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or Assimilation?
A Dilemma of Our Times

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> God . . . hath made of one blood all nations of men
> for to dwell on all the face of the earth (Acts 17:26).

Through the ages, relations between ethnic and racial groups have been at best, fragile, at worst, violent and devastating. Men have forgotten they are brothers. To deal with their conflict in the world, they have tried everything from integration, to pluralism, to separatism, even to extermination.

In our own century, we have seen all of these attempts. In the United States, we have witnessed various degrees of assimilation, Civil Rights, the separatist movement, and the enthusiastic adoption of a popular compromise: cultural pluralism. Worldwide, we may know of the relatively successful adjustment of a tripartite Switzerland, but our awareness is drawn more readily to the violent outcomes of attempted separatism: the forced expulsion of thousands of Asians from Uganda, the periodic violence between Moslems and Hindus in India, and the unending civil wars between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland, and between Christians and Moslems in Beirut. We have been horrified by the genocide of the Armenians by the Turks, of the Jews by Nazi Germany, of the Hutu by the Tutsi in Burundi,[1] and of the Tutsi by the Hutu in Rwanda.[2]

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The purpose of this paper is to shed some light on the complex problems related to ethnic and racial relations. Thus, we will first focus on the United States as a case study, to identify the basic issues involved in the traditional goal of assimilation. Then we will show that the new policy of cultural pluralism (an obvious compromise brought about by a sense of failure around assimilation) is not a viable goal, since it does not promote structural participation. Therefore, it can only realistically be viewed as a means to an end, or as a rather unstable point between two possible outcomes: assimilation and separatism.

A POLICY OF ASSIMILATION

American society has moved from the policy of Americanization to the melting pot approach, and (as a reaction to minorities' demand for power and separatism) to the cultural pluralism approach. Actually, all three of these approaches represent some degree, some version of assimilation. That is, the American brand of cultural pluralism does not seek separatism in the economic, political, and educational systems. It simply allows greater freedom of choice in more intimate aspects of life such as family, religion, and recreation.[3]

Yet, assimilation is an extremely problematic process which, in order to be achieved, requires: (1) the complete, unqualified acceptance of the minority by the dominant group, as well as (2) the complete, unqualified desire, on the part of the minority, to give up their deepest cultural commitments.[4] Apparently, in the United States, both requirements have often failed to materialize.

A. Relative Assimilation of European Immigrants

The integration of Europeans into American institutions has, for a long time, been taken for granted. A closer look, however, indicates that not all of them have become totally Americanized.

1. Americanization. From the beginning, people from Europe were invited to come to this country and integrate into the five existing institutions — family, economy, government, education, and religion — already established in England. Consequently, a nation of immigrants was to be quickly transformed into a nation of equals, with liberty for all. In fact, as some writers suggest today, all this really meant was that conformity to Anglo-American norms would be expected. This is indicated by the following equation:[5]

American assimilation: $A + B + C = A$

Most Northwest European and Scandinavian immigrants apparently did not mind very much surrendering their distinctive cultural characteristics. These Anglo-Saxon Protestant groups had given up on Europe and resolved to make a future for themselves in America. The frontier was wide open and they were welcomed by the settlers anxious to develop the nation. They were immediately given the right to vote and encouraged to send their children to school.[6] Soon, their sense of identity was drawn solely from American society, their roots were forgotten, and they were indistinguishable from those who had come before them.[7]

This was the quick mutual acceptance that can more easily take place between two groups of equals, with very similar physique, customs, values, ethos, and so forth, at a time when the in-coming group can be viewed not as a rival for social rewards, but as a partner to achieve common goals.[8]

The next settlers, however, were not as amenable to integration. German refugees chose to remain isolated from their American neighbors in the Midwest, establishing their own schools and maintaining their culture and language. Then the Irish came, escaping in large numbers from the potato famine. They settled in the eastern

cities, establishing their "Popish" churches and becoming visible as a group.[9]

When the next wave of Europeans came, at the turn of the century, they were even more different. From Central and Southern Europe, they brought with them a diversity of languages, religions, manners, and values. They remained in eastern ghettos. Older Americans felt uneasy about them and invoked thoughts of cultural inferiority to justify their prejudice, discrimination, and the resulting unrepresentative immigration quota of the 1920s.[10]

2. *The Melting Pot.* Interestingly, out of this disillusionment emerged a more lenient and open-minded version of Americanization: the Melting Pot doctrine, often represented as follows:

$$\text{Melting Pot: } A + B + C = D$$

This approach theoretically required the fusion of the minority and majority groups, as they combined to form a new group, a new culture, unlike any of the original groups.[11] It reflected (at a time when prejudice was high) an unexpectedly lenient view of the immigrants, and may have been the unrepresentative product of a few, because by then the well-entrenched American institutions were not going to be modified just to please the newcomers. This unrealistic movement enjoyed surprising popularity during the first few decades of this century. In the end, however, the movement was criticized by both the immigrants and the WASPs. Its death blow came at the onset of the First World War when it was discovered that millions in the United States could not communicate in English, had never obtained citizenship, and were influenced by their foreign governments through newspapers published in their native languages.[12] Thus, World War I reintroduced Americanization as a goal.[13]

Through the depression, through World War II and later, prejudice against European minorities abated, and

these continued the assimilation process. At that time, however, researchers found that assimilation is always somewhat selective and perhaps never complete. For example, in the 1950s, a large percentage of Catholics of European origin were found to have acquired a central aspect of the Protestant Ethic — deferred gratification — along with middle-class education and occupations. They had become middle class without becoming WASPs.[14] But on the other hand, social scientists also found that three "religiously defined melting pots" had developed in the United States: one within which the Protestants intramarry, one for all Catholics, and one for Jews, with few (but slowly increasing) intermarriages in between.[15] Thus, in spite of the dominant society's acceptance of European groups, these have been willing and able to give up some, but not all their expressive culture, their deeper values.[16]

Additional research has shown that, the more different immigrants are from the dominant group, the more their assimilation is opposed by the group in power and resisted by the immigrants. More specifically, differences in physical appearance tend to bring opposition and discrimination on the part of the dominant group, and become the greatest obstacle to assimilation. Differences in religion, on the other hand, tend to prevent the minority group from wanting complete assimilation.[17] This is why assimilation is easiest for those who come voluntarily at a time when they are needed by the host society, who are few in numbers or dispersed, and who tend to be culturally and physically similar to the dominant group.[18]

3. *Renewed Ethnic Pluralism.* More recently, a "new tribalism" seems to have emerged among European ethnic groups. This renewed identification is expressed through a greater interest in native food, dance, and costumes, in folk culture, and in religious traditions. It is also demonstrated through visits to ancestral homes, through the increased use of ethnic names, through the establishment of

fraternal organizations, museums, and native-language newspapers, and through the current resurgence in the use of hyphenated nationality terms such as Italian-American or Polish-American.[19] All these efforts to preserve one's heritage appear to confirm one study which claims that third-generation Irish and Italians are expressing a greater sense of being deprived from their roots than their migrant grandparents themselves had.[20]

This rising white ethnic assertiveness is an unexpected and interesting phenomenon occurring among people who have generally been thought to be well accepted and integrated into American society. It may simply be part of the national trend championing individualism. Or it may be defensive pluralism, motivated by the competition presented by other organized groups who are making claims for special treatment.[21] But it certainly tells us that while it is easy to change one's manners, material culture, and superficial beliefs and attitudes, it is much harder to abandon one's identification with the values of one's original culture.[22]

Yet at this time, there is no doubt that European ethnic groups have generally been integrated into American society. To the extent that they are not, it has been due more to their resisting complete assimilation than to rejection by the dominant group.[23] On the other hand, the people of color in the United States have had a different experience.

B. Problematic Adjustment of Racial Groups in the United States

Today, four major groups make up the people of color in this country: the Native Americans who, after the Indian wars, ended up mostly on reservations; the Afro-Americans, most of whom were brought as slaves two centuries ago; the Orientals who started immigrating well over a century ago, and a large and varied Hispanic population. Obviously, each of these groups represent widely different

ethnic backgrounds, national origins, reasons for being in the United States, lengths of stay here, and discriminatory experiences. Yet, for the purpose of this paper, we are mainly focusing on the Black movement because of their greater involvement in protest.

1. The Nature of Race and Racism. Most scientists agree that the concept of race is extremely unclear: all races overlap widely, and biologists have been unable to separate one race from another on the basis of relevant and visible physical characteristics.[24] This lack of a concrete definition, however, has not stopped many from adopting some social definition of race which is then related to specific (and generally negative) behaviors, abilities, and character traits. These traits often become stereotypes which reinforce prejudice and discrimination, and may open the way to institutional racism, or the establishment of norms, laws, and legal structures regulating relationships of the dominant group to given racial groups, i.e., apartheid in South Africa or Jim Crow legislation in the Southern United States. Then comes segregation, the policy of "separate but equal," which makes minority achievement within the dominant group virtually impossible.[25]

Such developments stand in deep contradiction with the ideals of the American dream, and therefore have been identified as the American dilemma.[26] Through the years, social scientists have tried to explain the existence of racism in the United States in terms of personality maladjustment, economic competition, a desire to exploit, the need to have a scapegoat, and existing racial norms.[27] But the dilemma is complex and resists easy solutions.

2. Racial Militancy and the Emergence of Cultural Pluralism. Since World War II, a number of Black movements have emerged, making different (and often uncoordinated) demands on the United States government. During the war, Black leaders obtained both the establishment of the FEPC (the Fair Employment Practices Committee) and the

desegregation of the armed forces. In 1955, Martin Luther
King, through his nonviolent movement, made great gains
against arbitrary segregation rules in the South.[28] But for
some the movement was too slow. Rioting in the streets
of some of our large cities made it clear that the Blacks no
longer believed that change could be obtained through
peaceful protest.[29] Simultaneously, the Black Muslims or-
ganized to demand land for a separate Black nation,[30] while
the Black Panther Party threateningly demanded equal
treatment.[31] These and other militant groups became part
of the Black Power movement which created a great sense
of Black pride. Other alienated groups followed suit, form-
ing Brown Power, Red Power, and Yellow Power orga-
nizations.

The problems are not over. People of color keep coming
to the United States. Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans,
and a number of Central Americans have come to escape
economic and political problems. A contingent of Haitians
unexpectedly came to escape their poverty. The Southeast
Asian political refugees are forming one of the newest racial
and ethnic groups. And all along, Samoans, Filipinos, Tai-
wanese, and people from Hong Kong have continued com-
ing in. In addition, research tells us that, in spite of many
government programs, the Black ghettos are still extremely
depressed,[32] the Native American reservations still have a
limited economic base,[33] and too few Hispanics attend col-
lege.[34] In addition, some backlash has occurred, raising the
cry of "reverse discrimination."

Yet, much has been done. It all started with racial mil-
itancy which brought pride to minority groups for their
racial and cultural origins. And it continued with the sub-
sequent involvement of the mass media in a campaign to
break down racial and ethnic stereotyping. Now it is no
longer considered good form to openly express prejudice
and discrimination against racial and ethnic groups. And
Affirmative Action, along with various educational

programs, provided greater chances for upward mobility among all minorities, greatly enlarging the middle class in all groups.[35]

Simultaneously, the goal of minority assimilation has fallen into disrepute. It was first challenged in the 1960s and 1970s by minority leaders and by minority people in the streets. More recently its viability is being challenged by the general public, supported by a few social scientists. The dominant group no longer feels it can insist that Anglo ways are the best. And minority group members derisively challenge: "What do you want me to do, become a white man?" All these new attitudes reflect cultural pluralism, the new and more permissive approach to minorities which has become popular in our country. This new approach is being enthusiastically adopted by politicians and professionals in their policy statements and is supported by many ethnic groups who express a desire for a qualified assimilation.

Notwithstanding the intense popularity of cultural pluralism, the evidence suggests that cultural pluralism, with its relativistic values and ethics and its enormously attractive appeal for tolerance and normative flexibility, actually may just turn out to be a brand new way of ignoring and isolating minorities.

A RATIONAL ARGUMENT AGAINST THE POLICY OF CULTURAL PLURALISM

Most supporters of cultural pluralism appear to interpret this concept as mutual appreciation of cultural differences, along with a resolve to protect each group's right to maintain their own way of life.[36] As such, it is difficult to quarrel with it because tolerance of cultural differences immediately sounds like a beautiful, obvious, and instant solution to intergroup conflict. Yet the notion is rather

simplistic and fails to take into consideration basic principles of human interaction.

In an attempt to identify the core issues in racial and ethnic relations, we will argue, first, that minorities would rather participate in American institutions than being "kindly" tolerated, and second, that tolerance, as a goal, may often interfere with institutional participation. Finally, it will be suggested that institutional participation can only be achieved through either assimilation or separatism, with the warning that separatism often leads to violence. In the process, the point will be made that cultural pluralism is not a viable goal, although it is indispensable as a means to achieving assimilation.

Argument No. 1. Cultural Pluralism or Institutional Participation?

What is it that minority group members really want — tolerance of their differences, that is, cultural pluralism, or full participation in the mainstream of America? Some writers indicate that they want and need both — tolerance and participation.[37] But could this not be somewhat contradictory?

The central problem in ethnic and racial relations is the fact that minorities are not fully participating in the mainstream of America and therefore feel deprived economically and socially. In fact, this deprivation is the central aspect of the most accepted definition of a minority group which is described as any group which, because of its members' ethnic or racial characteristics, has limited access to societal rewards.

Thus, participation in the social structure of the five basic social institutions is absolutely indispensable to members of a society, because occupying basic roles in an institution is the only way to receive social rewards. For example, as family members, we can receive love, acceptance, support, loyalty, security, stability, and roots. As

members of a community, as citizens, as voters, we get some measure of respect, some feeling that we make a difference, some pride, some security. As students, we get opportunities to gain recognition in scholastic and extra-curricular activities as well as a potential status based on the hope of our future achievement. And as church members, we may get a sense of moral commitment, a sense of oneness with others, a sense of eternity.

But above all, in the United States, it is through an occupational role that self-validation comes, because it is through it that clear, immediate, and consistent community and societal rewards are obtained. That is, with a job we are given space to work in, as well as an opportunity to prove our ability and to gain appreciation and recognition from those we work for and those we work with. We are given a chance to gain new knowledge and experience, and we are given some degree of financial security. More importantly, we are given some title, a social status, a sense of who we are vis-a-vis our fellowmen.[38]

Thus, because a job in the United States today is the greatest and most automatic source of social rewards, what is not needed is the type of tolerance which encourages the very patterns which ensure inequality. What we need, on the contrary, is tolerance as a means, tolerance which facilitates full social participation and unavoidably brings cultural assimilation.

Argument No. 2. Structural Participation Demands and Facilitates Cultural Assimilation

Social roles always imply behavioral expectations. Therefore, social roles are always conditionally rewarding. That is, generally speaking, social rewards are given when members of a group conform to their role expectations, and rewards are withdrawn when they do not.[39] Thus, well-integrated members of our society know that, in most jobs, they must come to work every day, on time, and

work until it is time to go home. And while on the job, they must clearly show that they are performing to the best of their ability. Some leeway is allowed but if deviations from expectations are frequent, obvious, and visible, the opportunity to work may be withdrawn.

Because of cultural pluralism, job expectations are not always understood by members of subcultural groups. For example, a young Native American obtained a university degree. Armed with it, he got a job off the reservation as a white collar worker in an industry. When asked about his job, he explained that every morning he found on his desk a pile of papers to process. He typically completed such tasks by noon. In the afternoon, with nothing to do, he would sit at his desk and read magazines. This lack of awareness of job expectations can be understood if we know that in his family, his father only worked sporadically as a farm laborer, and that he himself had never before held a job. Of course it did not take long for him to lose his position. Now he is back on his reservation.

This true story illustrates the fact that, typically, cultural confrontations take place at the structural level. They occur when an Anglo boss is faced with the problem of compensating for the absence of a Chicano employee who did not show up because his cousins from El Paso came to visit him that day. They take place when an Indian student, in the last semester of her training, decides to go home with no degree, rather than tell her divorced sister (who is visiting with her four children) that she cannot afford to take care of her. They happen when an Anglo-Saxon employee from Appalachia decides, from one day to the next, to quit his job to avoid being bothered by his many creditors.

The fact is that cultural definitions often clash. For instance, in our American society, self-validation comes through a job, while in many other societies, it does not come that way at all. It may come from having servants

and not having to work, as in Spain. It may come from being a leader within the extended family, from being someone on whom everyone can depend, as among many Latin Americans; or being a successful hustler in the inner city; or being a strong fighter and protector among the Mongols; or seeing visions among some Native American tribes of old; or owning cattle among some tribes of Africa; or giving up one's money and social position among Hindus.

But if representatives of these diverse cultures come to settle in our industrial society, wanting to share of our abundance, they will have to act, as a matter of survival, as if they believed that work is their greatest source of satisfaction. And it is in the process of learning this crucial American pattern that they should be given all the patience and tolerance their Anglo middle-class employers can give them, until job responsibility becomes second nature to them. Thus, cultural pluralism may be viable as a means to the end of assimilation, but cannot realistically be seen as an end in itself.

This is because participation not only demands some level of acculturation, but it inexorably brings further acculturation. First it brings external acculturation, the adoption of the more superficial aspects of the new culture (the material things, the language, the manners, the basic norms). Then it introduces the slower process of internal acculturation, the point when social rewards become so emotionally rewarding that identification starts shifting to the dominant group.[40]

Thus, cultural pluralism, as a means to an end, allows minority group members to establish some degree of compartmentalization, that is, working like a dominant group member, but living at home according to minority expectations. Eventually, however, secure in the acceptance of the dominant group, family members can venture into other institutions, perhaps first the PTA, then the banking

system, and then into the health facilities. Then they may decide to seek housing among Anglos and to participate in neighborhood and community affairs. They may even attend a church attended by their neighbors. And as they participate in all basic institutions, they become increasingly like their neighbors, increasingly aware of dominant expectations, and share increasingly in dominant social rewards. Because the dominant group is accepting, they do all this without being pushed into a marginal position, rejected by both groups.

To summarize, because cultural pluralism tends to lead to structural inequality, it cannot stand as a viable goal. On the other hand, participation by minorities in dominant social structures eventually brings assimilation, particularly if the dominant group uses tolerance of differences (or cultural pluralism) as a means to the eventual goal of assimilation.

Argument No. 3. Assimilation or Separatism?

If full institutional participation (and assimilation) is not facilitated by the dominant group, eventually the minorities will rebel. When they do, one choice they may demand is separatism, that is, their own land to establish their own separate basic institutions, their own society.

From the very beginning, as the young country welcomed new immigrants, the United States chose assimilation as the preferred approach to cross-cultural relations. This accommodating policy is rather rare worldwide, since most other countries have more typically established some version of separatism. But cases of successful separatism are rare, and most eventually end up in violence.

About the only existing case of lasting stability seems to be Switzerland, which has been tremendously successful in maintaining peace between three "separated" cultural groups under one government. For centuries, that country has existed as a peaceful federation uniting three basic

geographical and cultural groups (Germans, French, and Italians), and four languages (German, French, Italian, and Romansh). To survive as a nation, the Swiss had to exercise great rationality in organizing a tripartite government, with clearly delineated rules which permit each group to be fully represented in the central government. To preserve this fragile balance of power, however, the country had to establish stringent laws, such as prohibitive rules against migration. And in spite of their impressive record, in the 1970s a violent separatist movement emerged indicating that not even such workable, rational arrangements can totally eliminate conflict.[41]

In Canada, the French Canadians have attempted to maintain some degree of separatism which has yielded a rather fragile coalition, with the status of the French depending entirely on their current political power. Lebanon established a political arrangement similar to that of the Swiss, but it did not last. When they allowed their tenuous balance of power to be disturbed by the incoming Palestinian refugees, civil war came. And in Africa, many tribes, after a repressed but relatively peaceful coexistence under their colonial masters, are now facing one another sometimes in avoidance, and sometimes in fratricide.

Thus, separatism is not an easy solution. Typically, any type of pluralism brings conflict.[42] But separatism, in addition, carries with it the message that the differences involved are irreconcilable, that assimilation is out, and that compromise is no longer an option. And with this comes the depersonalization, the dehumanization of the enemy, which so often leads to violence in confrontation, and occasionally in extermination.[43]

Such confrontation is well described in a prophecy of war:

> After many days, slaves shall rise up against their masters, who shall be marshaled and disciplined for

war. . . . And thus, with the sword and by bloodshed
the inhabitants of the earth shall mourn (D&C 87:4, 6).

As a conclusion, it must be admitted that it is not easy
to achieve peace amid differences among human beings.
When we compare separatism with assimilation, we can
only conclude that separatism is rather risky and that as-
similation probably is, in the long run, a more functional
goal. Yet, assimilation is not easily achieved. In the United
States, the policy of assimilation has worked only when
the groups involved were relatively similar racially as well
as culturally. And recently, even the assimilation of white
Europeans has been questioned. Now, with a sense of
failure, the goal of cultural assimilation has been replaced
with a new goal: that of cultural pluralism, a nonviable
goal because it tends to work against the institutional par-
ticipation of minorities. No nation can afford to have large
segments of its population excluded from occupying con-
ditionally rewarding roles, because only through roles do
we share in the societal rewards. When demands for in-
stitutional assimilation are not met, minorities have only
one other alternative: separatism. But the successful cases
of separatism are few, and only for groups who have some
land autonomy and similar cultures. Peace, for those who
have ambiguous territorial claims and basic cultural dif-
ferences, is fragile, tenuous, and often turns to violence.

Notes

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43. Kruper, *The Pity of It All*, 122-24.