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SUPPORT FOR ASSIMILATION DOESN'T REJECT DIVERSITY

By Stephen L. Bakke  December 10, 2017



Iowa U.S. 4th District Representative Steve King caused quite a stir with his recent comments on diversity and assimilation. In his indelicate statements, King supported assimilation as being the real strength in America, not diversity as is so prominently proclaimed - and he's been chastised for it.

This is a subject I've thought a lot about, and even publicly shared my thoughts on it a time or two. Let's look at historical context before we finalize our reaction to those who strongly insist on assimilation. Recall these familiar quotes:

- *E Pluribus Unum* – “Out of many, one.”
- *I look to a day when people will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.* – Martin Luther King Jr.

E Pluribus Unum, “out of many one,” expresses the importance of assimilation in our American tradition of forging a culture from millions of immigrants representing many diverse cultures. Assimilation is an important reason for our country's success.

That principle is very compatible with another idea – that being the Martin Luther King Jr. ideal of deemphasizing racial differences. He thought we should look beyond skin color into the heart of individuals before judging them. While aggressively advocating for social justice, he spoke in a way that could both motivate his minority constituency, as well as help white America understand his peaceful methods and transformative goals. Martin Luther King had a very positive influence on America.

Unfortunately, progress toward Martin Luther King's ideal slowed as “political correctness” and “identity politics” became prominent in politics and elsewhere. Emphasis on differences has become more common on college campuses – segregated living, study areas, and courses. It seems what was once a search for “tolerance” and togetherness, has become “intolerance” and official separation. Contrary to Martin Luther King's ideal, ignoring race is now an unacceptable “microaggression,” and no longer tolerated.

So, what is assimilation?

Assimilation doesn't require immigrants to mimic or imitate Americans. It shouldn't be a means of subordinating immigrants and their culture to the existing citizens. Traditions, heritage, and religion don't have to disappear.

Assimilation is a process whereby immigrants encounter and react to a new set of experiences and challenges. Immigrants must survive, and hopefully thrive, in a very different environment than they have ever experienced. These newcomers can't avoid the many challenges, and must take the initiative to make adjustments necessary to thrive in their new situation.

Isolating themselves economically and socially from the rest of the community are impediments to successful assimilation. Dealing with the realities of diversity shouldn't result in distance, and separateness. This tendency, which results from our current version of multiculturalism, too often reinforces mistrust, and it's tearing the country apart.

Finally, the most indispensable requirements of assimilation are for immigrants to understand our institutions, embrace our Constitution, and comply with our laws. While being absolutely necessary, those are very reasonable minimum expectations.

Let's get back to the accusations against those supporting assimilation as uniquely important to America's strength. There's an attempt to align those claims with being "white nationalists," i.e. racists. They try to make that connection because racists reject diversity. But because racists reject diversity, it's impossible for them to support assimilation. Racists are opposed to people of different races coming together in any way.

Such is not the case for supporters of assimilation. Recognizing and accepting diversity, and the importance of bringing groups together, is central to the philosophy of effective assimilation. If someone like Representative King argues the importance of assimilation, it seems to me it's not racist at all. A racist would never advocate assimilation.