

E PLURIBUS UNUM

BY

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On Saturday, February 5, 2011, British Prime Minister David Cameron speaking on terrorism at the Munich Security Conference said in effect "Multiculturalism has failed." Here is a portion of his superb speech:

"[W]e must build stronger societies and stronger identities at home. Frankly, we need a lot less of the passive tolerance of recent years and a much more active, muscular liberalism. A passively tolerant society says to its citizens, as long as you obey the law we will just leave you alone. It stands neutral between different values. But I believe a genuinely liberal country does much more; it believes in certain values and actively promotes them. Freedom of speech, freedom of worship, democracy, the rule of law, equal rights regardless of race, sex or sexuality. It says to its citizens, this is what defines us as a society: to belong here is to believe in these things. Now, each of us in our own countries, I believe, must be unambiguous and hard-nosed about this defense of our liberty.

There are practical things that we can do as well. That includes making sure that immigrants speak the language of their new home and ensuring that people are educated in the elements of a common culture and curriculum. Back home, we're introducing National Citizen Service: a two-month programme for sixteen-year-olds from different backgrounds to live and work together. I also believe we should encourage meaningful and active participation in society, by shifting the balance of power away from the state and towards the people. That way, common purpose can be formed as people come together and work together in their neighborhoods. It will also help build stronger pride in local identity, so people feel free to say, "Yes, I am a Muslim, I am a Hindu, I am Christian, but I am also a Londonder or a Berliner too". It's that identity, that feeling of belonging in our countries, that I believe is the key to achieving true cohesion."

In giving his wake-up call about the failure of multiculturalism he was following in the footsteps of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who in October 2010, had declared multi-culturalism has "utterly failed." And a week after Mr. Cameron's speech French President Nicholas Sarkozy on French television said

"My answer is clearly yes, it is a failure.

Of course we must all respect differences, but we do not want ... a society where communities coexist side by side.

If you come to France, you accept to melt into a single community, which is the national community, and if you do not want to accept that, you cannot be welcome in France....

We have been too concerned about the identity of the person who was arriving and not enough about the identity of the country that was receiving him.”

Prime Minister Cameron’s speech, combined with what was then happening in Egypt and other parts of the Arab world where people were protesting and demanding freedom, cheered me greatly because for some time I had been concerned about the fracturing of our American society. That great motto “*E Pluribus Unum*”, out of many, one, which since 1873 appears on all our coins, which is on the Great Seal of the United States and on the seals of the three branches of our government, had seemed to be in danger of becoming meaningless. This great country, which out of many diverse peoples of many races, cultures and creeds had created and nurtured the unique individual known as “the American” who, though of many different races, colors and religions, shared values and philosophies based on the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the writing of the great men who founded our republic more than 200 years ago, seemed to have lost its way.

In his *Letters From An American Farmer* (1782) J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, a native Frenchman, wrote in response to his own question, “What then is the American, this new man?” that the American is one who “leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. He becomes an American by being received in the broad lap of our great Alma Mater. Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world.”

“...whence came all these people? They are a mixture of English, Scotch, Irish, French, Dutch, Germans, and Swedes... What, then, is the American, this new man? He is neither a European nor the descendant of a European; hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country. I could point out to you a family whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations. He is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds...The Americans were once scattered all over Europe; here they are incorporated into one of the finest systems of population which has ever appeared.” – J.

By today’s standards we would call that melting pot pretty bland, but by the standards of the late 18th century it was pretty spicy.

George Washington undoubtedly believed in the doctrine of the American as a new race. “The bosom of America is open... to the oppressed and persecuted of all Nations and Religions” said our first president, but he counseled newcomers against retaining the “language, habits, principles (good or bad) which they bring with them.” Let them intermix with our people so that they would be “assimilated to our customs, measures and laws; in a world soon to become one people.”

Alexis de Tocqueville in his *Democracy In America* (1835) concluded that what brought American society together was the commitment of its members to democracy and self government.

Half a century after Tocqueville the next great foreign commentator on American democracy, James Bryce, wrote *The American Commonwealth*. Immigration had vastly increased and diversified. Bryce's European friends expected that it would take a very long time for America to assimilate these "heterogeneous elements." What struck Bryce, on the contrary, was what had struck Tocqueville: "the amazing solvent power which American institutions, habits, and ideas exercise upon newcomers of all races...quickly dissolving and assimilating the foreign bodies that are poured into her mass."

A century after Tocqueville, another foreign visitor, Gunnar Myrdal of Sweden, found the essence of the "solvent power" in what he called "the American Creed." Americans "of all national origins, regions, creeds, and colors," Myrdal wrote in 1944, hold in common "the *most explicitly expressed* system of general ideals" of any country in the West: the ideals of the essential dignity and equality of all human beings, of inalienable rights to freedom, justice, and opportunity.

The schools teach the principles of the Creed, Myrdal said; the churches preach them; the courts hand down judgments in their terms. Myrdal showed why the Creed held out hope even for those most brutally excluded by the white majority, the Creed acting as the spur forever goading white Americans to live up to their proclaimed principles, the Creed providing the legal structure that give the wronged the means of fighting for their rights. "America," Myrdal said, "is continuously struggling for its soul."

[Here I want to say a quick aside. Lest you begin to think that I did a lot of deep scholarly work I must give much credit to a wonderful little book written in 1991 by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. "*The Disuniting of America – Reflections on a Multicultural Society*" which he revised and enlarged in 1998. I periodically have lifted materials from this book without giving him specific credit to which he is certainly entitled and of which he is highly deserving.]

The concepts of assimilation and the melting pot were dominant until about 50 years ago, although starting about 100 years ago the concept of cultural pluralism began to gain popularity. If cultural pluralism is the retention of certain cultural traditions by individuals and groups who have generally assimilated into the general society, then it is a continuation of a process that even precedes the founding of our nation. The individual colonies had substantial differences in their cultures and in the laws which flow from such cultures. These were preserved when federalism became the underlying principle of our constitutional form of government. And Article I of the Bill of Rights, by prohibiting laws for the establishment of religion, or preventing the free exercise of religion, contemplated a country with a considerable range of religious views and religious cultures. All of this made for the diversity within our American culture which has strengthened it, and which does not detract or distract from our commonality as Americans.

But with the advent of multi-culturalism we began moving away from our commonality as Americans. We began to emphasize cultural distinction and language differences and we began

to assign individuals to various classifications for statistical purposes. And above all we began to allege that our Anglo-American values had equivalency with, and the same standing as, the values of other peoples and cultures. We began disuniting us by encouraging the retention of our immigrants' native languages, denigration long established and well-shared values because they had been developed, discussed and written about by "long dead white men." We began to rewrite our history or ignore it altogether. We passed laws mandating ballots in foreign languages, bi-lingual legal notices, bi-lingual education instead of teaching english to non-english speaking children, and we became so politically correct that we overlooked or swept under the rug the failures and deficiencies of individuals just because they belonged to minority groups.

Today we live in a world where technology has made it very simple for immigrants to return frequently to their home countries and/or stay in constant touch with relatives, friends and events in those home countries. This has reduced the need to integrate into the larger society and to adopt and support its core values. And yet, the need of the peoples of a nation to come together as one was never so well illustrated as by the recent tragic events in Japan. Faced with overwhelming challenges arising from the enormous earthquake and resulting tsunami, followed by the major problems at one of its major nuclear facilities, the Japanese people have shown an admirable application of their societal values and unity of purpose in their response. One would hope that we Americans, under similar circumstances, would likewise show that, although we are of very diverse backgrounds, races and ethnicities, we are as one when it comes to meeting challenges and sustaining common values.

When the leaders of three major European powers, who are also our closest allies, publicly denounce multiculturalism and declare, in so many words, that it is a threat to society we should act to restore *E Pluribus Unum* – out of many, one – to the forefront of our civic policy, and to truly assimilate and integrate all of the people of whatever race, creed or color who live within the United States into one people – the Americans, who hold as their basic values the American Creed of freedom of speech, freedom of religion, representative democracy, the rule of law, and equality of rights for all, based on the nation's founding documents and their ever evolving philosophies.