

Assimilation: Imposition on Immigrants or Crucial to America's Survival?

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From a Central American Shantytown to a North American Suburb

As one who brought an immigrant on a fiancé visa to the United States from Central America in 1989 and married her in Albuquerque, New Mexico that same year, I have had ample personal experience with assimilation in my own family over the past three decades.

My fiancé Ana emerged from Customs and Immigration at the Houston airport wearing a weary smile and her only dress, lugging a single suitcase containing her modest wardrobe. Her English vocabulary was limited to one word: “no”, and the only reason she knew that one is because it’s the same in Spanish, with identical spelling, albeit slightly different pronunciation. She had grown up in a gritty, grubby shantytown (*barrio marginal*) clinging precariously to one of the steep, denuded hillsides climbing above Tegucigalpa, the congested capital of Honduras. Once covered with pines, the slope was now covered with wooden shacks.

I use “precariously” in two senses of the word: first, the *colonia* itself had been established by *una invasión ilegal* — an illegal land invasion by a group of poor people emboldened only by their numbers, willpower, and sometimes weapons, without legal rights to the properties they seized, at least initially; and, second, the flimsy structures were erected organically without the expertise of planners, engineers, or architects on steep, exposed slopes, and were subject to the unforgiving law of grav-

ity and the implacable hydrologic cycle. Especially after storms and hurricanes had dropped bucket-loads of rain, landslides, mudslides, and gully erosion could wash homes away, sometimes with their hapless occupants still inside. Hurricane Mitch killed an estimated 7,000 in Honduras alone (and more than 11,000 in Central America overall) from a lethal combination of flooding, landslides, and mudslides.

Although Ana had not even completed 8th grade, from her young peers at university she had absorbed much of the avant-garde anti-Americanism then infecting the National Autonomous University of Honduras, as well as most institutions of higher learning throughout Latin America. It was an understandable mistrust of gringos, *gabachos*, *güeros*, *Yanquis*, the CIA, and “*El Tío Sam*.” This mistrust was a reaction to America’s long, ignominious history of overt military or covert CIA intervention in the region, consistent with *realpolitik* and the imperialistic Monroe Doctrine, to serve U.S. business and political interests and maintain regional hegemony.

Ana and I met in 1987 and fell in love when I was a Peace Corps Volunteer in her country, at a time when Honduras was at the epicenter of a turbulent region engulfed in a maelstrom of civil wars. Those wars — between armed forces and armed *guerrillas* and *contras* in neighboring Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua — were all proxies of the larger, globe-enveloping Cold War between capitalism and communism, between “freedom” and “totalitarianism”, and its principal antagonists, the USA and the USSR. “The eye of the hurricane,” *National Geographic* magazine had called Honduras the year I went there.

In her first day on American soil, in the Houston airport, Ana rode an escalator for the very first time in her life, visibly hesitating a bit as she took that tentative first step and committed herself to trusting an unfamiliar, rather intimidating machine that would convey her magically from one floor to the next one above. That

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night, in the private home of a Houston friend of mine, she enjoyed her first ever bath in an actual bathtub, luxuriating in the abundant hot water flowing forcefully from sleek faucets.

Her humble abode in Tegucigalpa — not much more than a one-story, wooden shack with a concrete floor — had no indoor plumbing and no hot water. To bathe at a residence like this, you had to heat water in a pot atop a 55-gallon metal drum converted to a wood stove outside in the small, confined backyard. Then, you stripped and stood naked in that backyard, bare feet in a bucket or pan filled with water, and used a sponge or cloth with a cup to pour water over one's head. You were shielded from prying eyes by the perimeter fence, clothes hung to dry on a clothesline, and large banana and mango leaves and palm fronds. In Central America's "winter" in the mountainous highlands, it could be quite a chilly and uncomfortable experience even in the tropics, judging by the goosebumps on bare, wet skin.

Fast forward nearly three decades. Ana now speaks fluent — if heavily accented — English, and more than makes herself understood to anglophones with no understanding of Spanish. She has many "Anglo" friends and an Anglo boyfriend; our marriage foundered two decades ago after she felt "neglected," one of the clearest signs of her assimilation to the personal norms of North American women in modern romantic relationships. ("Feeling neglected" is a reason often given by American wives for leaving their husbands, not so among Central American wives, who are much more frequently abandoned — or betrayed — by their husbands.) Ana has built a successful career as a hair stylist, and she has retirement savings and a townhome in a leafy suburb with an inviting deck bordering a forest. This person with an 8th-grade formal education in Third World public schools is also

the proud mother of two university graduates, one of them an electrical engineer for the U.S. Navy, the other an investor and bookkeeper. Hers is a classic American immigrant success story.

When Ana talks about the United States in relation to other countries in the world, it's quite clear where her loyalties lie. She refers to "our" country" (not "your" country or "the" country), to "our" flag and national anthem, "our" soldiers, "our" Marines, "our" Navy SEALs, "our" diplomats, and "our" president. She is a staunch American patriot, even lacking formal American citizenship and voting rights. What imbued her with such an attachment to her adopted land? What enables her to feel so passionately a part of and invested in the new, emerging, more "multicultural" America, to the point where she now identifies as an American (of Honduran extraction), even if she cannot yet cast a ballot?

Well, marrying an American certainly helped, as did having two children born on American soil who went to public schools and are distinctly and thoroughly American, even as they are multiracial (white, American Indian, black), bicultural (Anglo and Hispanic), though not bilingual, despite our best intentions. It also helped to attend years of evening ESL classes, working hard at learning not just to speak and comprehend spoken English, but to read and write it as well. Many Latin American immigrants who can speak no more than broken English outside the home (and Spanish inside the home) at best forever remain functionally illiterate, and thus isolated or alienated from — and sometimes resentful toward — the broader American culture.

In the early nineties, in Southern California, at one of Ana's jobs as a maid (room service) in a large hotel near John Wayne Airport in Orange County, most of her co-workers were Mexican nationals who spoke little or no



The author and his fiancé in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, c. 1988.



Hillside barrio in Tegucigalpa, Honduras in 1988.

English. I remember these Mexican maids complaining about another Hispanic co-worker who had just received a promotion to a supervisory role, which according to them, was due mostly to the fact that she spoke English, not because of any other superior skill or seniority. These Spanish-speaking co-workers resented the fact that speaking English, and thus being able to communicate more effectively with Anglophone upper management and customers, should be a ticket to advancement. It struck them as very unfair and discriminatory to Spanish-only workers. And I remember thinking that their attitude, if widely shared among the increasing numbers of Spanish-speaking immigrants who were not learning English, was a serious and growing problem for the social harmony of our country as that immigrant population from Latin America expanded rapidly.

In America, Ana always lived and worked outside of the *barrio*. These were places where English was the dominant language, if not always among her co-workers, then at least among the clientele. This forced her to learn and use *el inglés* more regularly and more effectively than many foreign-born Latinos, who, for economic and cultural reasons, remain ghettoized and marginalized in linguistically isolated, Spanish-only *barrios*. Ana also eventually developed a career as a professional, licensed hair stylist, servicing a professional clientele who communicated almost exclusively in English.

All of this assisted in her assimilation, not only in contributing to the contemporary American scene as a wife, mother, homeowner, neighbor, friend, motorist, worker, and consumer, but just as importantly, in that she *belonged* to the American scene, believing in our country and eagerly and earnestly wanting it to survive and succeed. She is angered by grievance-mongers who seem to want to tear America apart more than they actually want to build it up and improve it.

Yet Ana has two sisters who have also resided in the United States for many years and who took decidedly different paths with regard to assimilation, paths which do not bode well for the future cohesion and wellbeing of our country.

UN CUENTO DE DOS HERMANAS (A TALE OF TWO SISTERS)

One was an older half-sister whom Ana did not know well. Having grown up on opposite sides of Honduras, they rarely or never saw each other back in the old country. This sister had come to the U.S. years before and had settled in the Miami region. On the one occasion I met her, when she visited the D.C. region, I was shocked and disappointed to learn, but shouldn't have been, I suppose, that she spoke virtually no English at all, and had apparently made little or no effort to do so.

I got off on the wrong foot with this sister-in-law

when I chastised her for this, telling her that when I lived in her native country, in contrast, I worked very hard to learn Spanish, both to be able to communicate with Hondurans and to be effective in my work, as well as out of respect for the sensibilities and customs of the host culture. I believed that “when in Rome, do as the Romans do.” It would have been disrespectful and arrogant on my part to expect Hondurans to communicate with me in English in their own country, where Spanish was the traditional language of culture and commerce.

This sister was at best poorly integrated into American society, and lived in what amounts to a Latin American colony at the southern tip of North America. After three decades residing in the United States, she still identified as a Honduran living among foreigners in a foreign land.

In the early nineties, another of Ana's sisters (one of my sisters-in-law) defied our cautionary warnings and urgent pleas, emigrating from Honduras, making the treacherous crossings of Guatemala and Mexico without authorization or documents, and wading across the Rio Grande to illegally enter Texas and the U.S. This journey was especially fraught for a vulnerable woman traveling alone. Once in Texas, she was able to join the flourishing underground economy there, built on the backs of illegal immigrants doing the heavily lifting. Over the years she was eventually joined by all three of her sons, illegal aliens all.

This sister was a sweet person in many ways, an adoring aunt to my two sons. Yet she also nursed a grudge against what she saw as a racist, xenophobic, exploitive United States for not being more welcoming of newcomers who were willing to work hard and contribute to the country's economic prosperity. In her view, these eager, hardworking newcomers — herself among them — were discriminated against for their brown skin, their Spanish language, their poverty, and their Hispanic culture. Outspoken open borders activists, Latino chauvinists, and their fellow travelers in the mainstream media and contemporary Democratic Party have made people like my former sister-in-law feel that they are entitled to waltz into the U.S. on a whim, trampling American sovereignty in the process. They argue that anyone from around the world, especially oppressed peoples of color who have supposedly borne the brunt of centuries of “white privilege,” “white supremacy,” and Euro-American ethnocentrism, racism, colonialism, and imperialism, have every right to converge on the epicenter of what the late Venezuelan strongman Hugo Chavez always referred to as “The Empire.” That is how they interpret “social justice,” as payback for historic wrongs.

Which story now predominates in contemporary America: the relative assimilation of my ex-wife, or the relative lack of assimilation on the part of my two ex-

sisters-in-law — her sisters? Liberals and conservatives hotly debate this question, in what is one of the major fronts of the “Culture Wars.” Are majorities of immigrants continuing to assimilate fully to American norms and values, becoming integrated into our national culture and economy, feeling American, or are they coalescing into what amount to growing, parallel, antagonistic nations within a nation? What and who do they themselves identify as?

With some exceptions, like liberal historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. (in his 1991 book *The Disuniting of America*, which worried about the consequences of resurgent “identity politics,” and was heavily criticized by his fellow liberals), until recently most liberals were publicly (if not privately) insistent that assimilation was proceeding apace. They agreed that assimilation was important, and they insisted that this assimilation was happening in spite of unprecedented, prolonged levels of immigration. And they claimed that it was assimilation to our higher, better, deeper values and virtues, not just assimilation to crass modes of mass consumption of Nike and Apple products or junk food sold at 7-Eleven.

Moreover, they claimed that American society was adapting and changing in ways that make it more inclusive, just, different, diverse, and better overall. “Diversity is Our Strength!” was their mantra. More recently, and especially since the election of President Donald J. Trump, liberals have voiced concern that a backlash is brewing among the fearful, diminishing white majority, many of whom continue to have bigoted, ethnocentric attitudes. In this ascendant view among liberals, white ethno-nationalists, motivated by “white supremacy” and sent “dog whistles” by a supportive president, are trying to maintain or restore an unjust, monochrome “white bread” America in which “whiteness” remains the exalted and privileged ideal to which all other races and ethnicities must genuflect, conform, or aspire.

In 2019, many on all sides of the culture wars would no longer agree that race and ethnicity in America are fading away as important factors in a utopian, post-racial society that emphasizes individual merit and achievement. Nor do they share Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream that his children would “one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.” Rather, race and ethnicity are only becoming more and more salient, divisive, and intractable features of American life in the twenty-first century.

Given current trends in inter-group divisiveness and heightened racial/ethnic awareness (identity politics), as the white majority is eclipsed for the first time in American history within two or three more decades, ethnic tribalism and balkanization are only likely to intensify for the foreseeable future. Unlike tribalism in other

countries, however, for the time being at least, the ruling class of the still dominant though fading white majority actually sides with other ascendant ethnic/racial groups, not their own. They would claim this is because the rising prominence and influence of formerly persecuted groups constitutes “social justice” and atonement for genuine historic grievances, and they want to be “on the right side of history.” But it is just as plausible that these perspicacious, self-interested white elites see which way the historical tides are shifting, and they prefer to ally and ride with the rising rather than the falling tide.

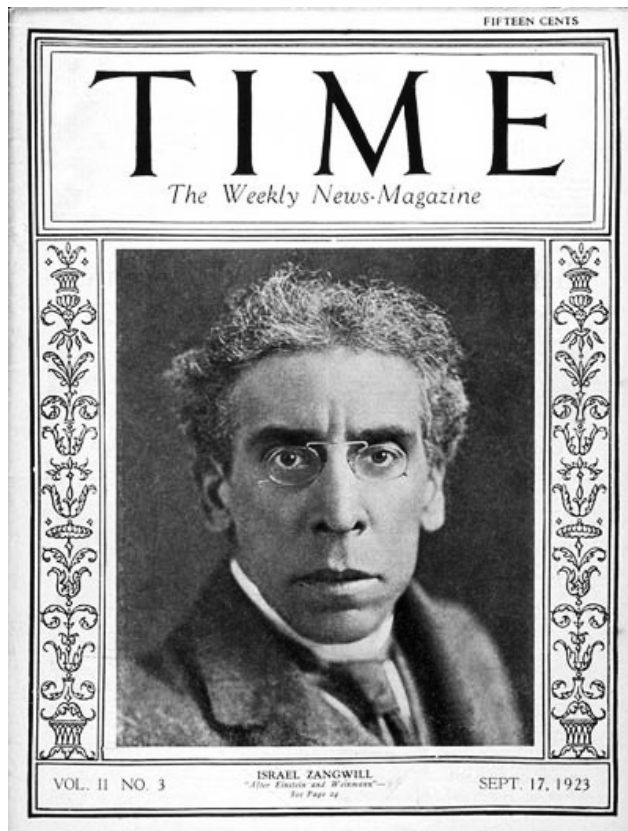
What has changed is that animosities and perceived grievances are no longer felt just by black, Latino, Asian, and Native American minorities, who often felt and were made to feel like strangers or second-class citizens in this land, but also by growing numbers within the emerging white minority. For the first time in our history, more and more rank-and-file whites are feeling aggrieved, alienated, excluded, and persecuted by this country’s multicultural ruling class. Most of these elites continue to be affluent, cosmopolitan white liberals and lefties who now consider themselves “allies” to historically victimized people of color and non-white immigrants. They feel little more than contempt for the millions of pathetic, white “deplorables” and losers among their own biological race, who continue to “cling to guns and religion.”

AN AMBIGUOUS LESSON FROM CANADA: MELTING POT — NON! SALAD BOWL — OUI! NATIONAL IDENTITY: ???

I was born on occupied territory: a U.S. Army base in Stuttgart, West Germany to two American-born parents. My Philadelphia-born father’s first language at home was Polish, but in keeping with the more stringent approach to Americanization of the times, his native tongue was discouraged or suppressed when he started first grade in the late 1920s and began learning English. He soon forgot his Polish immigrant mother’s native tongue, a personal loss of heritage which he has long regretted in spite of his deep American patriotism, proud military service, and abiding love for the American variant of the English language.

My dad was a World War II veteran and later rose to the rank of captain in the U.S. Army Reserves, called back to active duty after the Korean War in NATO’s initiative to deter a possible Soviet invasion of Western Europe during the Cold War. Three of my grandparents were born in America, one in Poland, and I count not only Polish but German and Irish ancestors. (Given this non-English ethnic background, years later, living in California, it was odd to hear myself lumped with “Anglos” simply because English was my mother tongue.) Raised back in the States in the fifties and sixties, like everybody

of my Baby Boomer generation, I was nurtured on the notion of the American melting pot, then a fixture in U.S. public education. This metaphor has long been used in the United States, along with our national motto, *E Pluribus Unum*, Latin for “Out of Many, One,” expressing the ideal and the hope that many peoples from diverse nationalities, ethnicities, and races could merge into one united American People.



While it was Israel Zangwill (1864–1926), a British Jew and Zionist, who made the notion of the melting pot famous with his 1908 play of the same name, about Russian Jewish immigrants to America, French immigrant J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur (1735–1813) is believed to be the first to write of immigrants “melting” into the recipient culture in his *Letters from an American Farmer*. He wrote prophetically, “Here individuals of all nations are *melted* into a new race of men, whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world.” Interestingly, this concept of a “new race of men” has something in common with that of *La Raza* (The Race) used in “the Other America,” that is, Latin America. *La Raza*, though, refers not just to a new cultural “race” of men imbued with a new collective identity, but to the actual biological merging of indigenous American (Indian) and European bloodlines through miscegenation. It has become a fixture of Mexican-American identity politics.

In the late seventies I moved to the West Coast to attend graduate school at the beautiful University of

British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. One of my professors, a former American, proudly informed me that Canada, her adopted country, had a more welcoming and inclusive approach to the assimilation of foreign newcomers than her former country did. Rather than conceiving of itself as a melting pot, where immigrants were expected or even forced to forgo their former identities, language, and customs, as they “melted” into the dominant national identity (as in America), Canada liked to style itself as a “salad bowl.” I suppose she meant a tossed salad, where each of the ingredients, such as lettuce, tomatoes, onions, and peppers, maintains its distinct identity, texture, and flavor, even as they all contribute these qualities to the salad as a whole, perhaps assisted by a salad dressing (a common language?) that envelops and unites all ingredients.

A related term for this more tolerant or permissive approach to assimilation is “cultural mosaic,” an actual mosaic, of course, consisting of hundreds or thousands of distinct, colorful pieces that each contributes individually to the grand design and the magnificent whole. In Canada’s reigning ethos, Canadian citizens pride themselves in being part of a cultural mosaic, grateful for and enriched by the gift of added cultural diversity bestowed by each arriving immigrant. “Diversity Is Our Strength!” is an upbeat unofficial national mantra with Canadian liberals, as it is with liberals in the U.S., with no official recognition that excessive diversity under one roof or within one set of borders might be problematic for social cohesion or national unity. “A house divided against itself cannot stand” seems to be an alien concept to most Canadian elites and talking heads. This is ironic, because since its founding, Canada has struggled to maintain itself as a single nation state largely because of an ambiguous dual identity stamped into its very DNA, its very origins.

For two centuries, the juxtaposition of the country’s dual English and French founding factions (which fought each other from 1754 to 1763 in what Americans call the “French and Indian War” prior to our own Revolution) led to a certain ambivalence about belonging to the same country among both the anglophone (English-speaking) majority and the francophone (French-speaking) minority (mostly confined to the province of Quebec). The less-than-uplifting slogan “two nations, one state,” meant to provide a unifying creed, belied an actual ambivalence that sometimes bordered on animosity.

Anglophone Canadians complained bitterly in 1976 when the ethno-nationalist *Parti Québécois* and its flamboyant and chain-smoking founder René Lévesque came to power in Quebec, pushing for independence (and later “sovereignty-association”) from anglophone Canada. If they had succeeded in this quest, it would have divided Canada into three or more parts — the

western provinces (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba), Ontario, Quebec, the Maritime Provinces, Newfoundland, and Labrador, and perhaps an indigenous state to the north encompassing the Yukon Territory, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut.



René Lévesque (1922-1987), the flamboyant and chain-smoking Parti Québécois premier of Quebec from 1976 to 1985.

While the drive for independence or sovereignty-association faltered (two province-wide votes failed, the second one barely), in 1977 the *Parti Québécois* did pass and enact its notorious Bill 101, the Language Law, which among other things prohibited the placement of prominent signs in public places in any language other than French. In the summer of 1978, my girlfriend and I experienced it firsthand when we crossed southern Quebec on a two-month, 2,000-mile bicycle tour from Ontario, through Quebec and the Maritime Provinces (Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick) to Newfoundland and back.

In the picturesque, quaint Eastern Townships of Quebec, north of Vermont, pedaling our bikes along narrow lanes bordered by sugar maples and mossy stone walls, we camped one night in the backyard of a McGill University professor, an anglophone who sold local handicrafts to American tourists who occasionally wandered by. Whenever he tried to put up a sign in English, on his own property, to attract English-speaking American tourists to his merchandise stand, some proud francophone vigilante would tear it down in the middle of the night; such a publicly displayed handmade sign in the English language was, after all, illegal, albeit under what many anglophones, a distinct minority within Quebec, regarded as an unjust, discriminatory law and a perfect illustration of tyrannical majoritarian rule.

Back in Ontario, before my girlfriend and I had even crossed the border into Quebec along the St. Lawrence River southwest of Montreal, we were warned by anglophone Ontarians to be wary of unfriendly or even

hostile francophones (neither of us spoke French). Yet perhaps because we were received as Americans, not English-speaking Canadians, who (in the anglophone view) were being blamed for centuries of discrimination against francophones, we were treated just fine by the native French speakers of Quebec.

Cosmopolitan former Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau (1919-2000) embodied Canada's duality in his very being. His father was a wealthy French-Canadian businessman and lawyer and his mother of mixed Scottish and French-Canadian descent. He spoke both English and French fluently. And he believed wholeheartedly not just in Canada's bi-national character, and in the "two nations, one state" ideal, but in the newfangled, fashionable concept of multiculturalism as well. In 1971, a Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism had just issued a report, one volume of which was focused on "the contribution by other ethnic groups to the cultural enrichment of Canada and the measures that should be taken to safeguard that contribution."

In a 1971 speech to the House of Commons on multiculturalism, Prime Minister Trudeau said:

A policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework commends itself to the government as the most suitable means of assuring the cultural freedom of Canadians. Such a policy should help break down discriminatory attitudes and cultural jealousies. National unity, if it is to mean anything in the deeply personal sense, must be founded on confidence in one's own individual identity; out of this can grow respect for that of others and a willingness to share ideas, attitudes, and assumptions. A vigorous policy of multiculturalism will help create this initial confidence. It can form the base of a society which is based on fair play for all.

The government will support and encourage the various cultures and ethnic groups that give structure and vitality to our society. They will be encouraged to share their cultural expression and values with other Canadians and so contribute to a richer life for us all.

Lofty sentiments indeed! But perhaps, if I may be so bold as to criticize such a worldly figure as Prime Minister Trudeau, these ideas were incredibly naïve or even daft at the same time. Respecting all cultures that were being invited, in ever greater numbers, to join the experimental Canadian cultural mosaic was certainly a well-intentioned, deeply idealistic gesture firmly within the proud Canadian tradition of respect for "the Other." But as the saying goes, "the way to hell is paved with good intentions." At what point does rejecting a chauvinistic,

arrogant ethnocentrism or xenophobia become a self-abnegating ethnofugalism or xenophilia?

Canadian population policy seems predicated on the myth that Canada is “underpopulated.” By comparison with its humongous American neighbor to the south, it most certainly is, with little more than one-tenth the population of the United States. (But since the U.S. is the third most populous country on the planet, after just China and India, perhaps this is not the best comparison.) According to one powerful part of the Canadian psyche (and its grow-grow-grow! business interests), Canada’s inspiring destiny is to pump up its population and fill those vast empty spaces and wastelands to the north with productive humanity. After all, now they’re characterized by immense stretches of nothing but boring bogs, muskegs, monotonous conifers, taiga, tundra, and the hum of trillions of mosquitos and black flies.

According to these boomers and boosters, the North’s tiny populations of indigenous, low-income First Nations and Inuit peoples will prosper from this growth. Boosting immigration to the highest per capita levels on earth (rivalled only by Australia) not only pursues this compelling version of Canada’s destiny, but allows the country to preen and prance on the world stage as an open-hearted, gentle, generous giant of a country. For some Canadians, especially those of a more left-wing bent, it is also important to distinguish themselves in the international arena from the closed-minded, wall-building, bellicose bully to the south.

With the rapid growth of “visible minorities” now officially encouraged, not just to preserve but to champion their distinctive identities, ethnicities, customs, and religions, multiculturalism has led to the disintegration and disappearance of the rather staid but reliable Canadian character we once knew and loved, the “hewers of wood and drawers of water,” the Canada celebrated in the Monty Python skit showing a choir of jolly Royal Canadian Mounted Police singing “I’m a Lumberjack and I’m O.K.” Religiously observant, politically and culturally assertive Islam and hijabs are a growing presence in Canadian cities. So are free-spirited Caribbean peoples, turbaned Sikhs, and less happily, international crime syndicates, gangs, drugs, and street crime. The scourge of illegal immigration is surging across the southern border.

On the West Coast, scenic Vancouver (where I lived for four years four decades ago), once proclaimed proudly as Canada’s “gateway to the Pacific and Asia,” has been described by one estranged native and former resident (he long ago escaped up the coast as part of the native-born exodus from the city) as a rapidly growing Chinese colony in Canada: “Hongcouver,” in effect. A 2015 *Los Angeles Times* article was headlined: “A city transformed — for better and worse — by Chinese wealth.” Its defenders describe Hongcouver positively

as a vibrant hybrid of Vancouver and Hong Kong. Yes, something precious was lost, but something new and valuable and perhaps even better has been gained, in their view. While Vancouver had long boasted the second-largest “Chinatown” on the West Coast after San Francisco’s, its conversion to a virtual outpost of Asia in the Americas began in earnest in the 1990s, when the United Kingdom returned Hong Kong to China, and wealthy residents of Hong Kong understandably began to flee en masse, unwilling to subject themselves and their hard-earned fortunes to the capricious whims and corruption of the Communist Party of China. A welcoming Canada awaited them and their wealth with open arms.

More than two decades on, the sense of dispossession by many native Vancouverites is palpable, even if most are too polite or cowed by political correctness to discuss it openly. The cost of housing has become the highest in Canada. A 2018 article by *Toronto Globe and Mail* columnist Gary Mason highlighted the findings of a study by academic researchers that Toronto and Vancouver “are the unhappiest cities in the country.” Mason also cited research by the Vancouver Foundation that found that “young people (between the ages of 18 and 24) in Metro Vancouver, and Vancouver in particular, are burdened by a sense of profound loneliness. It’s not a place where important human connections are easily made.” And he concluded sadly:

Of course, Vancouver is a beautiful, progressive place to live, with bike lanes galore and a climate that allows you to take advantage of them year-round. But what’s also undeniable is that over the past several years, the past four or five in particular, the city has changed. It’s not easy to put a finger precisely on how, but it does have something to do with its soul, an essence that made it such a wonderful place to be once upon a time.

In many respects, Vancouver is now a place you try to survive as much as enjoy. All the



Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada: a.k.a. Hongcouver.

problems are well known, the greatest being the high cost of housing.

The *exorbitant* cost of housing has crushed the aspirations of many working-class and middle-class native-born Canadians.

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. The current prime minister of Canada is Pierre Elliot Trudeau's self-absorbed hipster son Justin (b. 1971), famously a chill former snowboard instructor and part-time drama teacher before the family name and fame lured him into politics. Like liberal Americans and their enchantment with the "Camelot" Kennedys and the less glamorous Clintons, liberal Canadians also love a good liberal dynasty, and the Trudeaus are it. Justin was lauded loudly for appointing a diverse and gender-balanced cabinet back in 2015, including a Somali-born Immigration Minister, who, unsurprisingly, is gung-ho on mass-immigration from the Third World. Trudeau, when asked why he insisted on a 50-50 male/female cabinet, quipped, "Because it's 2015," a vacuous response that went viral 'round the world. And his legions of female fans and progressive followers swooned at how "woke" he was. To this hip PM, symbolism mattered more than substance. Pretty-boy, bubble-headed Trudeau would not be a fan of Heather Mac Donald's 2018 book *The Diversity Delusion: How Race and Gender Pandering Corrupt and Undermine Our Culture*.

In late 2015, Justin told the *New York Times* that Canada was becoming a new kind of country, one that had transcended its history and its narrow European origins, a country that now proudly embraced a "pan-cultural heritage." Canada's cute, popular, photogenic PM said that: "there is no core identity, no mainstream in Canada," calling his country "the first post-national

state." Even the far-left *New York Times* called this notion "radical." A year later, in 2016, Trudeau raised at least a few eyebrows when he reacted with "deep sorrow" to the death of Cuba's communist tyrant Fidel Castro, calling him "remarkable," and a "larger than life leader who served his people."

Justin's father Pierre considered Castro a friend; he declared "Viva Castro!" on a 1976 trip to Havana to pay homage to the Cuban dictator. Canada's national news-magazine *Maclean's* headlined an article in 2018 — "The Trudeau family's love of tyrants: Political blind spots are inevitable when you have warm thoughts for oppressors." In contrast, Pierre Trudeau had notoriously testy relations with those feisty, freedom-loving, collectivization-despising American politicians in Washington. If the elder Trudeau had been PM during the reign of Venezuela's late socialist strongman Hugo Chavez, no doubt he would have had another Latin American BFF.

The example of Canada is relevant for Americans because it is part of the same cultural "Anglosphere" to which America belongs, and because Canada is our neighbor, friend, and, some might say, sibling. These two friendly giants share the North American continent and what is often called the world's longest undefended border. The inscription on the American side of the Peace Arch at the international border crossing between British Columbia, Canada and the state of Washington reads that we are "CHILDREN OF A COMMON MOTHER." On the Canadian side, the inscription reads: "BRETHREN DWELLING TOGETHER IN UNITY."

The similarities and differences between the U.S. and Canada were on full display in the clever online meme which first surfaced the day after the 2004 U.S. presidential election, in which Republican incumbent



LEFT: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau poses for a selfie with one of his adoring female fans; he has legions of them. ABOVE: Bosom buddies — the senior Prime Minister Trudeau and Fidel Castro in 1976 during a trip to Havana.

George W. Bush defeated Democrat challenger John Kerry. This map playfully divided North America into the “United States of Canada” and “Jesusland,” suggesting that the more secular, less religiously devout states had more in common with Canadian values on fundamental social, cultural, and political issues than they did with their fellow American states in “Jesusland.” The United States of Canada included the West Coast (“Left Coast”), Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, New England, New York, and Maryland. Its borders were redrawn somewhat on the margins by Donald J. Trump in the 2016 election, but the idea of a sharpening divide between “red” and “blue” states remains intact.



In a cringe-worthy moment for which he was mocked even by Indians, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau prays to his multicultural gods on a visit to India in early 2018.

Given the drift of white American liberals further and further to the left in the past two decades, and the movement of the Democratic Party in that same direction, there is little doubt that on key issues of immigration and assimilation, the next Democratic presidential administration will be following in Justin Trudeau’s footsteps. While Trudeau himself has fallen out of favor somewhat with Canadian and American liberals (they are no longer drooling over his bare chest and every adorable Tweet) because of certain missteps and a corruption scandal, it is instructive that he has not been thrown under the bus for turning his back on Canada’s traditional core culture but for political ineptitude.

ASSIMILATION AS A DIRTY WORD: FROM MELTING POT TO IDENTITY POLITICS OF MULTICULTURALISM

Fresh out of the Peace Corps, living in Albuquerque, and studying at the University of New Mexico

(UNM) in 1988, I soon discovered that the very concept of assimilation was then under vigorous assault in the academy and certain quarters of the rapidly growing Hispanic or Latino community in the American Southwest. This gathering challenge to assimilation appeared to be an outgrowth of the Chicano Power movement of the late sixties, which itself was linked to the unrest of that turbulent earlier era, expressed in the anti-war movement, the Black Power movement, women’s liberation, the environmental movement, and the like.

I served on the board of the New Mexico Public Interest Research Group (one of the PIRGs originally promoted by Ralph Nader) based at UNM, and through PIRG came to know friends and acquaintances of Hispanic descent with multi-generational ties to New Mexico dating all the way back to colonial times, to when New Mexico belonged to Mexico (*México*), and even earlier, to Spain (*España*). I encountered a simmering resentment on the part of some of them that Hispanics, with their own proud, distinct heritage, should have to kowtow or bend the knee in any fashion to the nationally dominant Anglo culture. They decried assimilation as the behavior of a defeated, deracinated, impotent people, and they considered themselves to be none of these. Some went as far as having a perpetual chip on their shoulder.

An example of a fellow who had this kind of chip on his shoulder occurred one evening at a meeting of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) on the UNM campus over a pot luck dinner, organized by the campus Peace Corps recruiter. Attendees ate while they mingled, and after half an hour the recruiter asked for the floor so she could make some remarks about how we as an RPCV community might encourage UNM students to consider joining the Peace Corps upon graduation. Everyone, or almost everyone, quieted down.

As the recruiter started to speak, one of the attendees, a somewhat older Chicano gentleman (perhaps in his forties), continued to hold forth in a loud voice in a private conversation. Everyone observed that he simply ignored her request (was he deaf?) and in that moment a sense of awkwardness suddenly pervaded the room. His conduct was rude and disruptive, to the extent that the recruiter paused, and with a pained expression on her face at this blatant display of discourtesy, politely asked this gentleman if she could have his and everyone’s undivided attention. Did he say, “Oops, I’m sorry, please continue”? Nope. Instead, he blurted out accusingly at her: “You’re only telling me to shut up because I’m a Mexican.” Clearly taken aback at his effrontery and this absurd accusation, this blonde Anglo had to undergo the indignity of insisting in front of 30 attendees, most of them strangers, that his Chicano ethnicity had nothing to do with her request. She said she was only singling him out because he alone had ignored her earlier request.

The recruiter handled it well and was then able to make her remarks without any further fuss or interruption.

Later, I approached this fellow to chide him and ask what his problem was, and he admitted to me that he tended to be too sensitive about perceived insults to his identity. He was a decent guy, approachable, one with whom I could talk openly and even criticize to his face, and he didn't take umbrage. I don't doubt that he had experienced a certain amount of anti-Mexican prejudice in his life on the part of Anglos in New Mexico. But as an eyewitness, I could attest that this was most certainly not an example of that. His easily triggered senses and sensibilities, ever on acute alert to ascertain any possible affront to his dignity and identity, had completely misconstrued this situation and caused him to make an ass of himself — twice.

Significantly, I also encountered a couple of other things in New Mexico: a latent pride on the part of many Mexican Americans at being U.S. citizens, not Mexican citizens, and at being veterans of the U.S. armed forces in particular; and resentment on the part of many long-standing Hispanic American citizens of New Mexico, USA at the large influx of illegal immigrants from Latin America crossing the southern border, who competed for jobs with working-class, low-income, native-born Hispanics and sometimes committed crimes or caused neighborhoods to go downhill. And then there were those Hispanics who chafed at Anglo cultural and political dominance, as well as some Native Americans (Pueblo Indians, Apaches, Navajo, Hopi) who had lingering memories of the Spanish *conquistadores* and *invasores* (invaders) who had overpowered their ancestors centuries earlier, and the Hispanics who came to displace and dominate them on their traditional lands. In this situation, Hispanics couldn't get away with playing the victim card.

I encountered some New Mexico Hispanics who envied and resented me just a bit, or perhaps more than a bit, because I spoke Spanish fluently (from my Peace Corps experience in Central America) and they didn't. It bothered them that I, a non-Hispanic and an outsider to their Southwest homeland, spoke their own *lengua materna* (mother tongue) better than they did, even as they were exhorting themselves more and more that fluency in Spanish should be worn as a badge of ethnic identity and cultural solidarity.

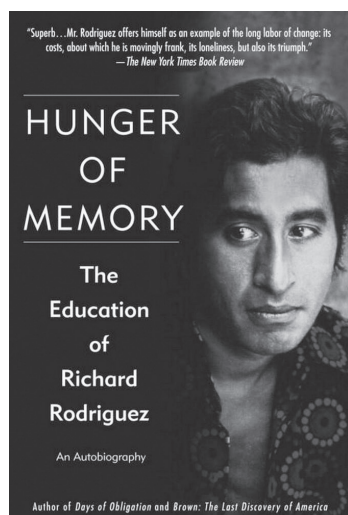
I was the environmental correspondent for the UNM campus daily newspaper, the *Daily Lobo*, and one of my colleagues on that student-run paper was an immigrant from Mexico, an undergraduate at UNM, who told me unabashedly that however long he lived in the United States, he would always remain a proud Mexican, never an American. It's who he was and would always be, his core identity. He boasted that he

was only in the U.S. out of economic necessity, taking advantage of the more robust American economy, but that his heart and soul were Mexican and would always reside in Mexico. If an American were to have spoken so passionately and unapologetically about his love and loyalty for America, he would have been derided by white American liberals and lefties for his ignorant ethnocentrism or jingoism; in contrast, the same feelings expressed by a Mexican were not just permissible, but honorable and worthy of respect, according to those same white liberals. And that's because, in their eyes, he represented the Oppressed Other, a victim of centuries of unjust white supremacy and subjugation; his outsized ethnic pride and sense of solidarity were not disdainful, but a justifiable and admirable reaction to this persecution.

This same Mexican acquaintance was an activist in the UNM campus chapter of MEChA (*Movimiento Estudiantil de Chicanos de Atzlán*), a radical, openly irredentist organization with chapters on many U.S. college and high school campuses that at the time was dedicated explicitly to reclaiming the American Southwest from the imperialistic, expansionist United States, which had seized it as the spoils of war after invading sovereign Mexican territory in 1846. (More recently, MEChA has changed the "Chicanos" in its name to "Chicanx" in a nod to the "inclusivity" of postmodernist and intersectional sensibilities — the 'x' stands for both sexes — and now it says its mission is to promote Chicano unity and empowerment through political action. It is still hard-left.) He bragged that when MEChA cadres attended UNM student council meetings, they deliberately spoke in Spanish (though most were bilingual), to the bewilderment or bemusement of the campus Anglo politicians. It was good to make the high-and-mighty Anglos feel disempowered for a change, and knock them down a notch or two.

I remember another of my good friends, a down-to-earth, female Mexican American from Texas, *una Tejana*, telling me that she never even knew she was supposed to refer to herself as a "Chicana" until she went to college. Neither did she ever realize that she had been oppressed and treated as a second-class citizen her whole life, until some grievance-mongering professor in her undergraduate Chicano Studies class informed her of how much she and other Chicanos had suffered at the hands of racist, supremacist Anglos. (Years later, I read a book by another acquaintance of mine, a much older Chicana who also grew up in Texas. Her story documented how she overcame very real anti-Mexican prejudice in her youth during the forties and fifties, to eventually marry a general in the U.S. Army and later serve in the administration of U.S. President and fellow Texan George W. Bush.)

Still another of my Mexican-American friends at NM PIRG, a proud son both of New Mexico and of a deceased U.S. Marine, introduced me to the moving 1982 book *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*. Rodriguez, like my own father, did not learn English at home as his first language; in his case, of course, his *lengua materna* as a toddler was Spanish. Rodriguez, also like my father, lost his native tongue when he went to elementary school. A sensitive and perceptive boy, he proved to be a gifted student and went on to receive a B.A. from Stanford and an M.A. from Columbia, as well as a Fulbright Scholarship to study in London. He was in the Ph.D. program in English Renaissance literature at the University of California at Berkeley when he dropped out to pursue a career as a writer and commentator.



***Hunger for Memory* author Richard Rodriguez, a Peabody Award-winner as well as a featured commentator on PBS's "The News Hour with Jim Lehrer."**

Hunger for Memory was the first of Rodriguez's several best-selling books and many articles. It recounted his personal story of assimilation: an uplifting but bittersweet odyssey from an underprivileged youth in a working-class Hispanic family and parochial subculture to full membership in the upper echelons of elite American society. He used to appear regularly on the long-running, popular PBS show, "The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer," and he won a Peabody Award for his visual essays in 1997. Rodriguez emerged from the sheltered, insular, Spanish-speaking world of his intimate family to the wider, public, intellectual world that mastering the English language opened to him. Yet this personal odyssey exacted a price — his American success story was accomplished only via a painful parting from his parents, his Hispanic culture, and a revered, idealized past. Rodriguez wrote: "Americans like to talk about the importance of family values. But America isn't a country of family values; Mexico is a country of family values. This is a country of people who leave home."

Hunger for Memory became a national best seller, garnered wide critical acclaim, and won several literary

awards, yet it also provoked a bitter backlash among some more strident Latino activists and academics. Why couldn't they simply celebrate a fellow Mexican American's success in the wider world? Because Rodriguez had come out strongly against two sacred cows: bilingual education and affirmative action. He had come to believe that bilingual education only retarded the progress and assimilation of immigrant children who didn't speak English at home. He had also begun to think that his own ready advancement through the upper ranks of academia at elite institutions was achieved at the expense of other capable, aspiring scholars — fellow strivers who in the new world of trying to atone for past wrongs were now becoming the victims of what amounted to reverse discrimination. To his credit, Rodriguez didn't want to be anybody's token Chicano. Yet some Mexican Americans denigrated him as a *pocho*, an Americanized Mexican speaker of "Spanglish," accusing him of betraying not only his people but his own identity. Still others heaped scorn on him as a "coconut": brown on the outside; white on the inside. Rodriguez himself said that he became "a comic victim of two cultures." It's a story right out of Victor Davis Hanson's *Mexifornia: A State of Becoming*.

What Rodriguez experienced and expressed so evocatively is that assimilation comes at a cost. For immigrants who move here of their own accord to join our ranks, it is a cost they should be prepared to pay. For every gain, there is a loss, if only the opportunity cost, of what might have become of one's life if a different choice had been made at that fork in the road. For proud and sentimental Mexican Americans in the American Southwest, with long memories and deep ethnic pride, a certain ambivalence about what is gained and what is lost with assimilation is understandable. The English language and Anglo culture were foisted on them, or on their ancestors, after all.

Yet for immigrant newcomers nowadays, assimilation is not usually a case of either/or, any more than it is for newlyweds, who by joining a new family through the bond of matrimony, aren't expected to sever all ties with their origins, that is, with their original biological family. They don't replace the old family with the new one; rather, they add the new family to the old. Similarly, joining the American "family" doesn't exclude an ongoing emotional attachment with the old country and customs. My ex-wife Ana willingly, if reluctantly, followed me to North America from Central America, leaving behind her family, language, community, culture, and cuisine. Yet in the subsequent 30 years, not only has she learned English and assimilated and integrated into American society in most of the important ways, but she has never forsaken Spanish or severed ties to the old country. At times she is wistful about what might have been had she never left her native Honduras, but she doesn't dwell on

it either, and overall she is happy with the choice she made and the course she took.

Unfortunately, in the 37 years since Richard Rodriguez wrote *Hunger for Memory*, the very idea of assimilation has become more and more conflicted and controversial. The social process of assimilation itself has been swamped by the largest wave of immigrants in American history. Especially as a Latin American immigrant, why bother to even learn English when you see or hear “Press ‘one’ for English; *oprime el número ‘dos’ para español*” every time you visit an ATM or dial information; when you can spend years languishing in bilingual ed at the taxpayers’ expense, take the G.E.D. in Spanish, and even vote in Spanish. And many other languages, according to Section 203 of the amended Voting Rights Act. Do such actions enable full participation by linguistically disadvantaged minorities, or do they stymie assimilation and foment long-term discord in our country?

At the same time, support for the assimilation process by influential sectors of American society has plummeted in recent decades, among the same post-national, globalist elites for whom patriotism has been suspect or passé at least since the sixties. While there was a short-lived burst of at least faux patriotism immediately after 9/11 among liberals who are normally squeamish (at best) about such symbols as the flag, the national anthem, and the Pledge of Allegiance, this proved to be short-lived, and George W. Bush’s disastrous, divisive invasion of Iraq in 2003 made short work of it.

Then too, especially in recent years, the fashionable intelligentsia has succumbed to virtue signaling and the pseudo-intellectual fads of postmodernism, critical race theory, and intersectionality. Leftist intellectuals and their fellow travelers denounce assimilation as an obsolete mandate of the imperious white ruling class. In its place, they advocate cultural relativism, cultural pluralism, and multiculturalism, all supposedly in the pursuit of “social justice”. As the numbers of immigrants, people of color, and “visible minorities” from non-European backgrounds have swelled, some of their own ethnocentric leaders, in cahoots with the regressive left, have become ever more assertive in demanding that America should change its ways to accommodate them, not vice versa. Elevating marginalized group rights and identities above those of individuals, the traditional American ideal, has led to the emergence of a toxic, divisive “identity politics,” pitting one group against another, and all supposedly oppressed or marginalized groups against the hated white overlords, the über oppressor group, exuding “the pathology of whiteness.”

Just when support for assimilation is needed more than ever because of the greatest wave of immigration in our country’s history — one which still shows no sign of abating — instead, support has withered. By the late

1990s, distinguished sociologist Nathan Glazer (1923-2019) was already asking: Is assimilation dead? In his view, it was even then, and that was two decades ago. Actually, as far back as the sixties, Glazer had co-authored the book *Beyond the Melting Pot* with the ever insightful Daniel Patrick Moynihan, in which they asserted that assimilation was broken.

Scholar Peter Skerry, author of the important 1993 book *Mexican Americans: The Ambivalent Minority*, writing for the Brookings Institution in 2000, had a somewhat different view than Glazer. He referred to:

...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 the 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.

He might have also asked, if America is such a racist, bigoted, exploitive society, why do millions upon millions of “people of color” from around the world continue to knock at its door asking to enter, or often simply barge in uninvited? Fox News’ Tucker Carlson has also raised this point. Carlson stated on his program in 2018:

We’ve invited millions and millions of people into this country in recent years. There are now more immigrants in America right now than at any time in the history of the country. Is America more united than ever before? Is it stronger? Please. It’s just the opposite, and everyone knows it.

Maybe that’s because our elites welcome the immigrants by telling them how horrible America is, and how bigoted its native population. Our immigrants believe that. Why wouldn’t they? It’s not their fault. It’s ours. We’re creating a lot of Linda Sarsours [a Muslim Palestinian American who had just claimed America was founded on the extermination of indigenous peoples and who compared ICE to the Gestapo]. This is a recipe for civil war.

Diverse countries need a reason to stick together. They don’t do it organically. Our elites ought to be staying up late night after night, every night, trying to figure out what that reason is. Why should we hang together? A shared language? A shared culture? A shared set of core beliefs? Pick one.

Our ruling class rejects all of those.... It won't end well.

When I lived in Southern California in the early 1990s I often watched nightly Spanish-language news programs aimed at Latino immigrants. I was appalled at the grievance-based narrative they pushed constantly to their enormous audience. Every story concerning Latinos, and especially immigrant Latinos, was framed within a narrative of the manifold injustices Southern California's whites (and sometimes blacks) forced on them. This framing continually reinforced the message that Latinos were reviled and exploited by non-Hispanic whites and blacks in L.A., not because many had no legal right even to be in the U.S. in the first place (on land that after all warmongering Americans had stolen from their ancestors), but purely because of their Latino or Chicano ethnicity. Innocent Latinos were victims of bigotry and racism, plain and simple. It was *periodismo amarillo* (yellow journalism) at its finest, perpetrated by the likes of Jorge Ramos and local reporters.

Peter Skerry also raised another significant concern two decades ago: "that immigrants and their children are assimilating — but not always to the best aspects of American society," that is, to a permanent, dysfunctional, and alienated underclass that often sees itself as pitted implacably against sinister white overlords, a.k.a. "The Man". Too many would-be achievers from the barrio were mocked by Latino chauvinists as "coconuts," even as achievers from the black ghettos were called "oreos" (black on the outside; white on the inside), or accused of "acting white" by some of their fellow African Americans.

The idealistic notion of cultural pluralism, a term coined early in the twentieth century by Polish-Jewish immigrant Horace Kallen (1882-1974), certainly did not anticipate this unsavory outcome of deeply entrenched enmity between rival, marginalized groups, sharing only a mutual resentment or envy of whites. Kallen believed that racial and ethnic diversity could make for a stronger, better, more robust America, and that cultural diversity was compatible with national pride. In this idealistic but perhaps utopian view, diversity could coexist with inter-group harmony and mutual respect.

It is worth noting that Kallen's critics accused him of being disingenuous, in that as an active Zionist, his vision of a multicultural America was at odds with his vision of Israel as an ethnically Jewish state. A century later, Israel continues to wrestle incessantly with existential questions that dog its destiny and its very identity: How do Arab Muslims and Christians, who are citizens of Israel, fit into a state founded on an explicitly Jewish identity? What if they were ever to become a majority (and what measures would the state take to prevent that from ever happening)? What happens as the high-fertility, ultra-Orthodox Jews or Haredim — who are

heavy welfare recipients and exempted from serving in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), which is compulsory for other Jews — become a higher percentage of the Jewish population with each generation and eventually outnumber the secular Jews who founded and fought for Israel? Israel's long-term viability as a Jewish state is clouded by these fundamental, unanswered questions related to its very identity.



Horace Kallen (1882-1974), the father of cultural pluralism in America.

America's long-term viability is now clouded as well. Economic, political, cultural, and social forces building for the better part of a century have all challenged and undermined the old ideal of assimilation. The traditional melting pot is now maligned as a misleading metaphor concocted by whites in service of the American "empire." And these whites (Euro-Americans) erected their unethical empire on the graves and backs of indigenous peoples, slaves, indentured servants, and exploited workers. This was the view promoted by the socialist historian Howard Zinn (1922-2010) in his popular 1980 book, *A People's History of the United States*. Zinn counted A-list Hollywood actor Matt Damon and dissident intellectual Noam Chomsky among his many friends, colleagues, and admirers.

Elites deserted assimilation because it was deemed too self-serving and too "white," even as immigrants

overwhelmed it with their sheer numbers. The embrace of globalization made it unfashionable. Many leftist globalists now regard old-fashioned patriotism as veiled racism. Inspired by ex-Beatle, multi-millionaire John Lennon's utopian dream of a borderless world in his song, "Imagine" ("Imagine there's no countries..."), they fantasize that their own promiscuous affections and loyalties extend equally to every one of the 7.8 billion "global citizens." I call this fantasy for what it is — a preposterous, preening delusion.



Immigrant caravan heading for the United States, featuring the flags of Mexico and Central American countries. How can assimilation ever cope with these kinds of numbers, consisting of peoples who are overtly loyal to other nations? America-hating leftists don't want it to be able to cope; they want to overload and inundate America with so many immigrants that they will never assimilate.

"Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world." Thus wrote the Irish poet W. B. Yeats in his 1919 masterpiece, "The Second Coming," composed in the weary, blood-soaked aftermath of the First World War. A century later, it almost seems like America, where the center is also not holding, may be on the verge of falling apart. The election of President Donald J. Trump in 2016, after a long and nasty campaign, left Americans more embittered and polarized than any presidential election in living memory. Indeed, one analysis showed that the Yeats poem was quoted more often in 2016 than in any year of the preceding three decades. Identity politics are tearing the country apart. Civil society appears to be crumbling alongside once great American towns and cities.

In a perhaps telling sign of the "widening gyre" Yeats wrote of in his 1919 poem, more and more whites themselves seem to be giving up on the classical liberal consensus that it is the individual, not groups based on immutable characteristics, which should matter in American society. They are starting to emulate other historically disadvantaged groups and beginning to play the victim card as well. As a result of unending mass

immigration and weakened and overloaded assimilation processes, whites are the newest emerging "minority" in city after city, state after state, and age cohort after age cohort. In a couple of decades more, they will be an absolute minority in the country as a whole. As their percentage of the population dwindles, whites are finding themselves more and more subjected to a nonstop barrage of criticism for their supposedly unearned and undeserved status. They are constantly being lectured to and hectoring for their alleged "privilege," "supremacy," "pathology of whiteness," "micro-aggressions," and similar calumnies by their betters at *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, National Public Radio, Silicon Valley corporations, and other elite institutions.

Whites are claiming to be victims of reverse discrimination and both overt and subtle bias in private and public sector hiring, education, the criminal justice system, and popular culture. Whites are the one ethnic or racial group that can be safely ridiculed with little adverse consequence in polite society. They are the intended victims of "hate hoaxes" like the one actor Jussie Smollett recently committed in Chicago. In what I see as a backlash to this perceived double standard, so-called white identitarianism is now on the rise in North America, as it is in Europe, where many natives feel that their ancient homelands are under siege. The more outspoken European identitarians speak openly of their demographic "replacement" by outsiders, by The Other, by alien forces.

British author and political commentator Douglas Murray wrote compellingly about the existential crisis Western Europe faces in his best-selling but deeply disturbing 2017 book, *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam*. Murray argues that Europeans have brought most of this dilemma on themselves, by allowing in millions of Africans, Middle Easterners, and Muslims who may never assimilate because of their sheer numbers, because they are not encouraged or forced to, and because they do not want to. At the same time, many Europeans have simply stopped having babies, as sure a reflection of a loss of faith in the future as any. Having and raising offspring is the ultimate investment in the future of one's nation; it literally gives one "skin in the game." Murray concludes sadly that he senses a gloomy feeling among many Europeans "that the story has run out" on their storied civilization, on all its glorious achievements and greatest tragedies. Of course, in both the "Old" and the "New World," followers of white identitarianism are denounced as racists, bigots, xenophobes, nativists, fascists, neo-Nazis, or zealots of the "far right" or "alt-right" by the elite whites who still largely run corporations, the Internet, legacy media, and governments.

Reducing immigration into the U.S. would reduce many of these cultural stresses and strains, but the polit-

ical consensus to do so is lacking precisely because of the very disunity that multiculturalism and social balkanization have unleashed. Smaller immigrant flows would allow newcomers to assimilate to a new, evolved American norm over time, as occurred with the last great wave of immigration that ended a century ago with the restrictive law of 1924. I am a descendant of one of those immigrants, and I can attest that the melting pot worked, for me and for millions of others.

I have two multiracial sons in their twenties, and I want very much to feel hope for their future and the future of America, the country into which they were born and belong, and I think, still believe in. I hope they will live long, productive, and happy lives in a fair, prosperous, and sustainable country long after I am gone. I am deeply troubled by the state of the union, the state of the world, and the direction of many of the national and global trends described above — including a number of ominous environmental trends that I didn't even touch on. Yet when I look at my sons and their black, white, brown, Hispanic, Asian, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, atheist, gay, and straight friends, all from a very diverse, majority-minority high school and community, many of them immigrants or children of immigrants (like my sons), I still feel at least a modicum of hope. Their friends comprise a veritable kaleidoscope of diverse colors and backgrounds, far more than my own friends in high school, each and every one of whom was white. Not that there's anything wrong with that either.

My younger son's extremely patriotic Army JROTC program in high school was majority brown and black, led by a retired black U.S. Army officer. The animosities

and toxic identity politics that are now so rife online, in social media, on college campuses, and in the political arena seem almost entirely absent from my sons' circles of acquaintances. My younger son did describe a bit of tension between Spanish-speaking immigrants and American-born blacks in his high school, but this sort of ethnic or class friction has always been with us — and every society. Unsurprisingly, my son — who also happens to be the son of a Spanish-speaking Central American immigrant Latina — sided with his English-speaking, native-born African-American friends in the few incidents with the Spanish-speaking foreigners he made me aware of. In other words, he didn't side with the ethnicity to which he actually belongs, as the high commissioners of identity politics would have prescribed.

Looking at my boys and their friends, I see that assimilation, of a sort at least, *is* still happening, but not to the Roaring Twenties America that my father was born into in 1924, or the America of my youth in the flag-waving fifties and psychedelic sixties. On the cusp of 2020, the country is a very different place demographically, economically, culturally, and technologically. Millennials are not Baby Boomers.

Whether or not the regressive left considers assimilation a dirty word, it will occur in some form, and it *must* occur in a good way, if we are to preserve at least some semblance of the American Nation. The question we all face is whether or not the America to which immigrants would assimilate is already, or soon will be, so irrevocably fallen, fractured, and dysfunctional that what they will assimilate to amounts to little more than shards of what it once was. ■

In formulating a permanent policy two considerations are of prime importance. The first is that the country has the right to say who shall and who shall not come in. It is not for any foreign country to determine our immigration policy. The second is that the basis of restriction must be chosen with a view not to the interest of any group or groups in this country, whether racial or religious, but rather with a view to the country's best interests as a whole. The great test is assimilability. Will the newcomers fit into the American life readily? Is their culture sufficiently akin to our own to make it possible for them easily to take their place among us? Certain groups not only do not fuse easily, but consistently endeavor to keep alive their racial distinctions when they settle among us. They perpetuate the "hyphen," which is but another way of saying that they seek to create foreign blocs in our midst.

—*The New York Times*
Editorial, March 1, 1924