

ment. If we want our metropolitan areas to use space more efficiently so development is more compact and open spaces stay open, some public planning process is required. It invariably will interfere with some scheme of some private developer, and it invariably will require public resources. To date, only one large metropolitan area—Portland, Oregon—has reclaimed enough public authority to have a truly effective anti-sprawl program.

Some of our downtowns are already looking brighter, but nationally an immense backlog of public parks, schools, subways, and squares is in need of refurbishment. Paradoxically, a period of unprecedented private affluence is exactly the right time to reclaim what is necessarily public.

## A Nation of Minorities?

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The young CEO felt strongly that “soon all America will look like California” and that we must prepare ourselves, employees, and fellow citizens for life in a diverse, “multicultural” America. The occasion was a “sensitivity” training workshop, which seeks to teach managers how to prepare their underlings to deal with people of different social backgrounds.

The CEO’s demographic acumen was quite keen. Much of America, and not only California, is being diversified. A growing number of immigrants from Latin America and Asia are settling in communities far away from both the Mexican border and the Pacific coast, in places such as Wasaua, Wisconsin and Storm Lake, Iowa. This population movement has led some commentators to argue that America in the foreseeable future will become a country in which European-Americans are a minority and Americans of other ethnic and racial backgrounds are the majority. Demographer Martha Farnsworth Riche wrote an article for the prestigious *American Demographics* entitled, “We’re All Minorities Now,” stating that “the United States is undergoing a new demographic transition: it is becoming a multicultural

society. . . . [Soon] 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.” A special issue of *Time* magazine dedicated to envisioning our ethnic future declared that “. . . America is moving toward an era when there may be no ethnic majority, with whites just another minority.”

Such visions of America are belied by elementary statistics. If the present trends continue, there will be a white majority in the United States for at least a whole generation and longer. For instance, by the year 2030 whites will still constitute 60.5 percent of all Americans, hardly a minority. Over more than a generation, from 1995 to 2030, the proportion of blacks in the population is expected to increase by a mere 1.1 percent and that of Asians by 3.3 percent. The increase in the Hispanic population in the same time period is believed to be much heftier: a substantial 8.7 percent. Still, all said and done, the share of the non-Anglo population would grow—over 35 years—by not more than 13.1 percent. Those who venture still deeper into the future, disregarding that such long-run predictions are often woefully off the mark, still foresee a white majority (albeit barely so) in the faraway year 2050. Regardless, such analysis misses the point. *The main question is not what the pigmentation of future Americans will be, but how they will relate to one another.*

### A New Amalgam

One fact, often overlooked in this context, is that as America steams forward, far from being more splintered along racial and ethnic lines, surprisingly strong bonds of intermarriage are evolving, which bridge the divisions that diversity advocates like to sharpen. (In earlier ages, people were inclined to tolerate working with and living next to people of different backgrounds, but were troubled when their children married a person from a different racial or ethnic background. These feelings have not disappeared, but have weakened considerably.) One out of 12 marriages in 1995 (8.4 percent) were interracial/ethnic marriages. Intermarriage between Asian-Americans and whites are particularly common, and marriages between Hispanic-Americans and whites are also rather frequent, while such marriages with African-Americans are the least common. All in all, intermarriages of all kinds are on the rise. Since 1970, the proportion

of marriages among people of different racial or ethnic origin has increased by 72 percent and is expected to rise in the future.

That is, while there may well be more Americans of non-European origin, a growing number of the American white majority will have a Hispanic daughter or son-in-law, an Asian stepfather or mother, and a whole rainbow of cousins. Sociologists stress that such intermarriages are of special importance for community building precisely because they create particularly intimate bonds not merely for the married couple but also for their extended families.

#### What Is Latino? Who Is Asian?

The very notion that there are social groups called “Asian-Americans” or “Latinos” is a statistical artifact reflecting the way social data are coded and reported. The notion is promoted by ethnic leaders who have anointed themselves to speak for (and to try to fashion and perpetuate) distinct social groups, and is a shorthand the media finds convenient. Most of the so-called Asian-Americans do not see themselves as, well, Asian-Americans, and many resent being labeled this way. Many Japanese-Americans do not feel a particular affinity to Filipinos or Pakistani-Americans, or to Korean-Americans. And the feelings are reciprocal. Paul Watanabe, of the Institute for Asian American Studies at the University of Massachusetts, himself an American of Japanese descent, remarks, “There’s this concept that all Asians are alike, that they have the same history, the same language, the same background. Nothing could be more incorrect.”

Most Americans of Asian heritage would rather be identified by the country of their origin. Setsuko Buckley, a Japanese language teacher at Western Washington University, points out that, “Asian-Americans need to be divided into Japanese-Americans or Chinese-Americans or Korean-Americans—just because they want to be. Even Southeast Asians are different from each other—Vietnamese, Thai, Cambodian—and they should have the option of being called what they want.” On the other side of the continent, the social categories are not any different. A study of a New York City high school, conducted by Queens College sociologist Pyong Gap Min, found that most young Americans of Korean origin do not consider themselves Asian-American but Korean-American.

William Westerman of the International Institute of New Jersey complains about Americans who tend to ignore the cultural differences among Asian nations, which reflect thousands of years of tradition. He wonders how the citizens of the United States, Canada, and Mexico who move to Europe would feel if they were all treated as indistinguishable “North Americans.”

The same holds for the so-called Latinos, including three of my sons. Americans of Hispanic origin trace their origins to many different countries and cultures. Eduardo Diaz, a social-service administrator puts it this way: “[T]here is no place called Hispanica. I think it’s degrading to be called something that doesn’t exist.” A Mexican-American office worker remarked that when she is called Latina it makes her think “about some kind of island.” Many Americans from Central America think of themselves as “mestizo,” a term that refers to a mixture of Indian and European ancestry. Among those surveyed in the National Latino Political Survey in 1989, the greatest number of respondents chose to be labeled by their country of origin, as opposed to pan-ethnic terms such as “Hispanic” or “Latino.”

The significance of these and other such data is that far from dividing the country into two or three hardened minority camps, we are witnessing an extension of a traditional American picture: Americans of different origins identifying with groups of other Americans from the same country—at least for a while—but not with any large or more lasting group.

#### Multiculturalism or American Creed?

Above all, it is a serious mistake to believe that because American faces may appear a bit more diverse a generation from now (if one goes by skin color or the shape of one’s eyes) that most Americans of different social backgrounds will follow a different agenda or hold a different creed than the white majority. For example, a 1992 survey found that although most Americans (79 percent) favor “fair treatment for all, without prejudice or discrimination,” the numbers for blacks and Hispanics are even higher (86 percent and 85 percent, respectively). Similarly, a poll of New York City residents shows that the vast majority of respondents considered teaching “the common heritage and values that we share as Americans” to be “very impor-

tant.” Again, minorities endorse this position even more so than whites: 70 percent of whites compared with 88 percent of Hispanics and 89 percent of blacks.

On numerous issues the differences among various Hispanic groups are as big or bigger than between these groups and “Anglo” Americans. A study by Louis DeSipio found that while 42 percent of Cubans and 51 percent of Anglos agreed with the statement that US citizens should be hired over noncitizens, 55 percent of Puerto Ricans and 54.7 percent of Mexicans adopted the same position. Quotas for jobs and college admissions were favored only by a minority of any of these four groups studied, but Cubans differed from Mexicans and Puerto Ricans more (by 14 percent) than from whites (by 12 percent).

The fact that various minorities do not share a uniform view, which could lead them to march lock-step with other minorities to a new America (as some on the left fantasize) is also reflected in elections. Cuban-Americans tend to vote Republican, while other Americans of Hispanic origin are more likely to vote Democratic. Americans of Asian origin cannot be counted on to vote one way or another, either. For instance, of the Filipino-Americans registered to vote, 40 percent list themselves as Democrats, 38 percent as Republicans, and 17 percent as independent. First-generation Vietnamese-Americans tend to be strong anti-Communists and favor the Republican party, while older Japanese and Chinese-Americans are more often Democrats.

We often encounter the future first in California. In a 1991 Los Angeles election for the California State Assembly, Korean-American, Filipino-American, and Japanese-American candidates ran, splitting the so-called “Asian-American” vote, not deterred by the fact that they ensured the election of a white candidate. Candidates of all kinds of backgrounds may carry the day in next century’s America, but the notion that all minorities, or even most members of any one minority, will line up behind them, is far from a safe bet.

While African-Americans are clearly the least mainstreaming group, there is a growing black middle class, many members of which have adopted rather similar life styles and aspirations to other middle-class Americans. Even if one takes all African-Americans as a group, one could be swayed too far by the data on the great differences in the

ways whites and blacks perceived the O.J. Simpson trial and other matters directly concerning racial issues. When it comes to basic tenets of the American creed, the overwhelming majority of blacks strongly accept them. For instance, a national survey asked in 1994: “a basic American belief has been that if you work hard you can get ahead—reach your goals and get more.” Sixty-seven percent of blacks responded “yes, still true,” only ten percent less than whites. Most blacks (77 percent) say they prefer equality of opportunity to equality of results (compared to 89 percent of whites). When it comes to “do you see yourself as traditional or old-fashioned on things such as sex, morality, family life, and religion, or not,” the difference between blacks and whites was only 5 percent, and when asked whether values in America are seriously declining, the difference was down to one percentage point. Roughly the same percentages of blacks and whites strongly advocate balancing the budget, cutting personal income taxes, and reforming Medicare. Percentages are also nearly even in responses to questions on abortion and marijuana.

In an extensive national survey, conducted at the University of Virginia, James Davison Hunter and Carl Bowman found that “. . . the majority of Americans do not engage in identity politics—a politics that insists that opinion is mainly a function of racial, ethnic, or gender identity or identities rooted in sexual preference.” While there were some disagreements on specific issues and policies, this study found more similarities than discrepancies. Even when asked about such divisive issues as the direction of changes in race and ethnic relations, the similarities across lines were considerable. Thirty-two percent of blacks, 37 percent of Hispanics and 40 percent of whites feel these relations are holding steady; 36 percent, 53 percent, and 44 percent feel they have declined, respectively. (The rest feel that they have improved.) That is, on most issues, four out of five Americans—or more!—agreed with one another, while those who differed amounted to less than 20 percent. No anti-anything majority here.

### A Community of Communities

All this does not mean that diversity is a figment of the overblown imagination of a bunch of left-liberals and small bands of political leaders. But the changes in America’s demographics do not imply that the American creed is being or will be replaced by something called

“multiculturalism.” The American creed always had room for pluralism of *sub*-cultures, of people upholding some of the traditions and values of their countries of origin, from praying to playing in their own way. But this pluralism was, is, and must be one that is bounded by a shared framework if America is to be spared the kind of ethnic tribalism that tears apart countries as different as Yugoslavia and Rwanda, and raises its ugly head even in well-established democracies such as Canada and the UK.

Which social, cultural, and legal elements constitute the framework that holds together the diverse mosaic? A commitment by all parties to the democratic way of life, to the Constitution and its Bill of Rights, and to mutual tolerance. It is further fortified by a strong conviction that one’s station in life is determined by hard work and saving, by taking responsibility for one’s self and one’s family. And most Americans still share a strong sense that while we are different in some ways, in more ways we are joined by the shared responsibilities of providing a good society for our children and ourselves—one free of racial and ethnic strife—and providing the world with a model of a country whose economy and polity are thriving. Indeed, we came in different ships, but we now ride in the same boat.

*“Yes to the market economy, no to the market society.”*

Slogan of the administration of  
French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin