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WE BELIEVE OUR DIVERSITY, OUR differences, when joined togeth-
er by a common set of ideals, makes us stronger, makes us more creative,
makes us different,” Barack Obama pro-
nounced at a citizenship ceremony last Fourth
of July. Until half a century ago most serious
historians would have called such an opinion
ignorant or naïve. Ethnic diversity implies
cultural diversity—if it did not, ethnic diver-
sity would soon disappear. Cultural diver-
sity means division, division means weakness,
and weakness means, eventually, unfreedom.
Such, at least, is the traditional view, and his-
tory appears to vindicate it. “Diversity” has
been an attribute of subject populations: me-
dieval elites communicated in Latin, laborers
in various vernaculars. Diversity has been the
form of belonging that typifies empires, just
as nationality has been the form that typifies republics. The British Empire, the Roman
Empire, and the Habsburg Empire—these
were diverse. England, Italy, and Austria, un-
til recently, were not. The motto E pluribus
unum is a sign that the founders saw diversity
as a challenge to be mastered, not a resource
to be tapped.

Yet “diversity” today is a sacred term. It car-
rries lots of power but resists easy definition. It
entered popular constitutional understanding
with the Supreme Court’s decision in Regents
Justice Lewis Powell held that an affirmative
action program that reserved spots for minori-
ties at the U.C. Davis medical school violated
the equal rights of white applicants, but that
“the goal of achieving a diverse student body is
sufficiently compelling to justify consideration
of race in admissions decisions under some cir-
stances.” Diversity thus became a euphe-
mism, allowing authorities to connive at pub-
ic-policy goals that they could not openly avow.

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION DEMOG-
rapher William Frey would seem a
good candidate to lead readers to a clear,
propaganda-free understanding of what diver-
sity is. The title of his new study on ethnicity
and population change is Diversity Explosion.
While he never defines the word explicitly, he
means the decline—in both population and
vitality—of America’s European-descended
population, and its replacement by more re-
cently arrived population groups from every-
where in the non-European world. Frey some-
times describes this change as “the browning
of America.” More than half (53%) of the
country’s 3,100 counties had declining white
populations by the first decade of the century.
In the current decade the white population has
begun to decline in the nation as a whole. Met-
ropolitan New York and metropolitan Los
Angeles have each lost a million white people
since 1990. Fewer than half the babies born
in 2011 were in the U.S. Census category of
“non-Hispanic whites.” Three years from now
most Americans under 18 will be “minorities”
of one kind or another. In 1970, there were
only two cities with more than a million black
residents: New York and Chicago. Now there
are seven. Los Angeles County and adjoining
Riverside County have 6.1 million Hispanics.
In days when people spoke more freely about such matters, dramatic change in the dominant population of the world’s dominant power would have been occasion for speculation and worry. About whether, for instance, as more of its citizens come from non-European backgrounds, the United States will change its idea of its cultural heritage. Or whether, considering the occasional tawdri ness of whites’ behavior toward minorities in centuries past—displacing Indians, enslaving Africans, deporting Chinese—there is cause to worry about race relations once the shoe is on the other foot. Or whether European civilization, which from the time of Columbus to the time of Goodbye, Columbus, seemed to roll ever westward as if by a law of nature, is now beginning to ebb.

Frey’s attitude toward these changes is much the same as President Obama’s: demographically, America is bound for glory. “Rather than being feared,” Frey writes, “America’s new diversity—poised to revitalize the country at a time when other developed nations are facing advanced aging and population loss—can be celebrated.” Any “resistance” to diversity can be explained by Americans’ “fear of change, fear of losing privileged status, or fear of unwanted groups in their communities.”

Now there are certainly good reasons to be glad of the size of our recent immigration. The U.S. labor force will grow 5% between this decade and 2030, and it would have shrunk considerably otherwise. Yet Frey could do with a reminder that what he is celebrating in passages like these is youth, not diversity, that natives ought to be as capable of bearing the next generation of children as the foreign-born, that their failure to do so may be an effect of something dire rather than the cause of something to be “celebrat ed,” and that policymakers have seldom been able to predict the outcomes of wholesale demographic change.

Clashes await. Frey sometimes has a sharp eye for them. Only 23% of those born in the Baby Boom generation and before believe America’s new diversity is a “change for the better”; 42% call it a change for the worse. The interests of America’s aging, infertile white population and its young, fecund immigrants will necessarily diverge, in ways that have nothing to do with anyone’s good or ill will. Both groups are dependent on government services, but in different ways. Sixteen percent of whites are over 65, versus 7% of minorities. The former, broadly speaking, want cheap drugs, lavish pensions, and a labor market in which young people will push wheelchairs and fix meals for next to nothing; the latter want new schools for their children, government-funded day care, and a so-called living wage. This year, for the first time, white families are supporting more dependent seniors than children. For them, the welfare state is no longer in any sense an “investment,” the way its social-democratic designers used to claim. It is, to use an appropriately Baby Boom expression, a drag.

Such statistics lend themselves to reflections about decadence and to questions about what it is we are really importing. It is not so much diversity, perhaps, and not so much labor, as traditional families. A third of Hispanic households consist of families in which a married couple lives with children, and a third of Hispanics are under 18. A third of Asian-American households consist of these families, too, and the country’s Asian population is now ten times what it was in 1970. Among whites, by contrast, such families make up only a fifth of households—except in those rare communities nationwide where the white population is growing. There, white habits resemble those of immigrants, with a third of families consisting of married couples and children.

Frey notes that over time Hispanics “tend to become ‘Americanized’ with regard to family and household relationships.” But, for now, new immigrant groups—or at least those individuals visible to the IRS—bear a disproportionate burden. Pay-as-you-go welfare states, in which all benefits are drawn directly from present earnings, are spectacularly unfair to those who procreate. Everyone, in time, has a claim to the benefits. But one group pays almost all the costs of producing, nurturing, and educating the next generation’s workforce: parents. For taxpayers, welfare states offer massive disincentives to having children. Both the old (who have already paid for others’ benefits) and the young (who will pay in the future) have legitimate but incompatible claims on the welfare state. Trying to honor both is one reason the country is now in such a fiscal predicament. Frey’s solution is to “persuade seniors that the key needs among striving young minorities—education, affordable housing, and steady employment—will work to benefit the Social Security and medical care programs that seniors will need in retirement.” Persuade all you like, but it’s not true, or at least not soon enough. In a pay-as-you-go system, there’s a lag of half a generation or a generation before education produces benefits (which, of course, not all education does). Politicians might reasonably ask seniors to consider posterity; but if anyone were capable of doing that, we wouldn’t have got ourselves so deep in debt in the first place. An economy built around mass immigration may lead to underinvestment in the future. Indeed, this may constitute an off-balance-sheet liability that makes the apparent economic benefits of immigration illusory.

Frey’s book includes an innovation that renders his statistics either clearer or less trustworthy, depending how you look at it: he treats the U.S. Census category “Hispanic” as a race. That is a fateful change, because Hispanics account for more than half of the country’s new “diversity.”

Is this move defensible? “Hispanic,” as defined by the Census Bureau, as well as by common sense, is not a race. It is rather a designation of immigrant provenance that has been applied in ways ever more bizarre as the years have passed. It classifies people by national language—not the language of the immigrant—so that a youngster from the Dominican Republic gets lumped together with an Indian from the Bolivian highlands (even if that Indian does not speak Spanish), not with a Haitian who grew up ten miles away (even if that Haitian does).

The problem is that government, however punctilious its definitions, has treated Hispanics as if they were a race. Ethnic lobbies, too, mix foreigners and Americans, non-citizens and citizens, under the same “Hispanic” category, in a way that renders meaningless many of the statistics that rank their progress. The prospects of Ramón “El Pachuco” Rodriguez of Maryvale, Arizona, who arrived from Sinaloa in his 30s a couple years ago without a high school degree or even a green card, are deemed somewhat relevant to those of Lowell “Skippy” Rodriguez of Greenwich, Connecticut, and Groton. The linguistic/national nonce-adjective “Hispanic” gets passed on as if it were a genetic inheritance so that Skip py (who may be “Hispanic” only because his great-grandfather owned the largest newspaper in Buenos Aires) can collect, on behalf of newly arrived El Pachuco, a “diversity” bonus that will allow him to bump a more deserving applicant from a spot at Yale.

“It is safe to predict that racial classifications will be modified in the future as multiracial marriages and populations proliferate,” Frey writes. But this prediction is not safe at all. There now exists a market of racial classifications. Whether such classifications as “black” and “Hispanic” get modified will depend on whether they continue to produce jobs, promotions and college placements. In the case of “Hispanic,” if a classification is something you
Frey is more interested in tracing the arrival, spread, and assimilation of immigrants than in examining the centuries-old divide between whites and blacks. Black population growth is steady but not spectacular—midway between the exploding populations of new immigrants and the declining one of whites. Still, his discussion of black population trends contains some of the book’s most surprising data. For the first time since slavery, immigration accounts for as much population growth among blacks as it does in the country at large. Over the past 20 years millions have arrived from West Africa, the Horn of Africa, and the Caribbean—a wave so large that a tenth of American blacks are now immigrants.

Meanwhile, the trickle of native blacks to the American South, which began in the 1970s, has in the last two decades become a torrent. It has reversed the migration to Northern cities that went on uninterrupted for most of the 20th century. The South is the only part of the country that is gaining native-born blacks, but it is gaining a lot of them, and the gains in Georgia have been particularly large. Atlanta recently passed Chicago as the country’s second-largest black metropolis.

Blacks are moving to the South in part because they are being welcomed there. The five most residually segregated metropolitan areas in the country are Milwaukee, New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Cleveland. The ten least segregated cities are all in the South or Southwest, including Charleston, Raleigh, Greenville (South Carolina), Lakeland (Florida), and Augusta (Georgia).

This may be because Southerners are nicer than Northerners, but Frey argues persuasively that the federal government was more able to enforce the Fair Housing Act of 1968 in new housing than in old, and most new housing built after 1968 was in the Sunbelt. By measures not just of segregation but also of income, poverty, and educational attainment, blacks today do considerably better in states that were segregated until the 1960s than in states that were not. The Supreme Court has been much criticized for deciding, in Shelby County v. Holder (2013), that the parts of the 1965 Voting Rights Act that call for special scrutiny of Southern institutions were unconstitutional. But if voting institutions resemble the ones Frey describes, it would have been arbitrary to rule otherwise.

Since the 1990s, when Frey noted that whites were fleeing areas of high immigration, the separation between whites and all minorities has, he says, “softened.” He speculates that immigration may have helped blacks and whites get along better because other minorities have provided a “buffer” between them, although he offers no data to back up this assertion. A sixth of newly married whites are married to someone of another race, but it is not easy to figure what this means since the non-racial category of Hispanics is, again, involved. Such intermarriage may be rising because whites are growing more tolerant or because new “races” have been introduced into American life that stand outside the historic black-white clash. White-Asian marriages outnumber white-black marriages, despite a vastly higher black population.

Yet white-black marriages have been rising since the 1960s, by about 50% per decade, and now amount to roughly one eighth of the number of black-black marriages. Frey finds a strange asymmetry in such racially mixed marriages: three quarters are between black men and white women. Frey does not give an explanation of where this imbalance comes from, though in a footnote he hints that it might involve a trade of the man’s economic status for the woman’s social status. Whatever the cause, something other than straightforward assimilation is at work—some social force that acts very differently on whites than on blacks.
STONEWALLED
Sharyl Attkisson

“Stonewalled paints a chilling portrait of our times.”
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In a 1973 episode of "All in the Family," Archie Bunker spoke of a co-worker everyone called Black Elmo, "so's not to get him mixed up with regular Elmo." Sophisticates have long belittled the worldview that white people are the only "regular" Americans. Yet we have built our official racial policy around exactly this conception. Our politics, as reggied by civil rights laws and affirmative action, assumes a mainstream culture, and the ebbing of the white majority in the United States is going to present genuine governing problems. Frey consistently fails to see this. "Although whites are still considered the mainstream in the United States," he writes, "that perception should eventually shift."

But how can it and why should it? Affirmative action has become such a lucrative source of privilege that lobbying has made it impregnable, even in a country that has shown, by twice electing a black president, that it has no need of it. But our regime of affirmative action requires a majority sensitive to pangs of conscience. When Frey offers policy prescriptions, he focuses on closing this or that "gap" between minorities and whites—as if the case for vigorous government action then required no further elaboration. Activists and government make a similar assumption. But once whites are a negligible part of the electorate, whose incomes (or life expectancies, or college achievements) are aggrieved minorities to be contrasted with? If blacks remain poor when whites are merely another L.A. minority, what kind of remedies will be suggested by the Mexican-American power structure and its Asian supporters? If whites are poorer than, say, Asians, against whose incomes will the poorest minorities be calibrated? Assuming whites cannot be transformed from a repen - tant majority into a scapegoat minority (on the model of European Jews historically, or the Chinese in Southeast Asia more recently), then our ability to make "voluntary" inter-ethnic transfers of money, jobs, and prestige may be nearing its end.

We have not prepared a regime to follow our half-century-long experiment with affirmative action. The transition will be more complicated than we assume. Should whites cease to be the majority, they will then become, by definition, just another subgroup. They show signs of following the interest-group logic that, since the 1960s and especially in the last decade, has "racialized" the politics of all other subgroups. "[T]he social, economic and demographic makeup of the white population is becoming ever more distinct," Frey writes, also noting their increasing tendency to vote Republican. Whites, even the very youngest, favored the underwhelming Mitt Romney in the last presidential election by between 7 and 23 points, depending on age cohort. This is not as extreme a polarization as that of nonwhites, who in 2012 gave Obama margins of victory between 58 and 64 points, but it is a significant change. It will have repercussions for our politics. In Georgia last fall, Democrat Michelle Nunn, an impressive candidate and the daughter of a long-beloved U.S. senator, lost after getting only 23% of the white vote. Weeks earlier, political analyst Nate Cohn had written in the New Republic that by 2016, due to the influx of blacks to Georgia, it should be possible for a Democrat to win Georgia with that many white votes. A racially polarized democracy is a terrible prospect. "Future elections like this one," Frey writes of 2012, "will not be demographically sustainable."

Like "multiculturalism," the word "diversity" is both a sociological description and an ideological program. Propaganda is baked into it from the beginning. Frey is as independent-minded a demogra - pher as there is working today, and yet he cannot employ the term without getting sucked into the bien-pensant maelstrom:

Given the growing, more diverse racial populations that are central to the nation's future, it is imperative that the kinds of laws and policies put in place to ensure equal access to employment, housing, education and voting are enforced, monitored, and—where necessary—augmented to accommodate new groups and needs, including the integration of immigrants and their families. [...] The demographic die is cast... racial minorities will not just "fit in" but will hold sway....

A need to atone for slavery and segregation was once the justification for the "laws and policies" Frey describes. Many and perhaps most Americans have lost the thread of this historical narrative. These laws and policies now seem to require no justification. So to whom, ultimately, will the "new groups" address their "imperative demands for 'equal access' when 'away' is held by people with no felt responsibility to atone for America's historic sins?" Into what kind of society will these new groups fit? Of what will these "augmented" monitoring programs consist, and against whom will they be directed? "Diversity" is leading us down an ominous and unfamiliar stretch of road.

Christopher Caldwell is a senior editor at the Weekly Standard.
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