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E PLURIBUS UNUM AND OTHER FANTASIES

By Stephen L. Bakke  January 9, 2020



Ours is a divided nation. The U.S. motto, E Pluribus Unum, usually conjures up images of the blending of cultures that has been a hallmark of the United States, and people associate the motto with immigration and assimilation. In this commentary, I'll comment on that and some other ways unity is on the endangered list.

First a look at racial and cultural divisions. About the time I was starting to shave, Martin Luther King was leading a civil rights movement in which he asked us all to judge people by the content of their character, not by the color of their skin. He asked us to get out of the way in terms of segregation and minority opportunity.

But then came identity politics with its emphasis on differences. 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.

As a result, contrary to King's ideals, differences and separateness have been emphasized. This is most obvious on many college campuses with living quarters separated by race and culture, and some courses segregated at the insistence of minority students. De-facto segregation has somehow become politically correct. King would be disappointed with this surge in identity politics and everything it engenders.

That leads us into our political divide. The first time I remember hearing the term "derangement syndrome" was in reference to President George W. Bush a little over 15 years ago. He remained above the fray and seldom got into verbal sparring matches, yet he was called a "cowboy," "the most dangerous politician on the planet," and eventually we began hearing about the "Bush derangement syndrome." Bush's only real sins seemed to be his "post-9/11" popularity and that democrats couldn't agree with him on anything.

Then came Obama, our "post racial president" who started off with a series of messianic proclamations that gave birth to the partisan divisions of today. For example, Obama had many transformational comments including, "this is the moment...when the rise of the oceans began to slow..." One example of Obama supporters' influencing his arrogance came

from “Bush bashing” Newsweek editor Evan Thomas: “...in a way Obama’s standing above the country...above the world, he’s sort of God.”

Division was furthered when Obama characterized voters opposing his programs by saying we Americans are “hardwired not to always think clearly when we’re scared.” And Michelle laid out her disdain for America when she stated Barack’s election was the first time she’d ever been proud of our country.

Finally, Obama officially alienated about half the country when it became apparent his idea of fairness doesn’t spring from opportunity and individual freedom, but rather from government power, regulations, programs, and (using his own word) “redistribution.”

And then came Donald Trump. He can be very polarizing, but I think of him as a populist reaction to all that has happened the last few decades. His outrageous, hyperbolic style somehow appealed to those conservatives who felt abused by the disdain and even hatred leftists held for them. All of his rudeness and bullying wasn’t enough to turn these Americans in the direction of the extreme leftist policies that have surfaced, such as preaching the evils of capitalism, to support for full term abortion.

There are bitter disagreements about America and everything our country represents. Americans have polarized into extremes of gratitude vs. grievance. For example, Eric Holder recently cynically challenged conservatives by asking, “Exactly, when did you think America was great.” In contrast, others reflect the feelings of former slave Frederick Douglass who wrote: “I am not wanting in respect for the fathers of this republic...they were brave men...with them, nothing was ‘settled’ that was not right...with them, justice, liberty and humanity were ‘final,’ not slavery and oppression.”

Many Americans tend to be proud and resolute in their loyalty to America, while recognizing all of its shortcomings. If you try to deny them those feelings, many will turn away from whatever you are promoting. Bitterness rots the soul, while pride and striving to be better feeds ultimate success of humanity and our country.