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Executive Summary

Patriotic assimilation is the bond that allows America to be a nation of immigrants. Without it, America either ceases to be a nation, becoming instead a hodgepodge of groups—or it becomes a nation that can no longer welcome immigrants. It cannot be both a unified nation and a place that welcomes immigrants without patriotic assimilation.

Over the past few decades, however, America has drifted away from assimilating immigrants. Elites—in the government, the culture, and the academy—have led a push toward multiculturalism, which emphasizes group differences. This transformation has taken place with little input from rank-and-file Americans, who overwhelmingly support assimilation. As Ronald Reagan worried just as it was first getting underway, this tectonic shift that “divides us into minority groups” was initiated by political opportunists “to create voting blocs.” Because presidential elections are times of national conversation, candidates of both parties are now uniquely placed to give the nation the debate on assimilation it has never had. For this, we need a thorough historical understanding of how the United States has dealt with both immigration and ethnic diversity for centuries.

Immigrants from Ireland and Germany began to settle among the original English colonists in Massachusetts, Virginia, and Pennsylvania almost from the start, altering the political outlook of the colonies. Diversity also came through the acquisition

of territory. With the addition of New Amsterdam in 1664—later renamed New York—the colonies gained a polyglot city in whose streets 18 languages were spoken.

All immigrants faced prejudice and segregation at times. Two early groups, the Germans and the Northern Irish, particularly faced opposition. Benjamin Franklin said of the first, “Why should the Palatine Boors be suffered to swarm into our Settlements?” As for the Northern Irish, in 1720, Boston passed an ordinance that directed “certain families recently arriving from Ireland to move off.” The immigrants overcame such adversity on their own. The Founders would have found repugnant the idea of intervening by giving groups special privileges or benefits.

The Founders worried that diversity could get in the way of national unity. Alexander Hamilton wrote that “the safety of a republic depends essentially on the energy of a common national sentiment; on a uniformity of principles and habits.” Immigrants were welcome, but in the hope that, as Washington put it, they “get assimilated to our customs, measures, and laws: in a word, soon become one people.” Adherence to the universal principles of equality, liberty, and limited government contained in the founding documents, as well as to virtues that made a constitutional republic viable—like frugality, industry, and moderation—would bind Americans together regardless of origin.

Because these principles could not be expected to take root by themselves, a system of so-called Common Schools rose in the early 19th century to educate and assimilate the children of immigrants. Early visitors like Alexis de Tocqueville noted that “in the United States, the instruction of the people powerfully contributes to the support of a democratic republic.”

Immigrants from Northern Europe, who started arriving in large numbers in the 1840s, benefited greatly from these schools. Abraham Lincoln, a great believer in assimilation who fought anti-immigrant forces in the mid-1800s, said it was belief in the sentiments and principles of the Founding that made immigrants Americans. By the 1880s, German-born Wisconsin congressman Richard Guenther was telling crowds, “We are no longer Germans; we are Americans.”

In the 1890s the country experienced a rise in immigration from different sources. Italians, Slavs, Jews, Hungarians, Greeks, Armenians, Lebanese, and others began to enter the country through Ellis Island. They encountered renewed opposition from nativists who said the new arrivals could never be Americanized. Immigrants from Asia fared worse. So-called transnationalists rose, too, to disparage assimilation—in their case because they disdained America and sought instead “a federation of cultures.”

Assimilationist forces stepped in again, this time with such men as Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, speaking in Boston on July 4, 1915, said that immigrants “must be brought into complete harmony with our ideals and aspirations and cooperate with us for their attainment.”

The assimilationist philosophy of Washington, Hamilton, Lincoln, Roosevelt, and Brandeis remained central to the country for most of the 20th century, until it began to break down in the 1970s. For the past 40 years, America’s new political, educational, corporate, and cultural elites have progressively pushed the country in the opposite direction. This new transnationalism—multiculturalism—is an attempt to make ethnic differences permanent by rewarding separate identities and group attachment with benefits, thus deterring national unity by requiring Americans to remain sorted into separate ethnic categories.

This new arrangement, dubbed by the historian David A. Hollinger “the ethno-racial pentagon,”

divided the country into whites, African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans. This unheard-of division of America into official groups was taking place just as the country was about to absorb the biggest wave of immigrants since the Ellis Islanders of 1890–1924. Changes in immigration law in the mid-1960s ended restrictionist policies and led to the next surge in immigration, this time largely from Latin America and Asia. As they arrived, new immigrants discovered they would be considered “minorities,” conceptually precluding from the start their full assimilation into the larger society.

As Nathan Glazer put it in 1988, “We had seen many groups become part of the United States through immigration, and we had seen each in turn overcoming some degree of discrimination to become integrated into American society. This process did not seem to need the active involvement of government, determining the proper degree of participation of each group in employment and education.”

Special treatment for specific groups by the federal bureaucracy implies betrayal and rejection of the principles espoused by every American leader from Washington through Reagan. This approach has contaminated our schools, preventing them from teaching civic principles and reverence for the nation—including lessons on how those principles have helped leaders repair the nation’s faults. The new approach also threatens the cherished American principle of equal treatment under the law.

This radical reordering was a top-down effort, not a response to a demand from below. PayPal founder Peter Thiel and Internet entrepreneur David O. Sacks, among others, call multiculturalism a “word game” that hides a “comprehensive and detailed worldview” that is used by American leftists to introduce radical policy ideas when “an honest discussion would not lead to results that fit the desired agenda.” As John Skrentny described it, “[I]t is striking that the civil-rights administrators—without any public debate, data, or legal basis—decided on an ethnoracial standard for victimhood and discrimination that officially divided the country into oppressed (blacks, Latinos, Native American, Asian Americans) and oppressors (all white non-Latinos).”

America owes itself an open, honest debate on multiculturalism and assimilation. Presidential candidates should ask the following five questions: (1) Why does the government need to divide Americans into

demographic categories based on racist thinking? (2) Can any society survive a sustained denigration of its history and principles through indoctrination in schools and universities? (3) Why should we continue to let the teachers unions block meaningful school-choice reform which would help to liberate immigrants from factors that threaten to relegate them to a permanent subordinate class? (4) Should the country strengthen citizenship requirements in order to make naturalization truly transformative? (5) Should the government continue policies that harm family formation and church participation,

knowing that families and churches have historically been incubators of Americanization?

Candidates should not be intimidated. The vast majority of Americans support Americanization. Patriotic assimilation is a liberating, welcoming action, a proposition only a nation like America can confidently offer those born overseas. Previous waves of immigrants have found the correct balance between keeping their traditions and adopting America's virtues, between pride in their ancestry and love of their new country. The new wave of immigrants can do the same.

A Nation of Immigrants

Even before the United States was the United States, it was a nation of immigrants. Small numbers of Irish settlers made their homes in Massachusetts and Virginia as early as the 1630s. Fifty years later, German Pietists and other religious dissenters started pouring into provincial Pennsylvania to seek freedom of conscience in William Penn's Quaker experimental colony.¹ The first permanent settlement comprised 13 families of Dutch-speaking Mennonites from Krefeld who arrived on July 24, 1683, in what is today appropriately known as Germantown, Pennsylvania.² Germans continued to arrive in Pennsylvania in the 18th century at the rate of about 2,000 a year,³ so that by 1790—two years after the Constitution was ratified—ethnic Germans made up one-third of the state of Pennsylvania and about 7 percent of the entire population of the newly constituted United States.⁴ Along the way, they changed the politics of the colony. In one of the first partisan divisions in the colonies, they sided in the 1720s with the Quaker party, with whom they shared social tenets, against the Gentleman's party, "composed principally of Anglican merchants, seamen and Scots-Irish immigrants"⁵—giving the Quakers prohibitive electoral majorities in the Provincial Assembly until the 1750s.

As for diversity, both immigration and territorial acquisition ensured its presence in America from the start. When the English acquired New Amsterdam in 1664 (which they renamed New York), they inherited a polyglot city in whose streets, according to visiting French Jesuit Isaac Jogues in 1643, 18 languages were spoken.⁶ The city also already included an important Jewish community.⁷ By 1790, Americans of English stock were already a minority (49.2 percent of the population) throughout the country.⁸

The Challenges of Diversity

As a result of its diverse composition, America benefited early on from the advantages that come with the meeting and blending of cultures. The nation also learned how to deal with the threats to national identity that accompany a regular influx of newcomers. Benjamin Franklin, for example, admired the thrift and industry of ethnic Germans in Pennsylvania, but famously worried about their refusal to speak the national language—English—and the impact they were having on the electoral process. In a 1753 letter to the botanist Peter Collinson, Franklin wrote:

I remember when they modestly declined intermeddling in our Elections, but now they come in droves, and carry all before them, except in one or two Counties; Few of their children in the Country learn English; they import many Books from Germany; and of the six printing houses in the Province, two are entirely German, two half German half English, and but two entirely English; They have one German News-paper, and one half German. Advertisements intended to be general are now printed in Dutch and English; the Signs in our Streets have inscriptions in both languages, and in some places only German: They begin of late to make all their Bonds and other legal Writings in their own Language, which (though I think it ought not to be) are allowed good in our Courts, where the German Business so encreases that there is continual need of Interpreters; and I suppose in a few years they will be also necessary in the Assembly, to tell one half of our Legislators what the other half say.⁹

Two years earlier, Franklin had gone even further, writing of the Germans in Pennsylvania:

Why should the Palatine Boors be suffered to swarm into our Settlements, and by herding together establish their Language and Manners to the Exclusion of ours? Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a Colony of Aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our Language or Customs, any more than they can acquire our Complexion.¹⁰

Another large group of immigrants, the Scots-Irish from Ulster, also caused consternation among the settled population. In 1720 Boston passed an ordinance that directed "certain families recently arriving from Ireland to move off."¹¹ When they did relocate to Worcester, a Puritan mob there burned down their church.¹² In 1729, Boston residents rioted in the streets to prevent the docking of ships carrying Scots-Irish immigrants from Ulster.¹³

Things did not go better for the Scots-Irish in Pennsylvania. Its provincial secretary James Logan, facing Indian attacks on settlements and realizing that "Penn's dream of forming a government with strictly pacifist principles in this raw frontier was impractical,"¹⁴ saw opportunity in the

warlike Ulstermen. He invited them to come and settle in Appalachia to create a buffer zone between the Indians and the Quakers. But he soon regretted having done so, and he wrote to a friend later that “a settlement of five families from the North of Ireland gives me more trouble than fifty of any other people.”¹⁵

Such prejudice doubtless took a toll on those at the receiving end. Writing more than a century later, Andrew Sachse recounted bitterly how, because of their “tenacious adherence to their mother tongue,” the early German immigrants were subject to accusations of heresy or worse, adding that “these calumnies have been repeated so often in print that they are now received as truth by the casual reader.” Sachse was especially condemnatory of New England writers, who he said had given to readers “the impression that even the present generation of Pennsylvania-Germans of certain denominations are but a single remove from the animal creation.”¹⁶

Freedom from the “Demoralizing Influence of Privilege”

The Founders, however, would have found repugnant the idea of intervening to remedy such prejudices by giving groups special privileges or benefits, or by attempting to apportion their participation in society in any way. So long as the government rigorously pursued a policy of giving all free men equal protection, the onus was on the individual and his family to succeed or fail. This produced an immigrant ethic that lasted two centuries. As Linda Chavez wrote in 1994:

The history of American ethnic groups is one of overcoming disadvantage, of competing with those who were already here and proving themselves as competent as any who came before. Their fight was always to be treated the same as other Americans, never to be treated as special, certainly not to turn the temporary disadvantages they suffered into the basis for permanent entitlement.¹⁷

Franklin made the message clear in writing to prospective immigrants, “with regard to encouragements for strangers from government, they are really only what are derived from good laws and liberty.”¹⁸ John Quincy Adams drove the point further in 1819 when he was Secretary of State, in a letter

to a potential immigrant: “There is one principle which pervades all the institutions of this country, and which must always operate as an obstacle to the granting of favors to new comers. This is a land, not of *privileges*, but of *equal rights*.... Emigrants from Germany, therefore, or from elsewhere, coming here, are not to expect favors from the governments. They are to expect, if they choose to become citizens, equal rights with those of the natives of the country.”¹⁹

The other side of the coin of being given no preferential treatment was that immigrants would be granted the same protection as natives, at that time an unheard-of privilege. George Washington made this protection clear in his letter to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island, of August 21, 1790, in which he wrote:

It is now no more that toleration is spoken of as if it were the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights, for, happily, the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.²⁰

This tradition lasted from the Founding into the modern era. In 1925, at the dedication of the cornerstone of a Jewish community center in Washington, DC, President Calvin Coolidge said:

Our country has done much for the Jews who have come here to accept its citizenship and assume their share of its responsibilities in the world. But I think the greatest thing it has done for them has been to receive them and treat them precisely as it has received and treated all others who have come to it. If our experiment in free institutions has proved anything, it is that the greatest privilege that can be conferred upon people in the mass is to free them from the demoralizing influence of privilege enjoyed by the few.²¹

***E Pluribus Unum*—One Culture, Accessible to All**

The Founders were aware that the diversity of the population posed a challenge for molding a new nation. Famous among them in this regard was

Hamilton, himself born on the Caribbean island of Nevis, who wrote:

The safety of a republic depends essentially on the energy of a common national sentiment; on a uniformity of principles and habits; on the exemption of the citizens from foreign bias, and prejudice; and on that love of country which will almost invariably be found to be closely connected with birth, education, and family.²²

Descent from England could not be the binding agent to hold the new nation together. The Revolution had had a transformative effect on the American colonists, severing links to a mother country they had, after all, just fought for eight long years. The Revolution “had deprived English culture of much of its claim to a natural position of superiority in America.”²³

The new bond would be adherence to the universal principles of equality, liberty, and limited government contained in the founding documents. These rights were so timeless that they came from the Creator;²⁴ the conservation of a government that protected those rights depended on nurturing the right virtues and habits,²⁵ and each succeeding generation would have responsibility for the continuation of such an arrangement.²⁶

The expectation of an emotional attachment to the unchanging principles of a nation’s Founding, and to the parchments in which they were codified, was uniquely American. “What would make the United States different was its demand that citizens give their allegiance to a set of political principles.”²⁷ Enumerating the principles into documents was also distinctively American. The *Mayflower* Compact that the Pilgrims had signed with non-dissenters, or “Strangers,” aboard the ship to agree on “a Civil Body Politic” foreshadowed this tendency.²⁸ This habit of writing principles into documents and then abiding by them stood in stark contrast to the governance of England, which to this day lacks a written constitution. As the British writer G. K. Chesterton put it, “America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed. That creed is set forth with dogmatic and even theological lucidity in the Declaration of Independence.”²⁹

Allegiance to the creed and its texts was to be based on deep loyalty, not mere practicality. “Rational adherence must be fortified with emotional attachment,”³⁰ writes the Hudson Institute’s John

Fonte. As James Madison wrote in *Federalist* 49, the new republic needed something more instinctive and primitive. The United States of America, its principles and its documents, deserved “that veneration which time bestows on everything, and without which perhaps the wisest and freest governments would not possess the requisite stability.”³¹

The ideological component of the emerging nation would also meld disparate ethnicities into one people, binding different groups into a politically monocultural America. Immigrants, said Hamilton, would be drawn gradually into civil society “to enable aliens to get rid of foreign and acquire American attachments; to learn the principles and imbibe the spirit of our government; and to admit of a probability, at least, of their feeling a real interest in our affairs.”³²

Or as Washington wrote to Adams, the hope was that “by an intermixture with our people, they, or their descendants, get assimilated to our customs, measures, and laws: in a word, soon become one people.”³³

E Pluribus Unum, the official motto in the Great Seal of the United States, demonstrated this urge for unity. In Latin it means “Out of Many, One,” and it has been through the centuries a reminder of the imperative of uniting different groups. Though the seal today has at its centerpiece the American bald eagle, the Continental Congress in 1776 considered displaying the heraldic symbols of England, Scotland, Ireland, France, Germany, and Holland—the main constituent groups at the time of the signing. This is a clear sign that to them *E Pluribus Unum* meant one nation formed out of many ethnic groups.³⁴ Among all nations of the world at the time, then, the newly formed United States was to be the only one not instituted along hereditary ethnicity or as the result of strategic dynastic marriages.

This made America exceptional. From the beginning, Americans felt that these principles made them the “City upon the Hill” that future Massachusetts Bay Governor John Winthrop had promised Puritans aboard the *Arabella* in 1630—though they now felt this for political, not religious, reasons. This was a proposition that, until very recently, American leaders confidently asserted.

As John Quincy Adams put it:

That feeling of superiority over other nations which you have noticed, and which has been so offensive to other strangers, who have visited

these shores, arises from the consciousness of every individual that, as a member of society, no man in the country is above him; and, exulting in this sentiment, he looks down upon those nations where the mass of the people feel themselves the inferiors of privileged classes, and where men are high or low, according to the accidents of their birth.³⁵

In turn, those strangers from other nations who came searching for economic opportunities, individual liberty, or political freedoms renewed America's commitment to all three as long as they subscribed to the virtues that had made the republic. Franklin spoke to this in a letter to Samuel Cooper, written in 1777, in the midst of the war:

Those who live under arbitrary Power do never the less approve of Liberty, and wish for it. They almost despair of recovering it in Europe; they read the Translations of our separate Colony Constitutions with Rapture, and there are such Numbers every where who talk of Removing to America with their Families and Fortunes as soon as Peace and our Independence shall be established, that tis generally believed we shall have a prodigious Addition of Strength, Wealth and Arts.³⁶

Thomas Paine, in the influential 1776 pamphlet *Common Sense*, likewise observed: "This new World hath been the asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty."³⁷ George Washington repeated the sentiment 12 years later almost verbatim when he wrote, "I had always hoped that this land might become a safe and agreeable Asylum to the virtuous and persecuted part of mankind, to whatever nation they might belong." He also listed the traits Americans needed: The new country would welcome those who were "determined to be sober, industrious and virtuous members of society."³⁸ Franklin, for himself, listed 13 characteristically American virtues in his autobiography, ranging from temperance and frugality to industry and moderation.³⁹

The American Character, Forged in the Classroom

These personal and civil qualities that the Founders deemed essential to maintain the republic could not be expected to bloom unaided. Because civic virtues and civic love needed to be sown into citizens

from early on, education became a requisite of constitutional government. James Madison wrote that "[k]nowledge will forever govern ignorance, and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives."⁴⁰

Jefferson is one of the Founders most associated with education. He was so concerned with it that he established the University of Virginia and then chose to include this achievement in his epitaph, leaving out that he had twice been elected President of the United States and written the Declaration of Independence. He wrote to John Adams in 1813 that education should be "the keystone in the arch of our government." Earlier on, in a letter to George Washington in 1786, he had written,

It is an axiom in my mind that our liberty can never be safe but in the hands of the people themselves, and that too of the people with a certain degree of instruction.⁴¹

Because a constitutional republic could degenerate into tyranny, the schoolhouse and the university would incubate republican principles. In a bill he introduced to the Virginia legislature in 1778 and again in 1780, Jefferson wrote that it was beneficial "for promoting the public happiness that those persons, whom nature hath endowed with genius and virtue, should be rendered by liberal education worthy to receive, and able to guard the sacred deposit of the rights and liberties of their fellow citizens."⁴²

"Common Schools" rose among the different states in the first half of the 19th century to instill precisely the moral and civic principles that a constitutional republic required. Their funding was "largely market-based until the Civil War."⁴³ They had, as Mark Edward DeForrest put it,

a large role in assimilating and educating the offspring of the immigrants then moving into the United States from Europe. The schools did not simply educate students in the basics of the English language or the Three Rs. Rather, the schools were actively involved in promoting the values and beliefs that were considered part and parcel of the American experience.⁴⁴

The common school "and the vision of American life that it embodied came to be vested with a religious seriousness and exaltation. It became the core

institution of American society,” wrote education historian Charles Glenn.⁴⁵ The schools were “perhaps the most noble and practical reform experiment of the first half of the nineteenth century.”⁴⁶

By the time the French aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville was making the rounds of the United States in the 1830s and jotting down his observations of the country, education was already deeply intertwined with the emerging republican and egalitarian character of the new country. Even the most rough-hewn pioneer penetrated the backwoods “with the Bible, an axe, and a file of newspapers.” This did not happen in a vacuum, wrote de Tocqueville, adding: “It cannot be doubted that, in the United States, the instruction of the people powerfully contributes to the support of a democratic republic; and such must always be the case, I believe, where instruction which awakens the understanding is not separated from moral education which amends the heart.”⁴⁷

The blueprint for assimilation—for Americanization—laid down by the Founders and the succeeding generation was in place by the second quarter of the 19th century: reverence for the founding documents and the principles they contained; the nurturing of self-reliant virtues; and the promotion of these principles in American schools. The Founders did not get everything right; the Naturalization Act of 1790 limited naturalization to free white persons, excluding non-whites and indentured servants. Still, the *Encyclopedia of U.S. Political History* deems the act “easily the most generous and open in American History.”⁴⁸

This blueprint quickly started yielding results. The Scots-Irish who entered the backwoods with the Bible, an ax, and a pile of newspapers—and who had earlier so repelled the citizens of New England and Pennsylvania—produced their first President in 1828. Andrew Jackson, the first non-English President and the first from the wild frontier, personified the belligerent traits then associated with his ancestors. His successor Martin Van Buren, in turn, has been called “the first ethnic President”⁴⁹ because he was the first descended not from people from the British Islands, but from New York’s Dutch settlers. Van Buren is to this day the only President to speak with a foreign accent.⁵⁰

The New Immigrants

The importance of this assimilationist blueprint became clear as immigration quickly rose in the mid-decades of the 19th century and then further

accelerated at the turn of the century. The first surge began in the 1840s, with the arrival of Catholic native Irish fleeing the Potato Famine, as well as a new wave of Germans who came this time not for religious but economic reasons.

The new immigrants flocked to the cities of a rapidly urbanizing America—especially New York, “where two-thirds of all immigrants landed between 1820 and 1860”⁵¹—and many, especially the Irish, stayed. Corrupt politicians and party machines like New York’s Tammany Hall began to sever the line between citizenship and patriotism by fraudulently naturalizing immigrants by the thousands in order to secure their votes. Between 1856 and 1867, “naturalizations during years with a presidential race increased by as much as 462 percent over the previous year.”⁵² Party machines did something else, too: “they openly fostered group reaction rather than individual reflection.”⁵³ This phenomenon was not limited to the cities. The territories and states sprouting west of the Appalachians also competed with each other to attract new immigrants, with some sweetening the deal by temporarily allowing aliens to vote.⁵⁴

Unsurprisingly, a significant element of those with a prior stake in the franchise reacted negatively—a phenomenon often repeated from this point on in American history. The 1850s saw a rapid rise in a secretive anti-immigrant party, the Know-Nothings, which at one point reached one million members and 10,000 lodges.

A politician born in a log cabin had not forgotten the blueprint for assimilation, however. The idea that attachment to the founding documents, their principles, and the American way of life was the bond that united the nation found a champion in a gangly Senate candidate from Illinois. Abraham Lincoln is best known for winning the Civil War and emancipating the slaves, but he also confronted the nativist Know-Nothings, and he did so by re-asserting the ideological component of assimilation and citizenship. There is no better exposition of this view than a campaign speech he gave, to long and sustained applause, to a crowd in Chicago in 1858. In that speech, he linked immigrants to the Founders:

If they look back through this history to trace their connection with those days by blood, they find they have none, they cannot carry themselves back into that glorious epoch and make

themselves feel that they are part of us, but when they look through that old Declaration of Independence they find that those old men say that “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal,” and then they feel that that moral sentiment taught in that day evidences their relation to those men, that it is the father of all moral principle in them, and that they have a right to claim it as though they were blood of the blood, and flesh of the flesh of the men who wrote that Declaration, and so they are. That is the electric cord in that Declaration that links the hearts of patriotic and liberty-loving men together, that will link those patriotic hearts as long as the love of freedom exists in the minds of men throughout the world.⁵⁵

The 1864 Republican Party platform with which Lincoln won re-election echoed again “the asylum of the persecuted” line from Paine and Washington and the idea that immigrants renewed America’s vigor.⁵⁶

The Germans and Scandinavians of the late 1800s famously clung to their language around the kitchen table, in church, and in some schools and newspapers. But the fact that patriotic assimilation was expected is clear from this passage in a speech given in the 1880s by Wisconsin congressman Richard Guenther, who was German-born: “After passing through the crucible of naturalization we are no longer Germans; we are Americans.... America first, last, and all the time. America against Germany; America against the world; America right or wrong; Always America.”⁵⁷

Immigration from Ireland, Germany, and Scandinavia waxed and waned in the post-Civil War years until, in the 1890s, the country experienced a rise in immigration from unlikely sources: Italians, Slavs of many different nationalities, Jews, Hungarians, Greeks, Armenians, Lebanese, and others from Southern and Eastern Europe and points beyond began to arrive in great numbers for the first time in America’s history. These immigrants, known as the Ellis Islanders because about 80 percent of them entered through the immigrant inspection station that opened at New York’s Ellis Island in 1892, encountered the same opposition as previous groups, or worse.

“They stood out together as a new and different kind of immigrant who, in the view of many Americans, posed a threat to the basic American character

of the nation,” wrote Michael Barone. “They came, after all, not only with little money but with little experience in republican traditions or democratic politics, and to most Americans they seemed to be a different race, or races.”⁵⁸

Immigrants from Asia fared even worse. Under pressure from labor unions and Western interests, Congress in 1882 passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which barred entry to people from China. Arrangements were made with Tokyo later to also exclude Japanese immigrants.

Some of the industrial Northeastern cities were dominated by immigrants or their children. Many of them—especially the Italians, the Jews, the Poles, and the Slovaks—had high rates of illiteracy.⁵⁹ Fairly or unfairly, too, labor strikes were associated with new immigrants. Americans “were quick to interpret labor unrest, particularly in sectors of the economy manned mainly by foreign workers, as an importation of the new European radicalism.”⁶⁰ Crime rose in many of these communities where immigrants clustered. Italian immigrants “accounted for a significant portion of the national rise in crime during the Ellis Island years; homicides were five to ten times more frequent among them than among other whites in America,”⁶¹ despite the fact that Italian immigrants “had lower crime rates than immigrants generally.”⁶²

Unsurprisingly, nativists rose again, this time with greater intensity, deeming the new immigrants as “unassimilable” as their Irish and German predecessors had been thought to be. After a particularly violent labor strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts, in which many immigrants were involved, the American sociologist John Graham Brooks asked, “What have we done that a pack of ignorant foreigners should hold us by the throat?”⁶³ On several occasions, Southern mobs lynched Italians.⁶⁴

This time a new strand emerged, also opposed to assimilation but for a different reason from the nativists. This new group fought assimilation on the grounds that America was not good enough for foreign immigrants to want to assimilate to her ways. According to this new strain of thought, then called “transnationalism,” America should instead become a multicultural federation of subcultures.

The transnationalists were led by intellectuals—such as Randolph Bourne, Horace Kallen, and later Herbert Marcuse—whose writings dripped with disdain for America, its culture, and the experiment of

the Founders. The attempt was to destroy what the country had become and replace it with something completely and quite literally alien. In one of the foundational texts of the time, a 1916 essay for the *Atlantic Monthly* entitled “Trans-National America,” Bourne disparages the original settlers for never “succeeding in transforming that colony into a real nation, with a tenacious, richly woven fabric of native culture.”⁶⁵

Bourne was of course writing of America in the early part of the 20th century, at the very beginning of what is now called the American Century. He was also referring to a country attracting millions, whose exercise in self-government had fired up the global imagination, when he wrote: “America has yet no impelling integrating force. It makes too easily for the detritus of cultures. In our loose, free country, no constraining national purpose, no tenacious folk tradition and folk style hold the people to a line.”

“It is apparently our lot to be a federation of cultures. This we have been for half a century and the war [World War I] has made it ever more evident that this is what we are destined to remain,” he added.

The Return of the Assimilationists

It is a testament to the reverence that America has commanded generation after generation that assimilationists have always risen to defy those who underestimated this country’s transformative, even redeeming, qualities. In the early 20th century, men from both parties—including Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, as well as Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis—rose up to respond to both the nativists and the transnationalists not just in their official actions, but by using their bully pulpits in speech after speech. By doing this, they were echoing what the Founders had done in the 1700s.

Justice Brandeis, himself the son of Jewish immigrants, spoke eloquently and at length about the question “What is Americanization?” to a Boston audience on July 4, 1915:

It manifests itself, in a superficial way, when the immigrant adopts the clothes, the manners and the customs generally prevailing here. Far more important is the manifestation presented when he substitutes for his mother tongue, the English language as the common medium of speech. But the adoption of our language, manners and customs is only a small part of the process. To

become Americanized, the change wrought must be fundamental. However great his outward conformity, the immigrant is not Americanized unless his interests and affections have become deeply rooted here. And we properly demand of the immigrant even more than this. He must be brought into complete harmony with our ideals and aspirations and cooperate with us for their attainment. Only when this has been done, will he possess the national consciousness of an American.⁶⁶

In a letter in 1919, Roosevelt echoed Washington’s position relating assimilation to equal treatment:

In the first place we should insist that if the immigrant who comes here in good faith becomes an American and assimilates himself to us, he shall be treated on an exact equality with everyone else, for it is an outrage to discriminate against any such man because of creed, or birthplace, or origin. But this is predicated upon the man’s becoming in very fact an American, and nothing but an American.⁶⁷

In an apparent response to the transnationalists, Wilson in 1915 made clear that America was not going to become a federation of nations when he said, “America does not consist of groups. A man who thinks of himself as belonging to a particular national group in America has not yet become an American.”⁶⁸

All in all, about 35 million immigrants entered the United States between 1840 and 1920, about 25 million of whom came after 1880.⁶⁹ The Immigration Act of 1924 severely limited immigration for decades, as a result of lobbying by restrictionists. But the assimilationists had unquestionably won the intellectual and cultural arguments about how to approach the millions of immigrants and the even larger number of their children who lived in the country at the time. Schools, companies, and civil society groups took up the challenge with numerous and unabashed assimilationist programs, classes, and other endeavors. In New York, where the vast majority of immigrants settled, the state legislature in 1898 passed a law “to encourage patriotic exercises” in “the schoolhouses of the state.” The state superintendent of public schools compiled a “Manual of Patriotism” replete with chapters on the flag,

patriotic songs, patriotism, and the need for virtues such as hard work.⁷⁰

The immigrants and their descendants responded in kind—as all previous immigrants had since the 1600s—by assimilating to the habits and virtues of their new country and by patriotically giving the nation their loyalty, without giving up their familial customs, kitchen-table language, or love for their ancestral land. In the case of the Ellis Islanders, they became “the Greatest Generation”—the Americans who came through when their adoptive country faced existential tests by defeating the Nazis and Communism.

The New Transnationalism

The history above is the story of ethnic groups coming to America, seeking no entitlement, “overcoming disadvantage...and proving themselves as competent as those who came before.”⁷¹ It is also a story of immigrants assimilating to their new nation by developing an emotional attachment to the principles, habits, and characteristic virtues of the American way of life. This produced a free and self-ruling republic with a unique culture and national purpose. For the past 40 years, however, America’s new cultural and political elites have chosen to spin an opposing narrative. They have arrayed all the forces at their disposal—governmental, educational, corporate, and cultural—to *dissimilate* Americans into different groups, the very practice against which Wilson had thundered.

The catch-all term for this new philosophy is *multiculturalism*. Often portrayed by its promoters as nothing more than appreciation for other cultures—something no reasonable person could be against—multiculturalism in reality attempts to revive transnationalism as the organizing principle for a country of immigrants. While assimilation unites the country around affection for a set of principles, habits, and shared cultural experiences, multiculturalism is an attempt to make ethnic differences permanent by rewarding separate identities and group attachment with purported short-term benefits. It deters national unity by requiring Americans to reduce their complex heritage and national identity to a checkbox on a form.

The origin of our present drift toward Balkanization was benign and well-intentioned. The Civil Rights struggle of the 1960s was a gigantic step toward giving African Americans the equal

protection under law that emancipation had failed to achieve a century earlier. Naturally, it led to a national conversation on remedies for the injustices suffered by black Americans. The main remedy proposed was “affirmative action.”

Originally, affirmative action mainly involved a necessary push for “race-blind” employment practices. In 1961 President Kennedy had used the term in Executive Order 10925, which required government contractors to “take affirmative action to ensure that applicants are employed, and that employees are treated during employment, *without regard to their race, creed, color or national origin*” (emphasis added).⁷² However, affirmative action soon transformed itself into the opposite—the enforcement of race-conscious policies in employment, school admissions, and government contracting. This, in turn, quickly metastasized into the idea that only members of a specific ethnic group could speak for other members of that group or represent them in elected office.

Throughout its history, America has always incorporated people from a broad range of strong ethnic identities. As individuals “assimilated to our customs, measures and laws” (in Washington’s words), they began to identify themselves as simply “American.” In contrast, the new groups artificially engineered by the government in the 1970s shared two important characteristics. They were both national in character—no longer constrained to provincial Pennsylvania or the tenements of Lower Manhattan, but extending to the whole United States—and at the same time supranational, five monolithic categories encompassing different nationalities that shared little in common beyond a patina of similarity.

This new arrangement, dubbed by the historian David A. Hollinger “the ethno-racial pentagon,” divided the country into white, black, brown, yellow, and red—that is, into Caucasians, African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans.⁷³ Its proponents at the time celebrated this as the achievement of a “rainbow nation,” but seeing the United States—a country so devoted to the proposition that all men are created equal that it fought a civil war over it—divided along such a color spectrum should make for difficult reading.

In this division, “whites” were the varied Americans whose ancestors came from Europe over the centuries: the English, Scots, Irish, Poles, Germans, Italians, Slovaks, and Portuguese, who were

once themselves thought of as belonging to different races. “Blacks” were Americans with origin in Africa, whether the descendants of African slaves brought to the United States, those who hail from the Caribbean, or those who emigrated on their own volition from Africa. “Brown” referred to Americans who originated in the former Iberian colonies of the New World, whether they were descendants of Europeans, of native peoples, or of Africans. “Yellow” denoted Americans with origins in Asia, whether Japan, Pakistan, the Philippines, China, India, or Cambodia. “Red” lumped all Native Americans, those immensely diverse clans and tribes with origins in North America before European colonization, into one monolithic group. The very fact that some of these color-based group names have now been jettisoned by preference of the groups themselves should itself raise alarm about the fact that the artificial divisions they represent are still so strong in driving social policy in America.

Next, policymakers divided the groups into “minorities” (all non-white groups) as against “the majority” (those identified as “white”), then assigned to all “minorities” the same preferences as African Americans—in accordance with the Marxist narrative that history is nothing but a stage for the struggle between the “oppressed” and the “dominant” group, or the “privileged” versus the “marginalized.” John Skrentny pinpointed this mutation in the national thinking when he wrote:

It was through affirmative action that policy makers carved out and gave official sanction to a new category of American: the minorities. Without much thought given to what they were doing, they created and legitimized for civil society a new discourse of race, group difference, and rights. This new discourse mirrored racist talk and ideas by reinforcing the racial difference of certain ethnic groups, most incongruously Latinos. In this discourse race was real and racial categories discrete and unproblematic. By dividing the world into “whites” and “minorities” (or later “people of color”) it sometimes obscured great differences among minority groups and among constituent groups within the pan-ethnic categories, so that Cubans and Mexicans officially became Latino, Japanese and Filipinos became Asian, and Italians, Poles, and Jews joined WASPs as

white. Most profoundly, the minority rights revolution turned group victimhood into a basis of a positive national policy.⁷⁴

Several laws, administrative rules, and judicial decisions in the 1970s identified “minorities” as those groups with a history of disadvantage in the United States. For example, Public Law 94–311, passed by Congress in 1976, called for the Census Bureau to “implement an affirmative action program...for the employment of personnel of Spanish origin or descent,” because “a large number of Americans of Spanish origin or descent suffer from racial, social, economic and political discrimination and are denied the basic opportunities they deserve as American citizens and which should enable them to begin to lift themselves out of the poverty they now endure.”⁷⁵

The following year Congress passed Representative Parren Mitchell’s (D–MD) amendment to Public Law 95–28 setting aside 10 percent of government contracts for businesses owned by “Negroes, Spanish-speaking [*sic*], Orientals, Indians, Eskimos and Aleuts.”⁷⁶

Eventually women and non-heterosexuals were added to the groups protected by the government because “having experienced the same kind of systematic exclusion from the economy as the various minorities...they are considered as having ‘minority status.’”⁷⁷ Whites were designated a group, too, but government literature made abundantly clear that the remedies were in place to correct for discrimination. In a take on Orwell, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) states: “Every U.S. citizen is a member of some protected class, and is entitled to the benefits of EEO law. However, the EEO laws were passed to correct a history of unfavorable treatment of women and minority group members.”⁷⁸

The New Wave of Immigrants

This unheard-of division of America into official groups was taking place just as the country was about to absorb the biggest wave of immigrants since the Ellis Islanders of 1890–1924. Changes in immigration law in the mid-1960s ended the 1924 restrictionist policies that had favored Northern Europeans and led to the next surge in immigration, this time largely from Latin America and Asia. An estimated 33.7 million *legal* immigrants entered the

United States between 1970 and 2012, according to the Department of Homeland Security. Of that total, 26.2 million, or 78 percent, came from Asia, Latin America, or the Caribbean (11.3 million from Asia, 14.8 million from Latin America and the Caribbean). Of these, 6.5 million, or about one-fifth, came from Mexico alone.⁷⁹ These figures do not account for the estimated 11 million illegal residents of the United States, of whom about five to six million may be of Mexican birth.

Some 100,000 people of Mexican descent lived in the American West and Southwest at the end of the 1840s, after the end of the Mexican War and Texas's accession to the Union. These were not immigrants but settlers obtained by territorial acquisition, just like the Dutch of New York and the French of Louisiana before them. However, they only accounted for around 0.4 percent of the U.S. population in 1850. The vast majority of today's 54 million Hispanic U.S. residents, accounting for 17 percent of the population, arrived as immigrants after 1965.

Just as these new immigrants came in, they discovered that they were to be ghettoized into one of the subgroups created by the elites. Since they were labeled as "minorities," any possibility of their assimilating into the larger society was conceptually precluded from the start. Government and cultural institutions now sought to instill into the new immigrants that—contrary to the traditional American credo—they could never overcome the circumstances of their birth but would henceforth have to conform to the ascribed norms of their assigned "group." This societal and mental estrangement was the price to be paid for certain forms of preferential treatment. Left unsaid, of course, was that—as John Miller put it— "group rights are underwritten by failure"⁸⁰ because they are contingent on the existence of prejudice, discrimination, and the inability of individuals to overcome such disadvantages without government support.

The difference between such treatment and that with which America met previous generations of immigrants could not have been more stark. As Nathan Glazer wrote in 1988 in *Affirmative Discrimination: Ethnic Inequality and Public Policy*:

We had seen many groups become part of the United States through immigration, and we had seen each in turn overcoming some degree of discrimination to become integrated into American

society. This process did not seem to need the active involvement of government, determining the proper degree of participation of each group in employment and education.⁸¹

The word "assimilation"—first used by Washington, then repeated confidently by his successors as the organizing principle of a country of immigrants—is now considered by the politically correct to be an ugly term, with connotations of stultifying and coerced homogenization or, at worst, "cultural ethnic cleansing." President Obama's New Task Force on New Americans does not mention "assimilation" once in its 70-page strategy paper.⁸² On the contrary, it calls on "welcoming communities"—that is, existing American communities—to adapt to the ways of new immigrants, who are encouraged only to naturalize and register to vote.

It is interesting to note that, years earlier, just as the shift from assimilation to the "minorities vs. majority" worldview was getting underway, both Dwight Eisenhower and Ronald Reagan had come to the same conclusion as President Obama. In July 1966, Eisenhower suggested that Reagan, then a gubernatorial candidate in California, run hard against the new minority concept at the "first major press conference" he held. Ike suggested that Reagan say:

In this campaign I've been presenting to the public some of the things I want to do for California—meaning for all the people of our State. I do not exclude any citizen from my concern and I make no distinctions among them on such invalid bases as color or creed.

Ike further advised Reagan,

Something conveying this meaning might well be slipped into every talk—such as "There are no 'minority' groups so far as I'm concerned. We are all Americans."⁸³

Reagan's response, too, was incredibly prescient:

I am in complete agreement about dropping the hyphen that presently divides us into minority groups. I'm convinced this "hyphenating" was done by our opponents to create voting blocs for political expediency.⁸⁴

Troubling Implications

The present approach to immigrants carries several deeply troubling implications. First, preferential treatment of any single group by the federal bureaucracy and our cultural institutions not only represents a betrayal of the principles espoused by every American leader from Washington through Reagan but requires an actual rejection of them. The Founders and their descendants belong to the “dominant group”—the dead white men—whose ways America is now being called on to transcend. This attitude has not only contaminated schools and universities, but it also now threatens the cherished American principle of equal treatment under the law.

The role that American schools played in teaching civic principles and reverence for the nation and its founding documents—including how those principles have helped leaders repair the nation’s faults—has been reversed. The examples of how the American educational system now teaches skepticism at best and derision at worst are too numerous to name. It suffices to say that Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States*—which slurs the Founders as men who sought to “take over land, profits, and political power” and thus create “a consensus of popular support for the rule of a new, privileged leadership”⁸⁵—continues to be the No. 1 political-science bestseller on Amazon 35 years after it was first published. In June of 2015, the University of California advised professors not to use such “microaggressive” phrases as “America is the land of opportunity” or “America is a melting pot.”⁸⁶ Similarly, the revised Advanced Placement History curriculum framework promoted by the College Board since the autumn of 2014 emphasizes the “marginalized vs. privileged” narrative and makes no mention of Benjamin Franklin.⁸⁷ This approach reverses that of New York’s 1904 “Manual of Patriotism,” which helped to shape the Greatest Generation.

In law, dissimulation has led to the new and egregious phenomenon of “cultural defense.” A member of an immigrant group who commits a crime under American law can now construct a defense by demonstrating that the criminal action is prescribed within the immigrant’s culture of origin. For example, when an Egyptian immigrant father recently killed his 17-year-old and 18-year-old daughters for dating non-Muslim men, even the FBI dubbed the case one of “honor killing.”

The new organizing principle includes racialist thinking that not only hearkens back to one of the ugliest flaws in U.S. history but even imports new ones. As John Miller put it, “[R]ace and ethnicity may be salient features of our political life, but they certainly should not be hardwired into our political institutions through a homeland policy that recalls South African apartheid.”

This is no hyperbole. Public Law 95–28, for example, was the first congressional act since 1854 to designate beneficiaries by race. As for Public Law 94–311, Rubén Rumbaut of the University of California at Irvine wrote that it was nothing less than “the first and only law in U.S. history that defines a specific ethnic group and mandates the collection, analysis, and publication of data for that group.”⁸⁸

As the Hudson Institute’s John Fonte has put it:

Multiculturalism attacks three pillars of the liberal democratic nation-state: (1) liberalism, by putting ascribed group rights over individual rights; (2) a strong and positive national identity, by emphasizing subnational group consciousness over national patriotism; and (3) majority-rule democracy.⁸⁹

The Need for a Debate

The radical reordering of how America absorbs newcomers came not as a response to a demand from below but as a top-down effort led by elites. PayPal founder Peter Thiel and Internet entrepreneur David O. Sacks, among others, call multiculturalism a “word game” that hides a “comprehensive and detailed worldview” and that is used by American leftists to introduce radical policy ideas when “an honest discussion would not lead to results that fit the desired agenda.”⁹⁰ Whether this represents an unintentional phenomenon or a deliberate conspiracy, it is hard to deny that to the degree multiculturalism succeeds, it pushes America leftward.

It is hard to argue, too, that average Americans asked for such a rearrangement. The multicultural revolution is premised on the need for affirmative action to remedy “a history of unfavorable treatment,” in the language of the EEOC. But the vast majority of Asian and Hispanic Americans for whom this ostensible benefit is intended are post-1965 immigrants who sacrificed much to get to U.S. shores, or their children or grandchildren. In other words, they not only lacked any “history

of unfavorable treatment,” but they also chose to wave aside the hardships that immigration imposes. These hardships were to them a lesser evil, compared to their problems at home.

There has been real discrimination against Hispanics in the West and Southwest, but it cannot compare to the life of African Americans under slavery or subsequently under Jim Crow laws in the South. Ezequiel Cabeza de Baca was the second elected governor of New Mexico in 1917—certainly a position of privilege—and he was preceded by other Hispanic leaders who governed New Mexico as a territory in the 19th century. Likewise, Cubans who immigrated to Tampa Bay, Key West, and Louisiana in the 19th century were subjected to the same treatment as other immigrants—and not, of course, to Jim Crow laws, unless they were Afro-Cuban—and were generally able to integrate well into existing American society at the time.

Mexican Americans, even those who suffered discrimination, showed strong aversion to being classified as disadvantaged. The UCLA sociologist Leo Grebler wrote in a massive 1970 study of Mexican Americans: “Indeed, merely calling Mexican-Americans a ‘minority’ and implying that the population is the victim of prejudice and discrimination has caused irritation among many.”⁹¹ Today, even though the terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” have been used for decades, many people designated as such still refuse to use these words when referring to themselves.⁹²

Similarly, though a larger portion of Asian Americans today are descended from those who suffered discriminatory laws in Western states in the first half of the 20th century—and even forced internment during World War II—it is not clear that affirmative action does anything to redress a history of past wrongdoing toward this population. If anything, Asians increasingly complain that affirmative action quotas harm them by denying them the number of admissions to colleges and universities that their academic accomplishments should suggest.⁹³

Rank-and-file Americans of all ethnicities were indeed not consulted about such a fundamental reordering of the way the nation has absorbed immigrants. As John Skrentny described it, “[I]t is striking that the civil-rights administrators—without any public debate, data or legal basis—decided on an ethnoracial standard for victimhood and discrimination that officially divided the country into

oppressed (blacks, Latinos, Native American, Asian Americans) and oppressors (all white non-Latinos.)”⁹⁴ Today, many Americans are still unaware of the history of this unilateral reorganization. Most think that the majority-versus-minority discourse has been around forever, not knowing that it was only introduced within the past 50 years.

America owes itself the opportunity to debate this issue. It is time to stop and ask what bureaucrats, politicians, and academics have done to the American ideals of equal treatment and equal opportunity for all. As Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Nathan Glazer put it in their 1970 introduction to their landmark 1963 book *Beyond the Melting Pot*, grouping Americans into “fantastic categories” that were each assigned a color on the spectrum is “biologically and humanly monstrous.”⁹⁵

Such officially enforced compartmentalization of the nation is deleterious first of all for the members of the “minorities” themselves. In a masterful and prescient study of assimilation, the California State University sociologist Milton M. Gordon predicted it would “prevent the formation of those bonds of intimacy and friendship which bind human beings together in the most meaningful moments of life and serve as a guard-wall against the formation of disruptive stereotypes.”⁹⁶

If perpetuating racist compartmentalization is harmful to members of historically disadvantaged groups, it is still worse for the country as a whole. If the continuation of self-government and liberty depends on the willingness of citizens to sacrifice for a greater good—and that is in turn contingent on a patriotic feeling, which must rely on a sound educational grounding in civic virtues—then the present course of the nation is suicidal. Segregating Americans into pan-ethnoracial groups will lead to a “loss of popular concern with the common good.”⁹⁷ In a crisis, such divisiveness could prove catastrophic.

A cursory glance at the many vicissitudes of societies such as Yugoslavia and Iraq, where group loyalty trumped national purpose, should make Americans apprehensive about importing group ideology as an organizing principle. Other Western societies such as Britain are now deciding to leave group ideology behind. In a speech after winning re-election in May, Prime Minister David Cameron announced that the U.K. would move beyond simply standing “neutral between different values,” adding:

That's helped foster a narrative of extremism and grievance. This Government will conclusively turn the page on this failed approach. As the party of one nation, we will govern as one nation, and bring our country together. That means actively promoting certain values. Freedom of speech. Freedom of worship. Democracy. The rule of law. Equal rights regardless of race, gender or sexuality.⁹⁸

A presidential campaign is an ideal time to have this conversation. A true debate on multiculturalism and assimilation in America can take shape along the following lines:

- **Re-evaluate the practice of segregating American residents by group.** Americans—all Americans, not just those who believe they know better—need to ask why, or whether, it is necessary to segregate American residents in the constitutionally mandated decennial Census or any of the other surveys the U.S. government conducts in-between. If it is demographical information that the country and its academics need, then the government could ask residents to check boxes according to nationalities of origin. But there is no need to deepen cultural cleavages by encouraging people to identify with one of five bureaucratically created pan-national groups. The U.S. government should stop bombarding Americans who originated in Latin America and Asia with the message that they are victims.
- **Allow school-choice reform.** One way that those designated as minorities today are indeed victims who risk being relegated to a permanent subordinate class is by being left behind educationally. This is especially true for those designated as Hispanics, whom the National Assessment of Educational Progress shows to consistently lag behind. Not coincidentally, Hispanics are overrepresented in public schools, especially in urban areas where public schools most struggle and underperform. Unfortunately, efforts to fix the system are often stymied by politicians' dependence on support from teachers unions that oppose true reforms. Candidates should ask why the country should continue to let teachers unions block meaningful school-choice reform, thus relegating immigrants and their children to the status of a permanent subordinate class. The outpouring of popular opposition to the Common Core curriculum is a hopeful sign that Americans may be taking school issues seriously.
- **Strengthen citizenship requirements.** Another area that needs debate is strengthening citizenship requirements. Some 54 percent of the 41 million foreign-born U.S. residents in 2012 were not citizens (around 22 million), so making civic and patriotic instruction part of the naturalization process would go a long way toward making naturalization a truly transformative experience and would help assimilate a significant portion of immigrant communities. Any immigration reform that a future President signs should include reinforcing citizenship requirements so as to start our new compatriots with a deep and thorough understanding of the elements that make America exceptional.
- **Government policies should not harm family formation and church participation.** Not all assimilationist efforts are within the direct reach of government. The vast scholarship on previous immigrant waves shows that strong and intact families strengthen patriotic assimilation and religiously active families even more so. Out-of-wedlock births, for example, are clearly linked to educational underperformance and to social pathologies and dysfunctions that are difficult to reverse later in life. The American family, as Kay Hymowitz states, always had

the mission of shaping “children into citizens in a democratic polity.”⁹⁹ As for church attendance, it is of course a matter of personal salvation, but there are clear temporal benefits. Vast amounts of research show that children who attend church regularly result in having more years of schooling, helping with economic mobility, and assimilation.¹⁰⁰ Both research and past experience also demonstrate that active church participation can help “make Americans” by teaching such civic values as volunteerism and other vital aspects of our culture.

This debate will not be easy. It will be a brave presidential candidate of either party that takes up both a critique of multiculturalism and a conversation on solutions to strengthen assimilation. Assimilation is now derided in the academy and the media as a coercion of immigrants into stultifying conformity. This phenomenon aside, the vast majority of Americans support Americanization. In a recent Harris poll, 83 percent of respondents said that Americans “share a unique national identity based on a standard set of beliefs, values and culture,” and 90 percent

believe that Americanization “is important in order for immigrants to successfully fulfill their duties as American citizens.” Nine out of 10 Hispanics agree with that view.¹⁰¹

These Americans know that even if assimilation can be at worst “a brutal but necessary bargain,”¹⁰² as several writers have described it, it is also at best a liberating, welcoming action, a proposition only a nation like America can confidently offer those born overseas. Previous waves of immigrants have found the correct balance between keeping their traditions and adopting America’s virtues, between pride in their ancestry and love of their new country. The new wave can do so as well. Patriotic assimilation is the bond that allows America to be a nation of immigrants. Without it, America would cease to be a nation at all, becoming instead a hodgepodge of groups that could no longer meaningfully welcome immigrants into a commonly shared, characteristic way of life. Like immigrant groups themselves, America can be trusted to find a sustainable balance between honoring the unique cultures from which diverse Americans come and integrating all Americans into a unified nation, just as it always has.

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**PATRIOTIC ASSIMILATION IS AN INDISPENSABLE
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