

# ISSUE BRIEF

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## The Task Force on New Americans: Congress Must Examine the Federal Strategic Action Plan

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President Barack Obama’s belief that immigrants are creating a “hodgepodge” nation—and that this will make it more difficult for conservatives to promote their policies—is well documented.<sup>1</sup> The continuation of the American form of self-government depends, however, on successive surges of immigrants absorbing America’s civic culture, national identity, and sense of patriotic allegiance.

So when the President set up a White House Task Force on New Americans the day after granting deportation relief to five million people last November, The Heritage Foundation called on Congress to elucidate whether there was a political strategy behind the task force.<sup>2</sup> Now that the task force has published its strategic action plan,<sup>3</sup> it is clear that the concerns were well placed.

Not everything in the strategic plan is inimical to the national interest. The plan includes the recognition that there is a substantial achievement gap between students with poor English and those who speak the national language fluently.<sup>4</sup> Ideally, this would lead to abandoning failed bilingual programs and creating support for school choice. Overall, however, the tenor of the strategic action plan unmistakably leans in the direction of deepening existing cultural cleavages in American society. It also appears to be a blueprint for indoctrinating immigrants into a

multicultural version of America that marks a radical departure from the past.

The strategic plan is replete with calls for (1) the “receiving communities” to change so that they can celebrate and accommodate the immigrants’ “diverse linguistic and cultural assets,”<sup>5</sup> rather than the traditional view (and three-century reality) of immigrants becoming Americans over time by assimilating into the nation’s unique culture and developing patriotic sentiments; (2) federal and state government agencies to sanction “diverse cultural practices”<sup>6</sup> rather than maintaining standards and norms that are equally applicable to all citizens; (3) making citizenship easier to attain, rather than the process being a more meaningful, transformative experience;<sup>7</sup> and (4) “bi-literacy and dual-language learning” in order to “maintain native language proficiency to preserve culture”<sup>8</sup> rather than schools performing their traditional job of promoting a shared cultural experience for all Americans. The plan also (1) accuses schools and agencies that supposedly prevent non-English speakers from having “meaningful access to federally funded programs”<sup>9</sup> of violating the Civil Rights Act’s prohibition of discrimination against protected classes; (2) draws no distinction between citizen and non-citizen, lawful or unlawful resident;<sup>10</sup> and (3) calls for distributing millions of dollars to liberal groups favorable to President Obama.<sup>11</sup>

The task force’s recommendations, in other words, make it easier to turn the United States into “more and more a hodgepodge of folks” in the President’s own words—one, moreover, where group differences become entrenched and remain permanent.<sup>12</sup>

Such politicization of immigration and Balkanization of immigrants is short sighted and dangerous in

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a country whose fortunes have been so tied to immigrant integration for more than 300 years. America has been called a nation of immigrants because, within a few decades after the settlement of Jamestown, it began to be populated by different surges of immigrants. By emphasizing the moral contained within the national motto of *E Pluribus Unum*, national leaders turned these disparate groups into what the historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr., no conservative, called “a transformative nation with an identity all its own.”<sup>13</sup> The Obama Administration’s strategic plan gets it exactly backward when it states that American culture is “steeped in a history of immigration, integration, diversity, and cultural pluralism.”<sup>14</sup> All leaders, until now, have seen it as their job to instill and maintain national unity through emotional “veneration” for the republic, which James Madison thought indispensable,<sup>15</sup> not to strive to make cultural differences permanent. Schlesinger, who worked as a special assistant to President Kennedy, warned that “the multicultural dogma abandons historic purposes” and leads to disintegration.

The American system of government is based on individual rights, not group rights, and the cultural background of the American political system affirms the dignity and freedom of individuals, not groups (all of it based on a religious belief in personal, not group,

salvation). These individuals, in turn, compose one nation-state and have constituted themselves into a republic the safety of which, according to Alexander Hamilton, “depends essentially on the energy of a common national sentiment; on a uniformity of principles and habits; on the exemption of citizens from foreign bias and prejudice; and on the love of country.”<sup>16</sup> Successive waves of immigrants eventually found a balance between affection for the land of their ancestors and making an emotionally patriotic commitment to their new nation and its unique ways. Their cultural, linguistic, and culinary contributions have become part of the complete national tapestry, not contained within certain squares of a quilt.

With this in mind, the Judiciary Committees of both Houses of Congress should call in the strategic plan’s authors—Cecilia Munoz, director of the White House Domestic Policy Council, and Leon Rodriguez, director of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services—in order to:

**1. Determine whether the assimilation of immigrants is no longer a goal of the United States.** President Washington thought it desirable for immigrants and their descendants “to get assimilated to our customs, measures and laws: in a word, soon become one people.” The term has

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1. “Obama: The Vox Conversation,” interview with Ezra Klein, Vox, January 23, 2015, <http://www.vox.com/a/barack-obama-interview-vox-conversation/obama-domestic-policy-transcript> (accessed April 23, 2015).
  2. Mike Gonzalez, “The Brand New ‘Task Force on New Americans’: Five Questions for Obama,” Heritage Foundation *Issue Brief* No. 4309, December 1, 2014, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2014/12/the-brand-new-task-force-on-new-americans-five-questions-for-obama>.
  3. White House Task Force on New Americans, *Strengthening Communities by Welcoming All Residents: A Federal Strategic Action Plan on Immigrant & Refugee Integration*, The White House, April 2015, [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/final\\_tf\\_newamericans\\_report\\_4-14-15\\_clean.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/final_tf_newamericans_report_4-14-15_clean.pdf) (accessed April 22, 2015).
  4. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
  5. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
  6. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
  7. *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 24–30.
  8. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
  9. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
  10. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
  11. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
  12. “Obama: The Vox Conversation.”
  13. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (New York: Norton, 1991).
  14. White House Task Force on New Americans, *Strengthening Communities by Welcoming All Residents*, p. 24.
  15. *The Federalist* No. 49.
  16. Alexander Hamilton, “Examination of Jefferson’s Message to Congress of December 7, 1801,” January 12, 1802, <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/1385> (accessed April 22, 2015).

been used for centuries to describe the ability of America to absorb millions of immigrants, something that brought them, in the words of Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, also no conservative, “into complete harmony with our ideals and aspirations and cooperate with us for their attainment.”<sup>17</sup> Indeed, this process by which foreigners *naturalize* themselves into American citizens (become Americans *as if by nature*) denotes an unheard-of willingness to treat naturalized citizens “on an exact equality with everyone else,”<sup>18</sup> one of several qualities that make America exceptional. Ronald Reagan famously celebrated the fact that “[a]nybody from any corner of the world can come to America to live and become an American,” and noted that this could not happen in any other country. Different versions of “diversity,” “inclusive,” and the need to “preserve cultures” can be found in abundance in the 57-page strategic plan. The word “patriotic” is missing, however, as is the word “assimilation.” The term used instead is “integration,” described as “when all community members belong, are secure in their rights and responsibilities, exercise their liberties, and share ownership in the community and our nation’s future.” Is integration materially different from assimilation? If so, in what way? Has the Obama Administration dropped the centuries-old goal of assimilating immigrants?

**2. Determine whether government emphasis on the preservation of cultural differences will erode the equal treatment of individuals.**

The 14th amendment of the Constitution guarantees all Americans “the equal protection of the laws.” Increasingly, however, calls for a “culture of inclusion” have translated into prodding government agencies, schools, and corporations into thinking of individuals as members of groups—and then bestowing different treatment on each

group. Even the military, in a major report by the Obama Administration’s Pentagon, stated four years ago that “although good diversity management rests on a foundation of fair treatment, *it is not about treating everyone the same.*”<sup>19</sup> (Emphasis added.) The report added that blindness to differences “can lead to a culture of assimilation in which differences are suppressed rather than leveraged.”<sup>20</sup> Such thinking has migrated to the corporate world, where “an emphasis on equal treatment” is now also often eschewed.<sup>21</sup> The strategic plan calls for preserving diverse cultures. Is this report another step in this process of “not treating everyone the same”?

**3. Determine the amount of money spent so far, and the efficacy of the programs.**

The strategic plan boasts that the Administration has already spent \$43 million for 222 grants to so-called Citizenship and Integration Grant Programs (CIGPs) since 2009, and says that \$10 million are available in additional grants for fiscal year 2015. The CIGPs are but one kind of many programs in which this Administration is spending money on its “integration” efforts. Groups with links to entities that have contributed to President Obama’s campaigns or supported his domestic policies (such as La Raza, the Center for American Progress, the Service Employees International Union, and Casa de Maryland) seem to be overrepresented in the list of receiving institutions. Is there a detailed account of who is receiving these taxpayer funds?

**Conclusion**

The implementation of President Obama’s planned legalization of millions of people residing in this country without the consent of voters as expressed through law has already been blocked by the U.S. District Court of the Southern District of Texas. It has also been rejected in the court of public

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17. Louis Brandeis, speech at a naturalization ceremony at Faneuil Hall, Boston, July 5, 1915.

18. Theodore Roosevelt, in a letter to a friend on January 5, 1919, the day before he died. Some historians believe the line was taken from a speech Roosevelt gave while President in 1907.

19. Military Leadership Diversity Commission, *From Representation to Inclusion: Diversity Leadership for the 21st-Century Military*, Final Report, March 15, 2011, [http://diversity.defense.gov/Portals/51/Documents/Special%20Feature/MLDC\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](http://diversity.defense.gov/Portals/51/Documents/Special%20Feature/MLDC_Final_Report.pdf) (accessed April 23, 2015).

20. *Ibid.*

21. David A. Thomas and Robin J. Ely, “Making Differences Matter: A New Paradigm for Managing Diversity,” *Harvard Business Review*, September–October 1996, <https://hbr.org/1996/09/making-differences-matter-a-new-paradigm-for-managing-diversity> (accessed April 22, 2015).

opinion as an abuse of his executive power. Any sign that the President means to use such a foundational institution as immigration for political purposes will only do further damage to the American polity. Congress should take a lead in keeping immigration above party politics.

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