

May 16, 2007

House Judiciary Committee, Immigration Subcommittee

Rayburn 2141 9:30 AM

Hearing on “Comprehensive Immigration Reform: Becoming Americans-US Immigrant Integration”

Testimony “It is Time for Americanization”

John Fonte, Ph.D.

Senior Fellow

Director of the Center for American Common Culture

Hudson Institute

[johnf@hudson.org](mailto:johnf@hudson.org)

Thank you Chairman Lofgren and Ranking Member King.

### **(I) What do we mean by Integration?**

Let us start by using the more serious and vigorous term “assimilation.” There are different types of assimilation: linguistic, economic, cultural, civic, and patriotic.

Linguistic assimilation means the immigrant learns English. Economic assimilation means the immigrant does well materially and, perhaps, joins the middle class. Cultural assimilation means that the immigrant acculturates to the nation’s popular cultural norms (for both good and ill). Civic assimilation or civic integration means that the immigrant is integrated into our political system, votes, pays taxes, obeys the law, and participates in public life in some fashion.

These forms of assimilation are necessary, but not sufficient. We were reminded again last week, in the Fort Dix conspiracy that there are naturalized citizens, legal permanent residents, and illegal immigrants living in our country who speak English, are gainfully employed (even entrepreneurs) who would like to kill as many Americans as possible.

The type of assimilation that ultimately matters most of all is patriotic assimilation: political loyalty and emotional attachment to the United States.

What do we mean by patriotic assimilation? First of all, patriotic assimilation does not mean giving up all ethnic traditions, customs, cuisine, and birth languages. It has nothing to do with the food one eats, the religion one practices, the affection that one feels for the land of one’s birth, and the second languages that one speaks. Multiethnicity and ethnic subcultures have enriched America and have always been part of our past since colonial days.

Historically, the immigration saga has involved some “give and take” between immigrants and the native-born. That is to say, immigrants have helped shape America even as this nation has Americanized them. On the other hand, this “two way street” is

not a fifty-fifty arrangement. Thus, on the issue of “who accommodates to whom;” obviously, most of the accommodating should come from the newcomers, not from the hosts.

So what is patriotic assimilation? (or as well shall soon discuss “Americanization”). Well, one could say that patriotic assimilation occurs when a newcomer essentially adopts American civic values, the American heritage, and the story of America (what academics call the “narrative”) as his or her own. It occurs, for example, when newcomers and their children begin to think of American history as “our” history not “their” history. To give a hypothetical example, imagine an eight-grade Korean-American female student studying the Constitutional Convention of 1787.

Does she think of those events in terms of “they” or “we”? Does she envision the creation of the Constitution in Philadelphia as something that “they” (white males of European descent) were involved in 200 years before her ancestors came to America, or does she imagine the Constitutional Convention as something that “we” Americans did as part of “our” history? Does she think in terms of “we” or “they”? “We” implies patriotic assimilation. If she thinks in terms of “we” she has done what millions of immigrants and immigrant children have done in the past. She has adopted America’s story as her story, and she has adopted America’s Founders—Madison, Hamilton, Franklin, Washington—as her ancestors. (This does not mean that she, like other Americans, will not continue to argue about our history and our heritage, nor ignore the times that America has acted ignobly).

## **(II) Our Historic Success with Americanization**

Historically America has done assimilation well. As Washington Post columnist Charles Krauthammer put it, “America’s genius has always been assimilation, taking immigrants and turning them into Americans.”

This was done in the days of Ellis Island because America’s leaders including Democrat Woodrow Wilson and Republican Theodore Roosevelt believed that immigrants should be “Americanized.”

They were self-confident leaders. They were not embarrassed by the need to assimilate immigrants into our way of life and by explicitly telling newcomers that “this is what we expect you to do to become Americanized.” Indeed, they didn’t use weasel words like “integration,” that suggests a lack of self-confidence. They believed in “Americanization.”

For example, on July 4, 1915 President Woodrow Wilson declared National Americanization Day. The President and his cabinet addressed naturalization ceremonies around the nation on the subject of Americanization. The most powerful speech was delivered by future Supreme Court Justice, Louis Brandeis at Faneuil Hall in Boston in which Brandeis declared that Americanization meant that the newcomer will “possess the national consciousness of an American.”

Let us listen to Louis Brandeis talk about Americanization to new immigrants in 1915:

What is Americanization? It manifests itself, in a superficial way, when the immigrant adopts the clothes, the manners and the customs generally prevailing here. Far more important is the manifestation presented when he substitutes for his mother tongue the English language as the common medium of speech. But the adoption of our language, manners and customs is only a small part of the process. To become Americanized the change wrought must be fundamental. However great his outward conformity, the immigrant is not Americanized unless his interests and affections have become deeply rooted here. And we properly demand of the immigrant even more than this - he must be brought into complete harmony with our ideals and aspirations and cooperate with us for their attainment. Only when this has been done will he possess the national consciousness of an American."

Wouldn't it be wonderful to hear an American national leader talk like Louis Brandeis today? President Wilson also gave a strong Americanization speech. While Brandeis spoke in Boston, Wilson made the following remarks in Philadelphia.

I certainly would not be one to even suggest that a man cease to love the home of his birth...these things are very sacred and ought not to be put out of our hearts—but it is one thing to love the place where you were born and it is another thing to dedicate yourself to the place to which you go. You cannot dedicate yourself to America unless you become in every respect and with every purpose of your will thorough Americans. You cannot become thorough Americans if you think of yourselves in groups. A man who thinks of himself as belonging to a particular national group in America has not yet become an American, and the man who goes among you to trade upon your nationality is no worthy son to live under the Stars and Stripes.

In a sense the views of Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson and Louis Brandeis on the need to foster assimilation go back to the Founders of our nation. Indeed, President George Washington explicitly stated the need to assimilate immigrants in a letter to Vice-President John Adams.

"...the policy or advantage of [immigration] taking place in a body (I mean the settling of them in a body) may be much questioned; for, by so doing, they retain the language, habits, and principles (good or bad) which they bring with them. Whereas by an intermixture with our people, they, or

their descendants, get assimilated to our customs, measures, laws: in a word soon become one people."

### **The Present Day: Americanization and Anti-Americanization**

During the 1990s, one of the great members of the House of Representatives, the late Congresswoman Barbara Jordan called for a revival of the concept of Americanization and for a New Americanization movement. Jordan wrote an article in the New York Times on September 11, 1995 entitled the "The Americanization Ideal," in which she explicitly called for the Americanization of immigrants. We should heed her words today.

Unfortunately, for decades we have implemented what could truly be called anti-Americanization, anti-assimilation, and anti-integration policies—Multilingual ballots, bi-lingual education, executive order 13166 that insists on official multilingualism, immigrant dual allegiance including voting and running for office in foreign countries, and the promotion of multiculturalism over American unity in our public schools.

The anti-assimilation policies listed above did not place in a vacuum. They are all connected and related to the larger picture. All of these policies and attitudes have hurt assimilation.

### **(III) Let us examine how assimilation has become more problematic in recent years.**

Traditionally the greatest indicator of assimilation is intermarriage among ethnic groups and between immigrants and native-born. Unfortunately a new major study published in the American Sociological Review by Ohio State Professor Zhenchao Qian found a big decline in inter-ethnic marriage. Professor Qian declared, "These declines ... are significant a departure from past trends" and "reflect the growth in the immigrant population" with Latinos marrying Latinos and Asians marrying Asians.

The survey found that even as recently as the 1970s and 1980s there was an increase in intermarriage between immigrants and native born citizens. In the 1990s however, this situation was reversed with intermarriage between immigrants and native-born declining. Mass low-skilled immigration was an implicit factor cited in the Ohio State University Research bulletin. The researchers pointed out the immigrants with higher education levels were more likely to marry outside their immediate ethnic group and the reverse was true for immigrants with less education. In recent years our immigration policy favors the less education and lower skilled.

My fellow witness, Professor Rumbaut has done some excellent work examining assimilation among the children of immigrants. With Professor Alejandro Portes he produced the "The Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study," of over 5,000 students from 49 schools in the Miami, Florida and San Diego, California areas. Portes carried out the research in Miami. Their joint findings were published by the University of California Press in 2001 as *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation*. The parents of the students came from 77 different countries, although in the Miami area they were

primarily from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Columbia. In San Diego there were large numbers from Mexico, the Philippines, and Viet Nam.

Portes and Rumbaut pointed out that it is significant that although the youths' knowledge of English increased during their three or four years of school between the longitudinal interviews, their American identity decreased:

“Moreover, the direction of the shift is noteworthy. If the rapid shift to English... was to have been accompanied by a similar acculturative shift in ethnic identity, then we should have seen an increase over time in the proportion of youths identifying themselves as American, with or without a hyphen, and a decrease in the proportion retaining an attachment to a foreign national identity. But... results of the 1995 survey point in exactly the opposite direction.”

In other words, linguistic assimilation has increased, but patriotic assimilation has decreased. After four years of American high school the children of immigrants are less likely to consider themselves Americans. Moreover, the heightened salience (or importance) of the foreign identity was very strong. Portes and Rumbaut declare that:

Once again, foreign national identities command the strongest level of allegiance and attachment: over 71% of the youths so identifying considered that identity to be very important to them, followed by 57.2% hyphenates, 52.8% of the pan-ethnics, and only 42% of those identifying as plain American. The later [plain American] emerges as the ‘thinnest’ identity. Significantly, in the 1995 survey, almost all immigrants groups posted losses in plain American identities.... Even private-school Cubans, over a third of whom had identified as American in 1992, abandoned that identity almost entirely by 1995-1996.

In 2002 the Pew Hispanic Survey revealed that around seven months after 9/11 only 34% of American citizens of Hispanic origin consider their primary identification American. On the other hand, 42% identified first with their parent's country of origin (Mexico, El Salvador, etc) and 24% put ethnic (Latino, Hispanic) identity first.

An empirical survey of Muslims in Los Angeles was conducted in the 1990s by religious scholar Kambiz Ghanea Bassiri (a professor at Reed College). The study found that only one of ten Muslim immigrants surveyed felt more allegiance to the United States than to a foreign Muslim nation. Specifically, 45% of the Muslims surveyed had more loyalty to an Islamic nation-state than the United States; 32% said their loyalties “were about the same” between the US and a Muslim nation-state; 13% were “not sure” which loyalty was stronger; and 10% were more loyal to the United States than any Muslim nation.

All of this data suggests problems with assimilation.

In a Chicago *Tribune* article on April 7, the head of the Office of New Americans in Illinois, the person in charge of assimilation in the state, made the following statement.

"The nation-state concept is changing. You don't have to say, 'I am Mexican,' or, 'I am American.' You can be a good Mexican citizen and a good American citizen and not have that be a conflict of interest. Sovereignty is flexible."

He is a dual citizen who is actively involved in Mexican politics. He votes in both the US and Mexico and is active in political campaigns in both nations. His political allegiance is clearly divided. He will not choose one nation over the other.

One hundred years ago the President of the United States in 1907, Theodore Roosevelt, expressed a different point of view:

"...If the immigrant who comes here in good faith becomes an American and assimilates himself to us, he shall be treated on an exact equality with everyone else, for it is an outrage to discriminate against any such man because of creed, or birthplace, or origin. But this is predicated upon the man's becoming in very fact an American, and nothing but an American...There can be no divided allegiance here. we have room for but one sole loyalty and that is a loyalty to the American people."

Those are two very different views of the meaning of the oath of allegiance in which the new citizens promises to "absolutely and entirely" renounce all allegiance to any foreign state.

#### **(IV) What is to be done?**

What do we do then, in a practical sense? For one thing, it makes no sense to enact so-called comprehensive immigration reform, which means both a slow motion amnesty and a massive increase in low skilled immigration further exacerbating our assimilation problems. What we do need is comprehensive assimilation reform for those immigrants who are here legally.

First, we have to dismantle the anti-assimilation regime of foreign language ballots, dual allegiance voting by American citizens in foreign countries, bi-lingual education, and executive order 13166.

Second, we should follow Barbara Jordan's lead and explicitly call for the Americanization of immigrants, not integration.

Third, we should enforce the oath of allegiance. The Oath should mean what it says:

I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or

sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or a citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by law; that I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by law; that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by law; and that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God.

Clearly, if we are a serious people, naturalized citizens should not be voting and running for office in their birth nations.

Fourth, Senator Lamar Alexander of Tennessee has introduced bi-partisan legislation “to promote the patriotic integration of prospective citizens into the American way of life by providing civics, history and English as a second language courses.” There is a “specific emphasis” on “attachment to the principles of the Constitution” and to the “heroes of American history (including military heroes).” This initiative will be administered by the Office of Citizenship in the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Also, this legislation incorporates “a knowledge and understanding of the Oath of Allegiance into the history and government test given to applicants for citizenship.” This amendment passed the Senate last year by 91-1. Its enactment should be implemented with or without any “comprehensive” measure.

Fifth the mandate of the Office of Citizenship should be to assist our new fellow citizens in understanding the serious moral commitment that they are making in taking the Oath, and “bearing true faith and allegiance” to American liberal democracy.

Because we are a multiethnic, multiracial, multireligious country, our nationhood is not based on ethnicity, race, or religion, but, instead, on a shared loyalty to our constitutional republic and its liberal democratic principles. If immigration to America is going to continue to be the great success story that it has been in the past, it is essential that newcomers have an understanding of and attachment to our democratic republic, our heritage, and our civic principles.

To this end, the Office of Citizenship should strengthen the current educational materials used by applicants for American citizenship. Since the Oath of Allegiance is the culmination of the naturalization process, an examination of the Oath and what it means, “to bear true faith and allegiance” to the United States Constitution should be part of those educational materials, and should be included on any citizenship test. Further, the Office could (1) examine ways to make citizenship training and the swearing-in ceremony more meaningful; (2) cooperate with other government agencies that work with immigrants such as the U.S Department of Education’s English Literacy-Civics

program; and (3) continue to reexamine the citizenship test to see how it can be improved (as it is currently doing, so kudos to the Office of Citizenship on this point).

Sixth English Literacy Civics (formerly English as a Second Language-Civics or ESL-Civics) is a federal program that provides grants to teach English with a civics education emphasis to non-native speakers. The program is administered by the US Department of Education through the states. The money goes to adult education schools, community colleges, and non-governmental organizations to integrate civic instruction into English language learning.

Logically, EL-Civics is a program that should promote the Americanization of immigrants. As noted, in becoming American citizens, immigrants pledge, “True faith and allegiance” to American liberal democracy. This requires some knowledge of our history and our values. If the money expended annually on EL-Civics assisted our future fellow citizens in understanding America’s heritage and civic values, the money would be well spent. This appears to have been the intent of Congress in creating the program in the first place.

Unfortunately, there are problems with EL-Civics programs. In many federally funded EL-Civics classes “civics” is defined narrowly as pertaining almost exclusively to mundane day to day tasks such as how to take public transportation or make a doctor’s appointment. Obviously, these “life-coping skills” (as they are called in the jargon) could be part of EL-Civics classes, but the classes should focus primarily on American values, or what veteran civic educator Robert Pickus calls “Idea Civics.”

The problem is that many state guidelines for EL-Civics are rigid and inflexible. These state guidelines have been influenced heavily by language professionals; who define “civics” in a very narrow way, and resist the idea of teaching American values through English language training.

It is time to put American civic principles at the head of the taxpayer supported English Literacy Civics program. Federal guidelines to the states should be revised, insisting on the use of solid content materials that emphasize our American heritage, and our civic and patriotic values. In our post-9-11 world, “Idea Civics,” that will assist newcomers in understanding the meaning of “bearing true faith and allegiance” to our democratic republic must be emphasized.

In sum, it is time to promote the patriotic assimilation of immigrants into the mainstream of American life. Today as in the past, patriotic assimilation is a necessary component of any successful immigration policy. This does not mean that we should blindly replicate all the past Americanization policies of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. But it does mean that we have much to learn from our great historical success. In the final analysis it means that we should draw on a usable past, exercise common sense, and develop an Americanization policy that will be consist with our principles and effective in today’s world.

### **(V) What about “Comprehensive Immigration Reform”**

The irony is that so-called “comprehensive” immigration reform is not “comprehensive.” There are no serious assimilation components to the legislation. Moreover the eventual promised amnesty and the massive increase in low-skilled immigration promoted by this formula would weaken assimilation. Assimilation policy cannot be separated from immigration policy. We need comprehensive assimilation reform (for legal immigrants), before we need comprehensive immigration.

Unfortunately, comprehensive immigration reform is primarily about the special interest needs of particular businesses, not the interests of the American people as a whole. It ignores assimilation and puts the market over the nation, but Americans must always remember that we are a nation of citizens before we are a market of consumers.