous nation-states admitting few or no poor immigrants, like those of northern Europe and Japan."¹⁴ This is not, I think, a productive way of posing the American problem. America is too diverse a country to depend upon common identity as its principal dynamic. As Tables 1 and 2 show, it is becoming increasingly diverse. Americans must find a way of bridging their differences; suppression of their differences is bound to fail.

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How do we go about facing our common challenge? Not by entertaining the hope that the newer Americans will forget their distinctive roots and merge into an undifferentiated culture. And not by indulging in a kind of separatism that pretends we share nothing together. It is usual to propose the metaphor of the mosaic or the salad bowl rather than the melting pot for what I am trying to describe, but I prefer the image of the flower garden, continuously growing and changing.

This is the central point: when it is working well, a diverse, multi-racial, multicultural society is more interesting, more energizing . . . more fun.

We have different vantage points for viewing the flower garden of American social life; mine is the campus of a public university in California.¹⁵ Significant numbers of students come to our college from al-

most every ethnic and immigrant group in the country. They are at a stage in their lives and in an environment in which the exploration of ethnic roots seems urgent. Many (not all) of the students are most comfortable associating with others of the same ethnicity: they walk around together, go to the same parties, share a table in the dining hall, paint murals with ethnic themes, form organizations, play their own music, and write for their own publications.

Some observers of student life are troubled by this picture, seeing in it ethnic separatism and the disintegration of American culture. Some liberal Anglos are especially upset at the sight of ethnic tables in the dining hall. Isn't racial segregation what the Civil Rights movement was struggling against? they ask. This response is overly alarmist. Students tend to feel insecure in an environment in which they know few others, so they cling naturally to people who at least look familiar. If they can become comfortable in that restricted social situation, they are often able to branch out across ethnic lines, make friends with different kinds of people and participate in broader social and intellectual activities. If they are helped to be secure in their own culture, they can share it with others. The fact of a stable home base makes wider multi-racial activity possible. There is no necessary conflict, therefore, between a certain degree of ethnic clustering, on the one hand, and a vibrant interactive community, on the other.

This, I think, is the pluralist paradigm for the country as a whole, not just for an isolated college campus. The different ethnic groups are what gives the United States its character. The groups need to keep separate enough from each other that the cultures are retained and reinforced, but they interact with each other too, to create the distinctively American society.

This controversial vision of American society is at odds, for example, with the views of distinguished historian, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. In *The Disuniting of America*, he writes, "The national ideal had once been *e pluribus unum*. Are we now to belittle *unum* and glorify *pluribus*? Will the center hold? or will the melting pot yield to the Tower of Babel?"¹⁶

This fear is off the mark. At the Tower of Babel, the different language groups could not understand each other. The promise of the emerging American society, in contrast, is that the different groups will interact and communicate with each other. As a consequence, all Americans will benefit by living in a national community that is broadening and stimulating. They will exchange ideas and they will learn more, about themselves and about the world. This is the central point: when it is working well, a diverse, multi-racial, multicultural society is more interesting, more energizing...more fun.

How can the promise be realized? There is no single answer. I am optimist enough, however, to think that I have been living in the United States during a generation when the change has been happening — through the Civil Rights movement, through political action, through education, through the assertion of legal rights, through cooperation by people of good will, and through immigration.

My principal reason for hope is the American system of constitutional democracy. The Constitution promises representation, democracy, and individual rights. The Constitution has not always been honored — we have suffered the Jim Crow era, the Japanese American internment, and many other violations. In fact, it is when the Constitution has been violated that race relations have been most explosive. But the document has always stood, and people excluded from the benefits of American life have been able to appeal to it. *Brown v. Board of Education* was decided on constitutional grounds, and both the Civil Rights Act and the Voting

Rights Act were attempts by the country to bring its racial policies into accord with the Constitution. The Constitution mandates the vote and democratic decision making; with the vote, minority and immigrant groups have been able to establish a foothold, struggle for their interests and face their fellow Americans on a more or less equal playing field. Constitutional democracy has transferred the competition between different ethnic groups from the arena of private warfare to the arena of public, political maneuvering. Our constitutional, political system is not a perfect tool, of course. For one thing, as we are increasingly aware, money speaks, as well as votes. For another, immigrants who fail to naturalize and poor people who fail to vote are necessarily marginalized by the system. In the transition period, when whites become a minority of the population but are not yet a minority of the electorate, a dangerous potential for racial recrimination exists,¹⁷ and this is why I think it is better to get through this period a little faster rather than a little slower. But it is the system of constitutional politics which gives each immigrant and minority group a foothold, and allows us at least to contemplate a social system of mutual respect, not ethnic cleansing, in our country.

All the immigrant streams from Europe — Irish, Poles, Jews, Italians and others — found a way to participate fully in politics, from the local to the national levels. They used their po-

sitions in government to protect their communities, to advance their interests and to fight against the discrimination that they faced from other groups. One of the legacies of the Civil Rights movement is that the same opportunity is now open to people of non-European origins. Because of the victories of the 1960's, the vote cannot be denied now to any group of citizens, just because they are perceived as a threat to a dominant group.

With representation comes the power to take action to protect ethnic and immigrant communities and to work for an agenda of change on behalf of a pluralist country. The new immigration inevitably leads to conflict, but as that conflict is focussed in the political sphere it is channeled in ways that are productive. Since political representation and political competition, embedded in a system of constitutional democracy, are the strongest tools the country has for racial accommodation, it follows that the cause of racial accommodation will be eased by population numbers that are relatively equivalent.

Is the country too white? Yes, somewhat. The central American task of constructing a decent, plural society will be easier if the ethnic groups are more equal in size. That will come, inevitably, regardless of current immigration policy. What we are arguing about is the speed of adjustment.

NOTES

The author would like to thank Robert Berkhofer, Amy Patrick, Marleny Rivera, Roz Spafford and David Sweet for help with early drafts of this paper.

¹ Peter Brimelow, "Response," *National Review* (February 1, 1993), 33.

² The historical data are taken from censuses and estimates made by the Census Bureau, as reported in United States Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1996*, 116th edition, (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1996). The projections are from Jennifer Cheeseman Day, *Population Projections of the United States by Age, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1995 to 2050*, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, P25-1130 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996).

³ Interpolated by the author.

⁴ The figures include both authorized and undocumented immigrants.

⁵ The fact that the white non-immigrant population is not currently falling is due principally to the baby boom, which created a disproportionately large concentration of today's population in the childbearing ages. Once this bulge passes, if the underlying fertility schedules stay unchanged, this subgroup of the population will begin to fall. The total fertility of the white American population is not up to the replacement level. The total fertility of the non-Hispanic white population is even lower.

⁶ Michael Lind, among others, argues that zero net immigration is a realistic possibility: "The best policy might be one of 'zero net immi-

gration' — limiting the number of legal immigrants to the number of people who voluntarily emigrate from the United States each year, around 200,000 (down from 7-800,000 today), and reducing the number of illegal immigrants to as near zero as possible." *The Next American Nation, The New Nationalism and the Fourth American Revolution* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 321-2. In view of the debate over the Immigration Act of 1996, which began with a proposed reduction of only one third and ended up with no change at all in authorized immigration, it is extremely unlikely that the political forces in the country would change to such an extent as to allow the extreme reduction that Lind proposes. As to illegal immigration, while the annual flow might be reduced somewhat, only a kind of police-state surveillance, quite incompatible with the 'liberal-nationalist' values that Lind endorses, could achieve a level anywhere close to zero.

⁷ Benjamin Franklin, *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, &c.* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1775).

⁸ Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

⁹ Dinesh D'Souza has uncovered a remarkable contemporary passage describing turn-of-the-century immigrants: "hirsute, low-browed, big-faced persons of obviously low mentality...clearly they belong in skins, in wattled huts at the close of the great Ice Age." *The End of Racism; Principles for a Multiracial Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 137.

¹⁰ David E. Stannard, *American Holocaust, Columbus and the Conquest of the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 28.

¹¹ Henry F. Dobyns, *Native American Historical Demography, A Critical Bibliography* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, published for the Newberry Library, 1976).

¹² Calculated from *Population Projections*.

¹³ See Michael Lind's perceptive description of what it is that Americans share in common in chapter 7 of *The Next American Nation*.

¹⁴ Michael Lind, "Huddled Excesses" *The New Republic* (April 1, 1996).

¹⁵ My personal observations have been informed, and are confirmed, by a study of the student body at the University of California, Berkeley, coordinated by sociologist Troy Duster, *The Diversity Project: Final Report* (Berkeley, CA: Institute for the Study of Social Change, 1991).

¹⁶ Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Disuniting of America, Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (Knoxville: WhittleDirect Books, 1991). For an equally passionate attack on current American race relations see Jared Taylor, *Paved With Good Intentions, The Failure of Race Relations in Contemporary America* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1992).

¹⁷ See the extended discussion of the 'white riot' in California in the mid 1990s, in Dale Maharidge, *The Coming White Minority, California and America's Immigration Debate* (New York: Random House, 1996).

Response to *Is America Too White?*

PETER BRIMELOW

Careful readers of my question as cited by Professor Isbister at the beginning of his presentation will realize that it does not, in fact, suggest that America is “not white enough.” Nor did I make this argument anywhere in my book *Alien Nation*. I merely ask why the U.S. government has chosen to shift the ethnic balance — why, to paraphrase Bertolt Brecht’s poem after the 1952 anti-Communist rising in East Germany, the government is dissolving the people and electing another.

Despite this misreading, indicative of the blind emotions typical of immigration enthusiasts, I congratulate Professor Isbister on his paper, which is a great step forward in its frankness

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and honesty. In *Alien Nation*, I raised two unasked questions about immigration. The first was economic: Is the current influx necessary, in the sense that it does something for the native

born that they are unable to do for themselves? Free market immigration enthusiasts, such as my friends at the Cato Institute, are extremely reluctant to face this question, because they know it is in fact impossible to maintain that immigration is necessary — as distinct from the issue of whether or not it imposes a fiscal burden. (It does.) My second question, of course, is Why should America be transformed? Professor Isbister now provides an answer. He says that abolishing the historic American majority will mean that the equal racial groups will balance more harmoniously, and that the result will be more “fun.”

This is indeed an answer to my question and I think it is a splendid one. Now all that remains is to go to the American people and ask them if they agree with it.

Because they have not been asked until now.

I do have certain technical disagreements with Professor Isbister. I don’t think he makes clear

enough that there was nothing implicit in the American demographic situation as of 1965 that would have caused the subsequent shift in the racial balance. This is simply the continuing repercussions of the immigration unleashed by the 1965 Immigration Act. Some 40 percent of Hispanics and 75 percent of Asians now present in the U.S. are foreign-born. And the projections that Professor Isbister cites depend critically upon the assumption that these new groups will continue their Third World fertility rates — in other words, that they will not have assimilated to the American norm more than half a century into the future.

I also think that it is simply intellectual escapism, albeit of a fashionable kind, to claim that race is merely a “social construct.” Although usually tactfully unmentioned in the immigration debate, the plain fact is that the entire trend of recent science, from *The Bell Curve* to the Human Genome Project, is in the opposite direction.

I think that is simply wrong to believe, as Professor Isbister does, that “it is a global phenomenon; the races are getting mixed up.” While researching *Alien Nation*, we contacted every major immigrant-sending country and asked them how we, as American citizens, could immigrate to them. They literally laughed at us. It is practically impossible for Americans to immigrate to Mexico, for example. The Indians asked us “Are you of Indian heritage?” — not citizenship, we had already specified we were Americans. They’re running a Brown India Policy over there, to match the old White Australia Policy. Reciprocity in immigration policy simply does not exist. You only find the races getting “mixed up” in First World countries run by guilty white liberals.

Finally, I think it is simply absurd to claim that current policy cannot be reversed. It would be a simple matter to shift the racial balance back, by favoring immigrants from America’s traditional European homelands. Indeed, something of the sort was implemented after the cut-off of the 1920s. I do not advocate this policy — I favor a moratorium while Americans are consulted — but I can’t see that it is any more illegitimate than Professor Isbister’s support for the opposite course.

In contradistinction to Professor Isbister, it seems to me a matter of historical fact that America is a nation like the great nations of Europe — an ethno-cultural community, not entirely ethnic but not entirely cultural either. Anyone doubting this should look at exactly who it

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was who signed the Declaration of Independence and convened in Philadelphia. The only difference is that a process of nation-building through incremental assimilation that in Europe took two thousand years was accomplished here in two hundred.

This is no mere theoretical issue. It goes to the roots of American order. America evolved, it was not merely put together by accepting anyone who agreed to sign on some creedal bottom line. It cannot be held together that way now. Nation-demolition can also be accomplished quickly. This is the danger that the U.S. now faces.

I can suggest a number of objections to Professor Isbister’s answer.

First, as is usually the case with immigration enthusiasts, he celebrates immigration in principle, not immigration in practice — the workings of the 1965 Immigration Act, as amended. He does not answer the question: why this par-

ticular immigration — why so unskilled? So heavily Spanish-speaking? So many Filipinos and so few Japanese? So many Hispanics and so few Africans?

Second, he doesn’t reckon with the argument, developed at length in *Alien Nation*, that tension increases precisely when racial groups are most diverse, particularly when hegemony appears to be up for grabs. It was the sudden chance to seize power that disrupted the diverse societies of Yugoslavia, Cyprus and the Caucasus when the former hegemon vanished. The situation will be particularly unstable in the U.S. because immigration will be continuously shifting the ethnic balance. Professor Isbister proposes to base society upon a demographic rolling log.

Third, he appears not to realize that the 1990 Census showed native-born Americans, both black and white, voting against “fun” with their U-Haul trucks. Immigrants replaced the native-born in the immigrant-impacted states on an almost one-for-one basis. And the native-born fled to quite different areas: the whites to the Pacific Northwest, the Midwest, the white areas of the South; the blacks to the great black metropolises of the South — Atlanta, Washington, D.C. etc. The country is polarizing ethnically in response to this enormous influx.

Fourthly, he fails to appreciate that immigration is confronting America with a spectacular form of Pascal’s wager. There has never been a case of a sovereign state undergoing this kind of transformation in the entire history of the world. He assures us it will be “fun.” But the question must be: why take the risk?

Response to *Is America Too White?*

LINDA CHAVEZ

I find the whole debate about whether or not America is becoming too white a totally bizarre phenomenon, and I say it's bizarre because I, quite frankly, can't figure out what people are even talking about in terms of these categories because I think they are largely meaningless. The term "white" presumably includes people from a Swedish background and a Sicilian background, and yet anybody who stood up and put a Swede next to a Sicilian would be able to see very significant physical differences between the two.

What these figures presume is much in the same sense of the one-drop rule that was applied in the pre-Civil Rights days in the South.

So how we even define the term "white" is important — interestingly, certain segments of the left and certain segments of the right have pushed this debate onto the public consciousness in ways that have not always been useful. The Left, presumably wishing to promote an idea of a multiracial, multiethnic, multicultural society in which there is no such thing as an American culture; and certain segments of the Right being concerned about some sort of ethnic purity that in some way might be tainted by people of darker skin.

So I think that when you look at the figures that are often tallied for how we are becoming a less white as a society, what these figures presume is much in the same sense of the one-drop rule that was applied in the pre-Civil Rights days in the South, that if one has one drop of non-Northern European blood, that makes one not white. And it presumes that there is no real biological assimilation going on when, in fact, what the census tells us is that there is considerable biological assimilation, people intermarry and produce offspring of a multiethnic background; among third generations, U.S.-born Mexican-Americans, among the youngest cohort of that population, about half of those persons marry non-Hispanic whites. Among Asians the numbers are equivalent or higher.

We're making a great leap when we look at all of these figures related to race and ethnicity, and presume that somehow the children of these intermarrying persons are somehow going to be less white or somehow culturally different. I think we're making a great leap.

And I'm talking about this not just in terms of scholarship. I stand before you, Linda Chavez, the daughter of a man whose parents and ancestors for 400 years had lived in New Mexico, came originally from Spain, from a small town in Estremadura, Spain, and settled in northern New Mexico; and a mother whose ancestors came from England and from Ireland. I married a Jewish man whose grandparents immigrated from Russia and Poland. My children are one-quarter Hispanic by census definition. My oldest son is now married, and has produced for me a beautiful granddaughter. He married a girl whose ancestors came from England, Scotland, and from Germany.

Now, Professor Isbister's paper would suggest that that granddaughter of mine is somehow less white than his children, and all of those who are promoting this idea that we are becoming less white, less European, can do so only by ignoring the fact of intermarriage and the children of these intermarriages.

Now, having said that, it is clear that there's also the question of cultural assimilation. And as we heard from Professor Patterson, in fact, if you look, it's not just Cuban-Americans, 90 percent of whose American-born offspring speak English; it is also Mexican-Americans, it is also all the various groups from Asia.

If you look at the language patterns of those persons born in the United States, they tend not to be bilingual, but English monolingual. A majority of third generation Mexican-Americans speak English as not just their first language but their only language. They have, in fact, assimilated.

Professor Isbister mentions the phenomena on college campuses in the way in which groups divide up. I've brought with me a study done at the University of California at

Berkeley called "The Diversity Project Study." It's a very interesting document because it talks about precisely this phenomenon.

A majority of newer generation Mexican-Americans speak English as not just their first language but their only language. They have, in fact, assimilated.

It was done by liberals on campus; it was done as part of their assessment of affirmative action. And what they describe is, yes, indeed, that kind of ethnic conclave forming on campus. But when they talked to the stu-

dents in interviews, what they found is that most of the Asian students and most of the Chicano students at Cal-Berkeley had come from suburban, integrated communities, had attended schools in which whites were the majority, and only when they came to Cal and

after lots of indoctrination by their professors, did their ethnic identity emerge.

It was, in fact, a political process, the process of identifying as a member of a distinct ethnic group came through politicization; it did not come through some culture being transmitted. Yes, in one sense we are a multiethnic, multiracial society. We have, as part of American culture, strains from many, many different nations in the world, from many different backgrounds, but to ignore the fact that there is such a thing as American culture and that that American culture can and is being transmitted and will continue to be transmitted to the children and the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren of immigrants who come from different racial and ethnic backgrounds is to ignore what is a very powerful assimilative attraction in this nation.

PETER SKERRY

DO WE REALLY WANT IMMIGRANTS TO ASSIMILATE?

A few years ago Nathan Glazer posed the question: “Is Assimilation Dead?” His answer was yes, more or less — certainly as a national ideal or policy objective, though he stressed that assimilation remains an ongoing social process.¹

While I certainly agree with Glazer that assimilation persists as a social reality, I strongly disagree that it is dead as a national ideal or policy objective. To be sure, assimilation is moribund among many of our elites, especially ethnic, racial, and minority group leaders. But as an animating force in our communities and in our national life, assimilation is alive and well.

I base this judgement not only on the available social science evidence (some of which I will review here), but also on the views and opinions of ordinary Americans whom I encounter as I travel about the country. I would also point

Indeed, if Americans better understood the process of assimilation, they might well ask for something else.

to Peter Salins’s recently published and widely noted *Assimilation, American Style*.² That Salins, an academic economist, wrote this book

under the auspices of the Manhattan Institute and the New Republic attests to the persistence of the assimilation idea even among some of our elites.

Yet if assimilation endures as an idea, it is a very confused and muddled one. “Assimilation” has become part of the liturgy of our civil religion, and like any liturgy, we repeat it without often pausing to consider what we mean by it. I will argue here that when Americans say they want immigrants to assimilate, they may know what they want, but they don’t understand the concept or its place in our history. Indeed, if Americans better understood the process of assimilation, they might well ask for something else.

This confusion is highlighted by the contradictory assertions we hear about the assimilation of newcomers. Immigrant leaders and advocates claim that America is a racist society that

will not allow “people of color” to become part of the mainstream of American life. Alternatively, it is argued that assimilation of such individuals into that mainstream is an insidious process that robs them of their history and self-esteem. No one ever bothers to explain how both claims can be true.

Echoing immigrant leaders, nativists and restrictionists also argue that today’s newcomers are not assimilating. Yet as I will argue here, there is abundant evidence that they are. How can so many Americans be mistaken about such a relatively easily verified and fundamental aspect of our national life?

What I propose to do here is to scrutinize what is typically understood by the term assimilation and then contrast it with a more adequate conceptualization of the process. I will be particularly concerned to highlight how assimilation has been bowdlerized such that we conceive of it as a benign step toward social peace and harmony, when in fact it generates new social problems and strains.

If you were to ask the average person on the street what is meant by “assimilation,” he or she would say something about immigrants fitting into American society without creating undue problems for themselves or for those already here. In *Assimilation, American Style* Peter Salins presents a considerably more thoughtful, though in my opinion incorrect, version of this common sense view of assimilation.³ Salins argues that an implicit contract has historically defined assimilation in America. As he puts it: “Immigrants would be welcome as full members in the American family if they agreed to abide by three simple precepts”:

First, they had to accept English as the national language.

Second, they were expected to live by what is commonly referred to as the Protestant work ethic (to be self-reliant, hardworking, and morally upright).

Third, they were expected to take pride in their American identity and believe in America's liberal democratic and egalitarian principles.⁴

Though hardly exhaustive, these three criteria certainly get at what most Americans would consider essential to successful assimilation. But let me examine these more closely.

English as the National Language

It is not at all clear what Salins means when he insists that immigrants should "accept English as the national language." He apparently opposes designating English as the nation's official language. Yet Salins seems to have much more in mind than immigrants just learning to speak English, which is what most Americans focus on. Unfortunately, he never really elaborates.

Many Latino politicians and public figures grew up speaking only English and have subsequently learned Spanish in order to maintain leadership of a growing immigrant community.

Perhaps Salins understands that one can speak English but nevertheless remain attached to a second language. For example, the evidence is that immigrants and especially their children learn to speak English (even if they don't necessarily learn to write it).⁵ Yet battles over English acquisition persist. Why?

One reason is that English typically replaces the language of one's immigrant parents and grandparents. As a result, linguistic assimilation sometimes fuels efforts to regain the language and heritage that has been lost. I am reminded of a young Mexican-American I met in Corpus Christi, Texas. Having just completed his first semester at Yale, this young man was pleased to be at home for the Christmas holidays and eager to tell an Anglo visitor from back East about his Mexican heritage. Since he had grown up a hundred and fifty miles from the Mexican border, I assumed this fellow was more or less fluent in Spanish. So, when I happened to inquire, I was surprised to hear him suddenly lower his voice. No, he replied, he did not speak Spanish, but he considered the language a critical part of the Mexican culture he fervently wanted to hold onto. And for this reason, I was

assured, he would see to it that his future children would learn Spanish before English. Shortly thereafter, we parted. So I never had the chance to ask him how he intended to teach his children a language he himself did not speak.⁶

It's easy to poke fun at this fellow, but efforts to recapture parts of a heritage that have been lost do not reflect mere adolescent confusion. Many Latino politicians and public figures grew up speaking only English and have subsequently learned Spanish in order to maintain their leadership of a growing immigrant community.

A more subtle and intriguing example is the career of Selena, the Tejano singer who has emerged as a cultural icon among Mexican Americans since being murdered by a fan two years ago. The tragedy of Selena was that having conquered the Spanish-language Tejano music world, she died just as she was about to cross over to the English-language market. The irony is that Selena was raised (in Corpus Christi, it so happens) speaking English and had to learn Spanish in order to become a Tejano star.

Further evidence that English acquisition does not necessarily lead to the positive outcomes we expect emerges from recent ethnographic research on the school performance of Latino adolescents. Several such studies report that although newly arrived students experience significant adjustment problems attributable to their rural backgrounds, inadequate schooling, and poor English-language skills, their typically positive attitudes contribute to relative academic success. Yet among Latino students born in the United States, the opposite is often the case. Despite fluency in English and familiarity with American schools, many such students are prone to adopt an adversarial stance toward school and adopt a cynical anti-achievement ethic.⁷

My point here is obviously not that learning English is to be avoided. But insofar as it reflects assimilation into contemporary minority youth culture, English acquisition is not an un-mixed blessing. In the words of one veteran high school teacher, "As the Latino students become more American, they lose interest in their school work . . . They become like the others, their attitudes change."⁸

Living by the Protestant Ethic

As for the Protestant work ethic of self-reliance, hard work, and moral rectitude, there is

certainly evidence that some immigrants have been adopting it. A recent study by the Rand Corporation reveals that Japanese, Korean, and Chinese immigrants enter with wages much lower than those of native-born workers, but within 10 to 15 years these newcomers have reached parity with the native-born. On the other hand, Mexican immigrants enter with very low wages and experience a persistent wage gap relative to the native-born, even after differences in education are taken into account.⁹

Now it is not at all clear why Mexican immigrants experience this persistent gap. The Rand researchers who identified it cite several possible causes: the Mexicans' quality of education, their English language skills, wage penalties experienced by illegal aliens, and discrimination. The Rand researchers also mention "cultural differences in attitudes toward work,"¹⁰ which of course speaks directly to Salins's criterion. Yet the fact is that we just don't know why Mexican immigrants are faring much worse than others.

Among immigrants generally, there are other trouble signs. For example, welfare participation rates among immigrants have been climbing in recent years, though overall they are currently about the same as among non-immigrants.¹¹ Some immigrants are clearly involved in criminal activities, though to what degree is subject to dispute.¹² Such indicators are indeed troubling. But along with the ethnographic findings about Latino adolescents cited above, they suggest that immigrants and their children are assimilating — but not always to the best aspects of American society.

Believing in America's Liberal Democratic Principles

Salins's third assimilation criterion — taking pride in American identity and believing in our liberal democratic and egalitarian values — has long been a difficult one for immigrants to satisfy. For the most part, however, the problem has been not with immigrants, but with native-born Americans' perceptions of them.

The assimilation of newcomers has long been characterized by the emergence of new ethnic group identities in response to conditions in America. The classic example, of course, is how earlier this century European peasants left their villages thinking of themselves as Sicilians, Neapolitans, and the like, but after arriving here

gradually came to regard themselves as they were regarded by Americans — as Italians. Later, they, or more likely their children and grandchildren, came to see themselves as Italian-Americans. Yet the fact that these group identities were stages in the assimilation process was lost on most native-born Americans, who condemned "hyphenated Americans" and considered such group identities as a fundamental affront to America's regime of individual rights.

Similarly today, immigrants from Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia, and other Spanish-speaking countries do not come to the United States thinking of themselves as "Hispanics" or "Latinos." That is a category and a label that has come into existence here in the United States. And just as with European-origin groups earlier this century, Americans are troubled by this assertion of group identity and fail to understand it as one step in the assimilation process.¹³

Still, there is one important difference between group categories like Italians earlier this century and Hispanics today. For the latter designates a racial minority group (as when we refer to "whites, blacks, and Hispanics") that is entitled to the same extraordinary benefits — affirmative action and the Voting Rights Act — that black Americans have been granted. These are group-based claims of an extraordinary and unprecedented nature about which Americans have reason to be anxious.

But, once again, such group claims are in response to conditions here in the United States, specifically the incentives offered by our post-civil rights political institutions. To focus on one immigrant group, Mexican Americans, I would urge you to consider the simple fact that Mexicans in Mexico do not agitate for the Voting Rights Act and affirmative action. Mexicans engage in such efforts only here in the United States, and they do so because our institutions encourage them to. Perhaps even more to the point, such institutions and programs, originally established in response to the demands of black Americans, have been crafted by our political elites in the name of the very same liberal democratic and egalitarian values that Salins invokes.

Immigrants and their children are assimilating — but not always to the best aspects of American society.

Assimilation Is Multidimensional

This commentary on Salins's three criteria leads to three overarching points about assimilation. The first is that assimilation is a multidimensional process. This point was made more than 30 years ago by sociologist Milton Gordon in his classic study, *Assimilation in American Life*.¹⁴ Yet academic and popular commentators alike continue to talk about whether this or that group will "assimilate," as if assimila-

What makes political sense for immigrants is often at odds with their cultural, social, and economic circumstances.

tion were a single, coherent process when, in fact, it has several different dimensions — economic, social, cultural, and political. Even when these different facets of assimilation are acknowl-

edged, they are typically depicted as parts of a smoothly synchronized process that proceeds in lock-step fashion. In particular, it is typically assumed that the social, economic, or cultural assimilation of immigrants leads directly to their political assimilation, by which is invariably meant traditional ethnic politics as practiced by European immigrants at the beginning of this century.

But as Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan observed many years ago in *Beyond the Melting Pot*, what makes sociological or economic sense for a group does not necessarily make political sense.¹⁵ Certainly today, what makes political sense for immigrants is often at odds with their cultural, social, and economic circumstances. Take the situation of Mexican Americans, which term I use loosely to include all Mexican-origin individuals living in the United States. As I have indicated above, there is evidence that Mexican Americans are having problems making economic advances. Nevertheless, there are other indicators — of English-acquisition, of residential mobility, of intermarriage — demonstrating that Mexican Americans are assimilating socially, culturally, and to some extent even economically.¹⁶ In other words, the evidence on Mexican-American progress is mixed and, as I have already suggested, our understanding of the underlying dynamics is limited.

In order to advance politically, however, Mexican-American leaders downplay or even deny signs of progress and emphasize their group's problems. More specifically, these leaders define their group as a racial minority that has suf-

fered the same kind of systematic discrimination as have black Americans. However regrettable and divisive, this political stance is hardly irrational. Indeed, it is a response to the incentives of our post-civil rights institutions, which have brought us to the point where our political vocabulary has only one way of talking about disadvantage — in terms of race. The resulting irony is that even though Mexican Americans are assimilating along various dimensions much as other immigrants have, their political assimilation is following a very different and highly divisive path.

Assimilation Is Not Irreversible

The second point to be made about assimilation is that it is not necessarily an irreversible process. To be "assimilated" is not to have arrived at some sociological steady state. Or to borrow from historian Russell Kazal, assimilation is not "a one-way ticket to modernity."¹⁷ The assimilated can and frequently do "deassimilate," if you will. I have already offered the example of language, of how linguistically assimilated Mexican Americans who speak only English reassert the importance of Spanish in their own and in their children's lives.

As sociologist John Stone has noted: "There is a dialectic of fission and fusion that marks the ethnic history of most eras."¹⁸ Indeed, assimilation is not a simple linear progression, but one that moves back and forth across the generations. As historian Marcus Lee Hansen put it succinctly: "What the son wishes to forget the grandson wishes to remember."¹⁹ However flawed as a precise predictor of generational differences within specific ethnic groups, Hansen's basic insight remains valid: the process of assimilation is a dialectical one.²⁰

A case in point is intermarriage. Social scientists and laymen alike point to intermarriage as one of the most — if not *the* most — telling indices of social assimilation. (I myself did so above, when highlighting evidence of Mexican-American assimilation.) Yet when we cite these data for such purposes, we make large and not always justified assumptions about how the offspring of such unions will identify themselves, or be identified by others. For example, we point to black-white intermarriage as an indicator of a desirable amalgamation of the races. And to be sure, in this spirit the children of some such marriages now refer to themselves not as black or white, but as multiracial.

Yet their numbers are small, and the fact remains that most such individuals tend to see themselves, and are seen by others, as black.²¹

Another example of the dialectic of assimilation can be seen in the findings of the Diversity Project, a research effort at the University of California at Berkeley. Project interviewers were particularly concerned to delve into how minority undergraduates identified themselves ethnically and racially before and after they arrived at Berkeley. Despite evident differences across groups, it is striking how many such students described themselves in high school as having so assimilated into majority Anglo environments that they did not think of themselves as minority group members. It is only at Berkeley where such individuals begin to see themselves differently.

The situation of Mexican-American students at Berkeley is particularly instructive. Though predominantly from working-class backgrounds, they typically speak no Spanish and are described as products of “sheltered secondary education.” One undergraduate, who had never thought of herself as “a minority” or “a Mexican” before arriving at Berkeley, recounted her surprise when she got introduced as a classmate’s “Mexican friend.” Another such student reported that the word “Chicano” was not one that she was familiar with, growing up in a predominantly Anglo community in San Luis Obispo. Another student complained to the Berkeley researchers that the student body at his Jesuit high school in Los Angeles was “pretty white washed,” that most of the Chicano students there spoke “perfect English,” and that he and they were “pretty much assimilated.” One other undergraduate, referring to his identity as a Mexican American, described himself as having been “born again here at Berkeley.”²²

I am struck that the rapid assimilation experienced by these students parallels what I have found in my field research throughout the Southwest. In the impoverished Rio Grande Valley, right next to the Mexican border, a prominent Mexican-American physician and Democratic activist expressed dismay that his grown children “think like Dallas Republicans.” In the barrios of Los Angeles, a persistent complaint is that Mexican grandmothers who speak little English have a hard time communicating with their grandchildren, who speak no Spanish.²³ I have heard young Mexican Americans repeatedly criticize their parents for raising them to

be ignorant of their Mexican heritage.²⁴ Contrary to much of what we hear today, for many, though not all, Mexican Americans social and cultural assimilation are so thoroughgoing and rapid, the result is often a backlash, especially among the young and well educated who, like the Yale student from Corpus Christi, want desperately to recapture what they have lost, or perhaps never even had.

Assimilation Is Conflictual

The third and final point I wish to make about assimilation is that it is fraught with tension, competition, and conflict. I offered a glimpse of this when I earlier focused on the emergence of ethnic groups as part of the assimilation process. Whether we’re talking about Italians yesterday or Hispanics today, such group identities in part signal the efforts of immigrants and their offspring to secure their place in America. Such efforts have in our history almost always been contentious. It is difficult to imagine that they could be otherwise.

Stanford sociologist Susan Olzak provides systematic evidence for this assertion. Based on her study of 77 immigrant-impacted American cities from 1877 to 1914, Olzak rejects the conventional view that intergroup conflict is caused by segregation. Instead, she argues that intergroup competition and conflict resulted from occupational *desegregation*.²⁵ In other words, tensions are caused not by the isolation of ethnic immigrant groups but by the weakening of boundaries and barriers between groups.

Olzak’s perspective is consistent with the findings of Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab in *The Politics of Unreason*. In that study of right-wing extremism, Lipset and Raab report that anti-immigrant nativism in the United States has

Anti-immigrant nativism in the United States has had as much to do with the social strains of urbanization as with anxieties associated with economic contraction.

had as much to do with the social strains of urbanization and industrialization as with anxieties associated with economic contraction. For example, both the Know-Nothings of the 1850s and the immigration restrictionists of the 1920s flourished during periods of prosperity.²⁶

Thus, it is during periods of growth when individuals have greater opportunities to break beyond previously established group boundaries.

But opportunities for more interaction also lead to opportunities for more conflict. The sociologist Kurt Lewin made this point many years ago about the consequences of advances made by Jews.²⁷ The historian John Higham has similarly noted that the remarkable economic advances made by Jews in post-Civil War America resulted in the harsh social discrimination they then encountered.²⁸ More recently political scientists Bruce Cain and Roderick Kiewiet point out that while claims of *economic* discrimination decline steadily from first- to second- to third-generation Latinos, claims of *social* discrimination increase.²⁹ Apparently, Latino economic advances lead to increased social contacts with non-Latinos and hence more occasions for friction. Once again, we are reminded that assimilation is a multidimensional process in which gains along one dimension may not be neatly paralleled by progress along others.

Cain and Kiewiet's cross-generational finding should remind us that much of what drives the tension and conflict associated with assimilation concerns the varying expectations of first,

[In] today's post-civil rights environment, the problems and obstacles experienced by immigrants are now routinely attributed to racial discrimination. This racialization of immigration has fundamentally altered the contours of public discourse.

second, and third generation immigrants. A virtual truism of the immigration literature is that the real challenges to the receiving society arise not with the relatively content first generation, who compare their situation with what was left behind, but with the second and third generations, whose much higher expectations reflect their upbringing in their parents' adopted home.

Thus, economist Michael Piore, a longtime student of migration, traces the labor unrest of the 1930s to the aspirations and discontents of second-generation European immigrants to America.³⁰ This dynamic is hardly limited to foreign migrants. For Piore also points out that it was not black migrants from the South who rioted in Northern U.S. cities during the 1960's, but their children — that is, the second generation.³¹

In light of the foregoing, Peter Salins is profoundly wrong when he asserts:

The greatest danger looming for the United States is interethnic conflict, the scourge of almost all other nations with ethnically diverse populations. Assimilation has been our country's secret weapon in defusing such conflict before it occurs . . .³²

To be sure, in the long term Salins is correct. But in the short and medium term he is wrong. As should by now be evident, the assimilation of newcomers and their families into American society has typically resulted in group competition and conflict. Moreover, today's post-civil rights political institutions transform the inevitable discontents generated by assimilation into divisive racial minority grievances.

Conclusion

We Americans seem to have a very difficult time grasping the contentious nature of assimilation. There are several reasons for our collective obtuseness on this point. On the one hand, immigration restrictionists focus exclusively on the strife occasioned by mass immigration throughout our history.³³ Indeed, restrictionists are so obsessed with this aspect of immigration that they overlook the fact that immigrants did assimilate and the nation survived and even prospered.

On the other hand, immigration enthusiasts go to the opposite extreme. They focus exclusively on the successful outcome of mass immigration and totally ignore the discord and dissension along the way. For example, reading Salins one would never know that our history has been marked by riots both by and against immigrants. For that matter one would never know that Catholic schools, which Salins correctly argues today promote assimilation, were nevertheless originally established by nineteenth-century churchmen to forestall the assimilation of Catholics.³⁴

My point is that both sides of this debate ignore precisely what I am arguing — that assimilation and conflict go hand in hand.

But there is another reason why we Americans have such difficulty confronting these conflicts. As I have already indicated, in today's post-civil rights environment, the problems and obstacles experienced by immigrants are now routinely attributed to racial discrimination. This racialization of immigration has fundamentally altered the contours of public discourse. On the

one hand, because the accepted explanation for any negative response to immigrants is “racism,” many reasonable and fair-minded individuals who might otherwise be tempted to disagree with immigration enthusiasts have been scared away from the topic. On the other hand, because racialization posits a community of interest between black Americans and immigrants who are “people of color,” obvious competition and conflict between black Americans and immigrants (especially the sizeable Hispanic population) has been downplayed, ignored, or simply denied. In other words, today’s post-civil rights ideology allows us to high-mindedly rule such group competition and conflict out of bounds — such that they are not topics suitable for serious inquiry.

What can be done about this situation? To begin, we need to get beyond the romance of immigration enthusiasts as well as the melodrama of immigration alarmists. We need to introduce a sense of realism about how we think about these issues and to face up to the turmoil and strains that mass immigration imposes on our society, particularly in this post-civil rights era.

I am reminded of Robert Park, whose research on ethnic and race relations pioneered the field of sociology at the University of Chicago earlier this century. Writing to a former associate in the wake of the 1943 Detroit race riot, Park commented: “I am not quite clear in my mind that I am opposed to race riots. The thing that I am opposed to is that the Negro should always lose.”³⁵ Here are the basic elements of Park’s “race relations cycle,” which took competition and conflict (and then accommodation and finally assimilation) as the inevitable outcomes of group contact. For all the criticisms that have been directed against Park’s perspective³⁶, it had the singular virtue of realism.³⁷

By contrast, today we recoil in hand-wringing dismay when legal immigrants are deprived of welfare benefits. Or we cry racism when illegal aliens are ferociously beaten by law enforcement officers. Such responses may be humane and generous-minded, but they are utterly lacking in the realism of which I speak. Do we honestly believe that millions of poor, disenfran-

chised immigrants can be introduced into a dynamic, competitive social and political system without their interests being at risk? If so, we bear an uncomfortable resemblance to an enthusiastic but imprudent football coach who allows inexperienced players with poor training and equipment onto the field and then reacts with surprise and shock when they get injured.

Park likened migration to war in its potential for simultaneously fostering individual tragedy and societal progress.

More than just realism, Park affords us a sense of the tragic dimensions of immigration. William James, one of Park’s teachers, once wrote that “progress is a terrible thing.” In that same spirit, Park likened migration to war in its potential for simultaneously fostering individual tragedy and societal progress.

French philosopher Jacques Maritain made a similar point about immigration in his short volume, *Reflections on America*. Writing in the 1950s when intellectuals, especially French intellectuals, were prone to criticize America as a soulless bourgeois nation, Maritain disagreed. Indeed, he argued that our experience as a nation of immigrants accounts for “our bruised souls,” which afford us special insight into the human condition.³⁸

As in war, the outcome of the immigration we are now experiencing is difficult to discern. And this is precisely what is most lacking in the continuing debate over immigration — an appreciation of the powerful forces with which we are dealing. We have heard much in recent months about the daunting experiment we have embarked upon with welfare reform. Yet our immigration policy is arguably a social experiment of even greater import — with enormous potential benefits, but also enormous risks. None of us knows for sure how these millions of newcomers will affect the United States. Easy answers about computer scientists and welfare cheats don’t begin to help us address the enormity of this issue. And neither do ill-informed notions about assimilation.

NOTES

¹ Nathan Glazer, "Is Assimilation Dead?" *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (Vol. 530, November 1993), 122-136.

² Peter D. Salins, *Assimilation, American Style* (New York: A New Republic Book/Basic Books, 1997).

³ See my review of Salins's book: Peter Skerry, "We the Peoples," *New York Times Book Review* (April 27, 1997), 34.

⁴ Salins, 6.

⁵ For evidence on the English language acquisition of immigrants, see Gillian Stevens, "Immigration, Emigration, Language Acquisition, and the English Language Proficiency of Immigrants in the United States," in Barry Edmonston and Jeffrey S. Passell, eds., *Immigration and Ethnicity: The Integration of America's Newest Arrivals* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press, 1994), 163-185. For a caveat on the disparity between immigrant children's spoken and written English, see Lorraine M. McDonnell and Paul T. Hill, *Newcomers in American Schools: Meeting the Educational Needs of Immigrant Youth* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1993), 68.

⁶ This episode is drawn from my book *Mexican Americans: The Ambivalent Minority* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 3-4.

⁷ See Maria Eugenia Matute-Bianchi, "Ethnic Identities and Patterns of School Success and Failure Among Mexican-Descent and Japanese-American Students in a California High School: An Ethnographic Analysis," *American Journal of Education* (November 1986), 233-255. See also Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou, "The New Second Generation: Segmented Assimilation and Its Variants," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (Vol. 530, November 1993), 74-96; Carola and Marcelo Suarez-Orozco, *Transformations: Migration, Family Life, and Achievement Motivation among Latino Adolescents* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995); and Harriet Romo, "The Mexican Origin Population's Differing Perceptions of Their Children's Schooling," *Social Science Quarterly* (Vol. 65, No. 2; June 1984), 635-650.

⁸ Suarez-Orozco, *Transformations*, 6. Similar observations by teachers are reported in McDonnell and Hill, *Newcomers in American Schools*, 56-57.

⁹ Robert F. Schoeni et al., *The Mixed Economic Progress of Immigrants* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1996), xiv, 20-29, 34-64.

¹⁰ Schoeni, 58.

¹¹ See George J. Borjas, *Immigration and Welfare, 1970-1990*, Working Paper No. 4872 (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, September 1994).

¹² See Kristin F. Butcher and Anne Morrison Piehl, "Cross-City Evidence on the Relationship Between Immigration and Crime," Faculty Research Working Paper Series, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, September 1994; also Kristin F. Butcher and Anne Morrison Piehl, "Immigration and Incarceration," Faculty Research Working Paper Series, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, October 1995; and William F. McDonald, "Illegal Immigration: Crime Ramifications and Control (The American Experience)" in William F. McDonald, ed., *Crime and Law Enforcement in the Global Village* (forthcoming).

¹³ Even as sophisticated an observer as historian Arthur Schlesinger overlooks that such group identities have been as much a part of our history as individualism. See Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (Knoxville, TN: Whittle Direct Books, 1991). A much more satisfactory interpretation is presented in Arthur Mann, *The One and the Many: Reflections on the American Identity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979).

¹⁴ Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion and National Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 60-83.

¹⁵ Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City*, 2nd. ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970), xii-xiii.

- ¹⁶ See my *Mexican-Americans: The Ambivalent Minority*, especially 65-74. See also Gregory Rodriguez, *The Emerging Latino Middle Class* (Malibu, CA: Pepperdine University Institute for Public Policy, October 1996); and Dowell Myers et al., *The Changing Immigrants of Southern California*, Research Report No. LCRI-95-04R (Los Angeles: Lusk Center Research Institute, School of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Southern California, October 1995). On intermarriage specifically, see Barry Edmonston, "Ethnic Intermarriage in U.S. Population Projections" (Washington, DC: Panel on Demographic and Economic Impact of Immigration, National Academy of Sciences; January 15, 1996).
- ¹⁷ Russell A. Kazal, "Revisiting Assimilation: The Rise, Fall and Reappraisal of a Concept in American Ethnic History," *American Historical Review* (Vol. 100, No. 2; April 1995), 440.
- ¹⁸ John Stone, *Racial Conflict in Contemporary Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 90.
- ¹⁹ Marcus Lee Hansen, "The Problem of the Third Generation Immigrant," in Peter Kvisto and Dag Blanck, eds., *American Immigrants and Their Generations: Studies and Commentaries on the Hansen Thesis After Fifty Years* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 195.
- ²⁰ For critical appraisals of Hansen's thesis, see the essays in Kvisto and Blanck, eds., *American Immigrants and Their Generations*.
- ²¹ For some revealing survey data on how few black Americans define themselves multiracial, see Clyde Tucker et al., *Testing Methods of Collecting Racial and Ethnic Information: Results of the Current Population Survey Supplement on Race and Ethnicity*, Statistical Note Number 40 (Washington: Bureau of Labor Statistics, June 1996).
- ²² Tomas Almaguer et al., *The Diversity Project: An Interim Report to the Chancellor* (Berkeley, CA: Institute for the Study of Social Change, University of California, June 1990), 16-17, 62-66.
- ²³ Twenty years ago Leo Grebler and his colleagues at the Mexican-American Study Project heard the same complaint in the barrios of Los Angeles. See Leo Grebler et al., *The Mexican-American People: The Nation's Second Largest Minority* (New York: The Free Press, 1970), 429.
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- ²⁵ Susan Olzak, *The Dynamics of Ethnic Competition and Conflict* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 214.
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Response to Do We Really Want Immigrants to Assimilate?

LAWRENCE H. FUCHS

Peter Skerry's paper is a sobering reminder to those who need one that assimilation — while clearly more desirable than the absence of assimilation — is not without its problems. Even Peter Salins, whom Skerry accuses of being simplistic about the process of assimilation, wrote about the “exceedingly bumpy road of assimilation.” Contention is always one result of the struggle by immigrants to become incorporated in American economic and civic life. Even in Colonial times, there was so much tension between Germans and Scotch-Irish in eighteenth century Pennsylvania that the agents of that colony were instructed not to sell any more land to Scotch-Irishmen in the predominantly German counties of Lancaster and York

Peter Skerry seems to be saying to the rest of us: “Don't be so enthusiastic in your desire to assimilate immigrants. You may get what you want!”

and to pay those who were already there to move to the Cumberland Valley. Almost a century later, in 1846, the overwhelmingly Irish first ward and the German fourth ward in Buffalo voted 87 percent against a referendum proposition to enfranchise blacks, by far the largest majorities of any wards in the city.

Salins opens himself to Skerry's criticism by carelessly asserting that immigrants were generally welcomed and assimilated to the United States if they learned English, worked hard, and embraced the democratic liberal faith, as well as by writing that assimilation heads off conflict. There is not a single important immigrant historian who would agree with such oversimplified formulations. Skerry takes Salins to task for a carelessness that is easily contradicted by some of Salin's own discussion of the troubles between Irish immigrants and the native born.

By assimilation, Skerry means economic and civic incorporation. Immigrants who live in economic ethnic enclaves are not likely to speak English, leaflet for candidates or vote. Living within tight economic and social boundaries, they are unlikely to have much friction with oth-

ers. The Hasidic Jews, active in the politics and economics of New York City, have much edgier relationships with others than do the Old Order Amish, who live largely apart. Peter Skerry seems to be saying to the rest of us: “Don't be so enthusiastic in your desire to assimilate immigrants. You may get what you want!”

There is an apparent contradiction in his thinking. Skerry acknowledges that assimilation is better than non-assimilation, at least in the long run. But even in the short run, what seems to worry him most is that the American-born children of recent immigrants from Mexico and Central America may be failing to assimilate to the economic and civic institutions and systems of the wider society. Many fail because they are acculturating to values and social behaviors that inhibit incorporation, mobility, and boundary crossing. He is concerned about first-generation American-born Hispanics who disparage such values as academic achievement, even when they speak English. Such youngsters pull away from their grandparents' values, ones that emphasized religion, family cohesiveness (including respect for elders), and hard work, even as some of them glorify “la raza” in their repudiation of a new American identity.

The population Skerry studies most closely, Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans, travels a road that is much bumpier than the one taken by most other immigrant groups. Mexican immigrants tend to have lower educational and other skills and greater difficulty in acquiring the effective use of English than members of most other groups. Compared to most others, legal immigrants from Mexico and Central America are linked to patterns of illegal migration and have a much higher proportion of sojourners among them. These factors retard economic and civic incorporation. They also erode family cohesion, thereby making healthy, successful participation in the economic and civic life of the larger society more difficult.

One indication of civic incorporation is naturalization. Immigrants from Mexico and Central American, along with other sojourners (e.g. French-Canadians) lag behind Asian immigrants in naturalization rates. Perhaps this is why Skerry says that “taking pride in Ameri-

can identity and believing in our liberal democratic egalitarian values has long been a difficult [criterion] for immigrants to satisfy.” But historically, the children and grandchildren of Mexican immigrants have not lagged in their

Immigrants and their children are free to be ethnic or not, as they make choices in their lives based on individual rights despite the efforts of professional ethnic group leaders to push group rights.

American patriotism. I am reminded of Ernesto Galarza, who in 1943 reacted to an attempt by his opponents to smear him as un-American by asking: “Can’t they see? I love this country in a way that people don’t if they are born here.” The patriotism of Mexican-Americans

during the Second World War was rewarded with a stunning distribution of Congressional Medals of Honor and other awards. One also thinks of Sergeant Jimmy Lopez, one of the American hostages held in Iran in 1980, who wrote on the wall of the room where he was imprisoned: “Viva el rojo, blanco e azul!” (Long live the red, white, and blue!) In this respect, the children and grandchildren of Mexican immigrants who settled in the United States have behaved no differently than the children and grandchildren of other immigrants. The best example may be the Nisei who fought so patriotically during the Second World War against Germany and Japan. But that was fifty years ago, and Skerry probably is concerned about more recent immigrants when he writes that it is difficult to satisfy the criterion of taking pride in American identity.

He may well be right about that, certainly compared to 50 years ago. But newly naturalized Asian immigrants commonly express patriotic sentiments about the United States. I have found that to be true of immigrants from East and West Africa, having interviewed fifty-two of them in Washington, D.C. in the last five years. They love assimilation to the American market system and civic culture, and they speak affirmatively of opportunities to participate in the economic and civic life of this country. When asked what they like best about the United States, they invariably say “freedom and opportunity,” and explain in some detail what they mean. When asked what they like least about the United States, they just as frequently refer to the difficulties they have in disciplining their children, or about their fear of random violence in the streets. They are culturally conservative and worry about the acculturation of their children to the values of young-

sters who do not respect the authority of parents or schoolteachers. It is an old American story. It is not assimilation that causes tension between parents and children, but acculturation to a much more individualistic society in which children not only have rights but easily detach themselves from family controls.

Mexican immigrants were included in a *USA Today*/CNN/Gallop poll of 732 immigrants — a poll conducted in English — in June of 1995 that found that the vast majority of immigrants very much want to be Americans. In this first comprehensive national poll of immigrants, two-thirds of those surveyed said they would stay in the United States even if it were possible for them to live as well financially at home. More than two-thirds already were naturalized and of the remainder, fifty-eight percent were planning to become citizens. Six in ten said that it was better for immigrants to blend into American culture, even if that means giving up aspects of their own backgrounds. And ninety-three percent said that people who work hard to better themselves can get ahead in the United States. Quite surprisingly, two-thirds of the immigrants also said that only a few or none of the people they spend the most time with are immigrants from the same country.

“We are a great assimilating people,” said Oliver Wendell Holmes, and that is still true. Of course, Skerry is right: In the short run, efforts to assimilate engender conflict. But the main story line is that in the not-so-long run, identities are reconfigured by all kinds of boundary-crossing within the framework of a powerful civic culture. In this respect, Salins is right, and Skerry agrees with him. Immigrants and their children are free to be ethnic or not, as they make choices in their lives based on individual rights despite the efforts of professional ethnic group leaders to push group rights. Think of Tiger Woods, the great golfer. It was understandable that African-American leaders would claim him immediately as a new African-American hero, particularly in the fiftieth anniversary celebration year of Jackie Robinson’s breaking the color barrier in baseball. But Tiger Woods, in his affable, modest way, made it clear that he doesn’t want to be counted as a member of any one particular group. Pointing to his combined Caucasian, African, American Indian, Thai, and Chinese ancestries, he said that he invented a new ethnic group for himself called “Cablinasian.” The point of this story is that the rate of intermarriage for second and third generation Mexi-

can-Americans is high, as it is for third and fourth generation Japanese-Americans. In a society of freedom and opportunity, individuals will make choices to cross boundaries of many kinds, leading most of them to become integrated into the institutions of American society. They will do so as Americans because the nation is glued by faith in and the practice of individual rights. More than any other nation in history, we have been and continue to be able to incorporate newcomers into a continental free market economy and a broad civic culture based on individual rights and equal protection of the laws.

Peter Skerry is right in insisting that it is simple-minded not to think about the costs of assimilation and immigration. That is why it is important to have conferences such as this one on the importance of developing a policy of assimilation. There seems to be a fair amount of agreement at this conference that education for the effective use of English and for participation in the economic and political life of the nation is a good thing. I think there is also widespread acknowledgment that the United States needs to do much better in both respects. To help all of us lead richer lives and become better Americans, we need an English language and civics agenda that acknowledges the richness and value of cultural diversity but insists on paying even more attention to the requirements of the *unum* rather than to the demands of the *pluribus*. Peter Salins is right in arguing that we are not so much threatened as a nation by immigration as we are by dumbing down standards in schools, approaches to teaching English that are ineffective, ethnocentric multiculturalism, and a politics of group rights spuriously advanced in the name of civil rights. I would also add that the process of modernization weakens family cohesion and parental authority in ways that immigrants may see more clearly than the rest of us. Weak families, more than any other factor, predict poor school performance, trouble with the law, and other unhappy outcomes for America's young, whether they are the children of immigrants or not.

Having said that, we should beware of romantic immigrationists who ignore costs and anti-immigration alarmists who would deny the United States strong infusions of human capital whose contributions give it a handsome advantage in global economic compe-

tion and in advancing the human rights and democratic goals of American foreign policy. The long-term success of the immigrant story in American history should not blind us to the serious short-term problems that accompany assimilation. History is a process, as is assimilation itself, and the fact that every argument advanced against immigration today — the country is falling apart being one of them — has been made before, does not mean we should fail to listen to critics of immigration policy. And whether or not we admit 500,000 or 800,000 immigrants a year, we should not take successful assimilation for granted. My requirements for encouraging assimilation to a civic culture based on individual rights would include: a strong commitment to helping all youngsters learn to use English effectively; a similar commitment to devoting English language training resources to our immigrant population; an abandonment of ethnocentric multiculturalism in high schools and colleges, to be replaced by the study of other cultures to enlarge intellectual understanding and enhance cultural sensibilities; the gradual elimination of group rights based upon using membership in a designated beneficiary group as a proxy for disadvantage and victimization; the vigorous enforcement of civil rights law that protects all Americans in their fundamental rights regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, national origins, or other attributes of personal identity; the vigorous prosecution of hate crimes; reinforcement by government and civic leaders of an understanding of the American narrative as a continuing and largely successful struggle to advance human liberty and a celebration of the heroes and heroines of that narrative from all backgrounds; a welcome to all immigrants as members of our larger social community and potentially of our political community, a welcome which promises that if they obey the laws and pay taxes, they will be free men and women in a society of opportunity; and finally, a pledge that whatever laws provide safety net benefits to American citizens will also apply to the immigrants we admit to our country as members of a national social community and as potential citizens.

And whether or not we admit 500,000 or 800,000 immigrants a year, we should not take successful assimilation for granted.

Response to Do We Really Want Immigrants to Assimilate?

JOHN FONTE

American philosopher William James made an important distinction between tough-minded thinking and tender-minded thinking. Tough-minded thinking is realistic, it examines the hard choices that have to be made; tender-minded thinking avoids the difficult questions. Peter Skerry's paper is tough-minded in the best sense of the term. This paper presents a realistic analysis of issues that are rarely discussed with such candor.

Over the last twenty-five years American elites have redefined our core values and hence the American Creed.

I will begin by jumping into the heart of the matter and examining the idea of ideological assimilation. We are often told that America, unlike most nations, is a creedal nation. Therefore, to

become an American is to accept the American Creed — to believe in the American Idea of liberty, equality, individual rights, opportunity, democracy, and the like. At the same time, as Peter Skerry, Peter Salins, and innumerable analysts have observed, over the last 25 years American elites have redefined our core values and hence the American Creed. We now have group rights and group entitlements in the name of affirmative action, diversity programs, speech codes, and multilingual voting.

On this point, the tough-minded Peter Skerry challenges the more tender-minded Peter Salins when he notes that post-civil rights “institutions and programs, originally established in response to the demands of black Americans, have been crafted by our political elites in the name of the very liberal democratic and egalitarian values that Salins invokes.” But, in fact, the ideology of multiculturalism crafted by our elites is a rejection of both historical liberalism, which means individual rights, and historical democracy, which means rule by the *demos* (rule by the people), majority rule in some form.

In his new book, *We Are All Multiculturalists Now*, Nathan Glazer states that “the basic de-

mand of the multiculturalists” is for “inclusion under the same rules” that have governed our liberal democracy in the past. On the contrary, I suggest that multiculturalism is about changing the rules of American democracy. Listen to the leading practitioner of multicultural education in the U.S., he writes: “to create an authentic democratic *unum* with moral authority and perceived legitimacy, the *pluribus* (diverse peoples) must negotiate and share power.” Surely, “negotiation and power sharing among diverse peoples” are not the rules that have governed American liberal democracy, but an updated version of the Austro-Hungarian empire.

Multiculturalism suggests that the basis of citizenship is the group that one is born into (race, ethnicity, gender) — not individual citizenship. Multiculturalism is not a new version of traditional ethnic ticket-balancing, New York style. The old multi-ethnic balanced ticket (“Goldberg for governor, O’Brien for attorney-general, Antonelli for senator”) was based on the goal of going to the electorate and winning a majority: on the other hand, multiculturalism is based on proportional representation for ascribed groups regardless of elections (thus feminists complain that women are underrepresented in an elected U.S. Congress because they comprise less than 10 percent of that popularly chosen body instead of more than 50 percent or their percentage of the population).

Dr. Skerry's paper notes that many young people of Latino and Asian descent at Yale, Berkeley, and elsewhere are being assimilated, but unfortunately it is the wrong type of assimilation — they are being assimilated into the ideology of multiculturalism. Even Skerry's discussion of “desassimilation” is, in a sense, really an examination of how second and third generation Latinos are radicalized at elite universities and thus “assimilated” into multicultural ideology.

So, what is to be done? We should promote civic assimilation or patriotic assimilation. Patriotic assimilation would certainly mean accepting the “American Idea” as it is traditionally understood, that is, a set of liberal democratic principles including individual rights and majority rule within the context of limited, con-

stitutional government as opposed to multiculturalism and group rights.

But a nation is more than an idea or a set of principles, so assimilation should also include conscious self-identification by newcomers with our nation's heritage. Thus, in patriotic assimilation all citizens essentially adopt America's heritage, heroes, and story as their own, regard-

Americans will continue to argue and disagree about our past — the important point is that it is "our" past.

less of their racial or ethnic background. Professor Fuchs illustrated this concept nicely in his book, *The American Kaleidoscope*, in describing Japanese-American students at McKinley

high school in Honolulu in the 1920s speaking about "our pilgrim forefathers."

This concept is the opposite of what multiculturalists such as Professors Ronald Takaki and Jorge Klor de Alva are teaching their students today at Berkeley. The McKinley high school students were practicing "patriotic assimilation" — they adopted the Pilgrims, the Founding Fathers, and the soldiers of the civil war as their own, as previous generations of Italians, Jews, and Poles adopted those Anglo-Saxon Protestants, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, as their ancestors.

For patriotic assimilation, the main issue today is whether, for example, a Korean American student studying the constitutional convention in Philadelphia in 1789 thinks of that historic event as something that "we," the American people, did or something that "they," white males of European ancestry, did. "We" is patriotic assimilation; "they" is multiculturalism. Obviously, I am not arguing in favor of one sanitized version of our past. Americans will continue to argue and disagree about our past — the important point is that it is "our" past. I believe the idea presented this morning by Professor Noah Pickus of Duke University about the need for both reason and reverence in examining our tradition is a good one.

Simply believing in the principles of liberal democracy does not make one an American. Let us say there is a "Professor Larson" at the University of Oslo. He is an expert on the *Federalist Papers* and the Declaration of Independence; He knows more than 99.9 percent of all Americans about these subjects; He prefers the Ameri-

can presidential-congressional system of checks and balances to European parliamentarianism. Despite all of this, "Professor Larson" is not, of course, an American, but a liberal democratic Norwegian. He could become an American, but his chances of permanent residence and eventual citizenship aren't too strong because he does not have any relatives in America and his skills are not in demand — most employers, after all, want scientists, not Straussians.

Again, what is to be done? In the best of all worlds a new "Americanization" movement would arise. The term "Americanization" is the best term to use for patriotic assimilation because it has the most resonance with the American people. It may have been misused in the past, but as Barbara Jordan said "it's our word, let's take it back." The new Americanization movement would be more than a series of academic books. It would be well-organized and well-funded, just as anti-Americanization initiatives have been well-organized and well-funded for years by the Ford and Rockefeller foundations. And like the anti-Americanizers, the movement would exert political pressure. The new Americanizers would aim to dismantle the structure of group preferences; defund official bilingualism; end the dumbing down of citizenship; stop the corruption of the naturalization process; and vigorously promote patriotic assimilation.

Support for such a movement exists among immigrants as well as among native born. A national Gallup poll in July 1995 revealed pro-assimilationist sentiments among immigrants in America, most of whom were non-Europeans. Immigrants were asked whether it is better for the United States to encourage immigrants to *blend* into American culture by giving up some important aspects of their own culture, or to encourage immigrants to *maintain* their own culture more strongly, even if that means they do not blend in as well. Fifty-nine percent of all immigrants preferred newcomers to "blend into American culture;" 27 percent said immigrants should "maintain" their own culture; 10 percent said both "blending in" and "maintaining" were equally important; and 4 percent offered no opinion.

Moreover, among immigrants living in the United States for more than 20 years, 65 percent favored "blending in;" only 21 percent supported "maintaining their own culture;" 10 percent said both were equally important; and 4

percent had no opinion. Significantly, most immigrants do not consider themselves victims of discrimination. The same Gallup poll asked: “have you ever felt discriminated against specifically because you were not born in the United States?” Sixty-one percent said no and only 39 percent said yes.

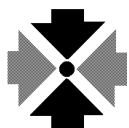
It is simply not possible to be an active citizen in our democracy without command of the English language. There is no reason not to support official English. Peter Salins in his new book and Robert King in an article in the April 1997 issue of the *Atlantic* suggest this is “divisive” and controversial. Well, so was the civil rights bill of 1964. Anything worthwhile is probably divisive and controversial. Passage of official English would be a normative statement about important principles — about who we are as a people — just as civil rights legislation has been in the past.

Professor Fuchs made a number of interesting suggestions for strengthening assimilation in testimony before Congress last fall, including efforts to improve the study of English and civic education. Unfortunately these needed reforms will be very difficult to achieve in a public school system dominated by multicultural ideology.

Unlike Professor Fuchs, I disagree with the suggestion by Immigration Commissioner Doris Meissner that we should change the current patriotic oath of allegiance that new citizens take during their swearing-in ceremony. Some opponents say the oath is archaic and anachronistic. The words are too difficult and old fashioned. Others are troubled by its unequivocal demand that allegiance be transferred from the old country to the United States.

Passage of official English would be a normative statement about important principles — about who we are as a people — just as civil rights legislation has been in the past.

In the oath new citizens promise to: “absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty . . . to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic . . . And bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by law.” There is no reason to change this oath. It’s not broken, so don’t fix it. Changing the oath with its rich patriotic symbolism to something more bland and equivocal would be like changing the Ten Commandments to the “ten suggestions.”



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