

# Are Hispanics Assimilating?

ALLAN WALL

I also happen to believe that the Hispanics should work harder at assimilation. That's one of the things I've been saying for a long time. You know, they ought not to be just codified in their communities but make sure that all their kids are learning to speak English, and that they feel comfortable in the communities. And that's going to take outreach on both sides, frankly.<sup>1</sup>

Thus opined Tom Brokaw, NBC's veteran news reporter and former anchorman (pictured right), on "Meet the Press," January 27, 2019.

Brokaw's tone wasn't hostile when he said this; he spoke as if he were giving friendly advice. His intentions were constructive.

But an outcry broke out immediately, with various attacks on the veteran newsman.

Unsurprisingly, Brokaw dutifully buckled under that same evening, profusely apologizing in the manner we've become accustomed to seeing of public figures who wound up on the wrong side of the PC Divide.

In the age of twitter, it was only a few hours after his "Meet the Press" comments that a broken Brokaw tweeted "I feel terrible a part of my comments on Hispanics offended some members of that proud culture."<sup>2</sup>

That was just the beginning, as he tweeted on and on about it.<sup>3</sup>

Another day, another PC climbdown. What's new? It's what passes for discourse in our contemporary society.

Why did Brokaw's reasonable-sounding comment provoke such hysteria? And what does that tell us about today's assimilation?

One argument was simply that Brokaw was wrong. Mark Hugo Lopez of the Pew Center tweeted that

DYK ["Did you know?"]: English proficiency among Latinos has been on the rise for sometime now.<sup>4</sup>

Well, if you simply want to say that Brokaw was factually wrong, by all means do it.

But whence the level of vitriol of some of these attacks? It's as if Brokaw were being attacked just for broaching this subject.



Here's how celebrity gossip pundit Perez Hilton (birth name Mario Armando Lavandeira Jr.) responded: (Obscenity alert): Assimilation? F@%k that! America is not a melting pot anymore! It's a tossed salad with many wonderful varied ingredients! One of the many reasons I've taught my children Spanish first!<sup>5</sup>

Latino Victory, an Hispanic political organization, tweeted that Tom Brokaw's comments give credence to white supremacist ideology and are not rooted in reality. They have no place in our political discourse. We call on Tom Brokaw to apologize. Not because we're offended. Because he should be sorry to have said it at all.<sup>6</sup>

"White supremacist ideology"? "No place in our political discourse"? Why are these people so bent out of shape?

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*Allan Wall is an American citizen who has lived in Mexico. Many of his articles and columns are archived at [www.VDARE.com](http://www.VDARE.com) and at [www.FRONTPAGEMAG.com](http://www.FRONTPAGEMAG.com).*

It used to be that assimilation was supported by almost everybody on the political spectrum.

### ASSIMILATION—WHAT IS IT?

The word assimilate is from the Latin *assimilare*. The relevant definition is “To absorb into the cultural tradition of a population or group.”<sup>7</sup>

Note too that the word assimilate is etymologically connected to the word “similar”, implying that the immigrants become similar to the Americans already here.

### WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF HISPANIC?

In an American context, what is the definition of Hispanic or Latino? It is defined as follows by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which sets the standards all federal agencies must adhere to:

A person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, to be Hispanic or Latino is considered an ethnicity, not a race. In fact, it's the only “ethnicity” recognized by law in the United States. Even the majority white, English-speaking population is now defined negatively, and referred to in statistical reports as “Non-Hispanic White”. We're defined by what we're not.

A “Hispanic” is someone whose ancestors came from a Spanish-speaking country. It doesn't matter what language he speaks. A Hispanic might or might not speak Spanish. Nowadays there are many Latin American immigrants who speak American Indian languages, and they're also considered Hispanics. And so are Americans of Hispanic ancestry who are native speakers of English and don't even speak Spanish.

And it doesn't matter what race the person is. A Hispanic/Latino could be white, such as previously mentioned Perez Hilton, the blue-eyed Hispanic who cussed out poor Tom Brokaw. Other Hispanics are of American Indian or black ancestry. Many are mixed-race. There are even Latin Americans of Middle Eastern and East Asian ancestry.

So this complicates the assimilation process. Since even white Hispanics receive privileges in our society for being Hispanic, that's a great incentive for them to identify as Hispanic and not white.

### ASPECTS OF ASSIMILATION

As for assimilation, that too must be considered in several different aspects.

**I. Economic Assimilation:** This is the easiest to accomplish. It simply means that immigrants are involved in the U.S. economy. That's true even of illegal aliens.

**II. Linguistic Assimilation:** Are immigrants learning and speaking English well enough to communicate in and participate in our society? This is very important.

The entity we now know as the United States of America was founded by English settlers in the seventeenth century. Since colonial times, English has been the language of the country. Our legal documents, our literature, our folk songs, our business and political discourse, it's all in the English language.

For an immigrant not to learn English means he cannot participate in the collective life of our society.

### CITIZENSHIP

To become a U.S. citizen is to become an American. According to the naturalization oath, the new citizen renounces his former citizenship when he swears “...I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen...”<sup>9</sup> That's what the oath says, but the laws no longer forbid it, and the State Department says it's A-Ok.<sup>10</sup> There are now probably millions of U.S. citizens who are also citizens of other nations.

Citizenship can be a double-edged sword, used against traditional American identity.

Given the high quantity of immigrants from Mexico, the citizenship issue bears special attention. In the 1990s, the Mexican government legalized dual citizenship (previously not permitted under Mexican law). This was done to make it possible for Mexicans to be eligible to vote in the United States and not lose their Mexican citizenship.<sup>11</sup>

Several Mexican entertainment personalities have openly announced their dual citizenship:

1. Actress Salma Hayek. When she became a naturalized citizen, she said she wanted to “have a voice that supports the Latino community in the United States,” and that she intends “to maintain both citizenships to help the Latinos.”<sup>12</sup>

2. Pop singer Thalía. The same day she naturalized as an American, she reassured her fans: “I feel that this step will give me the opportunity to contribute to and support even more the Latin community in the United States. I am of Mexican nationality, and I will always be a proud Mexican in heart and soul.” Your Fellow Citizen—Thalía!<sup>13</sup>

3. Mexican actress Kate del Castillo used her naturalization to slam Donald Trump, tweeting a photo of herself taking the oath while defiantly declaring that “FYI @realDonaldTrump I'm a #newUScitizen I SPEAK OUT & I don't support you or your #animalkiller son #fuerzalatina.”<sup>14</sup>

Note that in all three cases, the new citizen didn't naturalize from desire to become an American, but to practice pro-Latino political activism.

In December 2015, in the previous presidential election, the Mexican government openly announced

(on U.S. soil!) a plan to register 3 million Mexican immigrants in the U.S. as American citizens so they could vote against Donald Trump.<sup>15</sup>

Amazingly, this brazen attempt to meddle with U.S. citizenship on a massive scale was taken much less seriously than the ongoing hysteria over Russian meddling. (How many pro-Russian voters are in the United States?)

## RELIGIOUS ASSIMILATION

This is controversial, but some immigrants have changed their religion, or at least their Christian denomination, after immigrating. Most Hispanics are Catholic or Protestant, or nominal, so this is not such a major difference. Note however that the Virgin of Guadalupe cult is strong among Mexican Catholics and an important part of Mexican identity for many Mexican Catholics. (See The Virgin of Guadalupe and the U.S. National Question).<sup>16</sup>

## INTERMARRIAGE

In the past, intermarriage was an important part of assimilation. The children of the “Great Wave” immigrants (1880s to 1920s) intermarried with descendants of Americans whose families had been here since colonial times, and they became one people.

Intermarriage exists today, but it’s not clear where it will take us. Tom Brokaw actually discussed this issue himself in his infamous assimilation comments, when he mentioned people who didn’t want “brown grandbabies.” This also provoked a backlash. Some critics didn’t even distinguish between what Brokaw said about others or his own opinion. Once again, that’s the state of today’s discourse.

One thing about intermarriage is that if an immigrant group is still large enough, it doesn’t need as much intermarriage. Among Hispanics, there is also the phenomenon of intermarriage among various Hispanic groups, such as a marriage between a Mexican and a Colombian. Enough of this might lead to a stronger pan-Hispanic identity, though it’s too early to tell.

## POLITICAL ASSIMILATION

Tom Brokaw also discussed this. It’s clear that most Hispanics vote for the Democratic Party. That means if mass immigration continues, the GOP will go extinct as a national party. And yet many Republican policy-makers still want to go full steam ahead on immigration. Go figure.

## IDENTITY

Do immigrants and their children identify as Americans?

It’s possible to even become a naturalized citizen and still not identify with the U.S.A.

Here we see some troubling anecdotal evidence, such as Mexican-Americans cheering for the Mexican team at a U.S.-Mexico soccer match and booing the U.S. team.<sup>17</sup>

In 2010 a school in California suspended high school students for wearing American flag T-shirts on Cinco de Mayo, so as not to offend the school’s “Mexican” students. This was later upheld by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.<sup>18</sup>

Some of course want to stretch the definition of “American” so broadly that it can simply refer to anyone. So there’s not much identity there.

## WHAT I OBSERVED IN MEXICO

I resided in Mexico for a decade and a half, and I heard many Mexicans say they wanted to move to the United States. But none ever told me that they wanted to go to the U.S. for freedom, or to become an American. It was for the money. American citizenship is desirable yes, but for the benefits it brings, not for the real desire to become an American.<sup>19</sup>

Also, Mexicans look at Mexican-Americans, even those born in the U.S., as essentially Mexican, regardless of citizenship. Indeed, in recent years the Mexican government has begun to court them to get them to further its objectives. Once again, political and media people don’t seem to care about this at all, including those who go on and on about Russian meddling.

## ‘DON’T WORRY, THEY ARE ASSIMILATING’

This is what we are told by many of those, don’t worry, they’re learning English. I was in a PBS documentary once and was interviewed about my concern for the linguistic issue. But the documentary concluded that there is nothing to worry about, they are learning English.<sup>20</sup>

It’s true, most Hispanic immigrants and children of immigrants are learning English. And many strongly identify with the United States. Obviously, they are not the problem.

But if you look at Hispanics collectively and their current situation in our country, there are reasons to believe that, as a group, they will never assimilate.

## FACTORS AND INTERESTS THAT KEEP HISPANICS SEPARATE FROM OTHER AMERICANS

*I. The Continued Influx of Spanish-Speaking Immigrants, Both Legally and Illegally.* Under Trump, our border is under attack, mostly by Spanish-speaking Central Americans. They keep coming in. So even if all the ones here are fully assimilated, there are more coming in constantly.

*II. Advantages of Being Non-White.* Despite the rhetoric of “white privilege”, there are many advantages of being a non-white or Hispanic. One can avail oneself of

Affirmative Action, minority set-asides, racial disparity rulings, and the generalized sympathy of our political class and academic world. In the recent college entrance scandal, application fixer Rick Singer advised applicants to identify as minorities, and that if they didn't they were at a "competitive disadvantage."<sup>21</sup>

**III. The Hispanic Classification.** As discussed above, a Hispanic can be of any race. This means that even white Hispanics, of whom there are many, have an incentive to identify as Hispanic and not as white.

**IV. The American Establishment Has Changed.**

People look at the Great Wave immigration of the 1880s to 1920s as the classic period of American immigration. But the American establishment of that era demanded assimilation. Today's American establishment (including political, media, entertainment, business, and even religious leaders) don't demand assimilation. Multiculturalism and "diversity is our strength" are axioms, and previous generations of Americans are increasingly portrayed as wicked intolerant racists. Who would want to assimilate to that?

**V. Specific Spanish Privilege.** The Spanish language is used more and more in an official capacity. Spanish-language media companies such as Univision and Telemundo provide a Hispano-centrist viewpoint of the news. Spanish is used more and more as a political language, with politicians and candidates using Spanish. And with modern technology, immigrants can continue to receive media messages from the home country.

**VI. Hispanic Triumphalism.** Many Hispanic activists and spokesmen are chauvinists. They boast of Latino political power, and some even talk openly of the U.S. becoming a majority Hispanic country. Meanwhile Anglo-American politicians turn tail and surrender at the first whiff of controversy, their greatest fear being that someone somewhere might call them a racist. People want to be part of a winning team, right? Even establishment WASP politician Jeb Bush identified as Hispanic as his voter registration card. We may see more of that in the future — assimilation into the Hispanic orbit by people of non-Hispanic origin.

## WHAT CAN BE DONE?

If present trends continue, the U.S. will just become an appendage of Latin America. But it's not inevitable. Here's what could be done:

**I. Immigration Shutdown.** If the inflow continues, it doesn't matter what we do. The U.S. is going to be a Latin American country. But if immigration (both legal and illegal) were cut off, we'd have a fighting chance. Even today, U.S.-born Hispanic women have fewer children than foreign-born Hispanic women. So after a shutdown, the overall Hispanic birthrate would likely drop.

**II. Return to a More Traditional View of Assimilation.** Quit apologizing for our history and take it for granted that immigrants should assimilate to our culture. If they don't want to, they should go back to their country.

**III. Official English.** Declare English the official language and get rid of all this Spanish-language political activity.

**IV. Eliminate Affirmative Action.** Also abolish other methods of discriminating against "non-Hispanic whites."

**V. Make Puerto Rico Independent.** Our Spanish-speaking island is really a distinct society and ought to be independent. In the referenced article, I explain why and how it could be done.<sup>22</sup>

**VI. Limit Dual Citizenship.** Why should the U.S. allow it?

**VII. Eliminate the Hispanic Category.** Eliminate the Hispanic ethnic category. Why should only Hispanics have an ethnicity? While we're at it, how about eliminating all official racial categories?

**VIII. Adopt A Policy Of Benign Neglect.** Quit pandering to Hispanics and just treat them like everybody else. We might be surprised at how they react. ■

## Endnotes

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Hispanic migrants from Central America and Mexico on a train bound for the United States.