

Menace of Diversity

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sorb all the people of the world into our society and submerge our historic character as a predominantly Caucasian Western society?"

Mr. Will's response to this innocuous passage is to instruct Mr. Buchanan and us on American Nationality Properly Understood. Buchanan, he wrote, "evidently does not understand what distinguishes American nationality—and should rescue our nationalism from nativism. Ours is, as the first Republican president said, a nation dedicated to a proposition. Becoming an American is an act of political assent, not a matter of membership in any inherently privileged group, Caucasian or otherwise. The 'Euro-Americans' who founded this nation did not want anything like China or Arabia—or any European nation, for that matter."

Once we disentangle the cognitive meaning of Mr. Will's language from the snottiness that invariably embellishes his prose, it is clear that Mr. Will is here asserting a necessary premise of the political and cultural universalism by which the managed decomposition of American civilization is rationalized. America, that premise holds, is defined in terms of a proposition, and from the point of view of those who agree with this view of American identity, he is right to insinuate that Mr. Buchanan is downright un-American. If America is in fact founded on and is largely identical with a proposition, then one becomes an American simply by assenting to or agreeing with the proposition, just as one becomes a member of the Book of the Month Club by filling out the little card that in fine print details the terms of membership, and the process of assimilation as an American is no more complicated than understanding and carrying out the logi-

cal implications of the proposition or indeed of ordering your monthly installment of the immortal prose of Stephen King, Harold Robbins, and William Buckley from the Book of the Month Club.

There is no reason to learn a particular language, to adhere to particular moral and social norms that range from table manners and dress codes to the raising of

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children and the social uses of violence, or to conform to a set of institutions and collective habits that define American culture. Indeed, if Mr. Will were correct in his view of what constitutes American nationality, not only would Mr. Buchanan be wrong but so also would be most of the current legal requirements for naturalization, which still include learning English and displaying some grasp of the nature of American citizenship. No doubt those too will eventually be scrapped as the logical dynamic of the Lincolnian "proposition" works itself out and the distinctive and defining American civilization vanishes in the global stewpot.

The view that America is a proposition, an idea, an experiment, the product of a particular political theory or doctrine or ideology, or some other abstraction is thus an essential premise of the universalism that today serves as the principal formula of the

emerging global order. There is, however, an alternative view of America that is more correct historically and more sociologically realistic. That view is that America is not a proposition or an idea but a culture, which is to say it is many ideas embodied in inherited and habitual patterns of conduct. Because those patterns of conduct or folkways are usually not the result of rational thought and argument, they cannot be adopted merely by a process of intellectual assent, and for that reason they are by their very nature not universal.

The folkways that define any society, including America, are particular and specific to it, and while aliens may eventually assimilate to the norms contained in the folkways, the process of assimilation would be arduous, painful, and unusual, and even unappealing to those outside the folkways. And, if the folkways are not universal, neither are they immortal. They are artifacts, and they are not the product of nature, and unless they are re-enforced and sustained by continuous practice, which is to say, by tradition, they will cease to exist, and with them, the political society they create and define.

In the United States, throughout its history and even today, the principal source of the folkways that define and distinguish American society and culture from those of other nations is Great Britain, and the main authority today on the British origins of American folkways is the historian David Hackett Fischer, whose book *Albion's Seed* explores in massive detail how what he distinguishes as four different ethnic and regional migrations from Britain from the 17th through the 18th centuries established the fundamental normative patterns of conduct in both public and private life in this country. I don't plan to elaborate in any detail on what Professor Fischer writes

about these subcultures, but I will enumerate them briefly. They include the earliest large migration from England, mainly from eastern England in the region called East Anglia, of people who were Puritan in religion and who settled in New England; those who came mainly from southern England shortly afterward and, reflecting its more highly structured society in their Royalist political sentiments and aristocratic and deferential habits of life, settled in Virginia; those, largely Quakers, from the North Midlands of England and Wales in the late 17th and early 18th centuries who settled in the Delaware Valley, including Pennsylvania; and finally those from the northern borderlands of England and Scotland who arrived in the course of the 18th century and settled the Carolinas and Appalachian regions.

"Today," writes Professor Fischer, "less than 20 percent of the American population have any British ancestors at all. But in a cultural sense most Americans are Albion's seed, no matter who their own forebears may have been. Strong echoes of four British folkways may still be heard in the major dialects of American speech, in the regional patterns of American life, in the complex dynamics of American politics, and in the continuing conflict between four different ideas of freedom in the United States,... the legacy of four British folkways in early America remains the most powerful determinant of a voluntary society in the United States today." (pp. 6-7)

Fischer's emphasis on the transplanting of these four British folkways on American soil goes far beyond the commonplace that our language and literature, our mainstream religion, and our political and legal institutions are largely British in origin, and it rather exposes George Will's

"propositional" identity as the Boy Scout happy chatter that it is. Mr. Will, however, is not entirely wrong. There are indeed more abstract propositions and ideas that went to form the United States and American culture, but what he and we need to understand is that those abstractions are possible as norms only because they were inherited from the particular culture in which they developed and they acquire meaning only in the context of the historic cultural origins of the society that made use of them.

Many of the problems of public discussion that we experience today in this country come directly from the gradual loss or evanescence of the British cultural patterns that prevailed at the time of the settling and the Founding and the consequent loss of the intended and commonly understood meaning of the terms and values that the founders shared. Thus, terms like "cruel and unusual" as applied to legal punishments in the 8th Amendment to the Constitution, a phrase that derives directly from the English Bill of Rights of 1689 that was intended to ratify the Revolution of 1688, shared a common meaning in the 18th century that we have utterly lost. The concept of a "militia," mentioned in the 2nd Amendment as necessary to a "free state," is also a term and an institution of British origin that we no longer understand.

In a column in the *Orlando Sentinel-Tribune* on April 10, 1994, Sarah Brady, professional victim-crusader against guns and wife of the famous potted plant James Brady, revealed to an astonished public that "nothing could be further from the truth" that the 2nd Amendment permits private gun ownership because, among other silly reasons dreamed up by her ghostwriter, "It is now well-accepted that the 2nd Amendment guarantees the right to be armed only in connection with service in

a state's militia. The preservation of a state's militia—or National Guard as it is called today—does not give private citizens the right to maintain their own personal arsenal."

There are so many fatuous errors in this brief sentence that it is hard to know where to begin to criticize it. Mrs. Brady would do much better if she just stayed home and took care of her wounded husband instead of advertising her misinformed views of both the Constitution and American history and doing all she can to take guns away from the law-abiding but nothing to restrain criminals. In the first place, the National Guard, a distinct agency of the state government in the same way that the state police are, is not at all the same thing as the militia of the 2nd Amendment, and in the second place, the whole point of the British concept of the militia, of course, is that it is composed of private citizens who own their own guns. The militia, as both Englishmen and Americans in the 18th century and for long after understood it, was not an agency of the government so much as it was a function of the society. Just as it is sometimes said that the Episcopal Church is the Republican Party at prayer, so the militia may be thought of as the citizenry in arms, but it is the very opposite of the kind of state-maintained standing army that Mrs. Brady and other anti-gun nuts think it is.

Similarly, terms like "equality," "freedom of speech," and others had reasonably clear and agreed-upon meanings in 18th century England and America that they no longer have, so that today such words are used mainly as political weapons by which those most skilled at manipulating them can gain power instead of being used to communicate the shared values and beliefs of a culturally unified society.

Nevertheless, even though Professor Fischer asserts that the formative British folkways "remain the most powerful determinant" of American society today, that determinant is rapidly being eroded by the forces I mentioned earlier. At the time of the founding, the population of the United States was 60% English, 80% British, and 98% Protestant. As late as 1900, 60% of the population remained British, but by 1920 it composed only 41% of the population. By 1980 less than 20% reported having any British ancestors at all, and the largest ethnic stock was composed of those of German descent. This is a development that the Framers themselves feared and resisted. At the time of the American Revolution, as Dr. Wayne Lutton has shown in his monograph *The Myth of Open Borders* (Monterey, Va.: American Immigration Control Foundation, 1988), the Founding Fathers were virtually unanimous in opposing easy immigration to the new republic.

Thomas Jefferson wrote in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* that immigrants from monarchical countries should be discouraged from immigrating. "They will bring with them the principles of the governments they leave, or if able to throw them off, it will be in exchange for an unbounded licentiousness, passing, as usual, from one extreme to the other. It would be a miracle were they to stop precisely at the point of temperate liberty." Alexander Hamilton rarely agreed with Jefferson on much of anything, but he agreed with him on immigration. In a speech of 1802 he said, "The opinion expressed in *Notes on Virginia* is undoubtedly correct, that foreigners

will generally be apt to bring with them attachments to the persons they have left behind; to the country of their nativity, and to its particular customs and manners.... The influx of foreigners must, therefore, tend to produce a heterogeneous compound; to change and corrupt the national spirit; to complicate and confound public opinion; to introduce foreign propensities." James Madison also remarked that "I do not wish that any man should acquire the privilege of citizenship but such as would be a real addition to the wealth or strength of the United States."—not exactly the Julian Simon view of immigration.

George Washington wrote to John Adams in 1794 that "my opinion with respect to immigration is, that except of useful mechanics and some particular description of men and professions, there is no use of encouragement," and later he wrote, "I have no intention to invite immigrants, even if there are no restrictive acts against it. I am opposed to it altogether." These sentiments were commonplace among the leaders and founders of the American Republic, and of course they were mainly thinking of European immigrants. It probably never occurred to most of them that Asians, Africans, and Latin American Indians would one day displace even the Europeans whose coming they opposed.

But, as the demographic figures I mentioned show, the advice of the Framers was not followed, with major cultural consequences as immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe arrived in the 19th century. In *The Rise of Selfishness in America*, a little-noticed but impor-

tant book published in 1991, historian James Lincoln Collier discusses the effects on the Anglo-American culture of these European immigrants. Unlike the British settlers of the previous era, he argues, the Irish, German, Jewish, and Southern and East European immigrants who came to this country in the 1800s had little attraction to the prevailing Victorian ethic that the prevalent Anglo-Saxon stock had imparted. "The immigrants, then," he writes,

were bringing to the United States an array of habits, attitudes, and folkways that conflicted, at times dramatically, with the prevailing American patterns of thought and behavior. They were, in sum, resolutely anti-Victorian in almost every respect. They did not believe in discipline, punctuality, sobriety—the order and decency of the Victorian ethic. They wanted instead to live as expressively as they could. In what spare time they could snatch from their jobs and family obligations they wanted to drink, to dance, to gamble, to have fun. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the people of the old stock were appalled by their behavior. It seemed to them that the newcomers were intent upon destroying the decent and orderly society that they of the old stock were trying so hard to build and maintain.

The result, in Collier's view, was that the new immigrants of the 19th century imparted to America their own cultural habits centered around "expressiveness" through their predominance in the new mass industries of popular culture—sports, movies, music, theater, journalism, mass entertainment, and the mass vices offered by organized crime under the control of new immigrant godfathers. I note this cultural transition due to European immigration not because I want to criticize the effect of European immigrants on the United States, if criticism is in

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order, but merely to point out that immigration from countries and cultures different from that of the receiving culture will inevitably have a profound differentiating effect on the country that receives it, and that is precisely what happened in the United States in the 19th century, just as the Framers had foreseen.

What happened in the mid to late 19th century was a combination of three forces that served to impair the unity and integrity of the Anglo-American culture that had developed in the colonial period and the first part of the 19th century. The victory of the North in the Civil War allowed an increasingly plutocratic capitalist elite to seize national power and remold the country into a shape that served the interests of the elite, and though those interests generally demanded a laissez faire economic policy and a small federal government, their interests also sometimes involved using the state in their own behalf. As Robert Higgs has written,

Railroad promoters actively lobbied for land grants and other subsidies at every level of government. A chorus of manufacturers continually cried out for tariff protection. Big businessmen routinely resorted to the courts for assistance in their struggle against labor unions. In an age of rough-and-tumble politics and often venal politicians, the owners and managers of big businesses possessed extraordinary ability to sway the political process, and they did so with considerable success. (p. 81)

It was mainly because of the predominance of those interests that massive immigration from Europe occurred, and the conjunction of this wave of immigration, introducing into the United States cultural fragments that had little understanding of or loyalty to traditional Anglo-American folkways, combined with the unleashed acquisitive individualism of the Gilded Age to help initiate the erasure of the older folkways and the cultural and political order

founded on them. In time, the new immigrants would provide the mass political base as well as the directing elite of political movements that worked against the political institutions of the Anglo-American Old Republic and its public ethic of socialized or ascetic individualism and would help form the mass society and culture of the 20th century, with their managerial elites embedded in the leviathan structures of economy, state, and culture.

The conjunction of the plutocratic elite of the late 19th century with waves of new cultural aliens served to formulate the third force that contributed to the erasure of Anglo-American culture, acquisitive individualism. For all the invocation of nationalism, the new elite formulated a new ideology that merely used national unity as a mask for individual economic aspirations and material gratification, and Lincoln's egalitarianism was a necessary premise of this ideology. Equality was justified not so much on moral or ethical grounds as on utilitarian grounds, as useful for the achievement of upward economic mobility.

The Old Republican "equality before the law" was subtly hammered into the acquisitive individualist "equality of opportunity," a formula that allows for endless intrusion and manipulation of civil society by the national state. And in the 20th century, it was the 19th century erasure of the Anglo-American culture by the forces of a triumphant plutocracy that seized national power in the Civil War, their new ideology of acquisitive individualism, and their culturally alien imported proletariat that made possible and indeed perhaps inevitable the revolutionary discarding of Old Republican political institutions and the construction of the leviathan state that we today all know and love.

George Will and his cohorts who assert an abstract, propositional, universalist American nationality are therefore wrong, though he is partially right in asserting that "the 'Euro-Americans' who founded this nation did not want anything like China or Arabia—or any European nation, for that matter." It's quite true that the Framers did not want a Chinese or an Arab or indeed a European nation, and therefore they would have opposed the mass immigration from Arab and Asian and Latin countries that we experience today; they wanted an American nation, and they explicitly understood by an American nation a continuation of Great Britain and the cultural heritage that underlies its political unity.

Today we are quickly learning to read more carefully the fine print on the membership card of the New World Order and we may recall that what Hamilton said of immigration in the first years of the 19th century remains true at the end of the 20th, that "the influx of foreigners must...tend to produce a heterogeneous compound; to change and corrupt the national spirit; to complicate and confound public opinion; to introduce foreign propensities," and that the self-governing republic the Framers created cannot endure the heterogeneous compound that the New World Order promises us. That compound will become, and is already becoming, the mass political base of the new global despotism that rises before us, and if we seriously seek to restore the Old Republic, we will first need to understand and create anew the cultural homogeneity on which it was based and without which it could not survive. ■

Dr. Francis, is a syndicated columnist for the Washington Times. His article is based on a speech delivered at the 1994 meeting of the John Randolph Club.