

Assimilate this

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After practically vanishing from the presidential campaign in its waning days, the immigration reform issue is again the topic du jour among anti-immigration fire-breathers.

Trying to regroup after their loss, some Republicans wasted no time and just one week after the inauguration of [President Obama](#) met in [Washington](#) to argue that pandering to pro-amnesty Latino voters is not the way to go forward.

A press release listing their topics of discussion, includes this: "Whatever gains, if any, pandering to Hispanics gives is greatly outweighed by loss of the White Vote, which is more important."

Driving immigrants out and sealing the border are the best arguments to win future elections, according to the report "Immigration and the 2008 Republican Defeat," also discussed at the Washington gathering, issued by the group American Cause and authored by [Marcus Epstein](#).

The larger pool of white voters they're after get, in sizable numbers, their world view from conservative talk radio and Internet publications, where hate-mongering thrives, unchecked and unchallenged.

To their ears, the words "immigrant" and "Latino" are usually followed or preceded by adjectives such as "criminal," "illegal," "drug smuggler" or even "potential terrorist," as well as accusations of refusing to learn English or assimilate.

Immigration reform advocates, particularly Latino activists, are falsely characterized as advocating "open borders" and "blanket amnesty."

These comments constitute "hate speech," as defined in a preliminary report on a pilot study conducted by [UCLA's Chicano Studies Research Center](#).

Hate speech leads to hate crimes. No argument about that. Violence against Latinos has increased by 40% in the past four years — sometimes with deadly results, as evidenced by last year's murder of Ecuadoran immigrant [Marcelo Lucero](#) on [Long Island](#).

Based on this and other reports, the [National Hispanic Media Coalition](#) has filed a petition with the [Federal Communications Commission](#), asking it to examine the extent, nature and effects of hate speech, the role of the media and possible options to counterbalance its negative impact.

The economic hardship the country is experiencing can only lead to more instances of Latino-bashing when fewer and fewer jobs are at stake. Therefore, let's hope the FCC takes this petition seriously and promptly.

Freedom of expression, protected by the First Amendment to the Constitution, is the main reason many immigrants come to the [U.S.](#), and we cherish it as much as anyone.

Certainly, no one wants to inhibit anyone from expressing his opinion, regardless of how vile it may be, but a fair, safe, middle ground must be found.

Hate speech should have no place in a nation of immigrants that pays a lot of lip service to its racial and cultural diversity.

Neither should other kinds of speech that, though perhaps not be categorized as "hate speech," certainly qualify as "ignorant speech."

The aforementioned Mr. Epstein, writing in an anti-immigration blog and quoted in a recent [New York Times](#) editorial, said: "Diversity can be good in moderation — if what's brought in is desirable. Most Americans don't mind a little ethnic food, some Asian math whizzes or a few mariachi dancers — as long as these trends do not overwhelm the dominant culture."

We've heard this before: They love to eat the guacamole, but can't stomach the people who actually invented it.

Mr. Epstein, assimilate this: There's no one American "dominant" culture. There never has been. Throughout history, American culture has evolved, and will continue to evolve, with the ebb and flow of immigration from different parts of the world.

It's all a matter of time. Send in the mariachis.

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CORRECTION: An earlier version of this column incorrectly quoted a report by Marcus Epstein of American Cause saying

that white voters are “more important” than Hispanic voters. Those comments were not in the report and were not said by Epstein. The Daily News regrets the error.