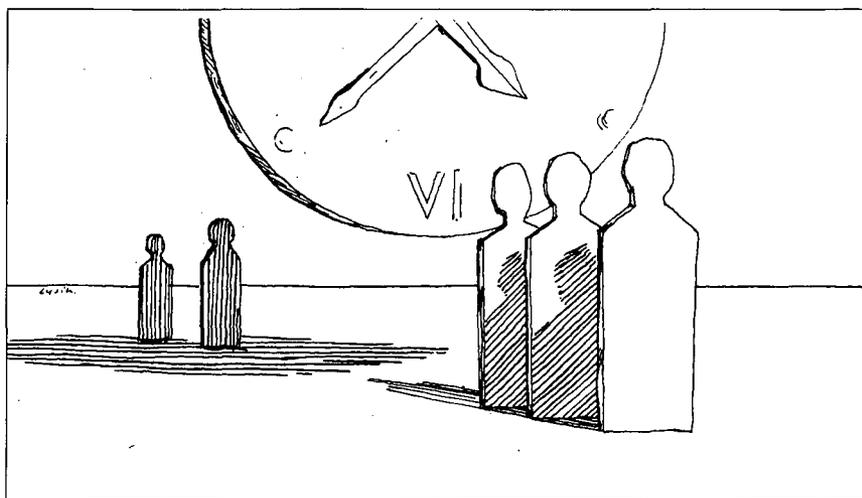


The Sentimentalist Conspiracy

by Chilton Williamson, Jr.

"Actum est de republica."
—Latin saying



Peaceful Invasions: Immigration and Changing America

by Leon F. Bouvier

Washington, D.C.: Center for Immigration Studies; 234 pp., \$45.00

The Bourgeois Age is finished, but a principal feature of Victorianism—the fullest and most developed expression of that era—still flourishes. Postmoderns consider themselves a hardheaded and realistic people, yet the average American today is probably as much a sentimentalist as the typical Dickens reader of a century ago. Sentimentality—not racism, greed, or sensuality—is the definitive vice of the American people at the end of the 20th century as it was at the close of the 19th, but it has undergone a change in emphasis over the past hundred years. In Dickens' time, the object of sentimental feeling was still the individual—Little Nell and Tiny Tim—while in our own day it is the group—The Poor, The Homeless, Minorities, Gays, The Differently Abled, The Third World. The evening news programs are the brief emotional equivalent of *Little Dorrit* and *Oliver Twist*, whose producers engage in every tear-jerking device known to their horrible trade short

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of actually holding up cue cards that say CRY. Of course, the individual case is meant to personalize the plight of the group, just as Dickens' novels intentionally pointed at social conditions lying beyond personal experience. Still, the Christian Victorians recognized in suffering a personal meaning that has become attenuated for the secular post-moderns, for whom pain and misery are more or less abstract manifestations of social dislocation. Add to the sociological temptation the susceptibility to sentimentality and fantasy encouraged and exploited by the creators of popular culture and the inability of the American public school system to graduate people able to think and to reason, and the result is public debate waged overwhelmingly by crass and unapologetic sentimentalists.

Rationalist liberals and New York and Washington "conservatives" enjoy a good time with sentimentally pious rightists who preferred their country when it was a republic to what it has become as an empire, yet at no time does their own brand of sentimentality betray, itself so obviously as when they insist that the United States, being "a nation of immigrants," must continue to hold its doors open to newcomers from abroad. Leon F. Bouvier, a demographer associated with Tulane University and formerly vice-president at the Population Reference

Bureau, as well as a member of the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy in 1980, is a self-proclaimed liberal who believes in what he calls a "liberal-limitationist" approach to a subject that could be called inflammable if it were not so unpopular as to be scarcely visible at all.

Professor Bouvier has four discrete arguments to make on behalf of setting a limit of 450,000 legal immigrants annually to the United States (the current number is 950,000) and of reducing illegal immigration to a trickle. The first is that the American underclass, which is proportionately larger than that of any other industrialized nation, is expanding in spite of the reduced national fertility rate and as a direct result of increased immigration quotas that add great numbers of predominantly young and unskilled aliens to the work force, thus aggravating a situation caused by the gap between employers' need for educated workers and the relatively small number of skilled workers available. The second is that high levels of immigration are retarding the modernization, and therefore the competitiveness, of American industry by creating a large pool of unskilled labor from which businesses can draw low-paid workers in preference to investing in technological development that would reduce the need for cheap labor

while increasing their efficiency and competitiveness, as well as, finally, their profitability. The third is that immigrants in their current numbers make assimilation into American society unlikely if not impossible, absent a curtailment of the present influx such as halted the three previous waves of immigration to the United States. Fourth, Bouvier makes the crucial but rarely stated case for the necessity of protecting the country's limited space, unlimited beauty, and precious natural resources from the impact of scores and, eventually, hundreds of millions of people; demographers' worst-case predictions envisage an American population of a half-billion people before 2060 and no end to human increase in sight, compared with 316 million (no further growth expected) by 2050 if immigration is held to the 450,000 per annum advocated by Bouvier and the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy. Bouvier effectively counters the assertion made by optimist-alarmists like Ben Wattenberg that the country will shortly face a paralyzing shortage of warm manageable bodies, and answers the nation-of-immigrants cant by replying that the United States no longer requires brute manpower in great quantities, and by citing the warning of Arnold Toynbee that the processes that create and develop institutions typically end by destroying them.

Professor Bouvier is correct in identifying the immigration question as a crucial one for the 1990's, since decisions made—or not made—in the coming decade will determine irreversible social, political, and economic developments for the next century and beyond. Which prompts one to ask why we are not hearing more concerning this issue. Alone among the candidates to bring up the subject in this election year is Pat Buchanan, who has outraged the keepers of public opinion by expressing a preference for British over Ethiopian immigrants, and advocated digging a ditch on the Southwest border. Outrage, however, has failed to produce debate but only insult from such public figures as William Bennett and Rich Bond, who exemplify the truth that charges of racism have become the last (or is it the first?) refuge of scoundrels and who lack the fundamental honesty and courage to engage in reasoned argument on the subject, preferring instead to smear those who display such courage. Under the circumstances that constrain public discourse in

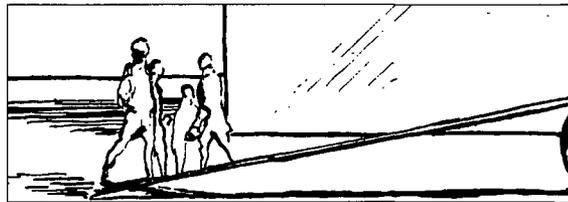
this country, Buchanan's remarks have fallen like pebbles tossed into a deep well. None of the Democratic candidates has had a word to say about immigration.

Why this neglect of what ought to be a major issue in American politics at the end of the 20th century? The polls have shown for years that an overwhelming majority of voters favors reducing substantially the number of people accepted for residency in this country, and it seems inexplicable that one or more politicians, whether brave or simply vote-hungry, should not have seized on the question long ago—as Le Pen has in France—to embarrass Congress, which remains steadfastly oblivious to the problems posed by tens of millions of “peaceful invaders.” Bouvier's explanation for Washington's studied indifference to majoritarian sentiment is that the anti-immigrationists are unorganized and that, with certain regional exceptions, the subject is not of primary importance to Americans; consequently, politicians feel secure in ignoring their concern as they do not in opposing the far more intense emotions of the antitax, pro-abortion, and pro-immigration lobbies.

So far so good, yet to place the blame for America's irresponsible handling of the

immigration crisis on the workings of politics-as-usual is to ignore the extent to which unexamined assumptions have come to overlie the more mundane preoccupations of what Mark Twain called “America's only native criminal class.” If Pat Buchanan cannot get a national argument going over immigration, it is because the two national political parties think alike on the question, as in fact they do on a great many—perhaps even most—others. Mencken's characterization of an American presidential election as “a deafening, nerve-racking battle to the death between Tweedledum and Tweedledee, Harlequin and Sganarelle, Gobbo and Dr. Cook” is a great deal more true today than it was at the time of writing in the early decades of this century. The Republican Party is the complementary half of the walnut whose other half is the Democratic Party; together, they comprise the political establishment of the corporate megastate to which each is unshakably devoted. One half of the walnut is sympathetic to capitalist corporatism, the other to socialist corporatism; one has tender regrets for “traditional values,” the other anticipatory admiration for sodomy and other forms of perversion, particularly feminism; one courts the destruction of the natural world in the name of progress, the oth-

LIBERAL ARTS



A BOILING—NOT MELTING—POT

Hundreds of marchers staged a rally in Santa Barbara, California, “chanting slogans of Chicano power,” reported the *Santa Barbara News-Press* last February. “One of the reasons we're here right now is to show people we can take those streets any time we want them,” said Rudy Acuña, a Chicano leader who was denied a faculty position in the Chicano Studies program at the University of California, Santa Barbara, last summer. The rally was dedicated to the memory of Luis Urzua, member of a radical Chicano group. Don Dubay, a UCSB administrator, called the event “democracy in action,” and Shirley Kennedy, a lecturer in black studies at UCSB, urged the marchers to run for political office, saying “The 21st century will be ours.”

er flirts with the wisdom of Deep Ecology which holds that man is a coequal element of nature. Between the two parties there is in fact a difference of sorts, but it is the difference between the creative department of a national advertising agency and the accounting one. Without the Democratic counterbalance, the Republicans would inaugurate Donald Trump as President, strip-mine the Grand Canyon, and make a killing on Wall Street by selling time-shared condominiums built on the remains to unsuspecting Japanese investors; without the Republicans looking over their shoulders, the Democrats would nominate Anita Hill for the presidency, confer voting rights on trees, and include Pet Rocks among the delegates to their national conventions. While there may occasionally be a compelling reason for rightists to vote for the Republican candidate in an election, there is no reason at all for them to wish, as New York "conservatives" do, for the domination of the state and federal governments by the Republican Party. There is really only one good reason for voting for the candidate of either of the two national parties, and that is in order to cancel out the candidate of the other.

The fact that the Republican Party establishment is unwilling to argue the immigration question in public proves in what degree it has become simply another

arm of the managerial state, a cheerful experimenter willing to give the concept of the First Universal Nation a try at the expense of what little remains of the old American Republic. The word "Republican," in other words, as applied to the party of Bush, Kemp, and Bennett—the prematurely undeclared Republican candidate in 1996—is one of the great misnomers of American history, to say nothing of the term "conservative" or "rightist." When Gramsci wrote of the susceptibility of conservative programs to gradual co-optation by progressive ones, he was foretelling with great accuracy the direction of American politics in the 20th century. "Ideology" is an awful word, pretentious and essentially meaningless. For that reason, I do not hesitate to apply it to another pretentious and idiotic thing, namely the idea of the First Universal Nation that the Republican Party refuses to gag at, like a too-polite guest at a banquet of salmonella-infected delicacies.

Ideology is torturously rationalized and elaborated sentiment based on nothing more than the determination that fantasy should be forcibly converted to fact. It is not surprising, therefore, that a society as sentimental as ours is should have capitulated not just to the most gigantic piece of sentimentalist ideology since the Tower of Babel, but to the peculiar

cowardice that sentimentalism always produces. Sentimentalism in decadent cultures always pays; and the question that America needs to ask itself in the 1990's is not whether we are a nation of laws or of men, but whether we have a government of men or of George Bush, Bill Bennett, and Jack Kemp.

If sentimentalism is a sin, it belongs to the category of sins of indulgence which today, in the twilight of the Democratic Age, so often take the form in public men of self-submergence in the conviction of their own compassionate wisdom and enlightenment, together with an unwillingness to examine the stark and un-sentimental truth. Is there another explanation for the Bush administration's readiness to spend tens of billions of dollars constructing a missile farm in the middle of an antelope pasture in South Dakota, while budgeting a couple of hundred million to beef up the U.S. Border Patrol? Or for its insistence that it is feasible to cover the continent with an antiballistic screen, but not feasible to control our border, as every other country in the world controls its own? Meanwhile, the Democratic-Republican Party expects us to lie awake fretting about incoming warheads from Libya, Iraq, and Kazakhstan, and to ignore the millions of peaceful invaders, legal and illegal, tiptoeing past our windows in the dead of night. ◊

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From a Front Box by James W. Tuttleton

Henry Adams: Selected Letters
Edited by Ernest Samuels
Cambridge: Harvard University Press;
612 pp., \$29.95

Only the most devoted students of Henry Adams are likely to have bought and read the six-volume *Complete Letters* that Harvard University Press produced between 1982 and 1988. More's the pity, since it was an excellent work of scholarship disclosing an American epistolary artist of the highest order. But the editor and biographer, Ernest Samuels, has now given us a manageable one-volume selection of 240 letters spanning the 60-year period from 1858-1918. And what a collection it is—nearly every one a gem.

Adams's correspondents included his famous family, of course, but many other recipients likewise had a recognized place in the literary, political, scientific, and social life of his time—including Charles Eliot Norton, Charles Milnes Gaskell, Henry Cabot Lodge, John Hay, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Charles W. Eliot, William and Henry James, Elizabeth Cameron, and Theodore Roosevelt. But even if some of the recipients were not themselves luminaries of the great world, Adams's letters are so full of shrewd and entertaining comments on important personalities and developments in his time that we cannot do without a single one of them. And, needless to say, the collection offers an unfolding autobiography, of sorts, of one of the most brilliant and complicated men of his time.

Descending as he did from a line of American Presidents, Henry Adams expected that his father, Congressman Charles Francis Adams, would likewise ascend to the White House. And who could doubt that he himself might in due course follow? The theme of *The Education of Henry Adams*, privately published in 1907, was to be the failure of his education in politics, law, science, literature, and society to prepare him for the life of his time. But in 1858, at age 20, he wrote

to his brother that he had "a theory that an educated and reasonably able man can make his mark if he chooses. . . . But if I know myself, I can't fail." The family chaffed with him about a life in politics; and he chaffed back in telling his mother in 1860 that "As for having the 'Presidency' in view I hardly think it's desirable with the present occupant's fate before one's eyes [a hostile Congress was investigating President Buchanan's 'abuse' of federal patronage]; I aspire to the leadership in the lower House and the Departments." Yet he knew himself to be most adapted to "literary pursuits," and given his family's importance, he decided at the beginning that what he had to write would have historical significance. In an 1860 letter to his brother—written from Washington, where he was serving as private secretary to his father—he remarks:

I propose to write you this winter a series of private letters to show how things look. I fairly confess that I want to have a record of this winter on file, and though I have no ambition nor hope to become a Horace Walpole, I still would like to think that a century or two hence when everything else about us is forgotten, my letters might still be read and quoted as a memorial of manners and habits at the time of the great secession of 1860. At the same time you will be glad to hear all the gossip and to me it will supply the place of a Journal.

The allusion to Walpole is not insignificant. Taken together, Adams's nearly 3,000 letters are the mirror of his age, a compendium of gossip, and the equivalent of a journal recording his impressions of friends and family, political and social developments, travels, and travails. Because he expected them to be published, the letters of this child of the Puritans are not as intimate as those of other writers like James Joyce or Henry James. But reading between the lines—in the light of others' memoirs, *The Education*, his histories, and the novels *Democracy* and *Esther*—Adams's account of political life in

the London embassy during the Civil War, of his wife's social brilliance in Grant's Washington, of his South Sea travels, of his long platonic widower's relationship with Elizabeth Cameron (the wife of a senator)—these give the volume a deeply personal as well as historical dimension.

What is surprising to discover is that the famous irony and self-deprecation were there from the very beginning. In 1863 he tells his brother Charles Francis that all of his readings in science and philosophy confirm his belief in "our own impotence and ignorance. In this amusement, I find, if not consolation, at least some sort of mental titillation." Later he responds to William James's argument for free will by remarking to him that "A few hundred men represent the entire intellectual activity of the whole thirteen hundred million. What then? . . . Not one of them has ever got so far as to tell us a single vital fact worth knowing. We can't prove even that we are."

After his beloved wife Clover committed suicide in 1885, Adams was thereafter silent about the matter. He told Lord Curzon in 1906 that "I cannot talk of her. . . . Some visions are too radiant for words. When they fade, they leave life colorless. I do not understand how we bear such suffering as we do when we lose them; but we have to be silent, for no expression approaches the pain." Adams thereafter launched on worldwide wanderings. His letters to Elizabeth Cameron are rich in descriptions, reflections, and observations about the South Seas, European society, and American life beyond the muddy Beltway. Wealthy and famous, he was always the object of matchmakers, but as he told Lucy Baxter in 1890,

You all abominate second marriages, yet you all conspire to bring them about. I receive admonitions constantly on the subject, and am aware that my friends take an active interest in selecting a victim to sacrifice to my selfishness. I do not care to interfere with their search. My only precaution is to show a pro-