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Multiculturalism: America's Enduring Challenge

James E. Bond[1]

As the world's first and only continuing multicultural nation, America has always faced an enduring challenge: how to encourage the enriching aspects of America's ethnic and racial diversity while simultaneously moderating the divisive tendencies of that same diversity. Today, that challenge is exacerbated because we are torn between two conflicting understandings of multiculturalism. "Melting pot" multiculturalism reflects a pragmatic assessment of our experience; "tossed salad" multiculturalism is rooted in an idealized conception of the Preamble's "more perfect Union."[2] Of all the debates that vex us, this is the most troubling because it is about who we are. People celebrate their identity in song and poetry.[3] They also kill and die for it.

Pragmatic multiculturalism is captured in the image of a melting pot. Melting pot multiculturalists favor assimilation over hyphenated Americanism. While assimilation does not require persons to abandon their cultural roots, melting pot multiculturalists do expect newcomers to integrate their respective heritages into the general obligations of American citizenship. Persons may, of course, preserve distinctive aspects of their heritages or lifestyles, as have the Amish in Pennsylvania, gays in the Castro, and Americans of Asian descent in Seattle's International District. But every citizen must also subscribe to some variant of Patrick Henry's pronouncement at the First Continental Congress: "The distinctions between Virginians, Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers, and New Englanders are no more. I am not a Virginian, but an American."[4] That is the timeless meaning of our national motto, *e pluribus unum:* out of many, one.

Melting pot muticulturalists view racial and other differences as a danger to be kept at arm's length, rather than a value to be embraced. While the mix

of differences is constantly evolving, the ever-present danger of such mixes—as history seems to indicate—is to convulse society and destroy the nation. Consequently, they believe the solution lies in public policies that refuse to acknowledge differences in the allocation of public benefits and burdens and, instead, promote civility in the private adjustment of the social problems that difference breeds.

Tossed salad multiculturalists, on the other hand, view diversity idealistically. They celebrate the richness of difference and insist on protecting and preserving it. Otherwise, they fear persons will be stripped of their identity and transformed into Euro-American widgets. Consequently, they oppose assimilation. Indeed, they revel in hyphenated Americanism because it emphasizes the primacy of separate identities, inherited or self-constructed, over a common identity as citizens. Moreover, they would make these differences the basis for allocating many public benefits and burdens. Finally, they would collapse nation and society into a single rainbow, so that all of our public and private institutions would look like America.

If these disagreements were not enough to polarize melting pot and tossed salad multiculturalists, their differing views of America poison the debate between them. Tossed salad multiculturalists frequently trash America as a rapacious conqueror and arrogant oppressor. The slimmest of their millennial hopes is presumably preferable to the awful realities of an Orwellian Amerika. Melting pot multiculturalists, on the other hand, often exude a chauvinistic patriotism that portrays America as the only country fit to live in. Presumably, their Panglossian reimagining of the often-disappointing American experience compensates for the decidedly non-millennial future they accept.

At this point, I should acknowledge that I am not neutral with regard to these competing conceptions of multiculturalism. Tossed salad multiculturalism, though well intentioned, is inconsistent with the foundational principles of the nation. It is detrimental to American society and incompatible with our country's providential destiny. By rejecting progress in its pursuit of perfection, tossed salad multiculturalism creates conflict that, paradoxically, takes America further from the very ideals that its advocates

cherish. For all the problematic aspects of melting pot multiculturalism, it is as good as it gets. Or, as Voltaire reminds us, the enemy of the good is the best.[5] Thus, Machiavelli counsels us to temper our idealism.[6]

To understand the perils that tossed salad multiculturalism poses, we must examine both its theoretical foundations and its practical consequences. Horace Kallen, perhaps America's first tossed salad multiculturalist, first addressed this topic in 1915.[7] Although he is not well known today, his work has been influential. "Americanizers" Kallen said, "suffered from invincible egotism,"[8] and Anglo-Saxon institutions "served to maintain the privileged classes in America secure in their privileges."[9] Arguing that America "did not have a single national culture," he insisted that "(d)emocracy involves, not the elimination of differences, but the perfection and conservation of differences."[10] Finally, he predicted that "the United States are in the process of becoming . . . a cooperation of cultural diversities, as a federation or commonwealth of national cultures."[11] He summarized his view with the following metaphor:

> As in an orchestra every type of instrument has its specific timbre and tonality, founded in its substance and form, as every type has its appropriate theme and melody in the whole symphony, so in society, each ethnic group may be the natural instrument, its temper and culture may be its theme and melody and the harmony and dissonances and discords of them all may make the symphony of civilization.[12]

Behind that sweet-sounding metaphor, however, are the four perils of tossed salad multiculturalism: It indulges a culture of victimhood; it spawns identity politics; it undermines civil society; and it celebrates the "other" while discounting the American creed, which is the only score that will save Kallen's multicultural orchestra from degenerating into cacophony.

First, tossed salad multiculturalism encourages a culture of victimhood. Although its proponents believe that they see America as it is, too many, in fact, see only stereotypical images of themselves, as in a mirror: black is

beautiful; Latin is warm; women are nurturing; gays are sensitive. But whatever the particular color, ethnicity, gender, or orientation of this ever-mutable face of multiculturalism, too frequently, it wears the mask of victimhood.

The phenomenon of such widespread victimhood would be ludicrous in any country as prosperous and well-ordered as America were it not that so many people genuinely see themselves as victims. Indeed, one political scientist looking at their claims has calculated that 374% of Americans are victims.[13] Lest you think that statistic ludicrous, consider that a woman of color, who is a lesbian and overweight, may count herself four times a victim. And if she were also a "marginalized allergy sufferer," one of the many victim groups whose plight women's groups have explored in recent years, she would be five times a victim! Perhaps this phenomenon of multiple victimhood explains why the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, which began with a modest mandate to protect black Americans, now seeks to protect "some 70% of the population, including the holders of more than three-quarters of the national wealth."[14] We have become—literally—a nation of victims.

Do not misunderstand me. There are victims in this country: those born into abusive and dysfunctional homes; the mugged and beaten; the molested and raped; the abandoned, tortured, and slain. There are people like Matthew Shepherd, a gay man who was left to die after being beaten and tied to a rough wooden fence on a rural Montana roadside, and James Byrd, a black man who was chained to the rear bumper of a pickup truck and dragged to his death over a rutted Texas trail. We trivialize their claims on our conscience when we treat as similar the ordinary bruises that accompany life in a multicultural society. And we ought not squander our storehouse of justice on the claims of those persons from privileged backgrounds, holding high-salaried and prestigious positions, who retreat to pleasant resorts to bemoan their own victimhood over lobster salad and chardonnay.

This "almost religious embrace of victimization"[15] increasingly excuses failures that are rooted, not in discrimination, but in a rejection of the

American creed. Ironically, that creed—which holds, in part, that all persons have the same rights—once inspired those who were relegated to second-class citizenship. Martin Luther King Jr.'s hand did not tremble with victim's palsy when he wrote his *Letters from a Birmingham Jail*.[16] Susan B. Anthony and her sister suffragettes did not demurely don the veil of victimhood when they demanded the right to vote. And the gay men who led the Stonewall riots did not storm the police precinct while proudly waving the banner of victimhood. None of these trailblazers saw themselves as strangers in a strange land. They saw themselves as Americans, and they demanded their rights as Americans.

Unfortunately, victims demand reparations, not rights. Thus, they practice identity politics, the second peril of tossed salad multiculturalism. In the resulting Hobbesian war of all against all, each group seeks to capture the government so that it can gorge itself on the benefits to which it believes itself entitled. By one count, there are now 168 federal programs that grant preferences to selected minorities.[17] These programs are based on the theory that, to cure generalized injuries from past discrimination, one must discriminate against those who never participated in that discrimination. The innocent are, thus, forced to pay for injuries inflicted by others, and individual effort is separated from reward, as people are told that they do not have to compete on the same playing fields, live by the same rules, or conform to the same standards. A poisonous atmosphere of suspicion, hostility, and recrimination is the ultimate result.[18]

The practitioners of identity politics further inflame society by dictating that all members of their race, gender, or orientation must hew to the party line, as if one's beliefs were determined by an, as yet, undiscovered groupthink chromosome. Those who do not, like Justice Clarence Thomas, are subjected to what he has called "public floggings."[19] The rest of us are subjected to diversity training and speech codes. Practitioners of identity politics lack Thomas Jefferson's confidence that we can tolerate any error of opinion so long as reason is "left free to combat it."[20] They do not understand that vigorous debate is the very oxygen that sustains a free society. In

fact, our tolerance for spirited discourse is one of the cultural patterns that unites us, for the American creed counsels us to lay down our arms and take up arguments instead.

Of course, almost all of us feel a natural kinship with our own kind, however defined. We naturally evaluate public policies in terms of how they impact our group. But even those persons beguiled by such inclinations to the extent that they would impose them through public policy ought to consider social and political realities. Basing identity politics on race is increasingly problematic. As interracial marriages dissolve us into a monochrome society, the very categories that undergird identity politics are rapidly disappearing. "The grandchildren of Latino and Asian immigrants—third-generation Americans—are marrying outside their groups at rates exceeding 50%."[21] And while the former director of the U.S. Census Bureau acknowledges that there are "no natural boundaries between the races," the 2000 Census included fifty-seven new racial categories.[22] Similarly, in the nineteenth century, "Brazil was so consumed with parsing the races that it created 462 possible combinations," but finally abandoned them all.[23] Race, it turns out, is the mother of all social constructions. The social reality is quite different. The future demographic face of America is Tiger Woods—and Tiger needs no preferences.

Basing identity politics on generalized, self-determined notions of victimhood is equally problematic. When victimhood becomes the currency with which governmental preferences are purchased, the have-plenties capture the victimhood lobby. For example, affirmative action has benefited middle-class white women and upper-class blacks far more than it has helped working-class women or poor blacks.[24] But consider this less well-known example, which ought to give those of us in education pause. Nearly half of all college freshmen who identify themselves as disabled claim to be learning disabled.[25] Learning-disabled students are far more likely than all other disabled students to be white and to have parents with high incomes.[26] They are among the disproportionately white students who receive time accommodations on the SAT.[27] These white kids are clustered along the affluent

Boston to D.C. and Seattle to San Diego corridors, where the number of students from prestigious private schools who receive time accommodations is four times the national average.[28] Apparently, Garrison Keillor was right: there are no average or below average kids, at least not at Lake Wobegone Prep; they are all just learning disabled. Incidentally, kids from inner city public schools seldom request or receive time accommodations.[29] As usual, the have-littles lose the political war and, thus, the opportunity to live the American dream.

That is why demanding government solutions to every problem that difference breeds is the third peril of tossed salad multiculturalism. As government expands, civil society shrinks. Yet civil society alone makes life in a multicultural society manageable. Tamar Jacoby describes how that process works in the cultural realm:

> [Our heritage] is a long history of struggling—two steps forward and two steps back—to forge one country out of many. And it's also the rich heritage of products created by that back and forth cultural exchange. What is jazz? It's not African music. It's the music that first black and then white people and then white and black people together have played in America with African and Latin rhythms and western marching band instruments.[30]

Such interracial, cross-cultural exchange flourishes only in a civil society that encourages people to pursue their interests and solve problems through voluntary associations that, over time, generate genuine understanding and mutual respect.

Even more important than these cultural patterns are the economic patterns that flourish in America's civil society. Commerce generates opportunity, promotes equality, and encourages assimilation. The Chinese laundry, the Korean grocery, the Italian restaurant, and the female-owned personal shopping service have given thousands a purchase on the American dream. According to Deirdre McCloskey, markets have been the "great liberator" of women, poor people, religious minorities, and sexual minorities.[31] In other

words, McDonald's has done far more for the inner city poor than affirmative action ever has. Benjamin Franklin sagely anticipated this phenomenon, as the late Judith Shklar explained. "Why," she asks, "have [immigrants] worked as maniacally as they have?"[32] Her answer? They followed *Poor Richard's* advice: "Be industrious and FREE."[33]

To be sure, civil society is far from perfect; it necessarily reflects our fallible natures. I am reminded of a scene in Flannery O'Connor's short story, *Revelation*.[34] As Ms. Turpin, a middle-aged, overweight, middle-class churchgoer, is sitting in a doctor's office, surveying the other patients, she fixes her gaze on a disheveled young woman, whom she classifies in her mind as white trash. She sighs to herself: Help them we must; but help them we cannot.[35] Living with people who are different is a bit like that: live with them we cannot; but live with them we must.

That predicament is, unfortunately, the reality of civil society. We cannot change human nature, and law cannot dictate tolerance, much less acceptance. The latter will come only when each of us practices better self-government, which is understood in its original sense as the self-regulation of personal conduct. As Edmund Burke observed centuries ago, persons are fit for civil society only to the extent that they observe moral constraints.[36] The cardinal virtue of American citizenship is not voting in every election. It is practicing, every day, tolerance, forbearance, and decency toward fellow citizens. Incidentally, those are the very practices that Paul, in his letters to the early Christian churches, implored his brothers and sisters in Christ to follow. If you understand that imperative, whether as a civic duty or as an obligation of faith, you can understand the profound insight of an initially shocking statement that a black colleague once made to me: "Most racism," he said, "is just bad manners."

The fourth and final peril of tossed salad multiculturalism is its uncritical celebration of the "other," which is illustrated in Martha Nussbaum's writings.[37] A humane education, as prescribed by Dr. Nussbaum, would strip students of the cultural narrow-mindedness of their birth communities.[38] To that end, she wants first graders told stories about other people, other tradi-

tions, and other ways of thinking, so that our children can be molded into citizens of what she calls the "community of human argument and aspiration."[39] In that world, America is just another maternity ward for producing little world citizens, who will model that relativism favored by libertine skeptics. Unschooled in the American creed and unburdened by quaint values like loyalty to kith and kin, love of country, or faith in traditional religion, these cosmopolitan druids will consider humankind their family; the world, their country; and internationalism, their religion. They will be taught but one "truth": all cultures are equally good.

Obviously, Dr. Nussbaum rejects the notion that the primary educational goal of a society ought to be the transmission of its history and values to its children. The devastating impact of that rejection can be seen in the work of Arthur Levine, the President of Columbia Teachers College. He reports that, in 1979, freshmen described themselves in terms of the beliefs they shared.[40] Today, they define themselves in terms of the differences that divide them.[41] One must ask: how can a multicultural society survive if it obsesses about its divisive differences rather than celebrates its unifying beliefs? Ordinary folk know the answer: it cannot. That is why American parents of all races and classes overwhelmingly want their children taught "the common history and ideas that tie all Americans together."[42] Indeed, seventy-nine percent of all Hispanics favor instilling pride in country over pride in race or ethnicity.[43]

Again, do not misunderstand me. We can, and should, learn much from the art, literature, and spiritual insights of other cultures, for they are rich in achievements that deserve our respect and admiration.[44] Indeed, one of the greatest strengths of America's culture has been the willingness of its people to appropriate the ideas and practices of successive waves of immigrants. But other cultures are not invariably worthy of emulation, and we will not find in them answers to the problems that vex us. If you doubt that, let us consider other great cultures.

- Will we discover in Japan ways to treat immigrants more fairly?
- Have Africans found better strategies for purging race hatred?

- Will we find models for the equal treatment of women in China?
- Does Turkey offer us progressive policies on same sex relationships?
- Should we ask Iran about how best to handle church-state relations?
- Will we learn how better to minimize class differences and reduce poverty from India?
- And where in the world—the former Yugoslavia, the Middle East, Central Africa, Indonesia, Ireland—should we look for suggestions on how to quell the slaughter of those who are merely "different"?

The answer to America's enduring challenge lies in ourselves, not in the "other." It lies in our history and the American creed that shaped that history. President Bush captured the essence of the creed in his State of the Union Address. Insisting that we have always rejected "tyranny and death as a cause and a creed," he reminded us that we made a different choice, "long ago, on the day of our founding."[45] President Bush further explained that "America will always stand firm for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law, limits on the power of the states, respect for women, private property, free speech, equal justice and religious tolerance."[46] That creed is nowhere more elegantly stated than in the Declaration of Independence.

> We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed . . . .[47]

Other nations have defined themselves in terms of ethnicity, religion, or geography. But we came from many peoples and races; we professed different faiths; and history had not yet fixed our borders. "American" has never meant European, or Christian, or trans-oceanic. Rather, it has always represented commitment to individual liberty and limited government. Gunnar

Myrdal, perhaps the most insightful foreign student of American society since De Tocqueville, observed that "America, compared to every other country in Western civilization, large or small, has the most explicitly expressed system of general ideals"; and "this 'American Creed' is the cement in the structure of this great and disparate nation."[48] Our continuing commitment to that creed makes us unique among nations; it makes us a propositional nation.

From the beginning, we were a multicultural society, and our diversity has only grown over time. Colonial America was, in large part, a crazy quilt of often-bickering religious sects. Compounding this religious diversity, settlers from each European country considered themselves a separate race, with each suspicious of the other. Fortunately, sex trumped suspicion. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur gave this example: A colonial from England married a Dutch woman. Their only son married a French woman. Their four sons each married women of yet different nationalities. This "strange mixture of blood," said Crevecoeur, was found "in no other country" and constituted what he called this "new race of men."[49] Moreover, the early European settlers were inextricably bound to the native peoples who preceded them and to the Africans whom they brought here in chains. Each became part of the ever-evolving American race. Successive waves of new immigrants only increased that diversity. The resulting diversity is astonishing, as the immigrant diaries, letters, and reports of every generation so colorfully illustrate.

My thesis is simple. Like all peoples, Americans have always eyed the "other" warily. And, unfortunately, many have been the crimes inflicted upon them. But unlike other countries, in the end, America always embraces the "other" because our creed requires it. Americans are both Plymouth Rock and Ellis Island. And so long as we place creed above color, we will remain the "last best hope" of a world still ravaged elsewhere by cruel ethnic, religious, and racial wars.

[1] This article is based on an address given at Seattle University on October 9, 2001.
[2] U.S. CONST. pmbl.
[3] *See generally* THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN, THE LEXUS AND THE OLIVE TREE: UNDERSTANDING GLOBALIZATION (Anchor Books 2000) (1999).
[4] JOHN ARTHUR GARRATY, THE AMERICAN NATION: A HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES 134 (1966).
[5] *See* THE OXFORD DICTIONARY OF QUOTATIONS 797 (Elizabeth M. Knowles ed., 5th ed. 1999).
[6] NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI, THE PRINCE (Luigi Ricci trans., Oxford Univ. Press 1952) (1515).
[7] JOHN J. MILLER, THE UNMAKING OF AMERICANS: HOW MULTICULTURALISM HAS UNDERMINED THE ASSIMILATION ETHIC 80 (1998). *See* HORACE M. KALLEN, *Democracy Versus the Melting Pot, in* CULTURE AND DEMOCRACY IN THE UNITED STATES 67 (1924).
[8] MILLER, *supra* note 7, at 81.
[9] *Id.* at 81–82.
[10] *Id.* at 81.
[11] *Id.* at 81.
[12] *Id.*
[13] CHARLES J. SYKES, A NATION OF VICTIMS: THE DECAY OF THE AMERICAN CHARACTER 12–13 (1992).
[14] GEORGE GILDER, WEALTH AND POVERTY 141 (ICS Press 1993) (1981).
[15] Shelby Steele, *War of the Worlds,* WALL ST. J., Sept. 17, 2001, at A22.
[16] *See* MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., *Letters from a Birmingham Jail, in* WHY WE CAN'T WAIT 64 (2000).
[17] President William J. Clinton & Senator Robert J. Dole, Presidential Debate at the University of San Diego (Oct. 16, 1996), http://www.pbs.org/newshour/debatingourdestiny/96debates/trans96b.html.
[18] *See generally* MILLER, *supra* note 7.
[19] *Justice Thomas Lashes at "Cultural Elite,"* CHI. TRIB., May 3, 1993, at N11.
[20] President Thomas Jefferson, First Inaugural Address (Mar. 4, 1801), *in* HAIG A. BOSMAJIAN, THE PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE OF FREEDOM OF SPEECH 63 (2d ed. 1983).
[21] Martin Kasindorf & Haya El Nasser, *Impact of Census' Race Data Debated,* USA TODAY, Mar. 13, 2001, at 1A.
[22] Solomon Moore, *Census' Multiracial Option Overturns Traditional Views,* L.A. TIMES, Mar. 5, 2001, at A1.
[23] Kasindorf & El Nasser, *supra* note 21.
[24] *See* GILDER, *supra* note 14, at 147–50.
[25] CATHY HENDERSON, AM. COUNCIL ON ED., COLLEGE FRESHMEN WITH DISABILITIES: A BIENNIAL STATISTICAL PROFILE 5 (2001), http://www.heath.gwu.edu/PDFs/collegefreshmen.pdf.
[26] Kenneth R. Weiss, *New Test-Taking Skill: Working the System,* L.A. TIMES, Jan. 9, 2000, at A1.
[27] *Id.*
[28] *Id.*
[29] *Id.*
[30] Tamar Jacoby, *Someone Else's House,* THE OCCASIONAL (Feb. 7, 2000), *at* http://www.theoccasional.com/Society___Culture/SC-Jacoby/sc-jacoby.html (on file with the Seattle Journal for Social Justice).
[31] Dierdre McCloskey, *Postmodern Market Feminism: A Conversation with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak,* RETHINKING MARXISM, Winter 2000, at 27, 29.
[32] JUDITH N. SHKLAR, AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP 71 (1991).
[33] *Id.* at 72.

[34] FLANNERY O'CONNOR, *Revelation, in* THE COMPLETE STORIES 488 (1992).
[35] *Id.* at 497.
[36] *See, e.g.*, EDMUND BURKE, *The State and Society, in* THE PHILOSOPHY OF EDMUND BURKE 43, 47 (1967).
[37] *See* MARTHA NUSSBAUM, CULTIVATING HUMANITY (1997).
[38] *See id.* at 69.
[39] *Id.* at 52.
[40] Arthur Levine, *The Campus Divided, and Divided Again*, N.Y. TIMES, June 11, 2000, § 4, at 17.
[41] *Id.*
[42] Amitai Etzioni, *Hispanics Just Want What Everyone Wants*, USA TODAY, Apr. 3, 2001, at A13.
[43] John Fonte, *Does America Have an Assimilation Problem? John Fonte Says Yes*, AM. ENTERPRISE, Dec. 2000, at 15, 19.
[44] *See* CHARLES TAYLOR, MULTICULTURALISM AND "THE POLITICS OF RECOGNITION" 72 (1992).
[45] President George W. Bush, State of the Union Address at the United States Capitol (Jan. 29, 2002), http://www.whitehouse.gov/stateoftheunion/index.html.
[46] *Id.*
[47] THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE para. 2 (U.S. 1776).
[48] GUNNAR MYRDAL, AN AMERICAN DILEMMA: THE NEGRO PROBLEM AND MODERN DEMOCRACY 3 (20th Anniversary ed. 1962).
[49] ARTHUR M. SCHLESINGER, JR., THE DISUNITING OF AMERICA: REFLECTIONS ON A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY 15 (rev. and enlarged ed. 1998).