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TODAY'S "QUICK HIT": DIVERSITY, IDENTITY POLITICS, and E PLURIBUS UNUM

By Stephen L. Bakke  March 3, 2017



"Kum ba yah" or culture wars? We are seeing some of the consequences.

Diversity, Identity Politics, and E Pluribus Unum

- *The United States is a nation of immigrants.*
- *Immigration is the foundation of our country.*

Over the decades of the 20th century we often heard those noble claims. We still do but in a different context. We kept those concepts in mind as we came through the era of segregation and world wars. Civil rights made great headway and we finally started to do a better, though still incomplete, job of deemphasizing our differences following the brilliant leadership of Martin Luther King Jr. Remember his famous statement: *"I look to a day when people will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."*

E Pluribus Unum became one of America's fundamental principles. It means "out of many, one." The original intent of this principle was to express the importance of assimilation in our tradition of forging an American culture from millions of immigrants representing many diverse cultures. Assimilation was one important reason for our country's success.

But then along came identity politics with its emphasis on differences, in particular the trend toward immigrants maintaining the purity of their cultures and not assimilating as had been the American tradition. What has happened? The progressive/liberal emphasis in recent years has been to proclaim that continued diversity and separateness of cultures is what makes America great. That's a change which totally discounts the importance of assimilation, and indeed, argues against it.

Thus we see a commitment to multiculturalism encouraged by: emphasis on ethnic studies in colleges and universities; highlighting our racial and cultural differences rather than ignoring them; and in many ways moving in the opposite direction of King's ideal.

This emphasis on differences is becoming more common on college campuses. There are movements promoting "African-American only" living quarters, study areas, and courses. There are even "no-white safe spaces" on a few campuses. *The Michigan Review*, a U-M student sponsored newspaper, made an astute observation in opposing student demands for such a space: "[This is] facilitating a sort of de facto segregation.....To advocate for the ideals of diversity, equity and inclusion, while simultaneously calling upon the University to sanction these spaces on campus is both unprincipled and laughably regressive."

Going hand in hand with this, it seems that “tolerance” is becoming “intolerance.” When someone tries to ensure freedom of speech by supporting a controversial discussion or speaker, there’ll likely be a student “shout-down.” When challenged, students insist their “freedom of speech” is being infringed. Eventually, it seems, extreme insistence on free speech actually becomes intolerance, along with attempts to actually limit free speech for others.

This neo-intolerance leads to extreme political correctness, and during election years, it teams with culture-based identity politics. Intense conflict is the result. In many ways this is tearing us apart. I applaud the President’s committed opposition to “political correctness.” I hope that helps to reverse the trend toward identity politics. Then maybe our tradition of immigrant assimilation can resume in full force.