

## Introduction

### The Moo-Shoo Burrito Culture

Heraclitus, the philosopher who posited that you cannot step into the same river twice, said, "Nothing endures but change." We see it all around us in our cities and suburbs. The old-fashioned mom-and-pop store on the corner is torn down to make room for a "strip mall" which is later demolished to make a parking lot for the shopping mall which is later turned back into an outdoor mall with picturesque little mom-and-pop shops (which, by the way, are franchised all over the country in case you want one).

Even more than these physical changes, though, is the change in our culture. The latest census revealed a growing number of non-white groups, particularly Hispanics, in America. An *Economist* article states, "Somewhere in the past ten years, the number of Californians who describe themselves as white fell behind the number who describe themselves as something else. To put it in shorthand, 'whites are no longer a majority.'"<sup>1</sup>

We could, of course, just ascribe this phenomenon to California as we have with New Age spirituality, homosexuality, and miniskirts. After all, what "they" do out there has nothing to do with the rest of the country. However, as Victor Davis Hanson notes in *Mexifornia*, California is "traditionally the early warning sign to the rest of the country."<sup>2</sup> As California goes, so goes the nation.

Perea, "The New America"

Two things were signposts to me of the changing culture. The first is a wedding photograph I have. The groom is a Catholic Asian who was raised in Australia. The bride is Jewish. Her brother is married to an Indian woman. The photograph of the wedding party is a mix of colors. If we were to listen, we would hear a mix of accents. No longer can we assume that a white boy will marry a white girl.



The other signpost occurred in the late 1980s. I had just started seminary and my personal life was already in the midst of change. One day I went to lunch with a client in the newly burgeoning suburb of Highlands Ranch, Colorado. I had moo-shoo pork, which was pretty spicy and was served with what I later learned were called pancakes, although they weren't anything like the pancakes my wife makes and serves with syrup. I mentioned to the owner how good the moo-shoo would be as a burrito, with tortillas instead of the pancakes. About a year later, the Moo-Shoo Burrito was on the menu. The combination of these two flavors represents the two fastest growing populations in America, the Hispanic and the Asian.

The church I pastor reflects these populations as well. A Korean church holds services in our building on Saturdays, and recently we started a Spanish congregation on Sunday afternoons in addition to our regular services on Sunday morning. The three congregations came together for a concert and potluck dinner. We had hamburgers and

Perea, “The New America”

hotdogs, the Koreans brought eggrolls, and the Latinos brought Mexican food. One man smothered his egg rolls with salsa and said, “Pastor, these are great Korean taquitos.”

That’s the New America – the America of the Korean taquito and the moo-shoo burrito.

Some are fearful of the changes and have suggested that America adopt more stringent immigration laws and a stricter border policy, in effect pulling the welcome mat back inside. When our Lady of Liberty said, “Give me your poor, your tired, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,” she didn’t actually mean *all* of them.

Others are suggesting that if we continue to let people in, they must assimilate to “our” way of life and “our” values. Stop putting up signs in English and Spanish. Pass English-only laws. Let them, or make them, learn English. After all, it’s our country. We’re the melting pot, so melt!

The problem, of course, is that what worked a century ago no longer works today. Assimilation doesn’t work today because there is no longer a single coherent America to assimilate into. At one time, we – and the rest of the world – were secluded. When people came to America, they broke ties with their homeland and said good-bye to family and close friends, in many cases for the rest of their lives. With today’s global village, that’s no longer the case. Technology has made the world smaller, less segregated. I can turn on the television and see news from around the world. I can email the family and friends I left back in the homeland, keeping me a part of the family, of that particular community. With low airfares, I can travel home – something that our immigrant ancestors would not have dreamed of. I can now live in this country and never have to learn the language in order to get by, again something that was unheard of in the past.

Perea, "The New America"

America is changing, and there is simply no way to return to what America was before. This doesn't mean, however, that we are headed down the tubes, or that the changes are necessarily for the worse.

How many times did we as children listen to our elders say, "When I was your age," only to repeat that same phrase to our children or grandchildren? Inherent in the tired idiom is the belief that the older way was better, that change is always for the worse. In 1829, Martin Van Buren, then governor of New York, wrote the following letter to President Andrew Jackson, predicting the physical and economic doom that certain changes would have upon American society:

*The canal system of this country is being threatened by the spread of a new form of transportation known as "railroads." The federal government must preserve the canals for the following reasons:*

*One. If canal boats are supplanted by "railroads," serious unemployment will result. Captains, cooks, drivers, hostlers, repairmen, lock tenders will be left without means of livelihood, not to mention the numerous farmers now employed in growing hay for horses.*

*Two. Boat builders would suffer and towline, whip and harness makers would be left destitute.*

*Three. Canal boats are absolutely essential to the defense of the United States. In the event of the expected trouble with England, the Erie Canal would be the only means by which we would ever move the supplies so vital to waging modern war.*

*As you may well know, Mr. President, "railroad" carriages are pulled at the enormous speed of fifteen miles per hour by "engines" which, in addition to endangering life and limb of passengers, roar and snort their way through the countryside, setting fire to crops, scaring the livestock and frightening our women and children. The Almighty certainly never intended that people should travel at such breakneck speed.*

Perea, “The New America”

Today, the letter seems quaint, and we smile at its naiveté. The attitude toward change, however, hasn’t – well – changed. The doomsayers are still out in force, clanging their bells to warn the people. Change, however, is neutral. What isn’t neutral is our management of change. How do we handle the changes that are occurring? King Whitney, Jr., president of Personnel Laboratory, Inc., understood the dynamics of change. To his staff, he said, “Change has considerable psychological impact on the human mind. To the fearful it is threatening because it means that things may get worse. To the hopeful it is encouraging because things may get better. To the confident it is inspiring because *the challenge exists to make things better.*”<sup>3</sup>

The book you are reading is that challenge. As Bob Dylan once sang, “The times they are a-changin’.” I am confident that the changes, already and still occurring, can make society better, if we work to make things better. Change can mean great opportunity, if we view it that way. This book was written as a way to not only examine the changes, but also to move toward better management of the changes, toward seizing the opportunities presented.

Chapter one discusses the model I use to demonstrate the attitudes prevalent in all aspects of our society. As discussed above, when change comes, it is natural to fight for the status quo. It is natural for people in power to fight to remain in power. Chapter one will discuss the fight for power by both the powerful and the powerless and suggest a better way to deal with change.

With the rise in minority populations, America is fast becoming a land where no people-group will enjoy majority status. What these multicultural changes are and how they are coming about will be the subject of chapter two.

Perea, “The New America”

Chapters three through nine will look at a variety of issues in the New America, beginning with the family. The model discussed in chapter one will be applied to each issue. The final chapter will also suggest ways to deal with the two extremes and how to move to the middle where we can best serve all interests.

One note on terminology. There is a great deal of discussion currently going on about what term this brown population should be known by. Latino and Hispanic are not interchangeable. Latinos are those people from the Americas south of the United States and would include Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. Hispanics are those of Spanish descent, the peoples of the Iberian Peninsula. When I am talking specifically about US Census figures, I will use the term “Hispanic,” because that is what is designated on the census form. If I am talking specifically about one people group, I will use the appropriate designation of Mexican, Spanish, Cuban, South American, or Puerto Rican. For all other usages, I will use Latino(a) which is rising in popularity. No offense is meant by the use of any term.

Every time I have shared this information with others, I have received surprised looks, enthusiastic comments, and a flood of further information. Everyone recognizes themselves in the model as well as their communities and the society at large. It is my hope that you will encounter yourself in these pages, and will be, in the words of King Whitney Jr., inspired and challenged to make things better.

---

<sup>1</sup> “The Golden State Turns Brown,” *The Economist* April 7, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Victor Davis Hanson, *Mexifornia: A State of Becoming* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by *Wall Street Journal*, June 7, 1967. Emphasis mine.