

*Eight*

# A Heart Transplant



## Galileo, Blumenbach, and Sociology

*In 1616* priests issued a fiery threat to Galileo Galilei. His work argued that the sun, not the earth, was the center of the universe. At the time, the Catholic Church held that the earth was the center of the cosmos, created by God for man. Both earth and man stood at the axis of a sacred and closed universe. Galileo's theory threatened to place all human beings at the periphery of an infinite universe, created by God knows who, for only God knew what purpose. In 1633 the church formally declared the heresy of Galileo's theories and gave him two options. Burn or recant. No fool, Galileo publicly recanted, and, armed with his telescope, he continued to privately believe what he pleased.

In the twenty-first century, we face a sociological challenge as meaningful and important as Galileo's. We must decide the significance of skin color and race in deciding people's place, not in a sacred cosmos but in the disunited states of America. This requires us to radically reassess received cultural wisdom about assimilation and the melting pot. As the earlier chapters on Chicanos, Asians, Indians, Arabs, Caribbean, and mixed-raced people have shown, instead of that melting pot, non-European immigrants have found, and still find,

themselves excluded from “mainstream” American life. Instead of a sense of unity, we have developed a series of parallel monologues that often define the groups—for example, “Muslim first” or Hindutva—in a manner that divides us more than ever.

We can solve these problems because we are graced with social scientific tools as powerful in their way as Galileo’s telescope. We have all the insights needed to assess our present position and then consciously ask where to begin.

The dichotomy is a problem in its own right. Tragically, it receives crucial support from the bad science that produced the concept of race. Thanks to “Caucasians” like Friedrich Blumenbach, race divides the world in general and Americans in particular. This prejudice teaches that biologically homogeneous groups of people exist; and it teaches that some groups of people are superior to others. In the United States, we actually argue that six billion people divide themselves into white and nonwhite human beings.

Galileo fought priests who fought science. Today, scientists opposed to the concept of race and the dichotomy often debate scientists who *agree* that science killed the concept of race! This is an odd dispute. Many supporters of racial thinking wholeheartedly accept that, as a scientific concept, race is as valid as the church’s claim that the earth was the center of a finite universe. As Manning Marable has written, “We are mobilizing ourselves around a concept that is morally repugnant and should not exist. Yet even though race is social constructed, it nonetheless sets the parameters of how most Americans think about politics and power.”<sup>1</sup>

Alternatively, some simply surrender to the supposedly daunting power of the conventional “wisdom.” In academic language, “we should think of race as an element of social structure rather than as an irregularity in it; we should see race as a dimension of human representation rather than an illusion.”<sup>2</sup>

Of course race is an element of human representation. But so are terms like *spic*, *kike*, *nigger*, *chink*, and *jap*. Would anyone argue that we should think of these labels as elements of social structure rather than a cancer to be excised? The inconsistency is to reject the ugly representations yet surrender to the underlying concept. The absurdity is to

accept race as a fact and then place Caucasians at the center of the universe, with people of color at the distant periphery.

But if Galileo could fight the church, we can fight—and change—the beliefs and values of American society. Admittedly, we face the well-armed white and black border patrol, but the abolitionists can win because those who accept that race is a social construct ignore the emancipating effects of that conclusion.

*Sociology is the most liberating discipline on earth.* When we “discovered” that race and the dichotomy are social constructs, we conferred on ourselves the power to transform, consciously and creatively, our societies and ourselves. People are in command. Society is a human construction. It is a liberating insight because nothing necessarily stops us from changing unacceptable or false beliefs and values. We can always move into the future based on a shared and corrected past.

The rub is that people never inherit a clean slate. At birth each of us discovers an already established set of *approved* cultural beliefs, values, and practices. By definition our freedom to reconfigure social life is constrained because we learn and internalize a culture before we manifest a desire to change it. Equally important, we must use the inherited culture’s words and ideas to transform the beliefs or practices that we find troublesome or, as with race, a 150-year-old falsehood.

Critics note that the concept of culture assumes a consensus that does not necessarily exist. Especially in a society as large and diverse as the United States, the culture received in New York may be very different from the offerings in Georgia or Kansas. While critics make a fair point, the beauty of our problem is that we focus on beliefs and concepts that, like a canopy, hang over each one of the fifty United States of America. From Hawaii to Florida, from Washington to North Carolina, from Kansas to New Jersey, from Texas to Vermont, I have never met an American who does not understand the white/black dichotomy and, as mental baggage, the concept of race and the outsider status of non-European immigrants to the United States.

Race, the white/black dichotomy, and the illusion of the melting pot are as close to American cultural universals as we are ever going to get. This puts those seeking social change at an enormous advantage.

For sure, the precise meaning and import of the dichotomy will vary from locality to locality and from person to person; but the most and least prejudiced Americans still understand where the other guy is coming from when they talk about the dichotomy and its linked beliefs, values, and practices.

The targets are in range, and we can fire at will. Yet the rub remains. We begin life with a received culture, we internalize that culture, and when we seek change we need to use the tools provided by the very culture we seek to change. It is a paradox. As adults, people are simultaneously free and socially determined. The culture first shapes us; and—here is the liberation promised by sociology—we can freely and consciously reconfigure the culture when we use the insights of men like George Herbert Mead.

With great force, Mead focused much of his work on the human consequences of a special ability: People possess the power to reflect on their experiences.<sup>3</sup> They can stop the action and look back at what they learned; and, even more important, people can consciously analyze how they reacted to what they learned. For Mead cultural emancipation is possible because we can see what we learned, understand how we reacted, and then decide if we want to continue thinking and acting as we do.

In chapter 2, I argued that the white/black dichotomy is a cultural dead end because, among other things, even those who despise Anglo Protestant culture still find themselves determined by it. When John McWhorter writes about “self sabotage in black America,” he contends that many African Americans reject an education only because academic achievement is something that white people do and “blackness means opposition to whites at all costs.” McWhorter makes an argument, and we can argue about the accuracy of his argument. It is, however, undeniable that he has stopped the action, has seen what “blacks” learn about themselves, and then has seen how they react to what they learned. If we accept McWhorter’s analysis, liberation is possible because African Americans can transcend both their cultural inheritance and their reaction to it.

With great reluctance, Debra Dickerson offers similar possibilities in *The End of Blackness*. We need to transcend race because “there is no

way to define blacks as the group owned by ‘whites’ without whites at the center of black agenda setting. It is a maddening but obvious choice.”<sup>4</sup> It is maddening because transcending race potentially ignores the reprehensible behavior of whites. It is obvious because unless we transcend race and the dichotomy we remain the prisoners of our inherited culture and, like those Africans Americans who reject an education because it is white, our self-defeating reactions to that culture.

Liberation requires an intensive effort; we need to unlearn what we can never put, completely, out of our minds. We need to erase the significance of beliefs and values that, for more than four hundred years, have made America a nation of whites, blacks, and none-of-the-aboves. But, once we accept that race and the dichotomy are *both* social constructs, we either accept the wonderfully emancipating consequences of that insight or point the finger of blame in only one direction: at ourselves and at our unwillingness to accept the gift offered by a conjunction of social circumstances that allow us to reconfigure America in a revolutionary fashion.

The mutiny is already under way. Chapters 3–7 show that, in general, Latinos, Asians, West Indians, and seven million fusions refuse to accept either the dichotomy or the concept of race. Indians and Arabs offer responses that are more diverse, but, to the extent they assimilate as whites, they reaffirm the dichotomy and the prejudices that go with it. Does anyone want a society in which being American means self-segregating, as in chapter 6, one group of Cubans from another or, as with some Arabs, making the thought of marrying an African American so unthinkable that your parents would regard the suggestion as a joke?

We *can* do the job, if we are willing to learn as much from immigrants and fusions as they learn from us, if we are willing to analyze the black and white consequences of assimilation, and if we are willing to “right” history. We need to transform American culture and consciously create a set of beliefs rooted in new core identities. Following are my suggestions for a way to begin *re*constructing the social constructs that now provide America’s operating system of “racial” and ethnic beliefs, values, and practices.

## Race Is Crucial

In *“Thinking Orientals,”* Henry Yu writes that, “even if every single American did stop thinking about race, this would not erase the legacy of a history of thinking about it and practicing it for so long that every element and relationship in society has been structured on its definitions. Indeed, forgetting about race would only freeze the historical inequities that existed because of racial thinking.”<sup>5</sup>

Yu spotlights the problem: A contemporary cornerstone of the white/black dichotomy is the concept of race. In American history, the dichotomy preceded the concept, but, with the imprimatur of science, race entered U.S. culture in the nineteenth century and it instantly fit like a white glove over the traditional prejudices of slave traders, slave owners, and millions of complicit Americans. In the robber-baron era race became such a powerful force in American culture that, like an octopus, its tentacles grabbed every immigrant group, examined them, and sent them packing if—like the Chinese, Japanese, Indians, or Syrians—they came from inferior races. Even Jesus Christ was theoretically deported when Americans used race to order the world and its inhabitants.

Race remains such an important concept in U.S. life that the Census Bureau still seeks world order rooted in race and a glaring contradiction: Race supposedly refers to solid, empirically verifiable scientific categories, yet the Census Bureau changes its racial categories so often that prejudice rather than science dictates the number of races at any given point in time. In 1890 the census list included octoroon and quadroon; in 2010 it may or may not include an “other race” category. The Census Bureau also confuses race and ethnicity. Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and Samoan are all races in the bureau’s latest version of world order.

Henry Yu is right: Race reaches into every nook and cranny of American society. It would be horrible to freeze the inequities that already exist. However, if we do not eliminate racial concepts from our thinking, then the only alternative is to freeze our minds, to teach the coming generations to think about one another using vague, subjective categories that supposedly reflect hard and fast scientific truth.

We would pass on to our children and grandchildren the concept of race *and* the inequities they produce.

Here is another option. Suppose we focus on the future, on the seven million men and women who confront racial vigilantes who, as if priests during the Inquisition, make it very difficult for them to have a good day. Let us think, too, about the Mexicans, West Indians, Puerto Ricans, Filipinos, Chinese, Indians, Cubans, and Arabs who also refuse to accept, or have serious reservations about, our racial thinking.

Abolishing race never means forgetting about it. On the contrary, to erase the concept of race, we need to think about it more than ever before. David Theo Goldberg, for example, argues that one of Europe's great problems with immigrants is that the concept of race is forgotten but exists; it is denied and so too the linking of race "to the intellectual and political histories of colonialism and racism." My argument is to do the opposite. To actually abolish—rather than to simply forget about—race, we need to spotlight it, especially in relation to political histories of colonialism and racism over and through time.<sup>6</sup>

Race will only disappear when we agree to think about it more than ever before so that, as a society of like-minded citizens, we eventually share an informed consensus about the illusion of race and the persisting reality of an illusion's positive (for whites) and negative (for people of color) political, economic, and personal consequences.

In burying race, we would never ignore the historical inequities or their persistence in our own time. On the contrary, as in chapters 2 through 7, any honest analysis of the consequences of racial thinking needs to right many historical wrongs because of what happened to—besides African Americans—Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Mexican, Indian, and Arab Americans. With varying degrees of inequity, racial thinking affected—and affects—all these ethnic groups. No one can understand the identity Chicano without also analyzing what the Reagan administration identified as the "total dependence" of U.S. agriculture on Mexican workers. Similarly, to read the 1869 *Congressional Globe* debates about Chinese Americans is to gain some understanding of why we remain surprised that third- and fourth-generation Chinese Americans speak such perfect English.

We can get rid of race and right history if we do not put the cart before the horse. Many millions of Americans with a sense of fair play will be far more willing to make up for historical and persisting inequities if, as a civilization, we first achieve a lasting consensus about the historical and contemporary consequences of racial thinking. My contention is that, while never losing sight of issues like reparations or affirmative action, we first need to focus on the social construct that uses science to create a hierarchy that begins with the Caucasians who live on Mount Ararat.

Suppose, for example, that Blumenbach was in a different mood when he created his racial order. Suppose he decided to call his beautiful people Ararats instead of Caucasians. How stupid would that be? And, if we believed in Ararats, what would that say about us and our civilization?

Here is a specific proposal: Where President Clinton created a Commission on Race, we need to have a national debate not about race relations but about the concept of race itself, its impact on American thinking, and its role in the perpetuation of profound inequities.

To repeat, we would have this debate not because of the declining significance of race but because, in many ways—think of West Indians and African Americans—race is as much of a problem as it has ever been. Equally important, if we neglect to tackle the concept of race head-on, it may generate a boomerang effect of national significance. Confronted by more and more contradictions and challenges, Anglo Protestant culture could react by reinforcing and resurrecting the world that was. As an answer to the demands of America's seven million walking contradictions—not to mention Chicanos, Asians, Arabs, and Indians—Americans might decide to strengthen rather than destroy the great walls that “protect” one group from another.

If a sitting president or either major political party made this debate a national priority, the print and broadcast media would jump on the issue. Alternatively, or simultaneously, religious groups or universities could lead the way. Funded by foundations like Ford, Rockefeller, or MacArthur, universities across the country could sponsor widely publicized public forums about the concept of race.

My own very specific suggestion is this: Since California *is* the

future, let's ask the people of California—who hold no less than fifty-three seats, or 12 percent, of the U.S. House of Representatives—to lead the way. Californians by themselves have enough political muscle to launch a national debate about the concept of race. It could even be headquartered at the University of California, Los Angeles, 45 percent of whose freshman boast “Asian” heritages of various kinds. A well-organized request from California would get a great deal of support from, among others, New York, Illinois, and New Jersey; and, altogether, representatives could begin the debate in the House that theoretically represents the will of the people.

However the debate begins, it need not be an acrimonious exchange between victims and victimizers. None of us is responsible for the culture we inherited, only for the culture we are willing to endure and sustain. The forums focus on everyone, on the uniting idea that there is only one race and that, while we might deny the future, we cannot stop it.

To jump-start the debate process, we can deliberately create what social movement theorists call a dramatic event. Sometimes, like the sinking of the *Lusitania* in May 1915, the events occur by accident. Sometimes, like draft card burning in the sixties, organizers stage the events. Either way, for social movements to gain national traction, dramatic events offer significant assistance. They momentarily monopolize our attention, and, with our eyes fixed, we can create the momentum needed for social movements of lasting significance.

Here is another suggestion. Fusions already manage national organizations. And with the incredible organizing power of e-mail and the Internet they can easily arrange dramatic events of historic significance. So why not imitate the example of countries like Latvia and Estonia? When the citizens of the Baltic countries wanted freedom from the Soviet Union, organizers staged a peaceful protest that caught the world's attention. Citizens lined up on the nation's highways, held hands from one end of the Balkans to the other, and made their demands for change using a backdrop of mass and peaceful support from the nation's men, women, and children.

Using the thousands of student groups that already exist on campuses throughout the United States, organizers could produce—on Blumenbach’s birthday, for example—simultaneous demonstrations from California to Maine. Holding hands around the campus student centers or local city halls, organizers would draw attention to the need for a national debate about the concept of race and its consequences. They could distribute charts depicting the absurdity of the Census Bureau’s shifting language from 1890 to 2000. They could deploy slogans like “One Race, United We Stand” or “People: The Fantastic Fusions.” The possibilities are endless; the goal is to monopolize attention with one or a series of dramatic events and therefore attract the support necessary for Americans to join the movement and support it over and through time.

Any movement to abolish the concept of race already has fifty million potential members. From Chicanos to Arabs, from West Indians to fusions, the mutiny is already under way. With support from the president or Congress, the nation could deliberately and consciously emancipate itself from the concept of race and, over time, discover a new world, a world that glorifies not one group’s ego but the worth of every individual, in all forms, in any of the fifty states.

### Erasing the Dichotomy

In 1946 Fernando Ortiz’s *El Engaño de las Razas* (The Deception of Race) argued that one of the most banal and vulgar ways to think about humanity was to call people white or “*de color*” (of color). Ortiz said this was an absurd dichotomy because anyone with two open eyes could see that whites were not white, blacks were not black, and the descendants of Cuba’s Chinese population certainly never deserved the word *yellow*. If society’s colorful labels actually rooted themselves in “logical rigor,” the opposite of people of color was “*incoloro*” (colorless). Whites would be colorless, blacks would be colorful, and never non-white. Additionally, logical rigor produced a “double absurdity” because, if perceived as the color of light, black was not a color but the negation of all colors. As old and new encyclopedias stress, “black is

the absence of light and therefore the absence of color.” White, on the other hand, represents “the integration of colors” since it occurs when red, yellow, and blue are added in equal amounts.<sup>7</sup>

Twenty-four years later, Albert Murray published *The Omni-Americans*, a “counter-statement or restatement” to America’s “race oriented propagandists.” Murray wanted to shout it out: “The United States is in actuality not a nation of black people and white people. It is a nation of multicolored people. There are white Americans so to speak and black Americans. But any fool can see that the white people are not really white and that black people are not black. They are all interrelated in one way or another.”<sup>8</sup>

*If any fool can see it, why can't we?*

Close to three hundred million Americans persist in vulgarities and nightmarish logic. If I was in a room and said to the audience that a red wall was purple, they would rightly assume that Fernandez has perceptual problems. However, if I call a tan person black, that somehow makes sense. When the Census Bureau says that dark-skinned Arabs are white, that also makes sense. And, when we meet dark-skinned Indians or Pakistanis and do *not* call them black, that too makes sense. Using the dichotomy is institutionalized nonsense, all in the service of perpetuating divisions that, thanks to their slave-owning creators, produce everyday and historical tragedies.

Here is another specific suggestion for significant social change: Stop using the dichotomy and never use skin color as an axis of anyone’s social or personal identity. The dichotomy defines us by what divides us, and simultaneously it excludes fifty million Americans who do not fit into the dichotomy. Activists try to include them by calling Indians or Chicanos “people of color,” but that label only ensures white supremacy. First, people of color only exist in relation to whites, who are not a color yet receive our foolish permission to define the color of everyone else on earth. Whites silently sit on the sidelines and let people of color use them as the human archetype. Second, the label “nonwhite” diminishes anyone who uses it because, as Murray stressed, it nourishes and sustains all the fundamental assumptions of white supremacy and segregation.

To erase the dichotomy we need no national debate, no dramatic

events, and no social movement. Like race, the words *white* and *black* are social constructs, created by one group of people to oppress and denigrate another group of people. Over time—and because of the concept of race—the dichotomy came to include whites and everyone else on earth. This absurdity eliminates itself in a simple manner: Each of us refuses to use color—and especially the words *black* and *white*—as a crucial means of group and personal identification.

Success is possible because this revolution is unique: It gives *everyone* something vital to do. Normally, leaders like Abraham Lincoln or Martin Luther King Jr. pave the way and the rest of us follow along. In the case of eliminating the dichotomy, our tremendous advantage is that each and every one of us can easily act like a leader. In sharp contrast to other liberation struggles, there is no need for violence, no need to attend a meeting, and no need to work a phone bank or send money. Anyone who wants change only needs to do one thing: prepare your mind to watch your mouth. Though tempted to use color as a means of identification—for example, “Do you remember that black guy we met last week?”—all Americans can refuse to focus on color, not because the world is color-blind but because it is as colorful as it ever was. However convenient color is as social shorthand, we can deliberately stop using the words *white*, *black*, *nonwhite*, and *people of color* because we refuse to support the beliefs, values, and inequities that the words condone as a matter of cultural fact. We can stop using the language because, after five hundred years of use, we finally agree to put an end to slavery’s most lasting ideological legacy: the white/black dichotomy.

One final point. If words are unimportant—or, as some critics suggest, political correctness malarkey—why do we get so upset about the slurs (e.g., *spic* or *jap* or *nigger*) associated with prejudice against particular groups? As with the concept of race, the incredible inconsistency is to attack the slurs but not the white/black dichotomy that makes white the American default category for everyone on earth. At the 2005 Golden Globe awards, African American actor Jamie Foxx spoke about the “Caucasian” director of the film *Ray*. No one stood up in protest. *Spic* or *nigger* act like lightening rods, but meanwhile, behind the scenes, *white*, *black*, and *Caucasian* quietly and endlessly

reaffirm the Eurocentric racial hierarchy envisioned by Friederich Blumenbach more than two hundred years ago.

In refusing to use the words *white*, *black*, *Caucasian*, and *people of color*, we deliberately run the risk of making social interaction impossible. Like the fusions that produce the question “What are you?” our unwillingness to support the dichotomy will produce another question from whites, blacks, and people of color: “What’s with you?” or, in a different mood, “What the hell are you talking about?”

Making interaction impossible is the only way to achieve emancipation. The old language reaffirms what we already know. By asking for a general strike against the words *white* and *black*, we—at all times empathetically—ask others to join us in thinking more than ever before about the dichotomy and its consequences. Like the fusions, we may founder about looking for new words to describe ourselves; and, like many Asians or Latinos, we may only know what we oppose. The strike is simply a way to get other people’s attention and begin, in millions of everyday interactions, a national conversation about the absurdity of the dichotomy and its provably poisonous consequences.

To the whites and blacks who wonder if we have problems, we can respond in the following manner: Yes, I do. The problem is Anglo Protestant culture, and I refuse to walk into the colorful dead end devised by slaver masters and Jim Crow. I want to move on, not stand still. And I even have some suggestions about the words that can replace *white*, *black*, and *people of color*.

When asked, “If you are not black or white, what are you?” I would answer with pride: “I am a fusion.” And I would explain that I chose this new identity not to be troublesome but to use it as a way of telegraphing the beliefs and values contained within the word *fusion*.

- Fusion denies the concept of race. It accepts, with Diego Rivera, that *all human beings* are fusions, that is, ethnic combinations. It accepts that there is one race, the human race, and that the human race is, by definition, a ceaseless series of human unions.
- Fusion deliberately refuses to use skin color as a basic category of identity. Fusions think it is ridiculous to key on a physical attribute determined by less than .001 percent of our genes.

- Fusions believe that, instead of being self-segregating barriers to interaction, somatic differences are delightful and diverse manifestations of the underlying and indissoluble unity of six billion people.
- Fusion is a core identity that happily allows room for other forms of self and group expression. Fusions think of differences in nationality, religion, ethnicity, or geography as a potential source of interest rather than as a reason to discriminate or self-segregate.
- Fusions are individualists. They define us by what unite us: our membership in the human race. Fusions believe, with the sociologist Émile Durkheim, that by glorifying the individual in general you create a greater sympathy for all that is human and, as if joined at the hip, a greater thirst for social justice.
- Fusion fosters a shared sense of solidarity among Asians, Chicanos, Cubans, West Indians, Arabs, Indians, and Puerto Ricans. Members of each group will recognize that fusions refuse to think in black and white; equally important, fusions accept that others may have as much to teach Americans as Americans have to teach the world.
- For anyone who refuses to change, the word *fusion* deliberately waves the revolutionary flag: “I moved on; how about you?” Fusions proudly and assertively announce that they seek a future with this goal: Let us make the word *fusion* so commonplace that it acts no longer as an alarm but as a bedrock of a reconfigured, just, and truly *United States of America*.

Besides the word *fusion*, I would add *American*. It is a surprisingly underused word in the United States. Ask a person what they are, and they generally respond with a skin color or an ethnicity. Americans exist when we travel abroad, but we need to bring the word home and marry it to fusion.

I am an *American fusion*. In battling the concept of race and the dichotomy, I would appropriate the word *American* and use it to celebrate what Samuel Huntington calls the “American Creed.” Simply defined, that creed applauds “the essential dignity of the individual human being”; the fundamental equality of all men and women; and

everyone's "inalienable rights to freedom, justice, and a fair opportunity." As the chapters on African Americans, Chicanos, Asians, and fusions show, these marvelous ideals often have little to do with life as it is actually lived. An "American fusion" pays homage to the creed and asks that, instead of paying it lip service, we best acknowledge our debt to Jefferson, Paine, Franklin, and Washington by using "common sense."

In 1776 Thomas Paine wrote that "male and female are the distinctions of nature, good and bad the distinctions of Heaven; but how a race of men came into the world so exalted above the rest, and distinguished like some new species, is worth inquiring into, and whether they are means of happiness or of misery to mankind."<sup>9</sup> Paine wrote about kings and subjects. Our focus is whites, blacks, and none-of-the-aboves. Using common sense, American fusions can imitate the patriots at the Boston Tea Party by throwing ugly social constructs overboard; and, this time, let us make the American Creed a living reality for everyone, even our most recent immigrants.

### Historical Inequities

*We must return* to Henry Yu's point: Does eliminating race and the dichotomy freeze the inequities created over hundreds of years of oppression, prejudice, and discrimination? Why, for example, would African Americans agree to these changes if a color-blind world threatened to blur or hide the awful political, economic, and cultural consequences of history?

For two reasons. One is the future. Unless we change the language, white remains the designer original against which we judge everyone else on the face of the earth. Over time—another fifty years—the negative implications of blackness may dissipate, but the white/nonwhite division of humanity would still perpetuate all the fundamental assumptions of white versus black. In addition, our none-of-the-above population—150 million people by 2050—would continue to experience confusion, prejudice, and, worst of all, the need to assimilate by learning to think like whites and blacks. If that is a future with

promise, the promise is more of the same, all in the name of white supremacy.

We need to change the language so that our grandchildren avoid slavery's most lasting ideological legacy. And, reason number two, we need to change the language as a way of using a different strategy to attack and eliminate institutionalized inequities. Leaders like Jesse Jackson want to hold on to traditional categories as a way of ensuring that, at a minimum, black power is neither diminished nor diluted by the recognition of a multiracial category by agencies like the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission. However pragmatic this concern may be, the reluctance to embrace revolutionary concepts perpetuates the racial status quo while enabling whites to feel victimized by blacks. It also alienates potential allies—for example, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Asians, Arabs, and Indians—who do not think in black and white and do not accept responsibility for the inequities experienced by African Americans.

But eliminating the dichotomy never means ignoring the inequities. On the contrary, it means thinking about them in a more forceful and just manner. By changing the words, we potentially make social interaction impossible; the revolution is perpetual because we ask anyone with whom we interact to rethink the beliefs and inequities buried in the words. We hope they respond in an empathetic manner, but, if they do not, we proceed with the peaceful revolution. We refuse to make skin color the axis of identity, and, like the mixed-race population, we will continue to live in limbo until we devise words, beliefs, and practices that offer justice, dignity, and self-respect to all Americans.

Challenging the words exposes one of the gravest of their consequences: the institutionalized inequities in anything from educational opportunities to hiring practices. In essence, as more and more fusions break out of the maze they unite and create a power block that transcends not only race and color but ethnicity, gender, and educational attainments. By definition, fusion denotes a new way of seeing self and society and a new means of coming together as a cultural and political force capable of honestly confronting inequities. African Americans stand to be among the biggest beneficiaries of this change

because the refusal to legitimate skin color as an axis of identity contributes to our efforts to solve many contemporary problems. For example, university admissions policies typically place very different people in the same black box. In 2004 roughly 66 percent of Harvard's so-called black students actually traced their ethnic roots to Africa, the West Indians, or biracial parents.<sup>10</sup>

Since everyone who is not white is a person of color under this system, such dark-skinned students are taking spots supposedly reserved for African Americans. But, if social justice is the goal, why should the offspring of an African or a West Indian with a PhD be considered in the same light as a poor African American student from New Orleans? This kind of lunacy goes on every day in the United States. We turn privileged newcomers and their children into overnight minorities; a system designed to open up opportunities gives those opportunities to people who, in many instances, already have excessive amounts of social capital.

The American idea of race also turns some Caribbean or African immigrants into blacks, who in turn embrace the dichotomy and all its divisive consequences. In her February 15, 2007, editorial for the *Washington Post*, Marjorie Valbrun says she is a Haitian immigrant who proudly identifies as a black; and as a voter, she has no trouble understanding how a politician who reaches out to "them" can also include "us." Such an approach increases the number of black Americans as it simultaneously reinforces the white/black dichotomy. The result is diminished opportunities for African Americans: like the West Indians taking "black" seats at Harvard, Haitians in America are now black and only black.

In a world without race, African Americans would be seen as an ethnic group with a unique and terrible history of oppression in the United States. To those who suggest that African Americans are not an ethnic group, I would respond that many African Americans are themselves adopting the "ethnic" designation. Among African American observers of the 2008 presidential race, some have decided that Senator Barack Obama is not "one of us," emphasizing the senator's partial ethnic origins in Kenya disqualify him from being an African American.

I agree. Such thinking ignores race and the one drop rule. Using

an ethnic lens, Senator Obama is *not* an African American—and that is exactly my point. By abolishing race and spotlighting African Americans, and not inflating their ranks with instant “people of color,” we focus on the real issues, problems, and needs of people who have lived in the United States for more than four hundred years. Fusions will be far more open to righting the past than whites and made-in-America “people of color.” In addition, American fusion is an identity that transcends both race *and* ethnicity. Right now, the four minority “food groups” self-segregate by using identities like Latino, Asian, Native American, and African American. At the Unity Conference for Minority Journalists held every five years in Washington, D.C., journalists bond with each other and focus on the institutionalized inequities that affect their groups. For example, as noted in our discussion of Detroit in chapter 5, blacks who dominate the city council seek to create an Africa Town using tax revenues that will freeze out the Arabs from Africa.

The entire debate takes place using the social constructs—the conceptual categories—created by white people for everyone else on earth. Does anyone believe that you will forcefully confront institutionalized inequities in a world where blacks tell Arabs that they come from the wrong part of Africa? Is the idea that whites who live in the high-end suburb of Grosse Pointe will frequent Detroit’s casinos and provide the revenues to one “minority group” so that it can freeze out Arabs, who are “nonwhite,” invisible, and eager to get their own minority food-group status?

Detroit is only one troubled city. But as Nicolás Vaca demonstrates in *The Presumed Alliance*, similar battles are going on in Los Angeles, Houston, Miami, and Compton.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, anyone who has spent time on this nation’s campuses has witnessed the same battle for resources among the various ethnic groups. “Minorities” often spend as much time fighting among themselves as they do with the “white folks” who control the purse strings and our self-defeating manner of conceptualizing social problems.

Those who fear a conceptual revolution because it will ignore inequities need to use cities like Detroit as a question mark. If the bewildering number of minority groups continues to self-segregate

and subdivide, where is the political muscle to achieve serious social change? American fusions offer a sense of unity that transcends the specific groups, rights history, and then seeks a redress of grievances rooted in a willingness to reconfigure the cultural and institutional consequences of the world created by white people for nonwhite people.

### Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty

*In the decade* 1821–30, 143,000 immigrants came to the United States. The figure for 1851–60 is 2.6 million immigrants; and for the decade 1891–1900, the figure is an astonishing 5.2 million immigrants.<sup>12</sup> On September 17, 1909, Israel Zangwill’s new play *The Melting Pot* opened on New York’s Yiddish Broadway. In the face of massive immigration, a Jewish playwright from London offered Anglo Protestant America a metaphor that explained how the new world welcomed immigrants from the old world. The main character is a Russian immigrant who, at the end of the third act with the upraised torch of the Statue of Liberty glowing in the background, makes this comment: “What is the glory of Rome and Jerusalem where all nations and races come to worship and look back, compared with the glory of America, where all nations come to labor and look forward.”

Incredibly, the melting pot myth was born in the middle of an Americanization campaign that produced slogans like “The English language, if you don’t know it, learn it, if you don’t like it, move out.”<sup>13</sup> Remember, too, the long series of court cases that denied citizenship rights to Chinese, Japanese, Syrian, and Indian immigrants. It was a time when a playwright like Israel Zangwill had to torture logic, sneaking Sicilians into the pot by calling them “dark whites.”<sup>14</sup>

The Anglo pot *never* had room for most of the world, yet, into the twenty-first century, the myth survives, rarely challenged by the facts that explode it. As Randolph Bourne wrote in 1916, Americans forget history. The early colonists never came “to be assimilated into the American melting pot. They did not come to adopt the culture of the American Indian. They had not the smallest intention of ‘giving themselves without reservation’ to the new country.” Bourne also stressed

that “we act as if we want Americanization to take place only on our own terms, and not by the consent of the governed.”<sup>15</sup> In 1924 Anglos formally closed the melting pot to everyone but their own kind. England, Ireland, and Germany received the lion’s share of new immigration slots for more than forty years after the passage, in 1924, of the “Ethnic Origins” legislation. Our problem today is that we want to use the myth of the melting pot to absorb the very people whom we callously expelled during and after the very successful run of Israel Zingwill’s play.

We can never create a sense of unity by using concepts that, by definition, exclude many of the people we supposedly want to include. Beyond this lies a still greater challenge: to determine our fundamental disposition toward the cultural differences that do indeed distinguish one group from another. Historically, we pushed people to assimilate or else; newcomers and especially their children generally accepted the culture of their adopted home. In a worst-case scenario, they also internalized the prejudices we taught them. Like some of the Cubans, Arabs, and West Indians discussed in the preceding chapters, they learned to think in white and black, to use the dichotomy to “understand” everybody from Chicanos to fusions to Indians.

In a society that affirms the American Creed, few people want newcomers to assimilate the prejudices of our culture. Some do so anyway. However, just as often, they resist assimilation and instead celebrate a process of transculturation, of reconfiguring American culture to their likes and desires. The Chicano notion of “Occupied America” is one example of a reconfiguration that creates disunity rather than solidarity. The Indian reaffirmation of Hindu culture is another. And the request of some Arabs for a new minority status is yet another effort to become American by embracing the dichotomy and its consequences.

Advocating the melting pot is like spitting in the wind. It ignores the many features of daily life that, in the twenty-first century, fuel resistance to assimilation: dual citizenship and the multicultural rhetoric that treats Europe and England as enemies; classroom lessons about American genocide of Native Americans and the continuing exploitation of Chicanos; and the need for a civil rights movement in a society that violently denied basic rights to African Americans.

Many immigrants are moved to ask, Do I want to become similar to these people? Do I want to become like the Japanese and Chinese who, after a hundred years in the United States, still get the same questions: Where did you learn to speak English so well? And how long is your visit to America?

The melting pot serves up a dish that needs to disappear. So, here is what I propose. Limit requests for similarity to the American Creed. As long as newcomers embrace our inalienable Bill of Rights, the essential dignity of every human being, and the U.S. Constitution, we will entertain a significantly different disposition toward beliefs and values that differentiate them in relation to attributes like religion, family, fashion, or food.

Instead of demanding cultural clones, we should think of the United States as a delightful banquet of cultures. We can sample a few dishes, taste them all, or leave the banquet and go to McDonald's for a hamburger and fries. The key is our positive disposition toward the cultural differences that obviously exist and the reasons for that positive disposition.

One reason is this: Exposure to other cultures shapes and broadens mind and character. As the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) put it in a recent publication entitled "All Different, All Unique," a willingness to learn from others is "a crucial factor in human and social development." Too often analysts focus on only economic or technological goals; they neglect that openness to other cultures also offers significant assistance as societies adapt to new possibilities, problems, and prospects. "It teaches us what other people believe needs to change to make the world a better place for themselves and for others"; and, perhaps most important, it nurtures and sustains all forms of creativity because "it widens the range of options open to everyone and gives us real choices for the way forward in the development of our societies."<sup>16</sup>

Throughout the United States, one university after another is urging its students to study abroad; from Augusta to Seattle, well-staffed offices of international education do everything possible to help students spend at least one semester in a foreign country. Their rationales range from the need to participate in a global economy to the

desire that students learn to see self and society from fresh and provocative experiences.

If exposure to other cultures is a positive and increasingly required attribute for America's best and brightest, why not take advantage of the cultures that exist in our own backyards? The banquet metaphor sees the vital presence of immigrant communities as an easy and inexpensive means for all Americans to broaden mind and character by exposure to different cultures. It is a positive disposition toward difference because it assumes that all cultures and people can learn from one another and in the process enhance and nurture all forms of creativity.

The banquet metaphor works because we normally want to feast on the dishes offered. Wearing a smile, we volunteer to be there, and, even if we do not like some of the cultural dishes, we can put them aside and happily let others enjoy what we do not. The banquet metaphor implies the same openness toward religion or family that many of us have toward different foods. New York City, Chicago, or Los Angeles contains every imaginable ethnic cuisine. People literally "eat it up." So, using a banquet metaphor, we decide to open ourselves to the world rather than, as in 1924, locking the doors to the cultural differences that can stimulate Americans as much as Americans stimulate others.

As a possible ideal for the United States, consider this example from contemporary Norway. Describing state-sponsored classes in Norwegian for immigrants, American Bruce Bawer notes that as he learned the language "we also learned about Norwegian folkways and gained insights into our own and one another's native languages and cultures." Equally important, Bawer stresses that the classes produced such openness to difference that "our discussions brought into focus previously unexamined attitudes and assumptions that our native cultures had bred into us." Ultimately, "we laughed—laughed in easy self-mockery, and laughed, too, in celebration of the opportunity we'd been given to grow beyond our native cultures."<sup>17</sup>

Thanks to the immigrants we also have an opportunity to laugh, to grow, and to reconfigure our inherited culture. But the banquet metaphor is always a two-way street. If I am going to open my mind to

the immigrants, they need to open themselves to me. Each of us uses empathy to understand the other person's culture, and everyone recognizes that empathy does not mean a suspension of judgment or a relativist repudiation of all standards by arguing that all cultures are equally good. After all, the person saying that all cultures are equally good just made a very strong value judgment.

Let me be quite specific. Given the immigration of millions of practicing Muslims, Europe now has to reconsider everything from school dress codes to the proper relationship between church and state. By definition "Islam is a holistic religion in which no distinctions exist between the realms of individual worship and community government, or between the realms of religion and politics." Since "there is no god but god," everything belongs to God, who through the gift of the Quran, provides a comprehensive guide to all aspects of life.<sup>18</sup> In Holland and Denmark, Islamic religious leaders adamantly claim jurisdiction that runs against the authority of the secular political state.

In the United States, Muslims now outnumber Presbyterians and Episcopalians. In addition, some Christian groups also make sweeping claims for the blessed and mandatory role of God in political as well as personal matters. In *American Theocracy*, Kevin Phillips claims that America contains perhaps forty million Americans who wish to see Jesus take a much more active role in political affairs. Many seek to reserve voting rights for Christian males; others wish to superimpose the Bible on the Constitution; and extremist Christian reconstructionists even advocate that homosexuals, prostitutes, adulterers, and drug users also be executed.

The banquet metaphor opens itself to empathizing with Islamic, Christian, or any religious beliefs. But, given the fundamental and indispensable primacy of the American Creed, anyone's right to be an atheist or gay is just as worthy of respect as anyone's right to be a member of a specific religion. The creed "glorifies the individual in general," and if there is a conflict between the inalienable rights of the individual and the credo of a particular religion, "the individual in general" receives primacy and the political state must ensure that, in this world, it is the sole and sovereign authority over civil rights and

the political guarantees that include free speech, free assembly, and a free press.

From this perspective, a respect for the American Creed is the sacrosanct means we use to discuss our positive disposition toward the many cultures that now exist in the United States of America. We guarantee the rights of everyone, and, as we debate our shared destinies, the banquet metaphor resolves the traditional battle between assimilation, cultural pluralism, and multiculturalism by choosing “none of the above.”

The banquet metaphor endorses an open road—what Nobel laureate Amartya Sen calls “cultural liberty”—because it recognizes that, given the unalterable realities associated with transculturation, all Americans now live between past and future. In this incredibly exciting social space, we can consciously reconfigure Anglo Protestant culture based on welcome additions from Americans of all ethnicities. Rooted in the American Creed, we can sit down with the newcomers, compare and contrast our contributions to the banquet, and altogether reconfigure a culture that eagerly globalizes not the economy but our beliefs and values about the world and about ourselves.

### The Contemporary “Screw Loose” Immigration Debate

*I—we—cannot talk* about a banquet of cultures unless we include the eleven million illegal immigrants. Many are here to stay, and if the last century is any guide, millions more are on the way. So, let us begin with a 1928 conversation (already cited in chap. 3) between Congressman Bird J. Vincent and District Director of Immigration Grover Wilmuth.

*Congressman Vincent:* The very fact that you had, say, a dozen Mexicans herded in some place and that you gave them a chance to go back to Mexico and they said they would not go, and then you very politely turned them loose, that would indicate to their mind that there was a screw loose somewhere, would it not?

*Grover Wilmuth:* Yes sir: that is a natural inference.

On June 19, 2006, Richard Stana, director of Homeland Security and Justice, appeared at Senate hearings entitled “Immigration Enforcement at the Workplace: Learning from the Mistakes of 1986.” In his prepared statement Mr. Stana said this: “if investigative agents arrest unauthorized aliens at worksites, the aliens would likely be released because the Office of Detention and Removal detention centers do not have sufficient space to house the aliens and they may re-enter the workforce, *in some cases returning to the worksites from where they were originally arrested*” (emphasis added).<sup>19</sup>

The Senate is presumptuous; as a nation we cannot learn from the mistakes of 1928, much less those made in 1986. Illegal immigration is, and has been for almost a century, an institutionalized part of American life. But, instead of rooting policies in structural realities, the 2005–2006 debates show that we are endlessly repeating history, all in the service of politics, vested interests, and hypocrisy. As General Clark Kent Ervin (the former inspector general of the Department of Homeland Security) recently told Congress, “Einstein said insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. They never learn anything. It’s just crazy.”<sup>20</sup>

Consider information Congress commissioned from the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO). In 1996 Congress passed legislation that established a “Basic Pilot Program” to monitor employer verification of potentially illegal workers. Participation is voluntary, so, as of June 2006, .0015 percent of America’s employers (8,600 firms out of a total pool of 5,600,000) actually use the government’s program. As the National Border Patrol Council stressed to Congress on July 5, 2006, “as long as employers are allowed to continue to hire illegal aliens without any meaningful consequences, only a handful of them will participate in a legal program. Expecting them to do so would be as ridiculous as expecting people to wait in line to use a sophisticated security gate when everyone else is walking around because there is no surrounding fence.”<sup>21</sup>

Despite the few firms (4,600 of the 8,600) that “actively” use the program on a regular basis, there are times when someone spots an illegal immigrant. Unfortunately, a new problem then arises because the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) often

refuses to provide any information to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), relocated by the Bush administration in the Department of Homeland Security. In explaining its reluctance to share information, the USCIS is quite clear: “They have concerns about providing ICE broader access to Basic Pilot Program Information because it could create a disincentive for employers to participate in the program, as employers may believe that they are more likely to be targeted for a worksite enforcement investigation as a result of program participation.”<sup>22</sup>

In reality employers need not worry because actual work site enforcement is the bureau’s lowest priority. For example, with an estimated ten to eleven million illegal immigrants, notices of *intent* to fine employers dropped from 417 in 1999 to 3 in 2004. Arrests dropped from 2,849 in 1999 to 445 in 2003, and that is good news for the bureau because it openly admits that it lacks the staff to monitor “a significant number of new employers.” Of course, it would not share that information with the Department of Homeland Security, and, even if it did, there is “no detention space” to house additional illegal immigrants.<sup>23</sup>

In hearings before the House of Representatives in November 2005, Congressman Howard L. Berman (D-California) called enforcement sanctions “a joke”; many of his colleagues seemed to agree, yet, in focusing on sending troops to guard the border and a proposed seven-hundred-mile wall between Mexico and the United States, the president, the House of Representatives, and the Senate neglect another study commissioned from the GAO. In an analysis entitled “Overstay Tracking,” the GAO stresses that “a substantial proportion” of illegal immigrants arrive legally; they overstay their visas to such an extent that, instead of the 30 percent figure cited by the USCIS, the actual number of overstays could be 57 percent or more of the nation’s total illegal immigrant population. Those overstays have a 2 percent chance of apprehension if only because “historically . . . over five times more resources in terms of staff and budget have been devoted to border enforcement than . . . to interior enforcement.”<sup>24</sup>

The border is political theater. With well-publicized crackdowns like Operation Gatekeeper, federal officials grandstand about their

expensive efforts to stop illegal immigration. The endlessly peculiar result is that Congress puts five times fewer resources in a search for the majority who continue working even though they can be easily apprehended; after all, we know exactly where the illegal immigrants are—at construction sites, in our homes, on lawns, in hotels, in restaurant kitchens, and on the docks collecting merchandise made in China and delivering it to the local Wal-Marts. As Bill Brush of Customs and Border Protection put it in June 2006, “if you were to make a firm policy that, say, Los Angeles and Long Beach had to check the immigration bona fides of every trucker, you’d have a major trucker shortage. You’d have a trade breakdown.”<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, after spending more than twenty billion dollars to guard the border since 1996—and that includes a wall that is already sixty-six miles long—a GAO study (released on August 2, 2006) indicates that in many instances people never try to climb the walls; they simply walk right past the border guards. In 2006 “on three occasions—in California, Texas and Arizona—GAO agents crossed the border on foot. At two of these locations—Texas and Arizona—CBP [the border patrol] allowed the agents entry into the United States without asking for or inspecting any identification documents.” The head of the National Border Patrol Council summed up the situation by telling Congress [in July 2006] that “front line agents estimate that for every person they apprehend, two or three successfully enter the United States illegally.”

Even when agents catch illegal entrants, this is often the result. As Congressman Henry Bonilla (D-Texas) told his colleagues, in the past agents actually hunted the illegal immigrants; now, when folks cross the Rio Grande “they look for the Border Patrol, throw their hands up, knowing full well they’re going to get a meal. They are going to get a place to sleep. They are going to get medical care . . . and then they [the Border Patrol] set them free with court papers, claiming that they don’t have the detention space.”

The immigrants come because of a fact openly accepted by Congress and editorial writers from one end of the country to the other. That is, the nation needs the illegal immigrants as much as the immi-

grants need the work. Listen to three members of Congress in November 2005 and to New York mayor Michael Bloomberg on July 5, 2006.

*Steve Pearce (R-New Mexico):* If you deport folks in Palm Springs that closes the city down. I mean it would just close down. All of the work is being done by a combination of legal and illegal immigrants in Palm Springs, and I have to tell you the hotels and the chambers of commerce, etcetera, are not willing to give that up. And they're not going to give it up.<sup>26</sup>

*Luis Gutierrez (D-Illinois):* Mexican immigrants today fill almost half of the blue collar, service related and unskilled jobs in my city [Chicago]. It is not an exaggeration to say that our cities would grind to a halt without these workers.

*Michael Bloomberg:* Although they broke the law by illegally crossing our borders or overstaying their visas, our City's economy would be a shell of itself had they not, and it would collapse if they were deported. The same holds true for the nation.<sup>27</sup>

*John Hostettler (R-Indiana):* I think the reason is, of course, that many of our industries depend upon that kind of labor. But we must answer to the American people . . . and make sure that our employers follow the law. But there are industries that are totally dependent.<sup>28</sup>

Total dependence is nothing new. President Reagan received the same message in 1986, and, after noting the complaints of his constituents, Congressman John Carter (R-Texas) told his colleagues that "these are ranchers that have lived on that border for four generations and had these illegals walk through for four generations of his family."<sup>29</sup>

Four generations and we still criminalize the workers; turn a blind eye to the employers; and ignore a point emphasized by an October 31, 2005, editorial in Tucson's *Arizona Daily Star*: "Eleven million people do not establish themselves as an integral part of a national economy without the tacit approval of society as a whole."<sup>30</sup>

In 1885 George Washington Cable criticized the North and Midwest for its "virtual consent" to the South's creation and maintenance

of the Jim Crow laws. Will we do it again? Will we, in 2007 and beyond, tacitly consent to totally depend on illegal labor yet tell that labor to move to the back of the bus when it comes to equal rights and opportunities? As the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* put it in a 2005 editorial, “it is simply un-American to tell immigrants you are good enough to work for us but not good enough to be one of us.”

Based on an analysis of documents at his presidential library, Ronald Reagan honestly and sincerely tried to resolve the nation’s dilemma. Far more than his predecessors and successors, he worried about the claim of being a nation of laws, in the face of flagrant employer and employee violations of the law, “one generation after another.” He also knew that if we made it too easy for workers to become legal “we would be rewarding those who have been here illegally and encourage others to continue coming.”

The president understood the problems associated with an amnesty; he also understood the nation’s reliance on illegal labor; and he respected and admired the work ethic, dreams, and tenacity of the vast majority of illegal immigrants. Ronald Reagan wanted to square the circle, but, in trying to “insulate” employers from the law, he ultimately bowed to the political pressures exerted by the supporters of both political parties. Like those who sent telegrams to then Senator Lyndon Johnson in the 1950s, employers (who also offered political contributions) made it clear to the president’s staff that they wanted the stream of immigrants to continue swimming north with no fear of meaningful employer sanctions.<sup>31</sup>

Businesses are not going to give up their reliance on undocumented labor. And neither are the rest of us. The folks mowing the lawns at our Connecticut University are Latinos; I do not ask about their status and neither do the students sunbathing on the manicured lawns.

The American way to regularize the situation is to bring our desires in line with their needs. We own the contradiction, and amnesty is not a gift; it is the long-term worker’s earned right. In the name of a century of justice denied, immediately offer amnesty (with no mention of a fine) to the long-term illegal immigrants. As President Ronald Rea-

gan knew from his experiences in California, they are hard-working, family-oriented, and religiously devoted human beings.

They are also an integral part of America's future. As the *Des Moines Register* put it on August 28, 2005, "the numbers are irrefutable. Births of Hispanic babies in the state rose 358% between 1990 and 2004, while births of non-Hispanic babies dropped 8%." So, as the editorial stresses, "if Iowa wants to grow, welcoming newcomers from other countries is the best hope."<sup>32</sup>

And, if America wants to grow, offering amnesty provides the best kind of family reunification. The illegal parents can openly sit at the same table as their born-in-America children; and then we can altogether embrace the "cultural liberty" that allows us to radically reconfigure American culture.

### Kingston, Jamaica, and Laredo, Texas

#### *Dancing in Kingston*

*I recently attended* the fortieth anniversary celebration of the National Dance Theater Company of Jamaica. The black-tie dinner took place in a theater very close to the center of Kingston, a city with a mountain of problems. Even locals avoid walking through many of its streets. Kingston manifests substantial poverty and, as a consequence of that poverty, an infrastructure in urgent need of major overhaul.

More than four hundred people attended the banquet and an exquisitely choreographed performance by the company. The troupe has always been run entirely by volunteers; the dancers sometimes receive food and other expenses, but most work for the love of their art. To be a member of the company is a badge of prestige in Jamaican society.

That evening's performance involved about thirty dancers. Their skin color included every shade of humanity. But what I found most impressive was that two of the lead dancers were Cuban. They had immigrated to Jamaica for the artistic opportunities, and they ultimately came to love the culture so much that they applied for citizen-

ship and established Cuban/Jamaican families. No one talked about mixed races, and no one used skin color as a primary means of identity. These thirty Jamaicans proved that, whatever was happening in the center of Kingston, they were living the nation's motto: out of many, one people.

Out of many, a so-called developing country used pride in nationality to welcome people with different languages and different beliefs. Nobody asked the Cubans to be similar. Their required contribution was creativity, a willingness to work hard, and a disposition to learn from Jamaicans as Jamaicans learned from them.

Exercising the next morning, I walked in a guarded hotel parking lot rather than through the unguarded streets. Kingston is a rough city. But, with so many Jamaicans practicing what they preach, civilization somehow wins the day. You leave Jamaica knowing that it is possible to create a society in which race and skin color are peripheral facts of everyday life. You leave Jamaica with a realizable goal for the United States: "e pluribus unum," one out of many, a nation of creative fusions.

*Laredo, May 1, 2006*

Like Kingston, Laredo is a city with problems, from pollution to drugs, poverty to urban sprawl. Move out of the downtown and you encounter concrete boxes, surrounded with thousands of parking spaces. Laredo shops and eats with the rest of us. At Mall del Norte you can walk from the Olive Garden or Fuddruckers to J. C. Penney or Sears. The main drag, called San Bernardo, is arguably as ugly a stretch as any in America.

But the beauty becomes evident when people start talking. Laredo is a bilingual (bicultural) city. Eavesdrop on diners in a restaurant and you immediately notice that men, women, and children are moving effortlessly from Spanish to English and back again. They are all Americans who effortlessly speak two languages, and stereotypes offer little help this close to the Mexican border. In one hotel a large group of literal Marlboro men sit in their best gear: monogrammed shirts, multi-colored boots, handlebar mustaches, toothpicks dangling from their lips, and white cowboy hats to protect their weathered faces. My North-

east stereotypes said southern drawls and prejudice, but I heard instead friendship, conviviality, and a mixture of accents, all seamlessly speaking Spanish and English. Some of the cowboys were Mexican Americans, but, whatever their ethnicity, their huge belt buckles announced that they worked for the Department of Agriculture. On horseback, these men chased not illegal immigrants but stray cattle, and they displayed a degree of interethnic comfort that, according to locals and the professors at Texas A&M, is characteristic of Laredo and its people.

Given this admirable state of relations, I expected a huge turnout for the “A Day without Mexicans” strike on May 1, 2006. At 5:00 p.m., the protesters planned to march from Laredo’s Civic Center to the brand-new Webb County Justice Center. The television news vans dutifully appeared, but the crowd numbered a mere 150 at best, and that was after organizers brought all the children in town. With attendance surpassing half a million at similar protests, the terrible turnout called for an explanation. One was quickly provided by a local police officer. He explained that “Across the nation, people are afraid of losing their jobs. But here in Laredo, a boycott doesn’t really make sense. Why would you walk out on your own people?” he said. “We are all one and the same.”

This unself-conscious sense of unity is perhaps the most powerful response we can muster to Randolph Bourne’s question, “What shall we do with our America?” In 1924 we answered that question by closing our doors to most of the world. We deliberately discriminated against virtually everyone in order to, as Congressman Albert Johnson stressed, discredit “the myth of the melting pot.” The United States belonged to white people. As Johnson and his colleagues noted, “We intend to maintain it so.”<sup>33</sup>

The people of Kingston and Laredo suggest a different answer to Bourne’s wonderful question. Jamaicans prove that skin color and the poisonous dichotomy only matter if we say they do. And the laudable sense of comfort evident in Laredo argues that we can reconfigure the culture if we define ourselves by what already binds three hundred million people.

At this banquet, we are one race, united in peace and driven by our desire to celebrate a nation of all-American fusions.