

# Whatever Became of Assimilation?

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## INTRODUCTION

It was 1991, and the mass immigration unleashed anew by 1965's Hart-Celler Act wouldn't start dominating the national conversation for another 15 to 20 years. But economist Martha Farnsworth Riche at the Population Reference Bureau (and later director of the Census Bureau under President Clinton<sup>1</sup>) was paying attention. Writing in *American Demographics*, she mused:<sup>2</sup>

The United States is undergoing a new demographic transition: it is becoming a multicultural society. During the 1990s, it will shift from a society dominated by whites and rooted in Western culture to a world society characterized by three large racial and ethnic minorities. All three minorities will grow both in size and share, while the still significant white majority will continue its relative decline....

Without fully realizing it, we have left the time when the nonwhite, non-Western part of our population could be expected to assimilate to the dominant majority. In the future, the white Western majority will have to do some assimilation of its own.

Riche's idiosyncratic take on "assimilation"—idiosyncratic, anyway, compared to the word's traditional meaning—hadn't been bruited about when the Hart-Celler Act was in congressional play. Back then, Senator Edward Kennedy had assured doubters, "First, our cities will not be flooded with a million immigrants annually.... Secondly, the ethnic mix of this country will not be upset

...Contrary to the charges in some quarters, [the bill] will not inundate America with immigrants from any one country or area, or the most populated and deprived nations of Africa and Asia..."

But 25 years after Hart-Celler's enactment, Riche was blithely projecting:

Government will find that as minority groups grow in size relative to one another, and as the minority population gains on the dwindling majority, no single group will command the power to dictate solutions. The debate over almost any public issue is likely to become more confrontational. Reaching a consensus will require more cooperation than it has in the past.

That "solutions" even exist in a multicultural society might be a naïvely *American* assumption, consistent with the confidence that "God takes care of little children, drunks, and the United States of America." The world's experience was probably better reflected in Malaysian leader Tunku Abdul Rahman's mid-1960s remark to an Australian diplomat, acknowledging the rationale for the then-extant "White Australia" policy: "Why should you have my insoluble problem? The problem of ethnic diversity is insoluble. I have Malays, Indians, and Chinese, and it is insoluble."<sup>3</sup>

So in an era when complaints about the need to "Press One for English" are routine, when signage in stores and on food-packaging labels often has Spanish in parallel with English, and when "diversity" has apparently become American society's lodestar, what is the state of assimilation (as traditionally understood)?

Of course, assimilation is a *vast* topic within the *vaster* subject of immigration, and entire books have been written about it.<sup>4</sup> In thinking about today's situation, historical comparisons—especially with the "Great Wave" immigration of 1880-1914—are useful, too, and are also the subjects of entire books.<sup>5</sup>

Thus what follows here is, inevitably, just a slight dip into that vastness—first, current realities for three key facets of assimilation; next, impacts on the native-born population; then a comparison with assimilation during the Great Wave; and, finally, some rumination on

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why today’s “Greater Wave” differs, assimilation-wise, from the Great Wave.

**THE STATE OF ASSIMILATION: LANGUAGE**

There are many aspects to immigrants’ assimilation beyond language. There’s familiarity with their “new” nation’s popular culture. There’s cuisine. There are goals for educational and economic attainment. In Western nations, there’s respect for the natural environment. There’s naturalization to citizenship, often followed by participation via voting. And ultimately, there’s what Hudson Institute historian John Fonte terms “patriotic assimilation,” reached “when a newcomer essentially adopts American civic values and the American heritage as his or her own. It occurs, for example, when newcomers and their children begin to think of American history as ‘our’ history, not ‘their’ history.”<sup>6</sup>

But language assimilation is a prerequisite for all the other aspects, and reported trends in this arena are generally dismal—at least for Hispanic immigrants and their offspring—once you look beyond the happy talk from academic studies<sup>7</sup> (and resulting popular reporting<sup>8</sup>) that relies upon individuals’ assessments of their own English fluency.

For example, the U.S. Census Bureau, in its annual American Community Survey (ACS), asks all adult respondents who speak a foreign language at home, “How well [do you] speak English?” The four choices are

“very well,” “well,” “not well,” and “not at all,” but there’s no *objective* measure of their ability involved in this reporting.

Public-policy analyst Jason Richwine looked into this question,<sup>9</sup> employing data developed by the National Center for Education Statistics (2012–2014). The participants—approximately 8,000 American adults, both native-born and immigrants—were challenged with a battery of problem-solving questions for which successful performances depended heavily upon literacy in English. In addition to tackling the questions, they also rated *themselves* for English fluency, using the ACS categories.

Among Richwine’s findings are the following:

- The average immigrant scores at the 21st percentile of the native score distribution.
- Hispanic immigrants struggle the most with English literacy. Their average score falls at the 8th percentile, and 63 percent are below basic.
- For Hispanic immigrants, self-reported English-speaking ability overstates actual literacy. The average literacy score of Hispanic immigrants who self-report that they speak English “very well” or “well” falls at the 18th percentile, and 44 percent are below basic.
- Literacy difficulties brought by low-skill immigrants persist beyond the immigrant



**SIGNS OF UNASSIMILATION** — Bilingual signs near the customer checkout aisles at Smith’s food and drug store in Bozeman, Montana (left) and the bilingual cooking instructions on the label of a Progresso soup can (above).

generation. The children of Hispanic immigrants score at the 34th percentile, and 22 percent are below basic.

When assimilation is the concern, that result about immigrants’ offspring is particularly troubling. For an example, consider Harrisonburg, a city of roughly 50,000 in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley that has experienced an influx of about 2,000 refugees since 2002, with resulting large impact on the Harrisonburg City Public Schools:

HCPS has one of the highest Limited English Proficient (LEP) populations in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Though HCPS is a small division of approximately 4,500 total students, 38 percent of those students are Limited English Proficient. Within that population there are 50 different countries and 52 different languages represented. Of our LEP population, **62 percent were born in the United States** (emphasis added).<sup>10</sup>

Anecdotes that support this picture of widespread language *non*-assimilation are easy pickings. For example, one evening in March 2004, while living in Redondo Beach, California, I systematically scanned the AM and FM radio bands and found that 20 out of the 52 stations

I received broadcast in foreign languages, mostly Spanish. By now, maybe we should expect this in southern California, but a few years later, while driving a rental car in the Washington, D.C. area, I had a similar experience. Also in the national-capital metro area stand several thousand kiosks for free distribution of the weekly *Washington Hispanic* or *El Tiempo Latino* newspapers, each with circulations of around 50,000 and claiming weekly readerships of 150,000 and 120,000, respectively.<sup>11</sup>

Further—farically—there’s the 700,000-person<sup>12</sup> Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) population, about whom President Obama lectured us (while foisting the DACA illegal-alien amnesty on the nation), “These are young people who study in our schools, they play in our neighborhoods, they’re friends with our kids, they pledge allegiance to our flag. They are Americans in their heart, in their minds, in every single way but one: on paper.”<sup>13</sup>

So it’s notable that space for “Contact Information, Certification, and Signature of the Interpreter” takes up about 10 percent of the DACA-application paperwork,<sup>14</sup> which is in English. Yep, interpreters—for all those “Americans in their minds.”

Immigrants’ language assimilation, then, can be graded, overall, as “at best, spotty.”

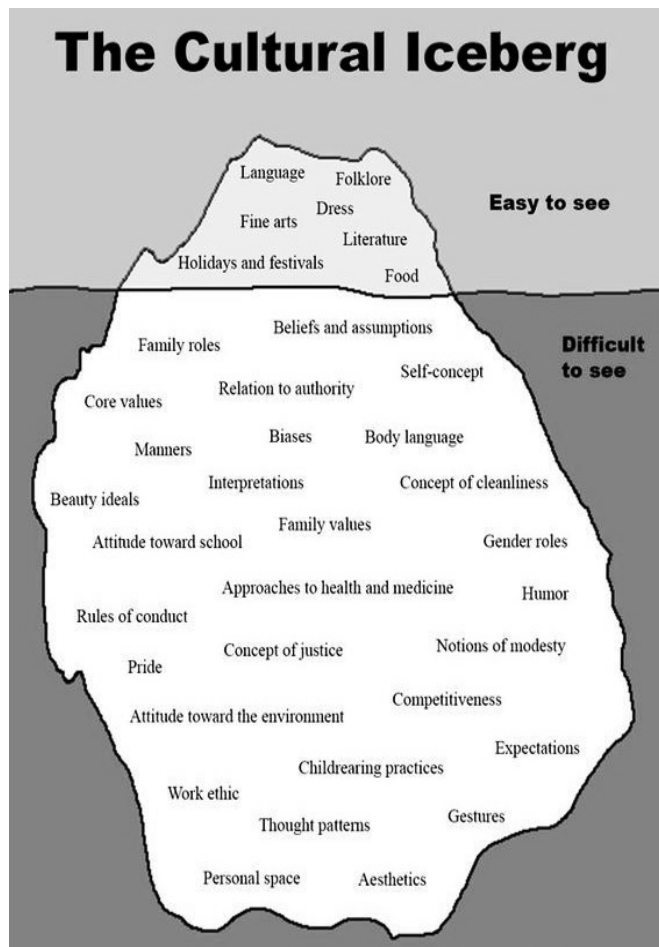
**THE STATE OF ASSIMILATION: EDUCATIONAL AND ECONOMIC**

As with most immigration-connected matters, whole books could be written on this topic (and have been—e.g., the works of Harvard labor economist George Borjas). Further, the topic subdivides when we ask “Which immigrants (and their progeny)?” As with language, it’s the educational and related economic performance of Hispanics (with Mexicans as representative) that’s most problematic.

Jason Richwine, again, provides a useful current summary:

[J]ust seven percent of working aged Mexican immigrants have a college degree, compared to 39 percent of white Americans. As expected, second generation Mexican Americans improve markedly, increasing their college graduation rate to 19 percent. Unfortunately, no further progress is observed. College completion for the third-plus generation stands at 18 percent, less than half the white rate.

Income patterns are only slightly more encouraging. Among working aged employed men, Mexican immigrants earn, on average, 53 percent of white income. The figure rises to 68 percent in the second generation, but then tops out at 74 percent in the third-plus generation.<sup>15</sup>



What's happening here might be destructive synergy between education and economics, as Center for Immigration Studies fellow David North laid out<sup>16</sup> in "The Immigrant Paradox: The Stalled Progress of Recent Immigrants' Children": The immigrant generation is ambitious and hard-working, and they appreciate the bounties of America in comparison to the "old country." But their educational backgrounds limit their economic achievement, so that they raise the next generation in straitened circumstances (i.e. "inner cities") compared to the larger society.

Then, as Thomas Sowell explained, "[T]heir children have never seen those other places; they've never lived that poorer life. All they know is that the population around them is a hell of a lot more prosperous than they are. And there are all sorts of ideologues and hustlers ready to tell them that it's society's fault that they don't have what other people have. This then gives you the people who hate the country in which they live."<sup>17</sup> Altogether then, the second and subsequent generations often do assimilate—but to their dysfunctional underclass surroundings, a trajectory that John Derbyshire has dubbed "absimilation."<sup>18</sup>

### THE STATE OF ASSIMILATION: CIVIC AND PATRIOTIC

John Fonte, already quoted above, defines "civic integration" (he uses "integration" and "assimilation" interchangeably) to mean that an immigrant is "assimilated into the American political and legal system, obeys the law, and participates in community or public life in some fashion."<sup>19</sup>

But beyond that, "The type of integration that matters most for the long-term health of American democracy—and the type that was advocated by Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Hamilton, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and Louis Brandeis—is political loyalty and emotional attachment to the American republic.... Commonly known as 'Americanization,' this can also be called 'patriotic integration.'"<sup>19</sup>

In 2013 Fonte and social scientist Althea Nagai<sup>20</sup> analyzed results from a 2008 poll, concluding that naturalized citizens are substantially less invested in our country and its future than are native-born citizens. The Harris Interactive survey of 2,421 randomly selected citizens revealed, for example, that:

- By roughly 31 points (81 percent to 50 percent), the native-born are more likely than immigrant citizens to believe that schools should focus on American citizenship rather than ethnic pride.
- By 30 points (67 percent to 37 percent), the native-born are more likely to believe that the U.S. Constitution is a higher legal authority

for Americans than international law.

- By 15 points (82 percent to 67 percent), the native-born are more likely than immigrant citizens to support an emphasis in schools on learning about the nation's founding documents.

Survey respondents' opinions on 16 such questions and their knowledge of several basic facts from U.S. history led Fonte and Nagai to conclude, "A large 'patriotic gap' exists between native-born citizens and immigrant citizens on issues of patriotic attachment and civic knowledge. Despite what some may believe, native-born citizens have a much higher degree of patriotic attachment to the United States than naturalized citizens."

Fonte and Nagai also quoted some complementary outcomes from other scholars' work, one example being a longitudinal study, reported in 2001, of 5,000 in the "immigrant second generation." A disheartening result of this study was that, after attending American high schools for four years, the study's subjects had become *less likely* to identify themselves as "Americans"—and more likely to call themselves "Mexicans" and "Chinese" (etc.) or "Hispanic" and "Asian" (etc.)!

### THE STATE OF ASSIMILATION: BURDENS ON AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NATIVE-BORN CITIZENRY

Of course, assimilation isn't all or nothing. Many immigrants arrive here intent on becoming Americans, adjust to American mores, contribute to civic life, and—as Fonte said—come to regard the country's history as "our history." Some such newcomers arrive as single adults, eventually marry native-born citizens, and raise children in English-speaking households.

If those trajectories were true for essentially all immigrants, assimilation wouldn't be grist for articles in *The Social Contract* (though there would still be substantial concerns about the environment, resources, and economics—in short, impacts resulting from the *scale* of immigration, the numbers). But as the late Lawrence Auster wrote (emphases in original), "[I]f it is true that many immigrants are *not* assimilating, that fact would not be 'balanced' by the fact that other immigrants *are* assimilating, since the net effect of immigration is to introduce a nonassimilating population into this country."<sup>21</sup>

The *tangible* burdens placed on us natives by the "nonassimilators" typically result from language-induced problems of many kinds. A few items:

- In 1980, Willie Ramirez, an athletic 18-year-old, fell into a coma and was rushed to a South Florida hospital by several relatives and friends whose English abilities were poor to nonexistent. The emergency-room doctor heard "intoxicado" from one of them and took it to mean "intoxicated"—a recreational-drug overdose. But they *hadn't* meant that, just the ingestion of something,

perhaps causing food poisoning. In fact, Ramirez had endured an intracerebellar hemorrhage that continued to bleed for more than two days as he lay unconscious in the hospital, but “[n]o neuro consult was ordered for two days because the Emergency Room physician and the doctor covering Willie in the ICU erroneously believed that Willie had suffered an intentional drug overdose and had treated him accordingly. The misdiagnosis was based on the physical exam, which initially pointed to a drug overdose, and on complete confusion regarding the medical history.”<sup>22</sup> Because of the delay in correct diagnosis, Ramirez awoke as a quadriplegic. The resulting malpractice suit yielded an immediate \$3.4 million settlement from the hospital and a series of periodic payments that will bring the total to \$71 million if Ramirez lives to age 74.<sup>23</sup>

- In 2007 in Kings Mountain, North Carolina, a violent collision between a train and a tractor-trailer resulted because truck driver Ricardo Ercia couldn’t understand signs in English warning vehicles to clear *two* tracks before stopping.<sup>24</sup>

- The late Jim Boulet, executive director of English First, wrote about practical problems engendered by mandates that interpreters—sometimes *multiple* interpreters when the proceedings are lengthy (so interpreter-fatigue might set in)—be provided by taxpayers in court and agency actions:<sup>25</sup>

Actually, having two interpreters in the room may require a third merely to referee. Judge Wayne Purdom told the *National Law Journal* in 2003 that once the interpreters are in place in an Atlanta courtroom, the language debates have only begun:

*Sometimes one interpreter is very critical of another’s translation — right in the middle of the courtroom — and they will interrupt and contradict each other and say the other person’s translation is bad.*

- In September 2010, Massachusetts’s Secretary of State recalled about 100,000 ballots printed for a primary election in Worcester County that included a race between incumbent sheriff Guy Glodis and a challenger. This was because the portion of the ballot translated into Spanish identified Glodis as “Aguacil actual,” which means “current dragonfly.” The spelling should have been “Alguacil,” the Spanish word for “sheriff.” And since absentee ballots had already gone out, they remained uncorrected.<sup>26</sup>

Instances of bungled translations for ballots and other official election materials aren’t rare. And they’re not the only effect of non-assimilation associated with elections. Consider the 2002 gubernatorial campaign in Texas, which pitted Democrat Tony Sanchez against Republican incumbent Rick Perry. Soon after the elec-

tion, Allan Wall (fluent in Spanish and, at the time, teaching English at a high school in Mexico) mused at VDARE.com:<sup>27</sup>

Democrat Sanchez and Republican Perry were not too far apart on issues. Both talk like conservatives, support low taxes and the death penalty. Both promised to improve health and education in the Lone Star State ...

What’s significant ... is how the election played out “ethnically.” Tony Sanchez might have made a fine governor. But his campaign approached Anglos and Hispanics in significantly different ways.

Wall noted that for Sanchez himself, assimilation was a non-issue—he was a highly successful businessman whose forebears had lived in the Laredo area since the 1700s, before Mexico was a country. Nevertheless, the Sanchez campaign’s broadcast ads in Spanish were starkly different from those in English:

In English, the Sanchez ads promote “common sense conservative values,” “values of rural Texas,” cutting government waste, eliminating unnecessary programs, getting tough on crime, support for the death penalty and “holding taxes down.”

[But none of those themes surfaced in Sanchez’s Spanish-language ads.] They did, however, contain a number of veiled and not-so-veiled ethnic appeals to Hispanics. I got warmer, folksier, more intimate vibes being expressed through the Spanish ads, which often addressed the listeners as “my dear friends” or something similar. The Spanish-language ads emphasized that Sanchez “no se olvida de sus raíces” [hasn’t forgotten his roots] and was “el amigo del pueblo” [the friend of the people]. They often referred to “nuestra gente” or “nuestro pueblo” [our people]. ... One ad said bluntly that “En toda la historia de Tejas nunca hemos tenido un gobernador de nuestro pueblo—mexico-americano” [In the entire history of Texas we have never had a governor of our people—Mexican-American].

Wall pointed out an important implication of Sanchez’s nominally bilingual campaign:

“What’s the big deal?” some readers might ask. Don’t all politicians tailor their message to particular interest groups? Even in a monolingual society, pandering is a politician’s specialty.

Maybe. But at least in a monolingual society, an informed voter can more easily monitor

what a politician is saying to another audience. *America's hapless English-speaking majority*, on the other hand, is blissfully ignorant of most of what is being said in the parallel Spanish-language media, whether it's politics, journalism, or entertainment (emphasis added).

Ultimately, Perry won in 2002 with about 58 percent of the vote,<sup>27</sup> but exit polling indicated that Sanchez took nearly 88 percent of Hispanics' votes,<sup>28</sup> perhaps an illustration of Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's observation a few years later that "In multiracial societies, you don't vote in accordance with your economic interests and social interests, you vote in accordance with race and religion."<sup>29</sup>

Other impacts on native-borns of non-language-assimilating immigrants are rife. There's the extra expense of K-12 education for Limited English Proficient pupils and the extra attention harried teachers have to devote to them, to the disadvantage of the natives. There are the native teenagers frozen out of jobs in fast-food restaurants because they speak only English. More generally, there are the many service jobs, especially in government, for which bilingual and multilingual candidates—hence, typically immigrants—are preferred, since the clientele include many immigrants who are monolingual in other languages.

But ultimately, the most profound effect of the "Press One for English" regime may be to make native-born American citizens feel like strangers in their own country.<sup>30,31</sup>

### ASSIMILATION: THE WAY WE WERE

Immigration and immigrants have never been widely *popular* among native-born Americans.<sup>32</sup> In the mid-nineteenth century, there was widespread concern in the largely Protestant country over the mass influxes of Catholics from Ireland and Germany, refugees from the potato famine in both countries and political upheaval in the latter.<sup>33</sup> Further, the immigrant-flooded labor market severely impacted the economic fortunes of many native-born workers.<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, for its first century and then some, the United States was a very *laissez-faire* nation. Applied to immigration, this meant that the immigrants assimilated or they didn't—it was up to them to flourish, or not. And as the Manhattan Institute's Steven Malanga has pointed out,<sup>35</sup>

In the first great immigration, America did not have a social safety net; we did not have welfare, we did not have Medicare, Medicaid, we did not have school lunch programs. We did not have any of those things. If you couldn't make it here, you went back. And in

fact, it's estimated that more than half ... of all immigrants during the first great immigration went back. There have been some studies of individual ethnic groups, Italian Americans, it's estimated 65 percent of all Italian-American immigrants went back ...

The floodtide immigration starting anew in about 1880 combined with the industrial revolution to generate noisome conditions in urban America, as described by Syracuse University historian David Bennett:<sup>36</sup>

Even more than in the 1840s and 1850s, eastern and midwestern cities experienced staggering growth and change. Huge new manufacturing establishments blackened skies and dominated urban landscapes. The influx of their workers transformed hundreds of neighborhoods, exacerbated ethnic tensions, and strained facilities to breaking point.... [T]he stench, congestion, crime, and chaotic conditions seemed to some the palpable symbol of a nation imperiled. In the fetid slums where immigrant aliens were packed in shabby tenements, the old fears of nativist yesterdays could find new meaning. Were not these people responsible for the ugliness and disarray? Could they ever be assimilated into the national community?

By 1900, the native-borns were becoming restless about the persistent *foreignness* of the foreign-born legions. Hence, the *laissez-faire* attitude was progressively abandoned in favor of emphases on assimilation ranging from service-oriented and welcoming to outright coercive.

The gentler variety was emphasized in the settlement houses, such as Jane Addams's Hull House in Chicago. These provided "a comprehensive array of services including counseling, employment bureaus, and emergency relief to those in need of food, clothing, or shelter. There were social clubs for young and old and full schedules of classes in every subject from 'Shakespeare' to 'English for Beginners,' with a wide selection of vocational programs in the industrial arts. ... Classes in cooking helped acquaint immigrants with American food and patterns of eating as well as being a culinary exchange."<sup>37</sup> At the same time, there was some encouragement for immigrants to retain aspects of their cultural heritages, both for their own benefit and as "immigrant gifts" to the ever-developing American culture.<sup>38</sup>

The other approach, heavily driven by concerns about immigrants' loyalty (or its lack) to America, was initially the purview of hereditary and patriotic societies, such as the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Sons of the American Revolution. The latter, for example, had a million pamphlets containing tutelage

for immigrants about American history and civic mores printed in fifteen languages and distributed in such venues as workplaces and night schools.<sup>39</sup>

(That plethora of languages marks one of the important differences between then and now: For immigrants of that era, English was a lingua franca amid the polyglot babel, whereas today's native speakers of Spanish can often survive without learning English, since immigration is so dominated by them.)

Pressures on immigrants for assimilation—then referred to as “Americanization”—ramped up when the Great War (World War I) descended upon Europe, even in the several years before the United States waded in. The 1910 Census had revealed more than 13.5 million foreign-born residents (amid a total U.S. population of 92 million<sup>40</sup>), of whom only 53 percent had naturalized or signaled their intention to do so.<sup>41</sup> With the war's onset, many of the immigrants were, understandably, focused on the fortunes of their European homelands. Equally understandably, the resulting sides-choosing raised concern in the larger society about “hyphenated Americans.”

The biggest concern was over the 4.7 million immigrants who hailed from the Central Powers, especially the 2.5 million from Germany itself.<sup>42</sup> After U.S. entry into the war, assimilationist pressures on immigrants from Germany became intense. That country's language and even its name were anathematized, so that sauerkraut was renamed “liberty cabbage,” and one Massachusetts doctor diagnosed German measles as “liberty measles.” [!] Berlin, Iowa was renamed “Lincoln,” the Germania Life Insurance Company became Guardian Life, and some individuals de-Germanized their surnames (e.g. from Koch to Cook and from Schwartz to Black). Playing music by Beethoven was made illegal in Pittsburgh.<sup>43</sup>

Industry contributed significantly to the pressure for assimilation. Probably best known is Henry Ford's insistence that his non-English-fluent employees take after-hours language classes offered in the company's factories; the courses culminated in “graduation” ceremonies wherein participants in “old-world” garb carrying corresponding flags entered a giant “melting pot” and, “stirred” by their instructors, emerged wearing “American” clothing and bearing small American flags.<sup>44</sup>

Assimilationist pressure often generated resentment and pushback among its targets, but as historians Otis Graham and Elizabeth Koed noted, sometimes it was a win-win regime:<sup>45</sup>

Gary, Indiana's Americanization program deserves a decidedly positive interpretation. Its emphasis on the work ethic improved corporate profits in Gary's mills but also worker compensation. Knowledge of the

English language and the ability to read and understand safety manuals and instructions improved safety records. Gary's Polish-American steelworkers did not reject management-sponsored evening classes and education, and responded well to patriotic messages that defined the meaning of America in terms of liberty, democracy, and equality.

Some of the assimilationist pressure that transpired during the Great Wave, and especially during the Great War, strikes me as excessive. In an example nominally affecting a broader subject population than solely immigrants from Germany, “[t]he Governor of Iowa issued a proclamation banning any language except English in all schools, church services, conversations in public places or over the telephone”<sup>46</sup> (Over the telephone—imagine trying to enforce *that!* Admittedly, there were “only” a few million phones in America at the time. Then again, they were served by hundreds of companies with *non-interconnecting* networks.<sup>47</sup>) At the same time, the native-born public had legitimate reasons for unhappiness at what mass immigration over decades was doing to their country, and their discomfort was only sharpened by the exigencies of a major war.

After the 1918 Armistice, the pressures abated, but the *laissez faire* approach to assimilation didn't return full-strength. While the national government largely retired from the fray, many state governments encouraged and funded the continuation of night-school classes in English for the foreign born, with Idaho and Utah actually mandating that non-English-speaking aliens attend Americanization courses.<sup>48</sup>

Meanwhile, the renewed surge of immigration following the war finally provoked changes in immigration policy that restrictionists had sought for decades.<sup>49</sup> The resulting throttling of the numbers in 1921 and the 1924 “cutoff” so changed the dynamics that assimilation could henceforth occur more organically, no longer hampered by a steady *mass* influx of “new” aliens. As Graham and Koed wrote, “[T]he best ally to the assimilation process is a lower rate of immigration itself.”<sup>50</sup>

Altogether then, the stretch of American history that saw the largest immigration influx prior to today's also saw heavy emphasis on immigrants' assimilation emanating from much of American society, *including its commanding heights* (for example, from such eminences as Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson.<sup>51</sup>). How times have changed.

### ASSIMILATION: WHAT'S GONE WRONG?

The question “What's gone wrong?” reflects a point of view. A hundred years ago or even a scant 40 years ago it was a point of view that wouldn't have needed acknowledgment, as it was so obvious: If people immigrate

to **our** country, *they must adjust to us and aim to meet our standards and expectations.*

This “obvious” point of view was widely shared, well beyond the entities and time period focused upon in the immediately preceding section. Routine grouching over the “press one for English” phenomenon shows that it’s widely shared even today. In fact, there are [gasp!] *immigrants* who make noises along these lines.

For example, CNN commentator Fareed Zakaria—generally seen as a liberal—said to Bill Maher in 2017, “Part of what has happened is on the left there’s been a kind of multiculturalism that says everything is equal, all these other cultures are equal. And, look, I can say as an immigrant, if I wanted to maintain Indian culture I could’ve stayed in India. The reason I came to America is because I admired American principles.” Maher’s studio audience applauded heartily as Zakaria said this.<sup>52</sup>

Further, while the previously cited Fonte-Nagai report “America’s Patriotic Assimilation System Is Broken”<sup>20</sup> showed that native-born citizens scored higher than naturalized citizens on all of the study’s criteria, those foreign-borns weren’t necessarily dug in and hostile. Consider the point (already noted) that, by 82 percent to 67 percent, “the native-born are more likely than immigrant citizens to support an emphasis in schools on learning about the nation’s founding documents.” That still means that two-thirds of naturalized immigrants think it’s important to study the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and *The Federalist Papers*.

Finally, a notable illustration of older vintage: The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) was founded in 1929 as a civil-rights organization to advance the interests of Mexican-American *citizens*.<sup>53</sup> According to LULAC’s account of its own history,<sup>54</sup>

Officers and members were required to accept an oath stating they would “be loyal to the Constitution and to the government of the United States of North America, and would obey its laws.” Membership was restricted to native born or naturalized citizens of Latin extraction 18 years of age, although Anglos were later admitted. . . . English was declared the official language of LULAC. The American Flag became its official flag and America the Beautiful its official song, and George Washington’s Prayer its official prayer. Also adopted were Robert’s Rules of Order as the governing rules during meetings and conventions.

So in its early decades, LULAC emphasized full integration of Mexican-Americans into the dominantly Euro-American society. Further, consistent with the interests of its membership, the organization advocated restrictions on immigration.<sup>53</sup>

Altogether, then, getting immigrants to assimilate (in the traditional sense) might have remained like pushing on an open door. But by 1991, Martha Farnsworth Riche—see my Introduction—was singing her different tune about “assimilation.”<sup>22</sup> And in 1995, apparently going with the temper of the times, LULAC was the lead plaintiff<sup>55</sup> in the ultimately successful attempt to quash California’s famous Proposition 187.

(Proposition 187, which passed with 59 percent of the vote in November 1994, would have prevented illegal aliens from accessing most state-funded public services, including K-12 education.<sup>56</sup>)

Such big changes on assimilation—and so ruinous. What’s behind them? I suggest overarching stupidity, plus the resulting smugness (also driven by historical ignorance) and political cowardice.

### **Stupidity in the saddle**

Orwell said that “Some ideas are so stupid that only intellectuals believe them.” His observation applies perfectly to the notion that ethnic diversity is “a strength” or even “our greatest strength,” except that those “intellectuals” have, through steady browbeating, enmeshed a much larger population in their delusions.

For example, an official website statement, “Diversity Is Our Greatest Strength,” by Broward County (Florida) Sheriff Scott Israel said, in part, “When I first took office in 2013, I directed a significant cultural change within the Broward Sheriff’s Office to prioritize diversity within our ranks. To serve the citizens of Broward to the best of our abilities, we must look like the citizens we police.”<sup>57</sup> (Israel—now an *ex*-sheriff—was on the job, so to speak, during 2018’s mass shooting at Parkland, Florida’s Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School.<sup>58</sup>)

The headwind that diversity poses for assimilation is implicit in a point made, memorably, by frequent *Social Contract* contributor Brenda Walker:<sup>59</sup>

We all prefer to be around others who speak our language, share our values, and understand our jokes. Human community is based upon similarities, not differences. Wouldn’t it be better to develop public policy on the basis of human nature as it really is?

The transformation of “diversity” into the mindless mantra it’s become goes back to a 1978 Supreme Court case, *Regents of the Univ. of Cal. v. Bakke*,<sup>60</sup> that concerned affirmative action at the University of California’s medical school. While the Supremes ruled that the university must not use racial quotas in admissions, Justice Lewis Powell also hedged that “creating a diverse classroom environment is a compelling state interest.” Soon thereafter, “diversity” became academia’s Holy Grail, opportunistically invoked by admissions officers countrywide in order [wink-wink, nudge-nudge] to do quotas without



quotas. And over time, it's broken out into the larger society, especially in government and big business.

Growing ethnic diversity brought to America by post-1965 immigration dovetailed nicely with the primarily black/white "diversity" that was the impetus in *Bakke*, boosting the anti-assimilation pressures to which we've capitulated. It's as if the whole society has applied to "diversity" the wry slogan I encountered in the aerospace industry when tackling difficult problems: "If you can't fix it, *feature* it."

The society-busting stupidity of "celebrating diversity" is reinforced at the granular level by innumerable thoughtless indulgences of the immigrant population, most commonly regarding language but sometimes involving behavior.

In the grand scheme of things, for example, it's a minor burden for a large corporation to add Spanish to signs in its stores or to labels on its products, since the largely one-time costs are amortized over myriad customers or cans. And there's presumably a competitive advantage for the first company in its industry that wades in. But that advantage evanesces once they all do it. At that point the advantage has devolved to mass shortsightedness, as such actions incrementally reduce pressure on non-English speakers to assimilate, and the country inches closer to being the "polyglot boarding house" that Theodore Roosevelt warned against.<sup>61</sup> Over the long term, a country with a fractious, identity-focused, and mutually uncomprehending population has to be a worse environment for business.

Or consider the 1987 case of a Chinese immigrant family that had been living in the U.S. about a year when the husband, Dong Lu Chen, killed his wife with a hammer because she was having an adulterous affair. As the *Washington Post* later reported, "The case was just another homicide until a state judge ... sentenced Chen to five years' probation, saying later that Chen's 'cultural background ... made him more susceptible to cracking under the circumstances.'<sup>62</sup> Abandon the demand for assimilation and you'll wind up abandoning "equal justice under the law."

### **Smugness informed by stupidity**

In 2003, *The Atlantic's* veteran foreign correspondent Robert D. Kaplan wrote:<sup>63</sup>

[L]ife inside the post-industrial cocoon of Western democracy has made people incapable of imagining life inside a totalitarian system. With affluence comes not only the loss of imagination but also the loss of historical memory. Thus global economic growth in the twenty-first century can be expected to create mass societies even more deluded than the ones we have now—the very actions neces-

sary to protect human rights and democracy will become increasingly hard to explain to those who have never been deprived of them.

Indeed, relatively few Americans seem to realize that many taken-for-granted features of our daily lives are actually up for grabs under the onslaught of "assimilationless" immigration. As a friend wrote to me regarding such uncomprehension, "It's called 'living for the here and now.' The highly-educated wife of a former newspaper colleague once said about our immigration crisis, 'Let my two sons worry about it. Every generation has its own problems.'" (Benjamin Franklin surely had such smug cluelessness in mind with his "A republic, if you can keep it" reply to the Philadelphia woman who'd asked him what the 1787 Constitutional Convention had wrought.)

What my friend's colleague's wife evidently doesn't grasp is that the ordered liberty of the West—great personal freedom amid the rule of law—isn't *normal*. Instead it's something *created by the West*, the labor of generations. Political scientist Angelo Codevilla had a warning for people like her:<sup>64</sup>

The reason why inhabitants of the First World should keep the Third World in mind is that habits prevalent in the countries that became known as the Third World are a set of human possibilities that any people anywhere can adopt at any time. As Argentina showed in the Twentieth Century, falling from the First World to the Third can be easy and quick.

That was written in 2009, well before we had the current, starker example of late socialism in Venezuela.

### **Political cowardice buttressed by stupidity**

Assimilation's eclipse is also assisted by political cowardice, high and low. The saga of affirmative action makes for a prime case. Initially portrayed as a simple codification of equal opportunity, affirmative action (AA) soon morphed into the preferences and racial quotas that were explicitly forbidden in the 1964 Civil Rights Act.<sup>65</sup> But the rationale, from "fairness," for this development, acknowledging the unique history of blacks in America, was intelligible.

At the same time, though, the inception of AA reflected a failure of nerve on the part of the white majority to insist that our civilization's achievements are admirable and its standards are worthy. Along with that failure of nerve—a cowardly political cringe—was the failure to acknowledge that shortcuts to success don't produce the real thing. The latter reality was expressed memorably by Thomas Sowell in an essay he wrote about "longshoreman philosopher" Eric Hoffer:<sup>66</sup>

Hoffer was convinced that the black leader-

ship was taking the wrong approach, if they wanted to advance the people in whose name they spoke. Only achievement would win the respect of the larger society and—more important—their own self-respect. *And no one else can give you achievement* (emphasis added).

And then AA metastasized! Originally a hand up for America's black citizens to remediate against some of the disadvantages left over from slavery and the subsequent Jim Crow era—a flawed idea, but well meant—by 1990 millions of immigrants became eligible for AA benefits upon their arrival. As Jim Robb, founding vice-president of NumbersUSA, explained:<sup>67</sup>

First, affirmative action policy makes no distinctions concerning country of origin. To meet affirmative action goals mandated by the government, a firm need only hire a certain number of employees from various racial/ethnic groups, regardless of whether or not they are citizens.

Second, the massive immigration influx of the past three decades has brought in immigrants who are mostly Hispanic, Asian, or black. Thus, most new immigrants automatically become protected minority group members. In 1993, for example, 74.9 percent of legal immigrants came from countries whose citizens are generally considered members of the protected racial/ethnic groups.

That *immigrants*—people who came here of their own volition—are granted automatic advantages over the native-born white population is facially absurd. But the history of entitlement programs in the U.S.<sup>68</sup> (and likely elsewhere) is that once they're in place, few public officials are brave enough to even *suggest* retrenchment. So AA for immigrants will likely be with us for the long haul.

(And how long might that be? In 2012, Obama's first Attorney General Eric Holder told a Columbia University audience that he couldn't "actually imagine a time in which the need for more diversity would ever cease. Affirmative action has been an issue since segregation practices. The question is not when does it end, but when does it begin ... When do people of color truly get the benefits to which they are entitled?"<sup>69</sup>)

Governmental bodies at local levels also routinely participate in the *de facto* campaign against assimilation. Consider the tavern near Cincinnati that was hauled before the Ohio Civil Rights Commission in 2005 because a sign in its window said "For Service, Speak English."<sup>70</sup> The individuals aggrieved by the sign recruited the local fair-housing agency to file a complaint with the commission. Upon receiving a favorable ruling, the agency's director said, "I really think it's an

affront to Hispanic families in the area, and I'm glad that the commission agreed that it's illegal discrimination." If an appeal failed, the tavern would be required to remove the sign and might have to pay for ads about nondiscrimination, while its staff could be forced to take diversity or cultural-sensitivity training.

Would the Ohio Civil Rights Commission insist that the tavern they upbraided actually be able to deal with comers in any language, on demand? Not just Spanish but, say, Urdu, Tagalog, Farsi, Polish, ...? Thomas Sowell must have been thinking of officious entities like the commission when he wrote, "Nothing is easier than for third parties to think up things that can be done at somebody else's expense."<sup>71</sup>

Employing a bit of spine instead of their default cowardice, the commissioners could have told the tavern's non-assimilating harassers to "Go pound sand"—and surely reaped broad public approval.

### ULTIMATE CULPRITS: AMERICA'S 'DEPRAVED POLITICAL CLASS'

People such as myself, with multi-decades involvement in the struggle to reorient America's immigration policy to the broad national interest, wonder and ask each other: What are these people—America's power brokers, its ruling class, its "elites"—*thinking*? Can't they *see* what immigration is doing to the country? Aren't they concerned about the impacts on their children and grandchildren?

Here's my list of what's to be seen, distilled from observations made while living in Redondo Beach (1996-2005):

1. The flood of immigrants drives wages and living conditions in our central cities toward those of the Third World.
2. The influx imposes both sprawl and gridlock on our metropolitan areas.
3. Immigrant families needing services overwhelm our schools, taxpayer-funded health-care facilities, and other public agencies.
4. Those requiring services don't assimilate, and, instead, expect to be served in their native languages.
5. American civic culture frays as each ethnic group establishes its own grievance lobby and pushes for preferences.
6. Illegal aliens bring us fearsome diseases such as tuberculosis (new, drug-resistant strains) and Chagas.
7. Shortages of water and other resources loom, especially in immigration-blitzed California.

(Note that only item 6 pertains specifically to *illegal* immigration.)

Under the assumption that our elites do care about the country's and their descendants' futures, one can conclude that, indeed, they *can't* see immigration's effects. They may be made impervious to seeing by all the national lore on the subject, most powerfully the "nation of immigrants" thought-stopper. This incapacity would be bolstered by their general innumeracy, shared by the American public, for whom George Kennan's point that "even the maximum numbers we could conceivably take would be only a drop from the bucket of the planet's overpopulation"<sup>72</sup> is probably difficult, conceptually. (When I fly across the country, I see mostly empty space! And you could pack all of earth's population into Texas, and each person would have 1,100 square feet!!<sup>73</sup>)

But how *elite* are our elites, anyway? The general, growing disarray and dysfunction in American life—especially in contrast to what the nation accomplished in World War II and the mid-twentieth century—hint that the answer is "not very." The writer Christopher Roach spoke to the point in 2018:<sup>74</sup>

Today we have an aristocracy of opinion made up of the managerial elite. Their chief credential is their credentials, as well as their having professed the right opinions. Among this class, much of what passes for deep thinking—whether on economics, foreign policy, or anything else—is in fact a repetition of stale conventional wisdom.

Mark Steyn was writing about this in 2011, when he referred to America's "depraved political class."<sup>75</sup> (More recently, he spoke in a video about the new-born competition between "a cultural nationalism and an ineffectual globalism by incompetent elites."<sup>76</sup>)

And in early 2016, *Wall Street Journal* pundit (and former Reagan speechwriter) Peggy Noonan, herself a prominent person, introduced some useful terminology. In a column whose very title and sub-title—"Trump and the Rise of the Unprotected: Why political professionals are struggling to make sense of the world they created"—are significant, she wrote:<sup>77</sup>

There are the protected and the unprotected. The protected make public policy. The unprotected live in it. The unprotected are starting to push back, powerfully.

The protected are the accomplished, the secure, the successful—those who have power or access to it. They are protected from much of the roughness of the world. More to the point, *they are protected from the world they have created*. Again, they make public policy and have for some time....

They are figures in government, politics, and media. They live in nice neighborhoods, safe ones. Their families function, their kids go to good schools, they've got some money. All of these things tend to isolate them, or provide buffers. Some of them—in Washington it is important officials in the executive branch or on the Hill; in Brussels, significant figures in the European Union—literally have their own security details.

Because they are protected they feel they can do pretty much anything, impose any reality. They're insulated from many of the effects of their own decisions [emphasis in original].

A current immigration-related example of "protected" disdain for the "unprotected" is furnished by Oregon's Democratic political establishment. In 2014, after enormous effort, citizens led by Oregonians for Immigration Reform nullified at the ballot box a legislature-passed law that would have granted driver's cards to illegal aliens. This citizens'-veto referendum won with 66 percent of the vote.<sup>78</sup> Despite that thunderous repudiation, as I write this in June 2019, Oregon's Democrats are on the verge of enacting, once again, driver's cards for illegal aliens, but this time with an "emergency clause" that will prevent use of such a referendum—an *emergency* clause, despite the fact that the measure won't go into effect until January 1, 2021.<sup>79</sup>

Has Oregonians' opposition to driver's cards for illegal aliens softened since November 2014? Hardly. A Zogby poll of registered voters done in March 2019 showed 63 percent in opposition to 30 percent in favor. According to the same poll, 68 percent think their legislature "must respect the decisions made by the voters through the ballot initiative process" versus 19 percent who are untroubled if the legislature passes laws "that have been previously overturned by the voters."<sup>80</sup>

Indifference or even hostility to assimilation is also a project of the "protected." In their paper on patriotic assimilation, John Fonte and Althea Nagai wrote:<sup>20</sup>

Since the 1970s American elites have altered our "de-facto assimilation policy" from Americanization (or patriotic integration) to a multiculturalism that emphasizes ethnic group consciousness at the expense of American common culture. In short, we have sent immigrants the wrong message on assimilation. It is our fault, not theirs, that this gap exists.

Altogether, America's depraved elites seem to be afflicted with the same sort of ennui as Europe's, laid out in Douglas Murray's 2017 book, *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam*. This *ultimate*

subject has attracted the attention of—to drop some names—such authors/thinkers (besides Murray) as Lawrence Auster, Angelo Codevilla, Georgie Anne Geyer, Peter Brimelow, Victor Davis Hanson, Mark Steyn, George Kennan, Christopher Caldwell, and Michael Anton. Plus there's saving-Western-civilization's ur-philosopher: Enoch Powell. Readers can turn to those authors for analyses of Western civilization's global crisis of self-confidence and death wish.

The rest of us could be assertive in the face of elites' imperiousness. For a demonstration of what that might entail, consider a letter posted at VDARE.com in 2007:<sup>81</sup>

Porter Paint Company of Louisville, Kentucky ... deserves the Corporate Linguistic Patriot Award of The Year for wasting the least amount of effort on bilingual consumer labeling.

I was reading the warning, technical, and usage instructions labeling (very detailed and extensive) on several of their one-gallon cans of paint thinners/industrial solvents. The first and only line of text in Spanish appears at the very beginning of the instructions and translates to:

WARNING: If you don't know English, get somebody to translate the following instructions for you before attempting to use this product.

And we need to realize that humanity's future probably isn't puppies and rainbows: Jean Raspail, author of the immigration-dystopia novel *The Camp of the Saints*, starkly laid out the choice facing the West amid the groaning planet's overpopulation. He concluded the 1985 edition's introduction with "[E]ither learn the resigned courage of being poor or find again the inflexible courage to be rich. In both cases, so-called Christian charity will prove itself powerless. The times will be cruel."<sup>82</sup> ■

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