VARIOUS demographers and social scientists have been predicting for years that the end of the white majority in the United States is near, and that there will be a majority of minorities. The issue has moved to the center of American political discourse: CNN has broadcasted a special program on the subject; President Clinton has called attention to it in his national dialogue on race relations; and numerous books and articles in recent years have addressed America's changing demography from vastly different—and frequently antagonistic—perspectives.

Some have reacted to the expected demise of the white majority with alarm or distress. Dale Maharidge, author of *The Coming White Minority: California's Eruptions and America's Future*, claims that by the year 2000, California's population will be less than 50 percent white. As he explains, "‘Minorities’ will be in the majority, a precursor to the 2050 state of racial composition nationwide, when the nation will be almost half nonwhite." According to Maharidge, "whites
are scared," especially in California:

The depth of white fear is underestimated and misunderstood by progressive thinkers and the media. Whites dread the unknown and not-so-distant tomorrow when a statistical turning point will be reached that could have very bad consequences for them. They fear the change that seems to be transforming their state into something different from the rest of the United States. They fear losing not only their jobs but also their culture. Some feel that California will become a version of South Africa, in which whites will lose power when minorities are the majority.

Fearing the "browning" of America, many whites have already formed residential islands surrounded by vast ethnic communities, foreshadowing, Maharidge claims, what the rest of America might become. Whites and nonwhites alike recently passed the anti-immigrant Proposition 187, which Maharidge links to these same fears about the end of the white majority. "There is ample evidence," he concludes, "that white tension could escalate."

In contrast, John Isbister, a professor of economics at the University of California at Santa Cruz, asks us to ponder whether America is too white. He contends that the decline in the white proportion of the population is a healthy development for the country, because it will gradually replace a majority-minority confrontation with interactions between groups of more equal size and influence. He further notes that "the principal case for a falling white proportion is simply this: it will be easier for us to transform a society of hostility and oppression into one of cooperation if we are dealing not with a majority versus several small minorities, but with groups of roughly equivalent size."

One people

As I see it, both views, that of alarm and celebration, are fundamentally wrong because these positions are implicitly and inadvertently racist: They assume that people’s pigmentation or other racial attributes determine their opinions, values, and votes. In fact, very often the opposite is true. America is blessed with an economic and political system, as well as culture and core values, that while far from flawless, are embraced by most Americans of all races and ethnic groups. (To
save breath, from here on, race is used to encompass ethnicity.)
It is a grievous error to suggest that as America's racial mix changes so will its core values. Of course, nobody can predict what people will believe 50 years from now. But it is clear that today the races share the same basic aspirations and principles. Moreover, current trends in attitudes that are concomitant with increases in the proportion of the nonwhite population further support the thesis that while American society may well change, whites and nonwhites will largely change together.

A 1992 survey finds that most black and Hispanic Americans (86 percent and 85 percent, respectively) seek “fair treatment for all, without prejudice or discrimination.” One may expect that this principle is of special concern to minorities, but white Americans feel the same way. As a result, the proportion of all Americans who agree with the quoted statement about fairness is 79 percent.

A poll of New York residents shows that the vast majority of respondents consider it very important to teach our common heritage and values. One may expect this statement to reflect a white, majoritarian view. However, minorities endorse this position more strongly than whites: 88 percent of Hispanics and 89 percent of blacks—compared to 70 percent of whites. A nationwide poll finds that equal proportions of blacks and whites, 93 percent, concur that they would vote for a black presidential candidate. Another national poll finds that over 80 percent of all respondents in every category—age, gender, race, location, education, and income—agree with the statement that freedom must be tempered by personal responsibility. Far from favoring a multicultural curriculum, approximately 85 percent of all parents, 83 percent of African-American parents, 89 percent of Hispanic parents, and 88 percent of foreign-born parents agree that “to graduate from high school, students should be required to understand the common history and ideas that tie all Americans together.”

Even in response to a deliberately loaded question, a 1997 poll shows that similarities between the races are much larger than differences. Asked, “Will race relations in this country ever get better?” 43 percent of blacks and 60 percent of whites reply in the affirmative. (Pollsters tend to focus on the 17
percent who strike a different position rather than on the 43 percent who embrace the same one. The difference between 57 percent of blacks and 40 percent of whites who do not believe that race relations are going to get better is also 17 percent.

**Not black and white**

While Americans hold widely ranging opinions on what should be done about various matters of social policy, people across racial and ethnic categories identify the same issues as important to them and to the country. For instance, in a 1996 survey, whites, African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans concurred that education is "the most important issue facing [their] community today." Similarly, more than 80 percent of blacks, Latinos, and whites share the belief that "it is 'extremely important' to spend tax dollars on 'educational opportunities for children.'" In another survey, 54 percent of blacks and 61 percent of whites rank "increased economic opportunity" as the most important goal for blacks. And 97 percent of blacks and 92 percent of whites rate violent crime a "very serious or most serious problem."

Other problems that trouble America's communities highlight points of convergence among members of various racial and ethnic groups. "Between 80 and 90 percent of black, white, and 'other' Americans agree that it is 'extremely important' to spend tax dollars on 'reducing crime' and 'reducing illegal drug use' among youth." In addition, some shared public-policy preferences emerge. Among whites, African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans surveyed by the Washington Post/Kaiser Foundation/Harvard Survey Project, between 75 percent and 82 percent of each group feel “strongly” that Congress should balance the budget. Between 30 percent and 41 percent are convinced that Congress should instate limited tax breaks for business; between 46 percent and 55 percent concur that Congress should cut personal income taxes; between 53 percent and 58 percent agree that Congress should reform Medicare. 67 percent of all parents, 68 percent of African-American parents, 66 percent of Hispanic parents, and 75 percent of foreign-born parents—close to 70 percent of each group—tell *Public Agenda* that the most important thing for public schools
to do for new immigrant children is “to teach them English as quickly as possible, even if this means they fall behind in other subjects.”

All this is not to suggest that there are no significant differences of opinion along racial and ethnic lines, especially when the subject directly concerns race. For instance, many whites and many blacks (although by no means all of either group) take different views of whether O.J. Simpson was guilty. In one survey, 62 percent of whites believed Simpson was guilty, in contrast to 55 percent of African Americans who believed he was not guilty. Likewise, concerning affirmative action, 51 percent of blacks in a 1997 poll “favor programs which give preferential treatment to racial minorities,” a much higher percentage than the 21 percent of whites who favor such programs. And a very large difference appears when one examines voting patterns. For instance, in 1998, 55 percent of whites versus 11 percent of African Americans voted for Republican Congressional candidates.

Still, if one considers attitudes toward the basic tenets of the American creed, the majority of blacks accept them. A Public Perspective poll from 1998 finds that 54 percent of blacks and 66 percent of whites agree with the following statement: “In the United States today, anyone who works hard enough can make it economically.” Most blacks (77 percent) say they prefer equality of opportunity to equality of results (compared to 89 percent of whites). On the question, “Do you see yourself as traditional or old fashioned on things such as sex, morality, family life, and religion, or not,” the difference between blacks and whites is only 5 percent, and when asked whether values in America are seriously declining, the difference is down to one point.

A question from an extensive national survey conducted at the University of Virginia by James Davison Hunter and Carl Bowman asks: “How strong would you say the U.S. decline or improvement is in its moral and ethical standards?” Twenty-three percent of blacks and 33 percent of whites said there was a strong decline, but 29 percent of blacks and 24 percent of whites said the standards were holding steady, and 40 percent of blacks and 38 percent of whites said there was a moderate decline. When asked “How strong would you say the
U.S. decline or improvement is in the area of family life?" 18 percent of blacks and 26 percent of whites said there was a strong decline while 42 percent of blacks and 40 percent of whites saw a moderate decline and 31 percent of blacks and 25 percent of whites said family life was holding steady. Roughly the same percentages of blacks and whites strongly advocate balancing the budget, cutting personal income taxes, reforming the welfare system, and reforming Medicare. Percentages are also nearly even in responses to questions on abortion and marijuana.

Pollsters and commentators tend to play up small differences and downplay large similarities. In most of the figures cited above, the differences among the races are much smaller than the similarities. On most issues, there are no findings that could be considered, even by a farfetched interpretation, to show a "white" versus a "black" position, nor a single position of any other ethnic group. Race simply does not determine a person's views.

**Class trumps race**

Most interestingly, differences within a racial group are often larger than those among races. For instance, sociologist Janet Saltzman Chafetz concludes in a recent study that "in any dimension one wishes to examine—income, education, occupation, political and social attitudes, etc.—the range of difference within one race or gender group is almost as great as that between various groups." A 1994 Kansas City study shows that income differences between age groups in a given race are greater than income differences between entire races.

Indeed, though African Americans are the least mainstreamed group in America, the black middle class is growing, and many of its members have adopted life styles and aspirations similar to those of other middle-class Americans and distinct from those of other black Americans. A 1998 Wall Street Journal public-opinion poll shows that differences within distinct classes of a single race are greater than differences among those races, on several, though not on all, key issues. Eighty-two percent of middle-class whites and 70 percent of non-middle-class whites report satisfaction with their personal finances (a disparity of 12 percent), while 74 percent of middle-class blacks
and 56 percent of non-middle-class blacks report such satisfaction (a difference of 18 percent). The differences, 12 percent and 18 percent respectively, are higher than the differences in opinion between the races (an 8 percent difference between middle-class whites and blacks, and a 14 percent difference between non-middle-class whites and blacks).

On numerous issues, the differences within various minority groups are as big or bigger than those between these groups and "Anglo" Americans. For instance, while fewer Cuban Americans agree with the statement that U.S. citizens should be hired over noncitizens than Anglos (42 percent of Cubans compared to 51 percent of Anglos), other Hispanic groups agree more strongly with the statement than Anglos (55 percent of Puerto Ricans and 54 percent of Mexican Americans). Quotas for jobs and college admissions are favored only by a minority of any of these four groups, but Cubans differ from Mexicans and Puerto Ricans more (by 14 percent) than from Anglos (by 12 percent).

The fact that various minorities do not share a uniform view, which could lead them to march lock-step with other minorities to a new "multicultural" America (as some on the left fantasize), is also reflected in elections. Cuban Americans tend to vote Republican while other Americans of Hispanic origin are more likely to vote Democratic. Americans of Asian origin cannot be counted on to vote one way or another. First-generation Vietnamese Americans tend to be strong anti-Communists and favor the Republican party, while older Japanese and Chinese Americans are more often Democrats, and Filipino Americans are more or less equally divided between the parties. Of the Filipino Americans registered to vote, 40 percent list themselves as Democrats, 38 percent as Republicans, and 17 percent as independent.

I am not suggesting that race makes no difference in a person's position, feelings, or thinking. One can find polls, especially in response to single questions, that show a strong racial influence. However, race does not determine a person's response, and often, on the most important matters, Americans of different racial backgrounds share many convictions, hopes, and goals—even in recent years, as we see the beginning of the decline of the white majority.
The social construction of race

Many social scientists call into question the very category of race drawn on by those who foresee increasing racial diversity and conflict. Alain Corcos, author of several books on genetics, race, and racism, notes that "race" has no single definition.

Race is a slippery word because it is a biological term, but we use it every day as a social term.... Social, political, and religious views are added to what are seen as biological differences.... Race also has been equated with national origin... with religion... with language.

The different definitions of race indicate that it is not a very reliable way to categorize human beings. Even anthropological and genetic definitions of race prove inadequate, because while each describes divisions among the human population, each fails to provide reliable criteria for making such divisions. As Corcos notes, such definitions "do not tell us how large divisions between populations must be in order to label them races, nor do they tell us how many there are." They are, he notes, "all matters of choice for the classifier."

Corcos also notes that strict biological divisions by race do not hold up. "Geographical and social barriers have never been great enough to prevent members of one population from breeding with members of another. Therefore, any characteristic which may have arisen in one population at one time will be transferred later to other populations through mating." Corcos further chronicles the failure of scientists and social scientists to categorize humans into definite races by such sundry methods as craniology, skin coloring, nose size and shape, and blood type or other genetic markers.

Social anthropologist Audrey Smedley shares these observations. She admits there are apparent biophysical differences among humans but reminds us that "race originated as the imposition of an arbitrary value system on the facts of biological (phenotypic) variations in the human species." She argues that race "was the cultural invention of arbitrary meanings applied to what appeared to be natural divisions within the human species. The meanings had social value but no intrinsic relationship to the biological diversity itself."
In other words, at first it may seem obvious that there are black, brown, yellow, and white people. But upon closer examination, we realize that there are great differences within each group, even if we choose to focus on, for example, skin color rather than on, say, manners. And these differences do not perfectly correlate with one another. That is, not all persons with darker skin are necessarily short (or tall), and so on. Race, which has been magnified in recent decades by identity politics, is but one imprecise social category, one that does not determine human conduct any more than numerous other social attributes, and often to a much lesser extent.

"Asian Americans" and "Latinos"

Such social groupings as "Asian American" or "Latino" are really statistical artifacts reflecting the way social data are coded and reported. Many ethnic leaders favor these labels, and the media finds them a convenient shorthand. Most so-called "Asian Americans" do not see themselves as such, and many resent being labeled this way. Many Japanese Americans do not feel a particular affinity to Filipino or Pakistani Americans—or even to Korean Americans. And the feeling is reciprocal. As Paul Watanabe, an expert on Asian Americans and himself an American of Japanese descent, puts it: "There's this concept that all Asians are alike, that they have the same history, the same language, the same background. Nothing could be more incorrect."

The same holds for so-called Latinos, including three of my sons. Hispanic Americans trace their origins to many different countries and cultures. According to Eduardo Diaz, a social service administrator, "There is no place called Hispanica. I think it's degrading to be called something that doesn't exist." Many Americans from Central America think of themselves as "mestizo," a term that refers to a mixture of Indian and European ancestry. Among those surveyed in the National Latino Political Survey in 1989, the greatest number of respondents choose to be labeled by their country of origin, as opposed to "pan-ethnic" terms like "hispanic" or "latino."

The significance of such data is that far from seeing a country divided into two or three hardened minority camps, we are witnessing an extension of a traditional American pic-
ture: Americans of different origins identifying with groups of other Americans from the same country, at least for a while, but not with any large or more lasting group. Far from there being a new coalition of nonwhite minorities soon to gain majority status (something President Clinton points to and Jesse Jackson calls a rainbow, one that contains all colors but white), racial groups differ greatly from each other—and within themselves.

"Nonwhite" states and cities

We can learn about the future, in which nonwhite majorities will prevail, by examining election results in the states and cities in which minorities already comprise the majority. They show that people of a given racial background often do not vote for a candidate of their color—and above all, that nonwhite groups often do not jointly support any one candidate of any one color or racial background. Any suggestion that race or ethnicity determines voting patterns is belied by the facts. For example, Peter Skerry, author of *Mexican Americans: The Ambivalent Minority*, notes that “when first elected to the San Antonio City Council in 1975, [the popular Henry] Cisneros was the candidate of the Anglo establishment and received a higher proportion of Anglo than Mexican votes cast.”

We often encounter the future first in California. In a 1991 Los Angeles election for the California State Assembly, Korean-American, Filipino-American, and Japanese-American groups each ran their own candidate, thus splitting the so-called Asian-American vote, not deterred by the fact that they thereby ensured the election of a white candidate.

In some nonwhite-majority cities, the mayor’s office is held in succession by whites, blacks, and Hispanics, despite only relatively small changes in the composition of the city population. For instance, in Los Angeles, which is roughly 64 percent nonwhite, Tom Bradley, an African American, served as mayor for 20 years, until 1993, when residents elected Richard Riordan, a white politician. New York City and San Francisco also have alternated in recent years between white and black mayors without witnessing any dramatic changes in the racial and ethnic makeup of those cities.
New York City, which is approximately 29 percent black, 24 percent Hispanic, and 7 percent Asian and Pacific Islander, elected for mayor the white Ed Koch, then chose the African-American David Dinkins, followed by Rudolph Giuliani. The roughly 55 percent minority city San Francisco was served by three white mayors from 1976 through 1995, but elected the African American Willie Brown in 1996. Dallas, which is about 30 percent black, 21 percent Hispanic, and 2 percent Asian, had no African-American mayor until 1995. Philadelphia, long served by white mayors, elected Wilson Goode to serve between 1984 and 1992, the city's first African-American mayor. Goode was followed by the white Edward Rendell in this city of nearly 40 percent blacks, 6 percent Hispanics, and 3 percent Asians. The fact that cities like D.C. (nearly 66 percent black) and Detroit (nearly 76 percent black) tend to elect black mayors is beside the point, because neither comprises a coalition of minorities but one minority. (Blacks, in some respects, exhibit more racial cohesion than other minorities.)

Virginia, in which whites outnumber minorities significantly (1.5 million minorities and 4.8 million whites), elected a black governor, L. Douglas Wilder, who served from 1989 to 1994. In the rural and conservative Second District of Georgia, a two-thirds white voter majority reelected Sanford D. Bishop, Jr., an African-American Democrat. Washington state, comprising only 4.5 percent Asian Americans, elected Gary Locke in 1996, putting in office the first Asian-American governor in the mainland United States. While one can find counter examples, the ones listed here indicate that the majority of minorities do not necessarily elect people of color, nor does the white majority necessarily elect white officials.

**Intermarriage and the rise of “Others”**

Last but not least, the figures used by those who project a majority of minorities, or the end of a white majority, are misleading. These figures are based on a simplistic projection of past trends, ignoring the rapidly rising category of racially mixed Americans, the result of the rising number of cross-racial marriages. One out of 12 marriages in 1995 (8.4 percent) were interracial or interethnic marriages. Intermarriages between Asian Americans and whites are particularly common;
marriages between Hispanic Americans and whites are also rather frequent, while such marriages with African Americans are the least common. About half of third-generation Mexican Americans marry non-Hispanic whites; even higher numbers of Asian Americans do the same.

Interracial marriage between black and other Americans is less common but rising. "In 1990, 84 percent of all married black people over the age of 65 were in both-black marriages, but only 53 percent of married blacks under 25 were," according to the Statistical Assessment Service. The Census Bureau finds that over the past 20 years, the number of marriages between blacks and whites has more than quadrupled, increasing from 65,000 in 1970 to 296,000 in 1994.

All together, since 1970, the proportion of marriages among people of different racial or ethnic origin increased by 72 percent. The 1990 Census notes 1.5 million interracial marriages. Some put the number of children of mixed-race parents at 3 million, not including Hispanic mestizos and black Americans who have European or Indian ancestry.

Another indication of the declining salience of race in American society can be gleaned from the fact that in the 1990 Census, 4 percent of Americans (9.8 million) chose to classify themselves as "others," i.e., not members of any particular racial group. Even if the trends already cited do not accelerate and continue only at the present pace, the figures for 2050 may read something like the following: 51 percent white, 14 percent multiracial, 35 percent minorities. Far from dividing the country still further, the rise of the "others," along with the fact that more and more Americans will be of mixed heritage, will serve to blur the racial lines. While there may well be more Americans of non-European origin, a growing number of the American white majority will have an Hispanic daughter- or son-in-law, an Asian stepfather or mother, and a whole rainbow of cousins. If one must find a simple image for the future of America, Tiger Woods seems more appropriate than Louis Farrakahn or David Duke.

Regrettably, identity politics led the U.S. Census Bureau to drop the category of "other" from its 2000 Census. This in turn makes it more difficult for Americans of mixed background, or those who wish to forgo racial labels, to declare
themselves what I would call "All Americans." Because the Census's categories influence other institutions—for example, colleges and universities which employ quotas—the "other" category of multiracial Americans is spreading more slowly than it otherwise would. In effect, at least 10 million Americans are forced into racial categories they seek to shed or modify, and American society appears more divided along racial lines than it actually is.

**Multiculturalism vs. the American creed**

In sum, foreseeable changes in America's demography do not imply that the American creed is being, or will be, replaced by something called "multiculturalism." Roberto Suro, author of *Strangers Among Us: How Latino Immigration is Transforming America*, reminds us that we do not need to divest ourselves of plurality in order to achieve harmony.

Americans have never thought of themselves as a single people as, for example, the Germans do. Although white, English-speaking Christians of European ancestry have set most of the norms for American society, there is still no deep sense of a *Volk* (a group that shares a common ancestry and culture and that embodies the national identity.) Ideas, not biology, are what generate oneness and homogeneity in the United States, and so long as the faith in those ideas has remained strong, the country has shown an extraordinary capacity to absorb people of many nationalities.

The American creed has always had room for a pluralism of sub-cultures, of people upholding some of the traditions and values of their countries of origin, from praying to sports to senses of humor. But American pluralism is bound by a shared moral and political framework. Otherwise, America would suffer the kind of ethnic tribalism that—when driven to extremes—tears apart countries as different as Yugoslavia and Rwanda, and has even split apart well-established democracies such as Canada and the United Kingdom (where Scottish separatism is on the rise).

The social, cultural, and legal elements that hold America together are well known. They include a shared commitment to the democratic way of life, to the Constitution and its Bill of Rights, and to mutual tolerance. The common culture that
underlies America’s racial and ethnic pluralism is further fortified by a strong conviction that one’s station in life is determined by hard work, saving, and taking responsibility for one’s self and one’s family. And most Americans still believe that while we are different in some respects, we are joined by the shared responsibilities of providing a good society for our children and ourselves—one free of racial and ethnic strife, a model of the thriving political order.