

El Republica del Norte

The next American nation?

by Brent Nelson

The *Albuquerque Tribune* in its issue of January 31, 2000, reported at length on one man's plan for a *Republica del Norte*. The new republic, according to its herald, Dr. Charles Truxillo, an adjunct professor of Chicano Studies at the University of New Mexico, should be brought into existence "by any means necessary."¹ Despite this impatient tone, Truxillo admits that the new *Republica del Norte* will probably not come into being until toward the end of the century. When it does take its place among the nations of the world, it will be a sovereign Chicano nation straddling the present U.S.-Mexican border. North of the border, it will comprise the present states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and part of Colorado. South of the border, it will include the present Mexican states of Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, and Tamaulipas.

Why will the rest of Mexico not be included in the new republic? The *Albuquerque Tribune's* reporter did not ask this question, but a reasonable guess is that the republic's boundaries will be drawn to include only the northern industrial belt of Mexico. This is the area of Mexico where the pro-capitalist National Action Party (PAN) has elected governors. Northern Mexico also has the highest concentration of people who are wholly or mostly of Caucasian descent. Southern Mexico is Indian Mexico and seems to be in a state of insurgency more often than not.² Although the Marxist opposition party, the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) is strong in the southernmost provinces, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) still manages to dominate them through force and fraud.

Truxillo believes in the right of a state to secede.

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Although the U.S. government might deny that right to its own states, it at least once recognized the right of Mexican states to secede. The notorious example of the latter was, of course, the U.S.-approved transformation of *Tejas* into Texas. (Santa-Anna could have argued—and perhaps did so, because he lived until 1876—that he was only trying to do what Lincoln did.)

Along both sides of the border, according to Truxillo, "there is a growing fusion, a reviving of connections. Southwest Chicanos and Norteno Mexicanos are becoming one people again." They must become one people again, and independent, because they "have been ruled by three empires, Spain, Mexico, and the United States. Under all three systems, we have failed to achieve self-determination."³

Why is self-determination for Chicanos so important? Truxillo's answer is thought-provoking: "Among native-born American Hispanics, there is the feeling that we are strangers in our own land. We remain subordinated. We have a negative image of our own culture, created by the media. Self-loathing is a terrible form of oppression. ... There has to be an alternative."⁴

Truxillo cites the notorious Malcolm X formula, "by any means necessary," but it is doubtful that any drastic measures will be taken to bring into being a *Republic del Norte*. The spirit of *el Plan de San Diego*, an abortive violent uprising which erupted in 1917, provided the inspiration for a number of nationalist movements from then until the 1980s, all focused on Aztlán and *la Raza*, but it is now probably an obsolescent model.⁵ Political and legal developments fully accepted and even welcomed by U.S. governing circles are preparing the way for a triumph of Chicano nationalism without any recourse to armed militancy.

On July 2, 2000, the Mexican equivalent of the fall of the Berlin Wall took place when Vicente Fox Quesada, the presidential candidate of PAN, won a winning plurality of the vote against the candidates of the PRI and the PRD. For the first time in 71 years, the candidate of the PRI had failed to win election.⁶

The PAN, a pro-capitalist and pro-religious party,

differs sharply from the PRI, which has always leaned to the left and to secularism. The most important difference between the two parties may be, however, the fact that the PRI has always been a nationalist, hence anti-United States party, while the PAN is, at least attitudinally, as pro-American as it is pro-business. Paradoxically, the pro-American stance of the PAN may make it more of a menace to the territorial integrity of the United States than the adversarial posturings of the PRI and the PRD.

Fox lost little time in proposing that the U.S., Canada, and Mexico work jointly to achieve an economic union patterned after the European Union. He asked that the U.S. immediately increase visas for Mexicans entering the U.S. to 250,000 a year. Fox admitted that closing the gap in wages between the U.S. and Mexico, which is 7 to 1 in the U.S.'s favor, might take decades.⁷ Since 1994, when the North American Free Trade Agreement was implemented, average wages in Mexico have in fact fallen, largely as a result of the 1994 peso crisis.⁸

Few spoke up to voice the obvious objection to such a closure from the standpoint of the American worker: once the gap was closed the new level of wages would almost certainly not be the U.S. level, but rather one intermediate between those of the two nations, a clear decline in the standard of living of wage workers and, probably, even salaried workers in the U.S.⁹ This would be especially true if the explosive growth of the Mexican population is not curtailed. PAN, a pro-clerical party, has already moved to outlaw abortion in at least one Mexican state and is unfriendly to birth control programs.¹⁰

The adoption of a European Union model for economic integration would be especially significant given the increasing acceptance of dual citizenship. The oath taken by newly naturalized citizens in which they “renounce and abjure all allegiances and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state or sovereignty” was by 1998 rendered legally moot. Since a U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1967, the U.S. no longer finds a second citizenship to be legally problematic. Supposedly, the oath no longer requires a citizen to give up a previous citizenship. In its report delivered at the end of 1997, the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform called for “modernizing” the language of the oath.¹¹

The U.S. Supreme Court in 1967 in the case of *Afroyim v. Rusk* (387 U.S. 253) reversed previous decisions and held that a naturalized citizen could not be

deprived of his citizenship by Congress. Afroyim, born in Poland, became a naturalized U.S. citizen, then moved to Israel in 1950 and in 1950 voted in an election for the Israeli Knesset. When he applied for a renewal of his U.S. passport in 1960, his application was refused by the Department of State which cited a section of the Nationality Act of 1940 mandating revocation of citizenship for naturalized citizens who vote “in a political election in a foreign state.” Afroyim sued the Secretary of State, asking to have the statutory provision declared unconstitutional as a violation of the Fourteenth

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Amendment. Overruling its prior decisions, most notably *Perez v. Brownell* (356 U.S. 44) in 1958, the Supreme Court agreed with Afroyim that he was unconstitutionally deprived of his citizenship. Only if a U.S. citizen voted in a foreign election with the stated intent of renouncing his U.S. citizenship could he lose his citizenship. Although this ruling seems to be as potentially significant as *Brown v. Board of Education* or *Roe v. Wade*, it has received little publicity.

In response to this tacit acceptance of dual citizenship, the Mexican government on March 21, 1998, changed the Mexican Constitution to permit millions of Mexican-born citizens, as well as their U.S.-born children, to claim or reclaim Mexican citizenship.¹² Admittedly, the Mexican Constitution is not unique in its recognition of dual citizenship. Ireland also offers citizenship to any of the millions of American citizens who had at least one grandparent who was born in Ireland. Germany, more generously, grants citizenship to anyone who can prove German descent. Thus, tens of millions of German Americans could also assume German citizenship.¹³ What made the Mexican initiative unique, however, was its being soon followed by what

seemed to be open attempts to mobilize Mexican Americans on behalf of the political interests of their nation of birth or ancestry. In 1999, a serious movement began in Mexico to allow Mexican Americans, possibly as many as ten million of them, to vote in the 2000 Mexican presidential election.¹⁴

The acceptance of dual citizenship by U.S. governing circles also partially explains the inadequate response to what may be called the partial secession of El Cenizo, Texas. In 1999, the Texas border city of El Cenizo, near Laredo, established Spanish as its official language and declared the town a “safe haven” for “undocumented workers.” City officials also warned that city employees cooperating with the U.S. Border Patrol

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would face dismissal. El Cenizo, a *colonia* chartered as a city only in 1989, had grown to a population of 8,000 by 1999, more than two-thirds of which spoke little or no English. The official establishment of Spanish as the town’s language of government aroused protests from the organization U.S. English, while officials of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service asked to meet with city officials regarding their stance on the Border Patrol.¹⁵

What happened in El Cenizo was a non-violent uprising of *el Republica del Norte* against the United States. The French political thinker Charles Maurras well-described the situation with his observation that the real nation is not to be confused with the legal nation. Truxillo’s new republic, as far as the city officials of El Cenizo are concerned, is their real nation. They and other Chicano nationalists have a sense of nationality, while the U.S. leadership does not go beyond considerations of citizenship (i.e., legality). Virtually every nation in Europe, unlike the United States, has a foundation in some

ethnicity, albeit that that foundation may no longer be legally recognized. Anthony D. Smith, a British sociologist, finds the core of each nation in what he calls “the ethnies.” Ethnies are “human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity.” Uniting the ethnies is a “collective name,” “imputed common ancestry and origins,” and a shared culture which includes religion, language, customs, institutions, laws, folklore, architecture, dress, food, music, and arts. The sense of solidarity, “which in times of stress and danger can override class, factional or regional divisions within the community” partially explains why the “paradox of ethnicity is its mutability in persistence, and its persistence through change.”¹⁶

Any attempt to establish an ethnies for the United States in the year 2000 now seems to be almost un-American. All members of the U.S. power elite seem to agree with Justice Hugo Black that “the United States is purely a creature of the Constitution.”¹⁷ The once popular sense of an ethnically defined founding people, who first created the nation and then crafted a constitution for it, has been largely lost. Admittedly, that sense may have been tenuous from the beginning and was further eroded by the 14th amendment.¹⁸

While the ethnies of the American nation is submerged and blurred, if it is any longer existent at all, that of Truxillo’s projected new republic is much sharper in definition and clarity. It is a sense of autochthony claimed by the Chicano population on the basis of their Indian ancestry. This right of priority, of being indigenous or autochthonous, has recently been challenged by partisans of Kennewick Man, but Kennewick Man established no enduring settlements.¹⁹ Survival is the final determiner of nationhood. If the American ethnies does not enjoy more than a feeble resurgence, then the Southwest U.S. will give way to *el Republica del Norte*.

NOTES

¹ Frank Zoretich, “New Mexico Will Secede to New Nation, Prof Says,” *Albuquerque Tribune*, 31 Jan. 2000, p. A1.

² See Lester D. Langley, *MexAmerica: Two Countries, One Future* (New York: Crown, 1988), pp. 4-5.

³ Zoretich, *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ For a somewhat partisan account of *el Plan de San Diego*,

see Alfredo Mirande, *Gringo Justice* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1987), pp. 95-6.

⁶ For a detailed account of this fateful election, see Mary Beth Sheridan, "Mexico's Landmark Vote," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 July 2000, p. A1.

⁷ See Kevin Sullivan and Mary Jordan, "Fox Seeks New Cooperative Era for N. America," *The Washington Post*, 14 Aug. 2000, p. A1.

⁸ See Edward Alden and Henry Tricks, "Border Crossing," *Financial Times [London]*, 21 Aug. 2000, p. 14.

⁹ Critics included George Borjas, "Mexico's One-Way Remedy," *The New York Times*, 18 July 2000, p. A21, and Robert J. Samuelson, "America as Mexico's Economic Safety Valve," *The Washington Post*, 20 July 2000, p. A25.

¹⁰ See Sullivan and Jordan.

¹¹ See "Courts Render Citizenship Vow Moot," *San Francisco Examiner*, 15 Feb. 1998, Sec. A, p. 17. See also Stanley A. Renshon, "Dual Citizens in America: An Issue of Vast Proportions and Broad Significance," *Center for Immigration Studies Backgrounder*, July 2000, pp. 1-11.

¹² See Jonathan Tilove, "Rise of the Ampersand American," *San Francisco Examiner*, 15 Feb. 1998, Sec. A, p. 17.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ See Sam Dillon, "Mexico Weighs Voting by its Emigrants in U.S.," *The New York Times*, 7 Dec. 1998, Sec. A, p. 3, and Patrick J. McDonnell, "U.S. Votes Could Sway Mexico's Next Election," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 Feb. 1999, Sec. A, p. 1.

¹⁵ See Joyce Howard Price, "Officially, They Speak No Ingles; It's Spanish Only for Town in Texas," *The Washington Times*, 14 Aug. 1999, Sec. A, p. 1.

¹⁶ See Smith's *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 21f.

¹⁷ Black is quoted in David Jacobson, *Rights Across Borders: Immigration and the Decline of Citizenship* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 102.

¹⁸ The last influential apologia on behalf of an American ethnics is Henry Pratt Fairchild's *The Melting-Pot Mistake* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1926).

¹⁹ On Kennewick Man, see Roger Downey, *Riddle of the Bones: Politics, Science, Race, and the Story of the Kennewick Man* (New York: Copernicus, 2000) and David H. Thomas, *Skull Wars: Kennewick Man, Archaeology, and the Battle for Native American Identity* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).