



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

Here Comes the Neighborhood

Preface to the Immigration and Emigration Series

This essay is one of several reports on immigration, emigration, and cultural assimilation issues in the United States. To be clear about my message: Only if immigrants are willing to assimilate into America's culture should they be welcomed. I am not making this claim from national chauvinism. I am making it because I believe linguistic, political, and cultural assimilation are essential to successful nation building.

To those who come to America for a better life: Keep your ties to the “old country” but foster ties with the new motherland. Keep your language, but learn English. Keep your traditions, but learn about those of America.

The American Italians did it. So did the American Chinese. My forbearers, the American Irish and Scots assimilated into our national family. As did many others.

Irish pubs are part of Americana. Little Italy in New York is a welcome respite to Manhattan's sky scrapers. The Chinatowns make our cities more appealing. The Latino citizens of Santa Fe are just as “American” as you or I, and their mariachi music is a joy to hear.

Thus goes our melting pot: a rich and diverse menu of mixed cultures, sensibly seasoned with American customs.

We are tolerant because of our diversity. We are strong because of our diversity. We are more interesting and have more fun because of this diversity.

So come, you are welcome, but with another caveat: You also embrace this idea: "America is now my country."

But I also state this idea. If you do not accept the Constitution and Bill of Rights as part of your life in America, you should not come to these shores. If you believe that religion should be integrated and holds supreme with that of law, I do not welcome you. This statement may come to you as harsh, but the very fiber of the United States is founded on the idea of the separation of church and state.

Here Comes the Neighborhood¹

March 30, 2005

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. I'm on the streets in the city where we live. We reside temporarily in Falls Church, Virginia. After selling our home in the Shenandoah Valley, we will claim residence here for a while to do our final visits to D.C.'s museums, other local places, and our long-time friends before we head west for keeps.

A Changed Neighborhood

I took a walk around my neighborhood this week. It was the first time I have taken such a stroll. When we bought this place a few years ago to serve as a city apartment during winter, the neighborhood's citizens were predominately-white Anglo-Saxons. No longer. My walk lasted over an hour. I passed-by twenty to thirty stores, including seven restaurants. Five of these places offered Middle East and Ethiopian food. One sold Peruvian fare. A lone pizza place advertised American cuisine---such as it is.

Other than people in vehicles driving-by during my walk, I encountered no Anglos. I walked into each restaurant, and found myself surrounded by brown-skinned people. On the streets and inside the stores, I was the only white person. Same goes for our apartment complex. Anglos, who made-up the population of this neighborhood in the past, are now in the minority.

What's my point? Pat Buchanan wrote a book a few years ago about the dying of so-called Western culture in America because of the huge and rapid influx of people from other parts of the (non-European) world.

I think most Americans welcome this influx. After all, who's going to flip the patties at McDonald's? For myself, I like visiting and interacting with new citizens because I learn a lot about other cultures. And a person's recounting of miserable times in his or her country makes me more appreciative of my own.

That stated, I hope the influx of immigrants into America is not happening too fast and on too large a scale for the newcomers to assimilate into America's melting pot. I occasionally encounter taxi drivers (my version of Gallup Poll samples) who like America's wealth, but dislike America's institutions and its citizens. But it seems this attitude is an exception and not the rule.

Balkanization or Assimilation?

For several years, I lived in Canada a couple months of each year. During this time, I came to understand the problem we may be creating in this country with uncontrolled immigration. It's called Balkanization---the division of a country into smaller sub-units. If you haven't witnessed it firsthand, I can assure you, it is not a nonproductive way to run a country.

¹ The signs in the Reporter's thought cloud on the cover were extracted from an article in *The Economist*, "Paleocon Pat," September 9, 2006, p. 36.

Canada. The land of the laid-back. The land of choice and forbearance. The country renown for tolerance and goodwill. But Canada almost split up a few years ago because Quebec's French speaking population was dissatisfied with its lot in life. I followed the events closely. I witnessed the rancor of the warring parties and the expenditure of massive national resources because parts of Canada---supposedly an assimilated nation---were not assimilated.

Canada is supposed to be bilingual, but it isn't. As an example, one afternoon I was alone in an office in a Montreal building. There was a fire. All (mandated) bilingual PA systems were supposed to broadcast English and French about the emergency. It didn't happen; only French was provided. I kept working away, oblivious to the possibility that my ignorance of French might have resulted in my becoming a French Fry.

Anyway, a thin line runs through the assimilation issue. Where do we draw it? How much assimilation. How little? Is there a balance of the two, a combination that will be beneficial to all concerned?

As I returned to our apartment from the walk around my Falls Church neighborhood, I passed by a small public park, inhabited by brown-skinned people. Several kids had chosen sides and were playing a ball game. The game? It was American football. I stopped for a moment and listened to their chatter. It was in English. Assimilation in action, as they had one foot in the melting pot.

If the Shoe Fits

Let's take a break from a serious subject. I suspect you could use a change of pace, and perhaps we can get in a few laughs. As a warning, will you please remove your political correctness hat.

Speaking of feet, down the street from our apartment is a large shoe store. I visited the store yesterday to buy some shoes. At the cash register, the (Pakistani) clerk opened the shoebox and examined its contents. The following conversation took place (jotted down shortly after the conversation).

- Reporter, "Why are you looking at each shoe?"
- Shoe person, "To make sure they're the same size. Sometimes the shoes get mixed up. On occasion, customers move the shoes around in the boxes when we're not looking."
- Reporter, "Why would a customer do that? It could result in buying two shoes with different sizes. "
- Shoe person, "That's correct. Quite a number of people have different sized feet. It's not uncommon for these customers to try to exchange the shoes in two boxes."
- Reporter, "Why don't you carry boxes of shoes with different sizes in each box? It seems there might be a market for the product."
- Shoe person, "We do get quite a number of customers with this problem. Anyway, we only sell two shoes of the same size. That's the way it is. Customers with different feet sizes must buy four shoes."
- Reporter, "Hmm. Well, how about a customer with one leg?"
- Shoe person pauses, and glances at me as if I were a foreigner, "Well sir, what about it?"
- Reporter, "You know, the person is handicapped. Seems like a good cause for the shoe store. I can see a lot of good publicity for you. Say, like running an ad in the newspaper

that says, ‘We cater to one-legged people. Change the name of this place to the ‘Pegged-Leg People Store.’ ”

- Shoe person, “Eh...” I got the idea that she could not decide to call for her manager or laugh.
- Reporter, “Think about it, this service might be needed. American capitalism at its best! Making money and solving problems. There might be a market for non-pairs of shoes. A store could market its shoes for both customers: Those who have two feet of different sizes and those who have only one foot. Just think: an entire store of odd-lot sizes. As well as shoe boxes built to hold only one shoe.”

The clerk began to laugh about my idea. She and I talked a bit more about the possibility of The Odd Lot Shoe Store. I think she became intrigued with the concept After all, she was in sales.

Before long, I made my way back to our apartment, thankful I was an assimilated American. Thankful I was wearing two shoes of the same size. Or for that matter, two shoes of any size. Even more, of needing shoes in the first place.

What does this frivolous tale about the shoe store have to do with the serious subjects of immigration and cultural assimilation? Absolutely nothing, but I hope you enjoyed the change of pace. Now put on your shoes (or shoe) and get to work.