

Abstract

[The melting pot theory](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781444351071.wbeghm359) [[1]](#footnote-1) has been used to describe societies that are formed by an assortment of immigrant cultures that eventually produce new hybrid social and cultural forms. The melting pot theory holds that, like metals melted together at great heat, the melting together of several cultures will produce a new compound, one that has great strength and other combined advantages. While the melting pot theory can be applied to any country that has integrated new cultures into its own, such as Brazil, Bangladesh, or even France, the theory is most commonly used to describe the United States as a new world with a distinct new breed of people amalgamated from many various groups of immigrants. Because of this, the melting pot theory has become synonymous with the process of Americanization.

# Melting Pots and Salad Bowls

**by**[Bruce Thornton](https://www.hoover.org/profiles/bruce-thornton)

Friday, October 26, 2012

*“This image, then, communicated the historically exceptional notion of American identity as one formed not by the accidents of blood, sect, or race, but by the unifying beliefs and political ideals enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution: the notion of individual, inalienable human rights that transcend group identity. Of course, over the centuries this ideal was violated in American history by racism, ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and other ignorant prejudices. But in time laws and social mores changed, making the United States today the most inclusive and tolerant nation in the world, the destination of choice for millions desiring greater freedom and opportunity.”*

*“Multiculturalism as we know it is not about respecting or celebrating the salad bowl of cultural or ethnic diversity, but about indicting American civilization for its imperial, colonial, xenophobic, and racist sins. Multiculturalism idealizes immigrant cultures and ignores their various dysfunctional practices and values. At the same time, it relentlessly attacks America as a predatory, soulless, exploitative, warmongering villain responsible for all the world’s ills.*

*Multiculturalism confines the individual in the box of his race or culture, despite his own wishes or chosen identity.”*

*“Multicultural identity politics worsen the problems of illegal immigration. Many immigrants, legal or otherwise, are now encouraged to celebrate the cultures they have fled and to prefer them to the one that gave them greater freedom and opportunity. Our schools and popular culture reinforce this separatism, encouraging Americans to relate to those outside their identity group not as fellow citizens, but as either rivals for power and influence or oppressors (from whom one is owed reparations in the form of government transfers or preferential policies). The essence of being an American has been reduced to a flabby “tolerance,” which in fact masks a profound intolerance and anti-Americanism because the groups that multiculturalism celebrates are defined in terms of their victimization by a sinful America.*

*No matter how the laws of Arizona and other states fare, this problem of assimilation will remain. Millions of the illegal immigrants in this country are no doubt striving to become Americans despite the obstacles multiculturalism has put in their path. Many others have not developed that sense of American identity, nor have they been compelled, as immigrants were in the past, to acknowledge the civic demands of America and give her their loyalty. Their relation to this country is merely economic or parasitic. Figuring out how to determine which immigrants are which, and what to do with those who prefer not to be Americans, will be the challenge of the years ahead.”*

# [America: History’s Exception](https://www.nationalreview.com/2016/06/america-melting-pot-immigrant-culture-made-country-great/) [[2]](#footnote-2)

**By [VICTOR DAVIS HANSON](https://www.nationalreview.com/author/victor-davis-hanson/%22%20%5Co%20%22Posts%20by%20Victor%20Davis%20Hanson)**

* June 9, 2016 4:00

We should seek to preserve the ideals that made America successful.

The history of nations is mostly characterized by ethnic and racial uniformity, not diversity.

Most national boundaries reflected linguistic, religious, and ethnic homogeneity. Until the late 20th century, diversity was considered a liability, not a strength.

Countries and societies that were ethnically homogeneous, such as ancient Germanic tribes or modern Japan, felt that they were inherently more stable and secure than the alternative, whether late imperial Rome or contemporary America.

Many societies created words to highlight their own racial purity. At times, “Volk” in German and “Raza” in Spanish (and “Razza” in Italian) meant more than just shared language, residence, or culture; those words also included a racial essence. Even today, it would be hard for someone Japanese to be fully accepted as a Mexican citizen, or for a native-born Mexican to migrate and become a Japanese citizen.

Many cultures reflected their suspicion of diversity by using pejorative nouns for the “other.” In Hebrew, the “goyim” were all the other non-Jewish nations and peoples. “Odar” in Armenian denoted the rest of the world that was not ethnically Armenian. For Japanese, the “gaijin” are those who by nationality, ethnicity, and race cannot become fully Japanese. In 18th-century Castilian Spain, “gringo” meant any foreign, non-native speakers of Spanish.

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The Balkan states were the powder kegs of 20th-century world wars because different groups wanted to change national boundaries to reflect their separate ethnicities.

The premise of Nazi Germany was to incorporate all the German “Volk” into one vast racially and linguistically harmonious “Reich” — even if it meant destroying the national borders of Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland.

The constitution of Mexico unapologetically predicates national immigration policies on not endangering Mexico’s ethnic makeup.

The United States steadily evolved to define Americans by their shared values, not by their superficial appearance.

Countries, ancient and modern, that have tried to unite diverse tribes have usually fared poorly. The Italian Roman Republic lasted about 500 years. In contrast, the multiracial Roman Empire that after the Edict of Caracalla in AD 212 made all its diverse peoples equal citizens endured little more than two (often violent) centuries.

Vast ethnically diverse empires such as those of the Austro-Hungarians, the Ottomans, and the Soviets used deadly force to keep their bickering ethnic factions in line — and from killing each other.

Modern states such as multicultural or multi-tribal Rwanda, Iraq, and Lebanon have often proved deadly failures. Europe is trying to emulate the multiracial but unified culture of the United States. But the European Union may well tear itself apart trying to assimilate millions of disparate migrants who are reluctant to fully assimilate.

#share#America is history’s exception. It began as a republic founded by European migrants. Like the homogenous citizens of most other nations, they were likely on a trajectory to incorporate racial sameness as the mark of citizenship. But the ultimate logic of America’s unique Constitution was different. So the United States steadily evolved to define Americans by their shared values, not by their superficial appearance. Eventually, anyone who was willing to give up his prior identity and assume a new American persona became American.

The United States has always cherished its “melting pot” ethos of e pluribus unum — of blending diverse peoples into one through assimilation, integration, and intermarriage.

The history of state multiculturalism is one of discord, violence, chaos, and implosion.

When immigration was controlled, measured, and coupled with a confident approach to assimilation, America thrived. Various ethnic groups enriched America with diverse art, food, music, and literature while accepting a common culture of American values and institutions. Problems arose only when immigration was often illegal, in mass, and without emphasis on assimilation.

Sometime in the late 20th century, America largely gave up on multiracialism under one common culture and opted instead for multiculturalism, in which each particular ethnic group retained its tribal chauvinism and saw itself as separate from the whole.

Hyphenated names suddenly became popular. The government tracked Americans’ often complicated ethnic lineage. Jobs and college admissions were sometimes predicated on racial pedigrees and quotas. Courts ruled that present discrimination was allowable compensation for past discrimination.

Schools began to teach that difference and diversity were preferable to sameness and unity. Edgar Allan Poe and Langston Hughes were categorized as “white male” or “black” rather than as “American” authors.

#related#Past discrimination and injustice may explain the current backlash against melting-pot unity. And America’s exalted idealism has made it criticized as less than good when it was not always perfect.

Nonetheless, for those who see America becoming a multicultural state of unassimilated tribes and competing racial groups, history will not be kind. The history of state multiculturalism is one of discord, violence, chaos, and implosion.

So far, America has beaten the odds and remained multiracial rather than multicultural, thereby becoming the most powerful nation in the world.

[**COMMENTS**](https://www.nationalreview.com/2016/06/america-melting-pot-immigrant-culture-made-country-great/)

We should remember that diversity is an ornament, but unity is our strength.

*— Victor Davis Hanson is a classicist and historian at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, and the author, most recently, of*The Savior Generals*. You can reach him by e-mailing**author@victorhanson.com**. © 2016 Tribune Media Services, Inc.*

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1. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781444351071.wbeghm359>

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