



There Are No “Minority” Voters

By

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As Election Day approaches, commentators are speculating about the impact the “minority” vote will have on the outcome. Can Mrs. Clinton win even if she does not receive as high a “minority” vote as President Obama did? Can Mr. Trump win without a significant number of “minority” votes? The “minority” voters they are speaking of are almost always African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans. Occasionally, Asian-Americans are mentioned. However, they never mention Jewish-Americans, Irish-Americans, or German-Americans. Why is this? A common definition of the word minority is “the smaller number or part, especially a number that is less than half the whole number.” Nothing about this definition can be used to argue that African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans are the only “minority” groups in this country.

Biographers indicate that Mrs. Clinton is primarily of English and Welsh heritage and Mr. Trump is primarily of Scottish and German heritage. Americans whose backgrounds are the same as those of the presidential candidates clearly constitute a number that is less than half of the U.S. population. Yet, neither presidential candidate is considered to be in a “minority” group.

Words like “minorities” and “minority groups” are clearly used selectively and are not applied consistently in reference to all ethnic groups that make up a statistically small number of the U.S. citizens. At times, these expressions seem to be used as code words with subtle negative connotations. Exactly which American citizens are members of “majority” groups? There is no single ethnic, racial, or cultural group that constitutes “true” Americans. Every citizen of the U.S. is fully and equally an American in the exact same sense of the word. Citizens who are descendants of passengers on the Mayflower are not, somehow, more truly Americans than descendants of “passengers” of slave ships, native people of the Seminole nation, or the most recent refugees from war-torn Syria, if they become citizens. The selective use of the word “minorities” as the collective designation of certain Americans can perpetuate negative stereotypes and is contradicted by what it means to be an American citizen.

European-Americans, with roots in Ireland, Italy, or Poland, for example, were once ostracized in this country as “immigrants,” “foreigners,” and “undesirable minorities.” The same was true of Jewish people. But why are they generally not considered minorities today? The answer is not because any one of these groups now

constitutes the statistical majority of the U.S. population. Matthew Frye Jacobson's *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* explains that the process of gathering together those Americans whose ancestors were from various European countries with very little in common and making them the "majority" group and relegating everyone else as "minorities" is, historically, a rather recent and arbitrary development. As a result, some commentators have implied that even if European-Americans become less than 50% of the population, they would not be considered a "minority" group. Yet, today, even when the majority of the residents in a city are African-Americans or Hispanic-Americans, they are still "minorities." The expression "minority" group compels some Americans to think of themselves in terms of who they are not, rather than in terms of who they are. This is similar to Catholics referring to Protestants as "non-Catholics." No one ever calls Catholics "non-Presbyterians."

The rejection of the word "minority" would not be a matter of so-called political correctness. Words, as conveyers of meaning, have great power. They can have a positive or negative impact on the self-esteem of individuals and groups. This is not an argument in favor of ignoring the great diversity of our country. It is just as easy to speak about the turn-out of African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans on Election Day as it is to speak about the turn-out of "minority" groups. A careful reflection on the meaning of the expression "*E Pluribus Unum*" excludes the possibility of designating "minorities" in this country, unless all citizens are so designated. A nation that proclaims itself to be "one from many" would be strengthened by affirming the truth there are no majority/minority groups in this country. In all of our diversity, we are striving to be one. That would be truly something for us all to celebrate on Election Day.

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