



Written by [Thomas Sowell](#) on December 22, 2015

The Busybody Left

The political left has been trying to run other people's lives for centuries. So we should not be surprised to see the Obama administration now trying to force neighborhoods across America to have the mix of people the government wants them to have.

There are not enough poor people living in middle class neighborhoods to suit the political left. Not enough blacks in white neighborhoods. Not enough Hispanics here, not enough Asians there.



Nowhere in the Constitution does it grant the federal government the power to dictate such things. But places that do not mix and match people the way Washington wants them to can lose all sorts of federal money they currently receive under numerous programs.

Handing out vast amounts of the taxpayers' money is the way the federal government has expanded its power far beyond the powers granted by the Constitution — thereby limiting the freedom of individuals, localities and states. Washington is essentially buying up our freedom with our own money, taken in taxes.

What makes this latest political crusade so ridiculous and so dangerous is that people have never been mixed and matched at random, either in the United States or in other countries around the world, or in any period of history.

We can see blacks and whites living in different neighborhoods, but many people who look the same to the naked eye also sort themselves out. Moreover, neither blacks nor whites are living at random within their own respective neighborhoods.

The upscale neighborhood called Sugar Hill in Harlem, where I delivered groceries as a teenager, was very different from the neighborhood where I lived in a tenement.

White neighborhoods also sorted themselves out. A man who grew up in Chicago said, "Tell me a man's last name and I will tell you where he lives." Studies of ethnic concentrations in Chicago have backed up his claim.

Back when the Lower East Side of New York was a predominantly Jewish area during the era of mass immigration from Europe, Hungarian Jews lived clustered together in a different part of the Lower East Side from where Polish Jews or Romanian Jews lived. And German Jews lived uptown.

It was the same story in Italian neighborhoods. Immigrants from Rome were not scattered at random among immigrants from Naples or Sicily. Moreover, this was not peculiar to New York.

The same clustering of people from particular parts of Italy could be found in cities across the United States, as well as in Italian communities in Buenos Aires, Toronto, Sydney and other places around the world.

The very same pattern could be found among Germans, Chinese, Lebanese and other peoples living in



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other countries. People of different ages, different incomes or different lifestyles likewise tend to sort themselves out.

Nevertheless the busybody left has launched a political crusade to make communities across America present a tableau that matches the preconceptions of their betters.

Nor are the true believers deterred by the failures and counterproductive consequences of their previous social crusades, such as busing children to distant schools to mix and match them with children from different racial, economic or social backgrounds.

The theory was that this would improve the education of all — through the magic of “diversity” — and promote greater understanding among different races and classes. In practice, however, compulsory busing of children to mix and match them produced more racial polarization and more educational problems.

Undaunted by reality, the left moved on to try something similar in the housing markets, by placing low-income housing projects in middle class neighborhoods and by giving housing subsidies to individual low-income families to go live in neighborhoods where they could not afford to live otherwise.

The counterproductive consequences of these efforts in the housing markets have only spurred on the busybodies of the left to try harder to force people to live their lives according to the preconceptions of the left, rather than according to their own direct personal experiences and preferences.

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