

# Cheers, Half-Cheers and Boos

Book Review/Essay by John Attarian

Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington's *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America's National Identity* argues that the prominence we give our national identity has varied; that we have defined our identity in terms of race, ethnicity, ideology, and culture, with the weights given these also varying over time; and that "Anglo-Protestant culture has been central to American identity for three centuries."<sup>(xvi)</sup><sup>1</sup> Our national identity is threatened, he rightly maintains, by mass immigration; multiculturalism; the large Hispanic population, mostly immigrant, and a resultant trend of Hispanization; and the denationalization of America's elites.

One possible outcome is that America could become a "creedal nation" united by commitment to a set of political principles, the liberal democratic Creed first formulated by Jefferson. This assumes that "a nation can be based on only a political contract among individuals lacking any other commonality." Huntington is rightly skeptical. Such a nation might become a loose collection of diverse groups, apt to fall apart without a central authority holding it together. (19) Another possibility is that the huge Spanish-speaking Hispanic presence could bifurcate America into a bilingual, bicultural society like Belgium or

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Canada. A third outcome is that challenges to our identity could prompt American whites "to revive the discarded and discredited racial and ethnic concepts of American identity and to create an America that would exclude, expel or suppress" people of other races, cultures, or ethnicities. While this is a highly probable reaction by a majority group that feels threatened, it could create "a racially intolerant country" with much "inter-group conflict" – obviously, not what Huntington wants. The final possibility, which he apparently does want, is that Americans of all racial and ethnic groups "could attempt to reinvigorate their core culture" through recommitment to a religious, mostly Christian, and English-speaking America which accepts "Anglo-Protestant values" and is committed to the Jeffersonian Creed. (20)

Huntington's main theme is "the continuing centrality of Anglo-Protestant culture" to our national identity. By "culture" he means not art, literature, music, and so on, but "a people's language, religious beliefs, social and political values, assumptions as to what is right and wrong, appropriate and inappropriate," and "the objective institutions and behavioral patterns that reflect these subjective elements." Although one cannot change one's ethnic and ancestral identity, one can change one's culture so defined. (30-31)

*Who Are We?* is a deeply mixed effort. Although many of Huntington's points are good, few are new, and *Who Are We?* is lethally flawed, muddled, and softheaded. Moreover, from a truly conservative perspective it is bad news. The deeper one looks, the worse it looks.

## One Cheer for Myth-Busting

Immigrationists assert that America is "a nation of immigrants," and that our identity is grounded solely in "a

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set of political principles, the American Creed.” These claims have “much truth,” Huntington concedes, but are only half-truths. (37)

The claim that all Americans except Indians are descended from immigrants is simply wrong. Huntington points out, correctly, that America was founded not by immigrants, but by “settlers” – i.e., colonists – from Great Britain. The difference is substantive, not semantic. Settlers leave an existing community and create a new one elsewhere. Immigrants, by contrast, simply move from one society to another one already created by somebody else, and typically experience “culture shock” on arrival. Moreover, in terms of actual bloodlines, the “nation of immigrants” cliché is quite literally only a half-truth. Statistical demographer Campbell Gibson concluded after careful study that 49 percent of America’s 1990 population was “attributable” to the 1790 colonial and black populations and 51 percent to immigration since 1790. Huntington concludes that “To describe America as a ‘nation of immigrants’ is to stretch a partial truth into a misleading falsehood, and to ignore the central fact of America’s beginning as a society of settlers.” (46) This is a devastating demolition job on a central immigrationist claim.

As for the claim that America is a “creedal nation” – defined by adherence to political beliefs: democracy, equality, rights and liberties, individualism, property, and the rule of law – in reality, race, ethnicity, culture, and religion were the original defining aspects of American identity and the creedal component became prominent only when the colonists fell out with Britain. And these purportedly defining principles were applied only selectively. Blacks were enslaved, then segregated. Loyalists were expelled and their property confiscated. And so on. So the idea that the Creed is what America is all about is nonsense. (46-49)

Moreover, Huntington makes a good case that “Anglo-Protestant culture,” not political propositions, is the true core of American identity. America would not be what she is, he avers, had she been settled by anybody other than English Protestants. Many of our key political institutions originated in Tudor England: a bicameral legislature with committees and whose members are responsible to local constituencies; subordination of government to fundamental law; separation of powers; and so on. Much of America’s essential orientation to existence is rooted in English Protestantism; so for that

matter is the political creed that supposedly defines us. Huntington points out that the notions of individual dignity and worth, the fundamental equality of mankind, the resistance to authority, especially arbitrary authority, which underpin the “creed” have their roots in England’s dissenting (non-Anglican) Protestantism.

Historically, assimilation meant not adopting “propositions,” but embracing Anglo-Protestant culture, starting with learning English. “Throughout American history, people who were not white Anglo-Saxon Protestants have become Americans by adopting America’s Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture and political values.” (61) Huntington is obviously right. This was certainly the assimilation my own Armenian and Dutch immigrant ancestors made. And the equation of being American with assenting to a series of propositions is dubious. By this argument Americans skeptical of democracy and equality, as many conservatives were and are, are not Americans.

In short, Huntington has smashed two key props of the open borders argument. After Huntington’s effort, the “nation of immigrants” and “creedal nation” line simply cannot be tenable to any serious, well-informed, and honest mind. This, surely, is one reason why immigrationists are crucifying Huntington.

## One Cheer for Exposing the Pernicious Role of Elites

Also valuable is Huntington’s revelation of the role of elites in deliberately deconstructing America. In the Sixties, certain intellectuals and politicians began promoting ideas and policies destructive of national identity and enhancing the status and identities of subnational groups. They not only reopened America to immigration but also encouraged immigrants to retain their identities, gave them special legal privileges, and downplayed assimilation. Learning English yielded to bilingual education. American history was rewritten to emphasize subnational groups. Minority group rights and racial preferences displaced individual rights. All this and more was justified by an ideology of multiculturalism exalting “diversity” rather than unity or Americanism.

In short, America abandoned her old policy of promoting national identity and unity, and instead adopted measures “consciously designed to weaken America’s cultural and creedal identity and to strengthen racial, ethnic, cultural, and other subnational identities. These efforts by a nation’s leaders to deconstruct the nation

they governed were, quite possibly, without precedent in human history.” (143)

Deconstruction had several causes. A trend of subnational tribalism was underway worldwide, and the Cold War’s end, by removing a unifying common external threat, exacerbated this trend. Politicians promoted subnational identity for self-serving reasons, as did minority group leadership. Bureaucrats interpreted civil rights and other legislation involving minorities in self-serving ways meant to make implementation easier

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for bureaucrats to administer and to increase the power and resources of bureaucracies. Liberalism led American elites to feel sympathy and guilt for supposedly excluded, oppressed minorities. Finally, “perhaps most importantly,” civil rights, immigration and other legislation which delegitimized race and ethnicity as factors in national identity “paradoxically legitimated their reappearance in subnational identities.” (144)

Huntington narrates America’s deconstruction, explaining the demand for special privileges by black leaders; the interpretation of civil rights legislation so as to institutionalize discrimination rather than eliminate it; the gerrymandering of congressional districts so as to create safe seats for minority candidates; the institution of bilingual education; the actions by legislatures and judges to downgrade English and cater to immigrants and others who did not know English; and so on. Most Americans did not want their country deconstructed, Huntington reveals, citing anecdotes and poll data. Which takes us to another welcome contribution of *Who Are We?: revelation of the yawning, and growing, chasm*

between what the still-patriotic American people want and what the denationalized elite wants. Many whites oppose affirmative action. Consistently, the American people have supported English as the national language, and almost always passed, usually by substantial margins, pro-English ballot referenda, often in the teeth of intense elite opposition.

Academic, business, media, professional, nonprofit, and intellectual elites are not only far more liberal and less religious than the American people, Huntington shows, but also far less patriotic. Many members of the elites identify with global or transnational institutions, are hostile to the very idea of nationalism, and see themselves as citizens of the world rather than of the United States. Transnational ideas and persons come in three types: universalist, represented by figures such as Ben Wattenberg, who sees America as merging with the world by accepting immigrants from all nations and cultures; economic, which sees globalization as dissolving national boundaries and creating one world economy and one market, and overriding the authority of national governments and making them obsolete; and moralistic, which sees nationalism as evil and regards international law and institutions and supposedly universal moral norms as superior to and overriding national institutions, patriotism, and national self-interest. Moralistic transnationalism is rampant in academe, Huntington notes, citing such specimens as Martha Nussbaum (University of Chicago) and Richard Sennett (New York University). He perceptively sees economic transnationals as “the nucleus of an emerging global super class.” (268)

Even casual knowledge of the anti-Americanism rampant in academe and of internationalist publications such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *theglobalist.com*, confirms his account. Huntington is laudably disturbed by the denationalization of the elites, who “abandon commitment to their nation and their fellow citizens and argue the moral superiority of identifying with humanity at large.” (269) Globalization is likely to continue, he warns, and so, therefore, is this denationalization.

America’s deconstruction and elite denationalization, Huntington valuably reveals, have the cloven hoof prints of economism all over them. Motivated by marketing concerns and a desire to fend off discrimination lawsuits and bad publicity, corporations were crucial in promoting

public policies of affirmative action and racial preferences; many had such programs of their own. Corporations have opposed pro-English referenda. Capital, Huntington makes clear, is loyal to nothing but itself. Globalization, he points out, is bearing out Adam Smith's observation that whereas landowners are necessarily citizens of the countries containing their land, a stockholder "is properly a citizen of the world, and is not necessarily attached to any particular country." (267)

All well and good, but populist conservatives have known these things for years. Two of the most illuminating and pointed treatments of the elites and their divergence from and disdain for the American people's concerns, priorities, and experiences are still Christopher Lasch's *The True and Only Heaven* (1991), specifically, chapters 10 and 11, and his *The Revolt of the Elites and The Betrayal of Democracy* (1995), neither of which Huntington mentions. Other valuable treatments of the elites are Louis T. March's and Brent Nelson's *The Great Betrayal: The Elite's War on Middle America* (1995), Patrick Buchanan's *The Great Betrayal* (1998) and Samuel Francis's *Revolution from the Middle* (1997), which he also passes over.

Nonetheless, *Who Are We?* has the merit of mainstreaming the longstanding populist conservative critiques of the elites. Huntington's prominence will make his treatment hard for elites to ignore.

## A Half-Cheer about Multiculturalism and Immigration

*Who Are We?* is most notorious for its discussions of multiculturalism and immigration. Multiculturalism, Huntington flatly and correctly states, "is in its essence anti-European civilization... It is basically an anti-Western ideology." (171) He warns that the ultimate consequence of multiculturalism will be to destroy the consensus of American political values of democracy, individual rights and liberty, and so on. The political Creed itself, he rightly observes, was the product of a specific culture, namely Anglo-Protestant. A multicultural America will ultimately become "a multicreedal America," with different groups of different cultures professing different political principles. (340) Although he does not say so, an obvious problem is that such an America would swiftly become ungovernable. No political system can possibly work if large segments of the population refuse to endorse it or observe its rules.

Huntington bluntly calls immigration "the greatest threat" to "societal security" – the ability of a society to preserve its essential nature and identity under changing and adverse conditions – for America and other developed nations. (181) The real issue, he maintains, is not immigration, but immigration without assimilation. Formerly, immigrants assimilated, because they came from many nations and cultures and dispersed spatially after arrival, which prevented formation of a large homogeneous bloc resistant to Americanization; because most immigrants were Europeans, with cultures similar to or compatible with ours; because they *wanted* to become Americans (those who did not went home); because immigration had fluctuating levels and long pauses facilitating assimilation; and because Americans, who shared a patriotic notion of American identity, insisted upon assimilation. Indeed, he shows, businesses, public schools, state, local, and national governments, and private organizations strove energetically to Americanize immigrants and even celebrated their Americanization.

Now, however, most immigrants are from cultures and languages radically dissimilar to ours. Many are not committed to Americanizing. What's more, many need not Americanize; they can retain dual identity and even dual citizenship, something once unheard of and, Huntington rightly observes, "foreign to the American Constitution." (213) Also, the immigration valve is stuck open: over a million immigrants arrive yearly, and this persistent high volume hinders assimilation. Moreover, many in the elite do not want immigrants to Americanize, but rather to preserve their distinct identity. Public policies such as bilingual education hinder assimilation. Today's immigration debate fixates on economics. "The consequences of immigration without assimilation for American social cohesion and cultural integrity, which were central to earlier discussions, were now largely ignored." (200)

Mexican immigration, which Huntington rightly sees as the main driver of a trend toward America's bifurcation, also receives much attention. Today's Mexican immigration is "unprecedented in American history" and decisively different from previous immigration experience. For one thing, Mexico is adjacent to the United States, making immigration easier and controlling it harder than when most immigrants came by ship. Second, Mexicans are entering in large numbers and constitute the lion's share of foreign-born

residents. Third, much immigration today is illegal, and most of that is Mexican, thanks to the ease of crossing the 2,000-mile border with Mexico. Illegal immigration, Huntington warns, is a threat to societal security. “The economic and political forces generating this threat are immense and unrelenting. Nothing comparable has occurred previously in the American experience.” (226)

Fourth, rather than disperse throughout the country – which the Founding Fathers deemed essential for assimilation and which facilitated it – Mexicans concentrate in the southwestern states, hampering assimilation accordingly. Fifth, whereas previous immigration fluctuated, with periods of little or no immigration making assimilation of previous arrivals easier, Mexican immigration levels are persistently high. This not only hampers assimilation, but “the longer migration continues, the more difficult it is politically to stop it.” (228) Finally, Mexicans, unique among immigrants, believe themselves to have a historical claim to American territory, specifically, the southwestern states obtained by the Mexican War. They are coming to lands which had once been theirs, which makes them resist assimilation.

As a result, Mexicans are lagging behind other immigrant groups in such important aspects of assimilation as learning English, educational attainment, occupation and income, naturalization, intermarriage with the indigenous, majority population, and sense of identity with America. Huntington raises the possibility that the Southwest will be so heavily populated with Hispanics, especially Mexicans, that it will be culturally and socially amalgamated with Mexico and that its Hispanic residents will neither want nor need to assimilate. Rather, that part of the country will undergo Hispanization *à la* Miami, which is so full of Cubans that they need not assimilate and that Miami’s blacks and whites have become outsiders, marginalized and discriminated against, with no choice but to accept their lot, assimilate to the Hispanics, or get out.

Judging from the space devoted to it, America’s possible bifurcation as a result of rising Latino immigration and militancy disturbs Huntington greatly. He points out that Americans have unwittingly done things that profoundly transformed their country, such as the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 immigration law, and that “something similar is happening” regarding Hispanization. “Without national debate or conscious

decision, America is being transformed into what could be a very different society from what it has been.” Moreover, Americans have been evading Mexican immigration’s special nature and thereby also evading the issue of whether America will still be a nation with one language and a common culture. “To ignore that question, however, is also to answer it and acquiesce in the eventual transformation of Americans into two peoples with two languages and cultures.” (318)

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Huntington also devotes much attention to the rise of dual citizenship and identity – the so-called ampersand alternative – and the role of foreign diasporas in American politics, showing how diasporas have affected congressional elections and shaped American policy to promote the interests of foreign nations. All of this apparently also disturbs him, and it should.

Most of these facts and arguments, however, have already been presented elsewhere, and in many cases better, by critics of multiculturalism and immigration. Huntington’s performance here vindicates Richard Weaver’s observation that “the chief trouble with the contemporary generation is that it has not read the minutes of the last meeting.”<sup>2</sup> Paul Gottfried’s richly scholarly *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Guilt* (2002) is a penetrating critique of multiculturalism and the tyrannical public policies promoting it, both here and abroad. Nineteen years before Huntington got around to it, Governor Richard Lamm and Gary Imhoff sounded the alarm about the importance of English in assimilation; bilingual education and its advocacy by Hispanic groups; the contrast between our former insistence on Americanization and our recent abandonment of it; and the Hispanization of Miami, in *The Immigration Time*

*Bomb: The Fragmenting of America* (1985). Brent Nelson's short but well-researched *America Balkanized: Immigration's Challenge to Government* (1994) deals with many of the same things Huntington does – the influx of Mexican immigrants; the Hispanization of Miami and the Southwest; the official shift away from Americanization and toward cultural pluralism; the lagging assimilation of Hispanics and the proximity of Mexico a factor in this – and with greater compactness, force, penetration, and perception. Much of the background information on immigration appeared already in Peter Brimelow's *Alien Nation* (1995), which also addresses elite hostility to the nation-state, bilingual education, multiculturalism, and official America's abandonment of Americanization.

Lawrence Auster's *The Path to National Suicide* (1990) makes clear that America's culture and institutions have an Anglo-Saxon core and ably examines the legislative history of the Immigration Act of 1965, which opened the floodgates of immigration, despite assurances by its congressional supporters that it would do no such thing. Auster's *Huddled Clichés* (1997) crisply debunks the “nation of immigrants” and “creedal nation” myths, along with many other specious arguments for immigration. Louis T. March's *Immigration and the End of Self-Government* (1999) addresses dual citizenship, bilingualism, assimilation, immigrant militancy, the role of multinational corporations in mass immigration, and the divergence between elite agendas and the popular will. Much of what Huntington says regarding Mexican immigration and its threat to America was already well covered by Chapter 6, “La Reconquista,” of Patrick Buchanan's *The Death of the West* (2002). Samuel Francis's *America Extinguished* (2003) is especially valuable in its treatment of assimilation in general and the non-assimilation of Hispanics in particular, and of the crucial importance of language for assimilation.

Nowhere in Huntington's 602 reference notes do any of these works appear. Apparently, he was totally unaware of them – a serious dereliction for a self-proclaimed scholar. The only restrictionist literature Huntington bothers to use are a few Center for Immigration Studies Backgrounders and studies, and one or two articles in *The Social Contract*. His information about immigration is news only to the ill-informed, and his observations about the breakdown of assimilation,

bilingualism, Mexican immigration, and so on are revelations only to those who have ignored the large and growing restrictionist literature.

But while little of Huntington's candid discussion of multiculturalism and immigration is new, it is welcome nevertheless. Its great merit is that an “establishment” intellectual has called the country's attention to things immigrationists have swept under the rug. No matter how hard conservative critics of multiculturalism and immigration work to make their case, liberals just ignore or demonize them. Huntington's academic credentials and prestige make ignoring him impossible. The effect is to push the immigration issue into America's face, and that is absolutely vital if the America we love is going to survive. The more controversy *Who Are We?* stirs up, the better.

But conservatives – that is, the genuine article, those wishing to conserve America's identity as an essentially European nation with an essentially British, or at least European, civilization and culture – who think Huntington is a kindred spirit had better think twice. In an interview, Huntington stated – perhaps to appease his rabid immigrationist critics – that “basically, immigration is good,” that in 1965, “I think very happily, we opened up, changed those [immigration] laws,” and that “I want to make it clear that I'm not opposed to immigration per se. I'm in favor of immigration ... but it has to be immigration with assimilation.”<sup>3</sup> Given that America's government and other major institutions have forsaken the old Americanization project, and are unlikely to return to it unless and until the American people force them to, Huntington's qualification is empty. And although Huntington bemoans the mass immigration of Hispanics, especially illegals, and observes that past immigration lulls facilitated immigration, it never occurs to him to make the connection that an immigration moratorium and rigorous elimination of illegal immigration are crucial to assimilation, much less to recommend these measures.

### A ‘Boo’ for Uncoupling Nation, Culture, and Ethnicity

Moreover, while his attack on the “creedal nation” myth looks attractive, on closer inspection, it is nullified by his desire to separate nationality and culture from ethnicity.

Incredibly, Huntington never defines “nation,” although surely it would be appropriate in a book

devoted to national identity and threats to it. My *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (1951) gives the etymology of "nation" as follows: from the Old French *nacion*, which in turn came from the Latin *natio*, nation, race, which in turn came from *natus*, the past participle of *nasci*, to be born. A nation, then, as conservative critics of immigration such as Thomas Fleming, Brent Nelson, and Peter Brimelow have rightly observed, is essentially a kind of extended family, meaning it has a common, or at least dominant, ethnic stock.<sup>4</sup>

*Webster's* goes on to define "nation" as: "1. A people connected by supposed [sic] ties of blood generally manifested by community of language, religion, customs, etc. 2. Any aggregation of people having like institutions and customs and a sense of social homogeneity and mutual interest. 3. The body of inhabitants of a country united under a single independent government; a state." Notice that the first, and original, definition is rooted in lived realities of flesh and blood and the common experience, language, culture, folkways, and world view of a people, whereas the other two definitions are in order of increasing abstraction from ethnicity. By the time we get to "nation" in the third sense, its inhabitants have nothing in common but geographic location and their government. Whether Huntington uses nation in the second or third sense is not clear; what *is* clear is that he does *not* mean it in the first sense.

Early on, Huntington stresses that he is arguing "for the importance of Anglo-Protestant culture, not Anglo-Protestant people." He deems the elimination of race and ethnicity as parts of American identity, and the creation of "a multiracial, multiethnic society in which individuals are to be judged on their merits" one of America's greatest achievements, perhaps the greatest. This transformation flows, he claims, from our commitment to Anglo-Protestant culture and to liberal democracy. If we sustain that commitment, "America will still be America long after the WASPish descendants of its founders have become a small and uninfluential minority." (xvii)

Huntington's desire to sever or ignore the links between ethnicity, nationhood, and culture is also evident in his treatment of the Soviet Union. With the Cold War over, he points out, the Soviets no longer had an enemy; and without it, the Soviet Union "quickly dissolved into sixteen states, each with its own national identity defined largely by culture and history." (259) The last statement is a crass evasion of the truth that these states were in fact "largely defined" by their ethnic groups: Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Estonians, Georgians, Latvians, and so on. It was obviously ethnicity that gave these nations their identity, and was the main root of their mutual antagonisms.

Huntington's concept of "culture" is crucial here. For him culture is, as we saw, a matter of ideas, beliefs, and institutions. Key elements of "Anglo-Saxon culture," he informs us, include "the English language; Christianity; religious commitment; English concepts of the rule of law, the responsibility of rulers, and the rights of individuals," as well as the dissenting Protestant values of industry (which he stresses), individualism, and the duty to create a sort of heaven on earth. (xvi) Since anybody can subscribe to a belief or an idea or participate in an institution, Huntington's definition cuts culture free from all of its roots in ethnicity save one: language.

So Huntington uses "nation" and "culture" largely as abstractions, whereas for genuine conservative critics of immigration such as Brimelow, Nelson, Sam Francis, and others, these terms are grounded in ethnicity. Huntington and the restrictionists are literally not speaking the same language.

One huge problem is that Huntington tangles himself in a profound contradiction. On the one hand, he asserts that what is important is "Anglo-Protestant culture, not Anglo-Protestant people." On the other hand, he argues that if America had not been settled by British Protestants, "It would not be America; it would be Quebec, Mexico, or Brazil." (59) This is a tacit admission that Anglo-Protestant people are in fact of central importance to our identity. Furthermore, he notes Campbell Gibson's finding that 49 percent of

America's 1990 population was descended from the 1790 colonial and black populations, which obviously implies that for most of America's history, the lion's share of her population was Anglo-Protestant. Surely this is of decisive importance for our national identity. Culture, both in the usual sense and in Huntington's sense, is grounded in ethnicity: just how would America have created an Anglo-Protestant culture without an overwhelmingly Anglo-Protestant population? And just how would the Americanization of immigrants – their assimilation of Anglo-Protestant culture – have taken place, if America had not had an overwhelmingly Anglo-Protestant population, living that Anglo-Protestant culture and thereby providing a model for immigrants to emulate; enveloping immigrants in that culture; creating, operating, and manning the institutions that promoted Americanization; and sufficiently aware and proud of its Anglo-Protestant identity to deem it worth preserving and to insist on immigrants' conformity to its ways? If Anglo-Protestants had been at best in a slim majority and had not controlled America's institutions, the Anglo-Protestant culture Huntington stresses could not conceivably have become central to America's identity. The Anglo-Protestants simply would not have been able to make it so.

Another grievous fault is that Huntington's sense of "culture" renders his demolition of the "creedal nation" myth illusory and meretricious. If Anglo-Protestant culture is what Huntington says it is and the Creed consists of democracy, equality, rights and liberties, individualism, property and the rule of law, then it emerges immediately that the Creed is merely a subset of Anglo-Protestant culture, and that the latter is merely the Creed with the English language, Protestant Christianity, and workaholicism tacked on.

Anybody can become an American, immigrationists claim, by assenting to a set of "propositions." No, no, no, Huntington retorts; becoming an American also requires learning English, being somewhat individualist, perhaps being religious (he does not insist), and working hard. It turns out that he and the creedal immigrationists are not so far apart. He kicks the "creedal nation" myth

off the front porch, only to sneak it back in through the kitchen window.

### A Loud 'Boo' for his Treatment of Race

As if this is not bad enough, Huntington's treatment of race is proof positive that the victim of your enemy is not necessarily your friend.

He argues, as we saw, "for the importance of Anglo-Protestant culture, not Anglo-Protestant people." He also asserts that, "identities are, overwhelmingly, constructed." Apart from a few characteristics like age, ancestry, and gender, identity may be defined as one likes. Although we inherit race and ethnicity, we can deny them, and in any case, Huntington claims, the meaning and applicability of "race" is malleable, and changes. (23)

He returns to these claims much later, in his treatment of ethnicity and race. With ethnic identity fading among white Americans thanks to ethnic intermarriage, most whites, he points out, see themselves in racial terms, which could lead them in some situations to cooperate against nonwhites. A "more inclusive" possibility is that "White Americans could forgo subnational, communal identities and simply think of themselves as Americans." (302) This, clearly, is the course he wants whites to take.

That this is so quickly becomes even clearer. Which identity whites pick to replace disappearing ethnic identities will be very important for America's future, he argues. "If they define themselves primarily as Euro-American or Anglo in response to a perceived Hispanic challenge, the cultural divide in America will be formalized. If they think of themselves primarily as white in opposition to blacks and others, the historic racial fault line will be reinvigorated. On the other hand, national identity and national unity will be strengthened if white Americans echo Ward Connerly and conclude that their mixed ancestries make them 'All American.'" (303)

This assertion launches his discussion of race. While physical differences between races exist, Huntington acknowledges, people classify each other by



race because they deem it important; therefore “race is a social construction as well as a physical reality. Race may also be a political construction.” (305) Intermarriage is slowly blurring the races, he observes, and multiracialism is becoming more accepted. If multiracialism keeps increasing, Huntington says, government efforts to classify people by race will become quixotic. “When it happens, the removal of race from census forms will signal a dramatic step toward the creation of a comprehensive American national identity.” (309)

Although Huntington does not say it explicitly, his prescription is clear. Whites should forget their identity as whites and not resist rising pressure from Hispanics and blacks, cheerfully submit to their dispossession, and embrace gradual biological obliteration through intermarriage and miscegenation. In short, Huntington thinks whites should commit racial suicide for the sake of averting racial conflict and promoting national unity.

It would, he concedes, be “extraordinary and possibly unprecedented in human history” if America’s momentous demographic and other transformations did not trigger a reaction from whites. (310) Huntington points out that a “white nationalist” movement reacting to these forces “should not be confused with extremist fringe groups,” such as militias and “hate groups.” What he sees possibly happening, rather, is a political movement arising to protect white interests. Actual or perceived loss of power, status, and numbers by any group, he rightly observes, “almost always leads to efforts by that group to stop or reverse those losses.” (313) As a result, he warns, America has the makings of “serious white nationalist movements and of intensified racial conflict,” such as affirmative action, liberal immigration policies, multiculturalism, concern over job losses due to globalization, and so on – and, above all, the perceived threat to whites’ language, power, and culture from the rise of Hispanics. (315-316)

What is so wrong with white nativism, especially if it’s not synonymous with race hate? Huntington’s only answer is worry about a possible rise of racial conflict and a more intolerant, exclusionist America. Brent

Nelson, by contrast, put his finger on the real problem with a clarity and forthrightness Huntington lacks: “When ... European Americans begin to think of themselves as such and demand ethnically conscious European American leaders, then America will have become America Balkanized, a nation without Americans, just as Yugoslavia, in the early 1990s, became a nation without Yugoslavs: i.e., no longer a viable nation.”<sup>5</sup>

Nelson argued that racial amalgamation along the

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*“If immigration is the threat to American identity and ‘societal security’ which [Huntington] says it is – and of course it is – why does he make no proposals for immigration control?”*

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lines of Brazil – i.e., Huntington’s prescription – is an illusory cure. Brazil is in fact a racially stratified society shot through with racism, race obsessions, and conflict. Nelson concluded that the only sound course, the only way to avert Balkanization, is rigorous immigration control.<sup>6</sup>

Nelson, not Huntington, has the right answer. If affirmative action, bilingualism, multiculturalism, and immigration are the real causes of America’s identity crisis, then reason and common sense suggest that the cure is to remove them. Yet Huntington advocates instead *a solution not suggested by the problem: white self-immolation. Why?*

**‘Not With a Bang But a Whimper’**

*Who Are We?* has other grievous faults. First, Huntington asserts that although all societies eventually succumb to threats to their existence, some can postpone their demise by “halting and reversing the process of decline and renewing their vitality and identity,” and that

he believes that “America can do that” (xvii) – yet he has nothing to say about how she can do so. From his description of the threats to America’s identity from affirmative action, immigration, multiculturalism, and denationalized elites, the remedies are obvious. We should drop affirmative action, bilingual education, and all public policies promoting multiculturalism and minority militancy; secede from globalization and break the hegemony of organized money in our national life; resurrect the vigorous Americanization of immigrants practiced in yesteryear; stop legal immigration; deploy enough troops along our southern border to halt illegal immigration; and deport as many illegals as possible. The yawning gap between the agenda and policies of the elites and the interests and desires of the American people cries out for a political realignment and a nationalist, populist third party.

Yet Huntington recommends none of these things. Given his concerns, this omission is bewildering. If immigration is the threat to American identity and “societal security” which he says it is – and of course it is – why does he make no proposals for immigration control? If he thinks that Hispanization will be the main stimulus to the white nativism he dreads, then why does he not argue for curtailing Latino immigration with a view to averting racial conflict?

Second, Huntington never makes a case for his own preferences. He asserts his belief that “Americans should recommit themselves to the Anglo-Protestant culture traditions, and values that for three and a half centuries have been embraced by Americans of all races, ethnicities, and religions and that have been the source of their liberty, unity, power, prosperity, and moral leadership as a force for good in the world.” (xvii) Yet this single blast of rhetoric is as far as he goes. From first to last he never advances any reasons why we should do so. He obviously believes that assimilation of immigrants is crucial to preserving America’s identity. Yet he won’t fight for it.

In any case, Huntington’s exhortation is utterly quixotic and naive. Even if he *had* backed it up with arguments, whom would he have persuaded? Why should the millions of immigrants and their descendants, and the increasingly cocky, truculent, and racist Latino activists, embrace the Anglo-Protestant culture and its values, especially if doing so means they would forego political and financial advantages? Why should they want to?

They have learned that they can get along just fine in America without becoming imitation Eighteenth Century colonists – especially in an America that is all too clearly afraid of them and is abjectly fawning over them, rather than insisting on their Americanization. Suppose somebody (Huntington?) did insist on it, and they merely said, as many surely would, “Vamoose, gringo, you bother me.”? What then?

The same goes for the implacable multicultural Jacobins on and off campus, race racketeers like Morris Dees and Al Sharpton, and the minorities working the racial spoils system. Huntington apparently thinks that America’s domestic deconstructors will voluntarily abandon their corrosive ideology now that he has politely explained that it has dysfunctional consequences from a patriotic perspective. But why should they commit to “Anglo-Protestant culture” when they have nothing to gain, and much to lose, thereby? A multiculturalist academic who turned his coat would soon find himself marginalized and persecuted, and his career prospects ruined. A race racketeer who opted for individualist meritocracy would be walking away from his meal ticket. For that matter, why should denationalized elites drop their commitment to globalism, universalism, and multiculturalism, since it has facilitated their acquisition of wealth, power and prestige?

The tough-minded realist Samuel Francis put his finger on the problem which Huntington ignores: “Ideas do have consequences, but some ideas have more consequences than others, and which consequences ensue from which ideas is settled not simply because the ideas serve human reason through their logical implications but also because some ideas serve human interests and emotions through their attachment to drives for political, economic, and social power, while other ideas do not.”<sup>7</sup>

Finally, Huntington’s ending is incredibly weak and tired. One would think that a scholar who teaches on American identity and is passionately concerned with it would end with a ringing call to national unity, recommitment to Anglo-Protestant culture, and Americanization of immigrants, along with arguments designed to persuade immigrants to assimilate. Yet Huntington does no such thing. *Who Are We?* simply coasts to a stop. After surveying the return to religion here and across the world, and the conflict between America and Islam, Huntington wanders around among

the alternative identities open to us – cosmopolitan, imperial, and national – and ends up vacuously saying the obvious: “Cosmopolitan? Imperial? National? The choices Americans make will shape their future as a nation and the future of the world.” (366)

Given the enormity of the threats to our identity; the cosmic importance of immigration, of America’s self-laceration, and of this moment in history for her destiny; and the validity of Huntington’s concerns, this is feeble stuff indeed. A far cry from the patriotism and undaunted defiance that ends Winston Churchill’s Battle of Britain speeches or Buchanan’s *The Death of the West*. There is a certain elegiac strain to *Who Are We?* That white race suicide is the *only* thing besides recommitment to Anglo-Protestant culture which Huntington can suggest – and covertly at that – in the entire book is telling. The deepest significance of this prescription is that it witnesses for the terminal decadence of the Anglo-Protestant stock that spawned America and Huntington himself – and for the liberal West’s limp, suicidal and masochistic acquiescence in its own oblivion. His opening exhortation to recommit to our Anglo-Protestant core identity, then, is not the rousing thump and blare of a Sousa march, evoking the proud, self-confident, swaggering America of Teddy Roosevelt’s day, but the frantic, pleading gasp of a played-out, beached fish flopping on the sand, pathetically protesting a doom it is aware of but lacks the vitality to escape. All in all, *Who Are We?* is eerily reminiscent of Eliot’s “The Hollow Men”:

*This is the way the world ends  
This is the way the world ends  
This is the way the world ends  
Not with a bang but a whimper.* •

#### NOTES

1. Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), p. xvi. To avoid a cluttering proliferation of footnotes, page references to Huntington will be enclosed in parentheses in the text.
2. Richard M. Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 176.
3. “Huntington Interview,” June 13, 2004, transcript, pp. 10, 11, 19, at [www.booknotes.org](http://www.booknotes.org).
4. See Thomas Fleming, “The Real American Dilemma,” *Chronicles*, March 1989, p. 9; Brent A. Nelson, *America*

*Balkanized: Immigration’s Challenge to Government* (Monterey, VA: American Immigration Control Foundation, 1994), p. 80; Peter Brimelow, *Alien Nation: Common Sense About America’s Immigration Disaster* (New York: Random House, 1995), pp. xix, 203.

5. Nelson, *America Balkanized*, p. 70.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99, 106.

7. Samuel Francis, *Beautiful Losers: Essays on the Failure of American Conservatism* (Columbia, MO and London: University of Missouri Press, 1993), p. 3.