Kit Kat Essay
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How Do You Spell Diversity?

Last October the burning suburbs of Paris were a showcase of Europe's failure to integrate its immigrants. Most of the rioting youths were born in France to African parents and speak French, yet these second and third generation immigrants feel little attachment to France, home to Europe's largest Muslim community – nearly 10% of its 60 million people.

In Denmark the Parliament recently adopted the toughest anti immigration rules on the Continent, including a rule preventing Danish citizens age 24 and younger from bringing in spouses from outside Denmark. This was followed by the banning of Friday Prayers by Muslims in all public schools across the country.

Italy's restrictive laws allow immigrants to apply for citizenship only after ten years of residency and children of immigrants are not eligible to apply for citizenship until they are 18 years old.

In Germany, until 2000, nobody could become a citizen if they were not of German extraction, even if they met the usual conditions such as being born in the country of parents also born there.

Different countries have tried different approaches to the challenge of integrating immigrants. Britain and The Netherlands opted for multi culturalism, offering citizenship to newcomers, encouraging them to assimilate while allowing them to retain strong ethnic identities.

France adopted the most idealistic approach. Anyone can become a citizen, and there are no recognized group identities. In practice, the French integration model promises the most but, in reality, delivers the least thereby compounding the frustration of minority groups.

While discrimination is a problem, a major issue is that in much of Europe it is difficult for low skill, low wage laborers to find work. There is no better way to make a person feel part of a society than to give him or her a job. Jobs create more integration, more immersion in the culture and more social mobility.

Why do people want to immigrate? The reasons are many: political freedom, religious tolerance, economic opportunity and family reunification to cite a few. America has always headed the list of destinations because America has jobs, America encourages religious freedom and America is the "land of opportunity."

Today Miami, Florida has the largest percentage of immigrants of any city on earth. Fifty-nine percent of the city's residents are foreign born, mostly from Caribbean nations as well as from central and South America. Three quarters of the residents of Miami speak a language other than English at home and 67% say they are not fluent in English.

To keep track of immigration, which creates a baseline of diversity, we refer to the Census.

At the time of the first census in 1790 the population "center" of the U.S. was near Annapolis, Maryland. Today it is in Southwest Missouri.

In developing the guidelines for the first census, one of the debates was whether to base representation on population alone or on population plus wealth. The framers fell into futile argument on how to measure wealth and in an awkward compromise agreed that slaves were an easily measured indicator of wealth and were counted as 3/5 of persons in determining the population size of a state. The result was a powerful bonus for southern states in the new Congress and electoral college.

James Madison wanted the census to identify the occupations of the adult male population but that was rejected. The agreed upon basic demographic principle was to distinguish on the basis of race - European, Native Indian and African.

Other expressions of racial/ethnic distinctions existed in the early Republic. Hoping to stimulate population movement, the Northwest Ordinance naturalized long-term alien inhabitants as U.S. territorial citizens. French, Catholic, the irreligious, free blacks and individual native Americans could claim this new kind of citizenship.

Territorial wars and land purchases added numerous other groups. The purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803 added creoles as well as French settlers. The Mexican-American War in 1848 added the first significant Mexican population, about 80,000. The purchase of the Russian colony of Alaska in 1867 added the Inuit, the Kodiak and other Alaskan natives. While these numbers were not necessarily large, they added substantially to the country's racial and ethnic diversity.

The numbers jumped with the flow of immigrants from Europe beginning in the early decades of the 19th century. The flow slowed significantly from 1931-1945 (the Great Depression and World War II) and gained momentum beginning in the late 1940's and continues today.

The 1850 census was the first to distinguish between native and foreign born. New York City was more than half foreign born with similar high proportions in Chicago, Milwaukee, Detroit, St. Louis and New Orleans.

While immigrant flows were predominantly European, Asian workers immigrated to the West Coast drawn to the mines and railroad work that offered wages unheard of in China and Japan.

Immigration into the United States was subject to virtually no legal restrictions before 1882. Essentially anyone who wanted to enter the United States could and no specified arrival areas existed until 1855. Prior to 1855, ships carrying passengers to the U.S. left them at the wharf in New York City. After 1855 Castle Garden at the southern tip of Manhattan became an immigrant receiving center. The receiving center was moved to Ellis Island in 1892 and, until its closing in 1954, nearly 12 million immigrants passed through its gates.

From 1790 to 1996 Congress passed 142 laws related to immigration and naturalization and those laws have been amended nearly 100 times. The first restrictive immigration laws were directed against Asian countries. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 prohibited the immigration of Chinese citizens and it stayed in effect until World War II. The Chinese Exclusion Act also prohibited the immigration of "convicts, lunatics, idiots and those individuals who might need to be supported by government assistance."

In 1907 Japanese immigration was substantially reduced through a "gentlemen's agreement" between Japan and the United States.

In that same year Congress set up the Immigration Commission. This body issued a report concluding that immigrants from southern, central and Eastern Europe did not assimilate easily and, in general, blamed them for various economic ills. Attempts at restricting immigration included proposing a law requiring a literacy test for admission to the United States and such a law was finally passed in 1917. This same law also virtually banned immigration from any country in Asia.

The Quota Act of 1921 laid the framework for a fundamental change in U.S. immigration policy. It limited the number of immigrants from Europe to a total of about 350,000 per year. National quotas were established in direct proportion to each country's presence in the U.S. population in 1910. In addition, the act assigned Asian countries quotas near zero.

Three years later, in 1924, the National Origins Act instituted a requirement that visas be obtained from an American consulate abroad before immigrating, thus reducing the total European quota to about 165,000 from 350,000 and changing how the quotas were determined. The quotas were then established in direct proportion to each country's presence in the U.S. population in 1890 rather than in 1910.

A major change in U.S. immigration policy occurred with the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. This law abolished the quotas based on national origins. Instead, a series of preferences were established to determine who would gain entry. The most important preference was given to relatives of U.S. citizens and permanent resident aliens. Preferences were also given to professionals, scientists, artists and workers in short supply. The 1965 law set a quota of no more than 20,000 individuals being allowed to immigrate to the United States from any single country. This law was designed to treat all countries equally. Asian countries were treated the same as any other country, so the virtual prohibition on immigration from Asia disappeared.

The Civil Rights Act of the 1960s used classification a different way introducing statistical proportionality which compares the proportion of a racial or ethnic minority group that suffers some disadvantage with the proportion of the white population so disadvantaged. We ask what groups are underrepresented in colleges and universities, in better jobs, in winning government contracts, in home ownership to name a few areas.

The Civil Rights movement was also historic because it led to many civil rights moments that opened up opportunities to address the decades of struggle by Native Americans, Asians,

Hispanics, feminists, issues of sexual orientation and, importantly, the disabled who were virtually ignored until the past 25 years.

Returning to the Census, by 1990 every resident of the U.S. was one of four primary racial groups: White, Black, Native Indian/Native Alaskan and Asian plus a residual "other" category. Being of Spanish/Hispanic origin is treated in the census as an ethnic and not a racial distinction on the argument that one can be Hispanic and Asian, Black, Native Indian and/or White. Hispanics, however, are saying otherwise. In the 2000 census 42% of Hispanics used the "other" option on the census form to declare their race as Hispanic.

The 2000 census also changed the racial classification option dramatically with the addition of four words – "mark one or more." This changed classification options from five to 126 categories of race/ethnicity.

Among the issues being debated about the census is whether to eliminate the term "race" altogether suggesting that it is an 18th century term that took physiological markers as indicative of moral worth and intellectual ability. An option being suggested is to ask to what population group does a person belong. What is the person's ethnic group? What is the person's ancestry, nationality, ethnic origin, tribal affiliation? And yes, you can mark one or more.

While this change would underscore the right of self identification, from the perspective of racial justice it is probably premature to discard the official categories which are used to administer antidiscrimination laws.

There are other demographic constants at work in the immigration issue world wide. Mass education and industrialization produce the transition from high fertility/high mortality to low fertility/low mortality. As this occurs and as fertility rates drop below replacement levels, countries must either manage population decline or adopt permissive immigration policies. "Replacement immigration" is a major political issue across Europe and in Australia. Replacement immigration brings immigrants who are culturally, linguistically, ethnically and religiously unlike the populations of the receiving countries compounding the challenges of integration which I mentioned at the beginning.

Immigration to the U.S., both legal and illegal, moves up and down with the health of the economy. The tide, however, never completely turns. Even in the most troubled times more come to the U.S. than leave. In 1970, the foreign born population was 9.6 million; by the 2000 census it had soared to 31 million and is estimated to top 35 million in 2006.

As the number of immigrants to the U.S. increases public opinion changes. A recent poll by the Center for Immigration Studies concluded that 57% of Americans say the country is too welcoming to immigrants and 51% responded that immigration weakens the U.S.

A website for an organization called FAIR – Federation for American Immigration Reform -- notes that "Today a wide open door (to immigration) is an invitation to national disaster."

What to do about the estimated 11 million illegal immigrants – mostly from Mexico – is complex and is being debated in Washington. In public opinion polls a majority favor a reform plan that would increase border security and penalize employers who hire illegal workers but would allow illegal immigrants, on payment of a fine, to get worker permits and the possibility of eventual citizenship.

Drilling down, the workers are needed to fill jobs Americans are unwilling to fill. Current immigration quotas limit the number of visas issued to low skilled, full time workers to 5,000 per year, while surveys indicate that 500,000 low skilled workers are needed yearly to keep the economy humming. It is estimated that 24 percent of agricultural workers and 11 percent of construction workers are here illegally.

As an aside, with tighter immigration laws in the U.S., perhaps the best way for immigrants to come to America is to move to Cuba, become Cuban citizens and cross over to Florida under cover of darkness because under the "wet foot-dry foot policy", Cubans who reach America and can put one foot on dry land are usually allowed to stay.

Where are the "new Americans" coming from? As recently as 1960 Europeans were 75% of the foreign born while today they represent less than 20%. Today 25% are from Asia with fully 50% from Latin America.

By the year 2050 demographers predict that Hispanics will account for 25% of the population, up from 10% now; blacks 14% up from 12%; Asians 8% up from 3% with whites at 53%, down dramatically from 74% today.

Whites are not the majority in Hawaii and New Mexico, soon to be followed by California, Nevada, Texas, Maryland and New Jersey. These are becoming "Majority minority" states, where no one ethnic group is the majority.

Over the years the definition of diversity has been broadened significantly.

In reference to the Civil Rights Movement, diversity related to "redressing the legacy of slavery." Without the Civil Rights Movement, Diversity as an issue would still be spelled with a lower case "d" and relegated to the back of the closet.

Somewhat surprising, diversity in higher education was largely overlooked for two centuries. It took 201 years after the founding of Harvard for the first woman to be admitted to a college and a mere 40 years ago many universities in the south were committed to racial segregation as a part of state policy.

While the early colleges reflected the plurality of national origins and Protestant sects, no thought was given to ethnic and racial diversity. The country was, in fact, very diverse with 20% of the population from dozens of African ethnicities and 500 native Indian tribal groups.

It was only after the Civil Rights Movement that American higher education responded to its special responsibility to integrate social justice into its traditional educational mission. Civil

rights became minority rights and references to black-white were replaced with references to "people of color" which in due course became too narrow a construction and was broadened to include women and the disabled who had been denied access to labor markets and educational opportunity.

Today colleges define diversity in many ways. An all inclusive college diversity statement would encompass: geography, ethnicity, culture, social class, national origin, gender, age, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, mental ability, physical ability and diversity of thought. That may be fine philosophically but operationally the key is to keep a balance, otherwise pedagogy shifts from the curriculum committee to the admission office.

Going forward the challenge will be to articulate how higher education can integrate the principle of merit selection with justice for groups long denied, while arguing that everybody's education is impaired if the student body and faculty/staff are less diverse.

Population growth in the U.S. could reach 400 million by mid century and eighty percent of the growth could be new immigrants. Today's immigrants are either very well educated or hardly educated. Some 12% have graduate degrees, compared to 8% of native born Americans, and more than one-third of immigrants do not have high school diplomas, double the rate for those born in the U.S.

Higher education is caught in the middle of these trends, benefiting as the children of the well educated reach college age and challenged to educate children less well prepared because of circumstances beyond their control.

Every culture, religion, ethnicity and linguistic group has arrived in America with dozens and dozens of languages being spoken in our public schools.

Certainly you would expect diversity of language in Columbus Public Schools, but you might be surprised that 60 languages are spoken in the Westerville City Schools.

A century ago there was general agreement that a yearning for a common language and culture was what constituted "mainstream" America. It is less clear what constitutes the mainstream in a multicultural society where there is more emphasis on preserving one's ethnic identity, of finding ways to highlight and defend one's cultural roots.

It is clear that not all of America is experiencing the impact of immigration equally. Although some small Midwestern cities have seen sharp changes in their racial and ethnic mix in the past two decades, most immigrants continue to cluster in a handful of large metropolitan areas. Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, Chicago, Miami, Washington, D.C., and Houston are home to more than a quarter of the total U.S. population and more than 60% of all foreign-born residents.

But as the new immigrants arrive, there is a reverse immigration as many American-born citizens are leaving these cities in search of new homes in more homogeneous locales. New York and

Los Angeles each lost more than one million native-born residents in the 1990's even as their populations increased by roughly the same numbers with immigrants.

Most of those leaving the big cities are white and they tend to be working class. They are skipping the suburbs of big cities and moving to more homogeneous, mostly white towns and cities and rural areas.

One writer sees in this pattern "the emergence of separate Americas, one white, middle-aged and less urban; the other intensely urban, young, multicultural and multiethnic. One America will care deeply about English as the official language and about preserving Social Security. The other will care about things like retaining affirmative action and bilingual education."

What was once a "melting pot society" has evolved into a "multicultural" society which in part, some would argue, is becoming a "centrifuge society" with groups isolated on the fringe producing a form of "demographic balkanization."

Even within gateway cities that give the outward appearance of being multicultural, there are sharp lines of ethnic segregation. This is not a new phenomenon, there have always been immigrant neighborhoods, but the persistence of ethnic enclaves and identification does not appear to be going away. Hispanics in Los Angeles, the dominant group in the nation's second largest city, are more segregated residentially today than they were 10 or 20 years ago.

Cities of high immigration have "dual economies." For the affluent, which includes a disproportionate number of whites, the large labor pool provides them with a ready supply of gardeners, maids and nannies. For businesses in need of cheap manpower the same is true.

The challenge is that there are fewer "transitional" jobs. The blue-collar work that helped Italian and Irish immigrants move up the economic ladder, that helped newcomers or their children on their way to the jobs requiring advanced technical or professional skills that now dominate the upper tier of the economy, are not there.

Traditionally, the phenomenon of assimilation was one of economic progression. The hard-working new arrivals struggled along with a new language and at low-paying jobs in order for their sons and daughters to climb the economic ladder, each generation advancing a rung. There are many cases where this is still true but in some groups, particularly in high immigration cities, they get "stuck."

They find themselves in an economic "mobility trap." While the new immigrants are willing to work in low-end jobs, their sons and daughters, exposed to the relentless consumerism of popular culture, have greater expectations but are disadvantaged because of their impoverished settings, particularly in the overwhelmed inner-city schools most immigrant children attend.

So, given the trends of reverse immigration and ethnic segregation—a question to ponder---could what happened in France last fall happen in selected U.S. cities in the future?

Certainly there are challenges related to rapid changes in the demographics of a community and a nation. Going forward, however, I remain convinced that in the debates to come across the country American democracy will remain committed to being both multicultural and meritocratic, inclusive of all and rewarding all on their individual merits and talents.

Which brings me back to the beginning. How do you spell diversity? U.S.A.

NOTES: This essay was prepared exclusively for presentation at a meeting of the Kit Kat Club of Columbus in January 2006 and is not for distribution or publication. The research sources, which are not cited in the essay, included articles and other information from: The New York Times, Financial Times, The Economist, U.S. Census Bureau, the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, American Council on Education, Association of Colleges and Universities, CBS News, The Wall Street Journal, The Columbus Dispatch, numerous websites, conversations with directors of state and federal agencies, faculty and staff at selected high schools and colleges and universities among other sources.