

How to Become a Melting Pot
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This country has always had a problem with integrating immigrants or absorbing former slaves and Native Americans. The ongoing arguments are about the best way to embrace these people into the American melting pot. The problem was particularly great in the 19th century, when ugly solutions were practiced.

The first immigration difficulties were with the Irish, who flocked here starving because of the potato famine in Ireland. We did not welcome them kindly. For some years, they were treated as if they were less than human, being poor, Catholic, and defenseless. "No Irish need apply" for jobs, other than house maids and muscle in building our railroads.

But over time, the Irish immigrants established urban power in policing, political clout, and charm. They became a loved minority.

Italians went through the same process: from disliked to now very much a powerful minority. The Chinese were extremely abused to the point of exclusion for some years. The Japanese certainly were abused and sent to camps during World War II, for no reason at all. But now both Asian minorities are completely integrated by most Americans.

Jews arrived in two waves: German Jews in the mid-19th century who were valuable as peddlers needed by the expanding American population. They soon were educated, many with distinction, and they played an important role in integrating the dirt-poor wave of Jewish immigrants from the Russian Empire. They opened settlement houses and taught Jewish woman how to become American. The results were within that first generation, with a flood of Jews with professional college degrees: doctors, lawyers, scientists, and entertainers.

For all these eventual successful integrations, two groups suffered greatly: emancipated slaves and Native Americans. They were not left to integrate themselves, but faced violence and deliberate national policies which made problems worse. Our Black population faced the horrors of Southern hate groups (KKK), police, real estate rules depriving them of equal housing, and when good schools for Black children were successful, thugs torched them.

But we are now seeing some success: educated Black citizens are thriving in every occupation, and we even had the first Black president, who was a model of what a President should be. It is slow, but progress.

The Native Americans faced a thorny divided government problem: initially horrific. Genocides, extermination of their primary food, the buffalo, and internment in reservations.

How to acculturate them into the American mainstream was the other debate: first abducting children and forcing them into Indian schools where they were forbidden any access to their native languages and tribal traditions. The motif was "kill the Indian and save the child." These schools were a horror, which Native Americans cannot forget.

Unlike other minorities, such as the immigrants, they were not allowed to remain at home in their tribes where they could receive American schooling yet not lose their family and tribal ties, as all other immigrants were allowed to do.

Somehow some managed to be completely integrated into American society and become success stories. One such was Mary Golda Ross, the first Native American female engineer. She was also the first female engineer in the history of the Lockheed Corporation. She worked at Lockheed from 1942 until her retirement in 1973, where she was best remembered for her work on aerospace design.

But one wonders what she had to give up? A recent PBS program, "Little Bird," traces the story of one Canadian Native American, stolen from her family and brought up in a Canadian household. She became totally integrated, was in law school, and about to marry a doctor when she began having flashbacks of the horrors of her initial kidnapping and adoption completely out of her culture. Her pain was palpable, moving her to find her missing family.

Europe is now having a similar problem with integrating a flood of Muslim refugees.

There is only one way to do this, create settlement houses where women can be educated in the mores, values, and practical child-rearing best practices. This must be voluntary. It frees the women too, always a problem with traditional societies.

Haters among us are no longer a majority.

685 words

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