

Americans. A nation must be more than a diverse people living in the same place and sharing only a standard of living.

There are three factors that begin with “D” which helped America assimilate. The first is “Distance.” Immigrants came from a long distance and often couldn’t go home. They had to become Americans. Today, a substantial percentage of our immigrants can go home for the weekend. The second is “Diversity”. Immigrants came from so many different places that they had to learn a common language to communicate. Today, almost seventy percent of our immigrants come from Spanish speaking countries and you can live your whole life in West Denver and never speak English. The third is “Discontinuity,” where times of large immigration were followed by wars or depression that virtually stopped immigration and allowed those here to assimilate. Today, we take unprecedented numbers of immigrants and we do so year after year. America faces a new and serious assimilation challenge.

I thus suggest that “diversity” is only an asset if it is secondary to unity. The emphasis must be on the “Unum,” not the “Pluribus.” We can be composed of many ethnic groups and religions, but we must be one nationality. We should respect diversity, but we should celebrate unity.

**COMMANDMENT V: A COMMUNITY WILL REMAIN A COMMUNITY ONLY AS LONG AS IT HAS JUSTICE AND HONORS PEACEFUL CHANGE.**

There is nothing more important to community than justice. People must feel that they are fairly treated and that when justice is administered it is even handed and proportionate. If I don't spend a lot of time recounting the reasons justice is needed is not that it isn't important, but that it is obvious.

A community needs institutions to mediate individual and group differences. That includes both substantive justice and procedural justice. A community must be to some degree self-governing. Community needs citizens not subjects but it needs citizens who recognize and honor democratic institutions. We must believe more in the bloodless revolution we call "elections" than who wins the election. As one thoughtful person wrote:

"A democratic community enjoying political liberty is only possible when the attachment of the majority of citizens to political liberty is stronger than their attachment to specific political doctrines."

Some institution must engender enough loyalty and authority to prevail when interests and factions conflict. Many people see public schools as wellsprings of civic virtue. That discussion takes more time than we have today.

What a lesson we have had in loyalty to community in the last Presidential election. We didn't need to like, or even agree with the Florida voting procedures or the U.S. Supreme Court decision to accept them. Our attachment to Democracy was greater than our partisanship. Etzioni says Democracy is where we all fight with one arm tied behind our backs.

**COMMANDMENT VI: A QUALITY COMMUNITY IS ONE THAT ANTICIPATES THE FUTURE.**

A community must care about and anticipate its future. Citizens must anticipate major changes, which will take place in their society. It must foresee and forestall. Public policy is like a kaleidoscope and time turns it to present us with whole new patterns. Let me discuss a couple of possibly community damaging issues we face. The first is the "aging of America."

America is getting older — fast. In 1900, we could expect to live 47.3 years; by 2000, we could expect to reach the age of 77. It is likely those born early next century can expect to live to 85. In 1900, only 4.1 percent of Americans were over the age of 65. Today, 13 percent are over the age of 65. Yet, by the year 2030, it is likely that 20 percent, or 1 in 5, will be 65 or older. It may go even higher. The over- 65 population for the last fifty years has been growing four times faster than the rest of the population. The U.S. today has more people over the age of 65 than Canada has people. In the next forty years, we will add over 40 million people over 65 to the 31 million we presently have. This is essentially adding yet another Canada, plus all the people in the Rocky Mountain States to our elderly population.

“This is the first time humans have altered the age structure of the population,” says University of Chicago demographer Jay Olshansky. Sam Preston estimates that over two-thirds of the improvement in longevity, from prehistoric times to the present, has taken place in the 20th Century.

We are not only increasing the number and percentage of elderly, but the elderly themselves are getting older as modern medicine performs its miracles and a larger percentage of our population lives beyond 75. The fastest growing demographic cohort in the U.S. is people over 100; the second fastest growing cohort is people over 85. These two trends have a great impact on the general demographic growth of the 20th Century. Since 1900, the population of the United States has tripled. The population of those over 65 grew 10 times, and the population of those over 85 grew 30 times. This trend will continue. Over 10 percent of the elderly have at least one child who is over 65. These realities will push us into uncharted territory for public policy.

Extended longevity is clearly good news for us individually. Eighty percent of babies born today will live past their 65th birthday, while fifty years ago less than 40 percent lived to see their 65 birthday. Today’s senior citizens have unprecedented and wonderful opportunities for a dignified and active retirement.

But public policy views this with mixed emotions. Compounding the increase in life expectancy and the sheer number of elderly is a third demographic revolution taking place: the drop in the birthrate. People age from the moment they are born, but societies do not automatically age. Societies age mainly by a drop in the birthrate and an increase in longevity. This is what is happening in America and much of the world. In 1957, the American woman, on average, would bear 3.8 children. Today, she has 2.0. Twenty percent of the baby boomers have no children, and 25 percent will have only one. During the last half century, an extraordinarily large generation was followed by an extraordinarily small generation. The average American adult has more living parents than children. Since 1983, for the first time in history, America has more people over 65 than it has teenagers and more people over 85 than under 5. It is this higher proportion of both elderly and “old old” (over 85) that so compounds the challenges facing an aging society.

Soon America will be a vastly different society. One set of authors observes:

"By the middle of the next century, when this revolution has run its course, the impacts will have been at least as powerful as that of any of the great economic and social movements of the past — movements such as the conquest and subsequent closing of the frontier, the successive waves of European immigration, the development of our great cities, or from more recent times, the post -WWII baby boom, the civil rights and women's movements, the massive influx of women into the paid labor force, the revolution in sexual mores, and the decay of many of our large urban centers. All these developments have had a profound effect on our nation, but the aging of the population will certainly have an equal, if not greater impact..."

The United States is not alone in this demographic challenge. Worldwide, approximately 500 million people, 9 percent of the present population, are age 60 or above. The World Bank warns that “the world faces a looming old age crisis,” and it estimates that, by 2030, individuals over age 60 will number 1.5 billion, making up 16 percent of the population. The problem will be particularly acute for developed countries where pension funds are headed toward bankruptcy under this demographic avalanche.

The results of this demographic change are in some ways predictable, in others, unknowable. Without change in the current trends, America in 2050 will be a very different place:

Very high proportions of elderly persons and very high dependency ratios accompanied by continuing low fertility and very low mortality could have profound social and economic consequences. Education, health care, housing, recreation and work life would be affected by the changes in age structure described. There could be severe dislocations in the economy as it tries to adjust to the changing needs for jobs, goods and services. Tax rates could become oppressively high and serve as a disincentive to work. Younger workers will be called on for larger and larger financial contributions to the federal treasury on behalf of older non-workers.

In all cultures, in all nations, and in all religions, there is a universal theme against profligacy and urging justice for future generations. A community cares about posterity. An old Middle East proverb observes, “The beginning of wisdom comes when a person plants a tree, the shade under which he knows he will never sit.” Wise words.

**COMMANDMENT VII: A GREAT COMMUNITY IS ONE THAT HAS DEVELOPED A GREAT COMMUNITY CULTURE.**

We need a community culture, which gives diverse people a stake in each other. A community can celebrate differences, but they must have a certain level of trust in each other and feel some sense of commitment toward each other. A community must have things they do or honor in common: voting, volunteering, donating blood, attending town meetings, trusting their neighbors and co-workers. There has to be a substantial degree of “civic engagement” in community and some common loyalties.

**America has come a long way since we questioned electing a “Catholic President”. It is not even a stretch to imagine a woman, a Black and/or a Hispanic elected President this century. But “try to imagine a Turkish Chancellor of Germany, an Algerian President of France, a Pakistani Prime Minister of Britain, a Christian President of Egypt, an Arab Prime Minister of Israel, a Jewish President of Syria, a Tibetan running China and anyone but a Japanese in power in Tokyo.” (Harlan Cleveland)**

I think more and more about "social capital" and community culture these days. Social capital is where people work together to solve problems, have a habit of trusting each other and working out their problems peacefully. A great community is one that has developed a great community culture. James Fallows puts it this way: “In the long run, a society's strength depends on the way that ordinary people voluntarily behave.” A successful community culture encourages certain traits:

- Citizen participation
- Community leadership
- Volunteerism and philanthropy
- Civic education
- Community pride
- Justice

When de-Tocqueville visited America in the 1830s he observed:

“These Americans are a peculiar people. If, in a local community, a citizen becomes aware of a human need, which is not being met, he thereupon discusses the situation with his neighbors. Suddenly a committee comes into existence. The committee thereupon begins to operate on behalf of the need and a new community function is established. It is like a miracle because these citizens