



Written by [Thomas Sowell](#) on October 20, 2010

The Multicultural Cult: Part II

There was a reason why employers in the middle of the 19th century had signs that said, “No Irish need apply” — and why employers in the middle of the 20th century no longer had such signs. It was not that employers had changed. The Irish had changed.

The Catholic Church for years worked to bring about such changes among the Irish immigrants and their offspring, just as various religious and secular organizations among the Jews, among blacks and among other groups worked to bring about changes within their respective groups. By and large these efforts paid off. All these groups were advancing, long before there were civil rights laws.



Yet today, attempts to get black or Hispanic youngsters to speak the language of the society around them are decried by multiculturalists. And any attempt to get them to behave according to the cultural norms of the larger society is denounced as “cultural imperialism,” if not racism.

The multicultural dogma is that we are to “celebrate” all cultures, not change them. In other words, people who lag educationally or economically are to keep on doing what they have been doing — but somehow have better results in the future than in the past. And, if they don’t have better results in the future, it is society’s fault.

Such notions have been tried, and have failed, in other countries and times, long before they became a fashionable dogma called multiculturalism.

In 19th century Latvia and Bohemia, among other places in Eastern Europe, the great majority of Germans were literate, while most of the indigenous peoples around them were not. Not surprisingly, Germans had more education and skills, and enjoyed a higher standard of living.

In both Latvia and Bohemia, the German minority held most of the jobs requiring education and skills. But, in both places, the indigenous people — Latvians and Czechs — could rise by acquiring the German language and culture, and many did.

But, for the newly rising Latvian and Czech intelligentsia, that was not enough. They wanted to be able to rise without having to learn a different language and culture.

Nor were Latvians and Czechs unique. Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, Malays in Malaysia and Maoris in New Zealand are just some of the others who have wanted the same thing — namely, to cling to their own culture and yet achieve the same success as people with a different culture.

Many of these efforts have failed and few have succeeded. But what is truly painful is how often the polarization created by these efforts led to tragedies, such as civil war in Sri Lanka and brutal mass expulsions of millions of Germans from Czechoslovakia, to the detriment of both the Germans and the



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Czech economy.

The history of blacks in the United States has been more complicated. By the end of the 19th century, the small numbers of blacks living in Northern cities had, over the generations, assimilated the culture of the surrounding society to the point where they lived and worked among the white population more fully than they would in most of the 20th century.

In New York, Washington, Chicago, Philadelphia and other Northern cities, black ghettos became a 20th century phenomenon. It was after the massive migration of far less acculturated blacks out of the South in the early 20th century when a massive retrogression in black-white relations took place in the Northern cities to which the migrants moved.

The blacks who moved to these cities were of the same race as those who were already there, but they were not the same in their culture, values and behavior. No one complained of this more bitterly than the blacks already living in these cities, who saw the newcomers as harbingers of a worse life for all blacks.

This same process occurred on the west coast decades later, largely during World War II, when the same influx of less acculturated blacks from the South marked a retrogression in race relations in places like San Francisco and Portland.

Cultural differences matter. They have always mattered, however much that may be denied today by the multicultural cult.

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To find out more about Thomas Sowell and read features by other Creators Syndicate columnists and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate web page at www.creators.com. Thomas Sowell is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305. His Web site is www.tsowell.com.

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