

Cultural differences and measuring achievement

Re: "Lamm's remarks stir anger," July 28 news story.

Dick Lamm and I have some major disagreements about the causes of differential minority group success in America. But I'll say this about my University of Denver colleague: He runs an excellent and inclusive discussion seminar. I discovered this when Dick graciously invited me to address our differences in a graduate public policy class last spring. We had a very respectful and useful dialogue that included many energized students. It was everything a college class on a controversial topic should be.

What's more striking to me is the difference between the context and substance of public talks we gave on successive Mondays last month. While Dick spoke about minority economic and educational underperformance to 120 presumably well-heeled citizens in Vail on July 24, the previous Monday I spoke about Hispanic and African-American contributions to the great struggle for industrial freedom and workplace justice that culminated in the Ludlow Massacre — to eight people in the basement of the First Presbyterian Church in Glenwood Springs.

This summer, as we scurry to and from relatively safe workplaces and enjoy weekends (and even entire weeks) away from work, it might be good to remember — or study up on — the enormous sacrifices made by minority groups in winning some very basic rights that Americans of all colors today take for granted. Cultural success, and differential achievement, can be measured and explained in many ways. We need public conversations that generate less heat, and more light.

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