

**E PLURIBUS UNUM – FROM MANY, ONE – CALLS FOR UNITY, NOT UNIFORMITY**

***By Michael W. Grebe***

With a new President, an economic recession of historic proportion, and an ongoing war against terrorism abroad, it is clear that The United States of America is at a critical point in its history. President Obama is raising questions about our country's identity. America is unique as a nation founded not on ethnicity, but on ideals. What follows, then, is the necessity to identify and encourage those common ideals that make up our nation's identity while respecting and honoring our ethnic diversity.

Homeland safety and security, immigration reform, assimilation to American culture, the importance of America's sovereignty and identity, as well as the economic implications of all of these items will play a vital role in our nation's identity crisis.

And that is exactly what we have – an identity crisis. The Bradley Project commissioned a major study called *E Pluribus Unum*, which utilized Harris Interactive to conduct a survey on Americans' views on national identity. The survey found that although 84% of Americans believe our nation retains an identity, 63% of us believe it is weakening, and 24% believe we are already so divided at this point that a common national identity is impossible.

Furthermore, it was found that not only does the next generation place its confidence in a globalized society, but 45% of 18-34 year-olds believe that international law should trump the U.S. Constitution. At the same time, however, 80% of Americans believe our schools should focus on American citizenship rather than ethnic identity, and majorities of Latinos (70%) and African – Americans (54%) agree.

A nation without an identity is a nation without unity. A sense of national identity is essential to enable people the freedom to express their ethnicity and beliefs, while being able to share common principals and ideals necessary for the common good. Because this poll revealed a strong sense that our national identity is weakening, it is clear we must take action to determine what exactly our identity is, and what role it should play in the future of our country.

It is possible to unite under a national identity for the common good, while still playing an active role in a global society. A safe and prosperous future in this increasingly global society does not call for uniformity of our nation's citizens; rather, it calls for a unity of ideals. We must encourage an increased appreciation of our rich history, affirm our diversity and many cultures, and work to assimilate our citizens based on our commonalities. Doing these things and entering into dialogue about them will help us navigate the future of globalization as one, unified nation.

For example, by renewing our focus and embracing America's founding principles, heroes, history, and landmarks, we can communicate and teach the appreciation of history in our schools. By encouraging the full participation of immigrants into the American way of life, we can celebrate new citizens and demonstrate how their heritage can help them develop a commitment to the common American ideals. By recognizing and affirming the benefits of our diversity we can determine what brings us together and makes us one. We need to promote policies that unite us as Americans, rather than divide us or compromise our national identity.

We are a nation founded not on common ethnicity, but on a set of shared ideals. We encourage, celebrate, and thrive on individuality and self expression, but we seem to be losing the shared ideals or identity that once bound us as "Americans." As we enter a new era of American history we face the awesome task of reviving our national economy. The timing is right to engage in dialogue regarding what best characterizes the United States of America, and what comprises our national identity.

## **The Bradley Foundation**

*E Pluribus Unum – Prepared for Crossroads*

The findings of our E Pluribus Unum report regarding our weakening national identity may be alarming, but in reality, they tell us that now is the time to look at, analyze, and discuss what it means to be a citizen of the United States of America. We must begin the dialogue in our homes and classrooms, exploring practical measures to teach the ideals, culture, and history of our nation.

To establish a common identity, we must appeal to our national pride, and edify the great ideals of The United States of America. We must explore how we encourage assimilation and principled patriotism as our nation grows and thrives with diversity. We must find the appropriate balance between national identity and global participation as we continue to play an increasingly powerful role in a globalizing society. And, we must implement practical methods to share our country's ideals, culture, and history to the immigrants we welcome.

The goal is clear – as society becomes increasingly global, we must identify and encourage the unifying factors that create our nation's identity. What unites us as Americans is far greater than what divides us. As Benjamin Franklin stated years ago, "We must, indeed, all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately." We must hang together as one nation comprised of unique individuals. The means by which we achieve this goal remains unforeseen, and I ask you as readers, leaders, the public and future of this community to begin this most important dialogue to ensure the continued and increased strength of our nation and its people.

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