

Excerpts

ASSIMILATION IS AMERICAN

As expressed by President Theodore Roosevelt

In the first place, we should insist that 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 person's becoming in every facet an American, and nothing but an American. If he tries to separate from the rest of America, then he isn't doing his part as an American. There can be no divided allegiance here. Any man who says he is an American, but something else also, isn't an American at all. We have room for but one flag, the American flag, and this excludes the red flag, which symbolizes all wars against liberty and civilization just as much as it excludes any foreign flag of a nation to which we are hostile. We have room for but one language here, and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns out people out as Americans, of American nationality, and not as dwellers in a polygot boarding house; and we have room for but one soul loyalty and that is a loyalty to the American people."

— from a January 3, 1919, letter to the President of the American Defense Society, in *Theodore Roosevelt and His Time Shown in His Own Letters, Vol. II* (edited by Joseph Bucklin Bishop; published by Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920)

PLURALISM IS AMERICAN

As expressed by President William J. Clinton

Our Nation has remained young and strong now for over 220 years by always meeting new challenges in ways that renew our oldest values. That is the wellspring of our greatness. Our Nation was not founded on religion or race or geography but on a set of incandescent ideals, which have been reiterated and reaffirmed and reembraced at every critical moment in our history: Lincoln at Gettysburg; the Progressives forging a new freedom for an industrial age; Franklin Roosevelt rescuing America from the abyss in the name of our oldest ideals; Dr. King challenging America to live out the true meaning of our creed. At every single moment of challenge and change, we Americans have found a way to keep these old ideals, not musty words scratched on parchment but instead living guideposts for a new era. ...

[America has] more diversity [than many other nations.] We have more racial diversity; we have more linguistic diversity; we have more cultural diversity. ... This diversity of ours is a godsend. It is a huge gift in a global economy and a global society. If we can find a way not only to respect our differences but to actually celebrate them and still say what binds us together is even more important, we will have solved the conundrum that is paralyzing Bosnia, that is still leading to people blowing themselves up to kill innocent children in the Middle East, that has my people in Ireland still arguing over what happened 600 years ago, that has led to vicious tribal warfare in Africa, leaving hundreds of thousands of people hatcheted to death. ...

This is a question of imagination, of vision, of heart. ... People have to get up in the morning and feel good about this country with all of its diversity, because we have to know what's good about the differences between us and celebrate them, and we must know, too, what it is that binds us together. What are the requirements of membership in the American community? What do you have to believe in and be willing to live by and be willing to stand up for in order to be an American? That is what we are going to do. We have to visualize our future as a truly multiracial, multiethnic, multireligious democracy that still runs in a straight line from here all the way back to George Washington.

— from remarks at American University, Sept. 15, 1997