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Fragmented Future

Posted By Steve Sailer On January 15, 2007 @ 12:00 am In | [3 Comments](#)

In the presence of [ethnic] diversity, we hunker down. We act like turtles. The effect of diversity is worse than had been imagined. And it's not just that we don't trust people who are not like us. In diverse communities, we don't trust people who do look like us.

—Harvard professor Robert D. Putnam

It was one of the more irony-laden incidents in the history of celebrity social scientists. While in Sweden to receive a \$50,000 academic prize as political science professor of the year, Harvard's Robert D. Putnam, a former Carter administration official who made his reputation writing about the decline of social trust in America in his bestseller *Bowling Alone*, confessed to Financial Times columnist John Lloyd that his latest research discovery—that ethnic diversity decreases trust and co-operation in communities—was so explosive that for the last half decade he hadn't dared announce it "until he could develop proposals to compensate for the negative effects of diversity, saying it 'would have been irresponsible to publish without that.'"

In a column headlined "Harvard study paints bleak picture of ethnic diversity," Lloyd summarized the results of the largest study ever of "civic engagement," a survey of 26,200 people in 40 American communities:

When the data were adjusted for class, income and other factors, they showed that the more people of different races lived in the same community, the greater the loss of trust. 'They don't trust the local mayor, they don't trust the local paper, they don't trust other people and they don't trust institutions,' said Prof Putnam. 'The only thing there's more of is protest marches and TV watching.'

Lloyd noted, "Prof Putnam found trust was lowest in Los Angeles, 'the most diverse human habitation in human history.'"

As if to prove his own point that diversity creates minefields of mistrust, Putnam later protested to the Harvard Crimson that the Financial Times essay left him feeling betrayed, calling it "by two degrees of magnitude, the worst experience I have ever had with the media." To Putnam's horror, hundreds of "racists and anti-immigrant activists" sent him e-mails congratulating him for finally coming clean about his findings.

Lloyd stoutly stood by his reporting, and Putnam couldn't cite any mistakes of fact, just a failure to accentuate the positive. It was "almost criminal," Putnam grumbled, that Lloyd had not sufficiently emphasized the spin that he had spent five years concocting. Yet considering the quality of Putnam's talking points that Lloyd did pass on, perhaps the journalist was being merciful in not giving the professor more rope with which to hang himself. For example, Putnam's line—"What we shouldn't do is to say that they [immigrants] should be more like us. We should construct a new us"—sounds like a weak parody of Bertolt Brecht's parody of Communist propaganda after the failed 1953 uprising against the East German puppet regime: "Would it not be easier for the government to dissolve the people and elect another?"

Before Putnam hid his study away, his research had appeared on March 1, 2001 in a Los Angeles Times article entitled "Love Thy Neighbor? Not in L.A." Reporter Peter Y. Hong recounted, "Those who live in more homogeneous places, such as New Hampshire, Montana or Lewiston, Maine, do more with friends and are more involved in community affairs or politics than residents of more cosmopolitan areas, the study said."

Putnam's discovery is hardly shocking to anyone who has tried to organize a civic betterment project in a multi-ethnic neighborhood. My wife and I lived for 12 years in Chicago's Uptown district, which claims to be the most diverse two square miles in America, with about 100 different languages being spoken. She helped launch a neighborhood drive to repair the dilapidated playlot across the street. To get Mayor Daley's administration to chip in, we needed to raise matching funds and sign up volunteer laborers.

This kind of Robert D. Putnam-endorsed good citizenship proved difficult in Uptown, however, precisely because of its remarkable diversity. The most obvious stumbling block was that it's hard to talk neighbors into donating money or time if they don't speak the same language as you. Then there's the fundamental difficulty of making multiculturalism work—namely, multiple cultures. Getting Koreans, Russians, Mexicans, Nigerians, and Assyrians (Christian Iraqis) to agree on how to landscape a park is harder than fostering consensus among people who all grew up with the same mental picture of what a park should look like. For example, Russian women like to sunbathe. But most of the immigrant ladies from more southerly countries stick to the shade, since their cultures discriminate in favor of fairer-skinned women. So do you plant a lot of shade trees or not?

The high crime rate didn't help either. The affluent South Vietnamese merchants from the nearby Little Saigon district showed scant enthusiasm for sending their small children to

play in a park that would also be used by large black kids from the local public-housing project.

Exotic inter-immigrant hatreds also got in the way. The Eritreans and Ethiopians are both slender, elegant-looking brown people with thin Arab noses, who appear identical to undiscerning American eyes. But their compatriots in the Horn of Africa were fighting a vicious war.

Finally, most of the immigrants, with the possible exception of the Eritreans, came from countries where only a chump would trust neighbors he wasn't related to, much less count on the government for an even break. If the South Vietnamese, for example, had been less clannish and more ready to sacrifice for the national good in 1964-75, they wouldn't be so proficient at running family-owned restaurants on Argyle Street today. But they might still have their own country.

In the end, boring old middle-class, English-speaking, native-born Americans (mostly white, but with some black-white couples) did the bulk of the work. When the ordeal of organizing was over, everybody seemed to give up on trying to bring Uptown together for civic improvement for the rest of the decade.

The importance of co-operativeness has fallen in and out of intellectual fashion over the centuries. An early advocate of the role of cohesion in history's cycles was the 14th-century Arab statesman and scholar Ibn Khaldun, who documented that North African dynasties typically began as desert tribes poor in everything but what he termed *asabiya* or social solidarity. Their willingness to sacrifice for each other made them formidable in battle. But once they conquered a civilized state along the coast, the inevitable growth in inequality began to sap their *asabiya*, until after several generations their growing fractiousness allowed another cohesive clan to emerge from the desert and overthrow them.

Recently, Princeton biologist Peter Turchin has extended Ibn Khaldun's analysis in a disquieting direction, pointing out that nothing generates *asabiya* like having a common enemy. Turchin notes that powerful states arise mostly on ethnic frontiers, where conflicts with very different peoples persuade co-ethnics to overcome their minor differences and all hang together, or assuredly they would all hang separately. Thus the German heartland remained divided up among numerous squabbling principalities until 1870. Meanwhile, powerful German kingdoms emerged on Prussia's border with the Balts and Slavs and Austria's border with the Slavs and Magyars.

Similarly, the 13 American colonies came together by fighting first the French and Indians, then the British. In this century, two world wars helped forge from the heavy immigration of 1890 to 1924 what Putnam calls the “long civic generation” that reached its peak in the 1940s and ‘50s.

Half a millennium after Ibn Khaldun, Alexis de Tocqueville famously attributed much of America’s success to its “forever forming associations. There are not only commercial and industrial associations in which all take part, but others of a thousand different types—religious, moral, serious, futile, very general and very limited, immensely large and very minute. Nothing, in my view, deserves more attention than the intellectual and moral associations in America.”

The transformation of economics into a technical rather than empirical field discouraged hard thinking about co-operation. It was much simpler to create mathematical models based on the assumption that rational individual self-interest drove human behavior, even though that perspective could hardly explain such vast events as the First World War, that abattoir of asabiya.

In the 1990s, the importance of civil society was widely talked up as crucial in transitioning post-Soviet states away from totalitarianism, but the free-market economists’ prescription of “shock therapy” prevailed disastrously in Russia, as gangsters looted the nations’ assets.

An important contribution to the scholarly revival came in Francis Fukuyama’s 1995 book *Trust: The Social Virtues & the Creation of Prosperity*. Fukuyama raised the hot-potato issue that Americans, Northwestern Europeans, and Japanese tend to work together well to create huge corporations, while the companies of other advanced countries, such as Italy and Taiwan, can seldom grow beyond family firms. (As Luigi Barzini remarked in *The Italians*, only a fool would be a minority shareholder in Sicily, so nobody is one.) Fukuyama prudently ignored, though, the large swaths of the world that are low both in trust and technology, such as Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East.

As an economics major and libertarian fellow-traveler in the late 1970s, I assumed that individualism made America great. But a couple of trips south of the border raised questions. Venturing onto a Buenos Aires freeway in 1978, I discovered a carnival of rugged individualists. Back home in Los Angeles, everybody drove between the lane-markers painted on the pavement, but only about one in three Argentineans followed that custom. Another third straddled the stripes, apparently convinced that the idiots

driving between the lines were unleashing vehicular chaos. And the final third ignored the maricón lanes altogether and drove wherever they wanted.

The next year, I was sitting on an Acapulco beach with some college friends, trying to shoo away peddlers. When we tried to brush off one especially persistent drug dealer by claiming we had no cash, he whipped out his credit-card machine, which was impressively enterprising for the 1970s. That set me thinking about why we Americans were luxuriating on the Mexicans' beach instead of vice-versa. Clearly, the individual entrepreneurs pestering us were at least as hardworking and ambitious as we were. Mexico's economic shortcoming had to be its corrupt and feckless large organizations. Mexicans didn't seem to team up well beyond family-scale.

In America, you don't need to belong to a family-based mafia for protection because the state will enforce your contracts with some degree of equality before the law. In Mexico, though, as former New York Times correspondent Alan Riding wrote in his 1984 bestseller *Distant Neighbors: A Portrait of the Mexicans*, "Public life could be defined as the abuse of power to achieve wealth and the abuse of wealth to achieve power." Anyone outside the extended family is assumed to have predatory intentions, which explains the famous warmth and solidarity of Mexican families. "Mexicans need few friends," Riding observed, "because they have many relatives."

Mexico is a notoriously low-trust culture and a notoriously unequal one. The great traveler Alexander von Humboldt observed two centuries ago, in words that are arguably still true, "Mexico is the country of inequality. Perhaps nowhere in the world is there a more horrendous distribution of wealth, civilization, cultivation of land, and population." Jorge G. Castañeda, Vicente Fox's first foreign minister, noted the ethnic substratum of Mexico's disparities in 1995:

The business or intellectual elites of the nation tend to be white (there are still exceptions, but they are becoming more scarce with the years). By the 1980s, Mexico was once again a country of three nations: the criollo minority of elites and the upper-middle class, living in style and affluence; the huge, poor, mestizo majority; and the utterly destitute minority of what in colonial times was called the Republic of Indians...

Castañeda pointed out, "These divisions partly explain why Mexico is as violent and unruly, as surprising and unfathomable as it has always prided itself on being. The pervasiveness of the violence was obfuscated for years by the fact that much of it was generally directed by the state and the elites against society and the masses, not the other way around. The current rash of violence by society against the state and elites is simply a retargeting."

These deep-rooted Mexican attitudes largely account for why, in Putnam's "Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey," Los Angeles ended up looking a lot like it did in the Oscar-winning movie "Crash." I once asked a Hollywood agent why there are so many brother acts among filmmakers these days, such as the Coens, Wachowskis, Farrellys, and Wayans. "Who else can you trust?" he shrugged.

But what primarily drove down L.A.'s rating in Putnam's 130-question survey were the high levels of distrust displayed by Hispanics. While no more than 12 percent of L.A.'s whites said they trusted other races "only a little or not at all," 37 percent of L.A.'s Latinos distrusted whites. And whites were the most reliable in Hispanic eyes. Forty percent of Latinos doubted Asians, 43 percent distrusted other Hispanics, and 54 percent were anxious about blacks.

Some of this white-Hispanic difference stems merely from Latinos' failure to tell politically correct lies to the researchers about how much they trust other races. Yet the L.A. survey results also reflect a very real and deleterious lack of co-operativeness and social capital among Latinos. As columnist Gregory Rodriguez stated in the L.A. Times: "In Los Angeles, home to more Mexicans than any other city in the U.S., there is not one ethnic Mexican hospital, college, cemetery, or broad-based charity."

Since they seldom self-organize beyond the extended family, Los Angeles's millions of Mexican-Americans make strangely little contribution to local civic and artistic life. L.A. is awash in underemployed creative talent who occupy their abundant spare time putting on plays, constructing spectacular haunted houses each Halloween, and otherwise trying to attract Jerry Bruckheimer's attention. Yet there is little overlap between the enormous entertainment industry and the huge Mexican-American community.

In late October, I pored over the 64-page Sunday Calendar section of the L.A. Times, which listed a thousand or more upcoming cultural events. I found just seven that were clearly organized by Latinos. While it's a journalistic cliché to describe Mexican-American neighborhoods as "vibrant," they aren't.

Some of this lack of social capital is class-related—Miami indeed has a vibrant Hispanic culture, but it's anomalous because it attracts Latin America's affluent and educated. In contrast, Los Angeles is a representative harbinger of America's future because it imports peasants and laborers.

It's often assumed that low-trust societies can be fixed just by everyone deciding to trust each other more. But that can only work if people become not just more trusting but more

trustworthy.

Although most Asian-Americans originate in low-trust cultures centered around the family, they typically adapt well to middle-class American life because their high degree of honesty makes them dependable neighbors and co-workers. Hispanics in America, in contrast, have a relatively high crime rate—while their imprisonment rate is less than half that of blacks, it is 2.9 times worse than that of whites and 13 times that of Asians. Alarmingly, the Latino crime rate goes up after the immigrant generation, suggesting a troubling future. While many American-born Hispanics assimilate into the middle class, others descend into the gang-ridden underclass. Further, the illegitimacy rate has reached 48 percent among Hispanics (versus 25 percent among whites), and it's higher among Mexican-Americans born here than among newcomers from Mexico.

The problems caused by diversity can be partly ameliorated, but the handful of techniques that actually work generally appall liberal intellectuals, so we hear about them only when they come under attack.

Putnam points out one success story but draws an unsophisticated lesson: "I think we can do a lot to push change along more rapidly. There was a lot of racial tension around the time of the Vietnam War. Now, polls show that US military personnel have many more friendships across ethnic lines than civilians. If officers were told they wouldn't make colonel if they were seen to discriminate, they changed."

Imposing martial law on the rest of America might prove impractical, however. And negative sanctions can hardly account fully for the growth of positive relationships within the military.

One important aspect that Putnam ignores is the military's relentless use of IQ tests. From 1992-2004, the military accepted almost no applicants for enlistment who scored below the 30th percentile on the Armed Forces Qualification Test. This eliminated within the ranks the majority of the IQ gap that causes so much discord in civilian America. Contra John Kerry, enlistees of all races averaged above the national mean in IQ: white recruits scored 107, Hispanics 103, and blacks 102.

Another untold story is the beneficial effect on race relations of the growth of Christian fundamentalism. Among soldiers and college football players, for instance, co-operation between the races is up due to an increased emphasis on a common transracial identity as Christians. According to military correspondent Robert D. Kaplan of The Atlantic, "The rise of Christian evangelicalism had helped stop the indiscipline of the Vietnam-era Army." And

that has helped build bridges among the races. Military sociologists Charles C. Moskos and John Sibley Butler wrote in *All That We Can Be: Black Leadership and Racial Integration the Army Way*, "Perhaps the most vivid example of the 'blackening' of enlisted culture is seen in religion. Black Pentecostal congregations have also begun to influence the style of worship in mainstream Protestant services in post chapels. Sunday worship in the Army finds both the congregation and the spirit of the service racially integrated."

Similarly, it's now common to see college football coaches leading their teams in prayer. Fisher DeBerry, the outstanding coach of the Air Force Academy, who has led players with no hope of making the NFL to a record of 169-108-1, hung a banner in the locker room bearing the Fellowship of Christian Athletes' Competitor's Creed, which begins, "I am a Christian first and last." When the administration found out, he was asked to take it down.

Because policymakers almost certainly won't do what it would take to alleviate the harms caused by diversity—indeed, they won't even talk honestly about what would have to be done—it's crazy to exacerbate the problem through more mass immigration. As the issue of co-operation becomes ever more pressing, the quality of intellectual discourse on the topic declines—as Putnam's self-censorship revealed—precisely because of a lack of trust due to the mounting political power of "the diverse" to punish frank discussion.

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3 Comments To "Fragmented Future"

#1 Comment By Dana Ely On August 12, 2012 @ 4:25 am

No comments? There should be at least one.I wrote this letter to the local paper in Maryland in 2010. It does not say much new but I really like the line about the turtles since it is the Maryland Terrapins.

Does diversity turn us into turtles in the turtle state? Does diversity cause us to withdraw from the public forum, to pull into ourselves like a turtle? A professor from Harvard would say "Yes."

In the recent discussion of diversity, lack of minority representation and lack of participation in community affairs, no one has mentioned the significant study of diversity by Harvard professor Robert Putnam. He interviewed 30,000 people across America and found, much to his chagrin, "that the greater the diversity in a community, the fewer people vote and the less they volunteer, the less they give to charity and work on community projects ("Downside of diversity," Boston Globe, 2007, online)."

The Sept. 9 letter by Eva H. Gonzales mentioned Russ Swatek's comment in an Aug. 27 story on lack of minority representation. He said, "It wasn't that they [minorities] ran and didn't get elected, it was that they didn't run." This seems to confirm Putnam's findings that diversity has a negative effect on civic participation in a community.

As far as the turtle analogy is concerned, later in the Boston Globe article and in other articles which discuss this study they quote Putnam, "People living in ethnically diverse settings appear to 'hunker down,' that is, to pull in like a turtle."

Perhaps the Maryland Terrapin is more than just a mascot. Perhaps it is our future?

#2 Comment By Daryl Davis On December 7, 2012 @ 2:38 pm

Among several fallacies within this otherwise wonderfully written article the most insidious is the assumption that the goal of a society ought to be the fostering of a stronger social cohesion. Individual freedoms should supersede social cooperation, except in the extreme case, where unchecked freedom imperils society itself. (Yelling "fire!" in a crowded theater, for example.) Or shall we all band together, for the sake of this cohesion, sacrificing our own interests to hold hands and sing "Koombayah" every Friday evening? Ah, imagine the liberal utopia!

We all have our own lives and our own individual lessons to learn that have nothing to do with community organization. So long as there abides here the widespread support for an impartial rule of law — and also the power of the state to enforce the same, no matter our cultural and community differences — it isn't necessary to assimilate all people's into one homogeneous culture, Christian or otherwise.

Only, let criminals within all cultures be prosecuted with an equal fairness and firmness, leaving the rest of us to enjoy our productive, private lives, where we express and eventually overcome our genetic and cultural differences — in our own time, and in our own ways.

If some cultures are less inclined toward impartiality, objectivity and individuality, and so less socially trusting and more dysfunctional, so be it. So long as these cultural shortcomings and the individual consequences thereof are confined to the communities in question and aren't misguidedly ascribed to the evil of the prevailing, well-functioning white culture — as liberals are so prone to do — it should matter only to the individuals within those cultures whether they choose to continue to live in squalor and crime, thanks to their own prejudices and ignorance, or step out of that lifestyle and into a modern America.

Where in this world is a country less diverse than the U.S. and yet more trusting, more free, and more prosperous? Surely not Russia or Mexico, nor Japan or South Vietnam? Homogeneous societies are not inherently more trusting. Culture counts. It is determined by, and it itself determines, many genetic differences — and destinies.

But those who come to America — or at least those who did so until the last century, before the modern welfare state — distinguished themselves by the search for individual freedom and a philosophy of classical liberalism. They sacrificed old cultural traditions for

the sake of freedom and opportunity.

An America on the right path again would not look like a white Christian republic and collective, but like a diverse, constitutionally-limited direct democracy — where diverse communities could make and live by their own unique laws and ordinances — all without imposing the consequences thereof upon any other.

Then, ironically, this same diversity would accelerate individual learning within each community, forcing reforms to avoid disasters — and fostering, ultimately, social cohesion and growing trust nationwide — all without imposing an obedience to uniformity at the expense of thought and individual freedom.

[1]

#3 Comment By [margarin](#) On July 7, 2013 @ 5:13 pm

Anyone living in the culturally diverse suburbs of Los Angeles knows exactly why this study is correct- as California is flooded with more and more “diversity”- illegal immigrants and legal ones from a vast array of cultures, people become more and more isolated and distrustful of one another. I saw my town in the past 15 years go from a typical American town to one of voluntary segregation! The Asians hung out with their own kind, and often obliterated the competition academically, for example. This is happening across California. If racial “minorities” are being treated so badly and not given the chance to succeed, why are Asians beating out Hispanics and blacks in academia? It has to do with values, period. Affirmative action is a joke- Asians are the majority at the UC schools, and whites have become a minority in California for the first time.

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