

# Nationhood and Ethnicity

A Book Review by Wayne Lutton

## AMERICA BALKANIZED: IMMIGRATION'S CHALLENGE TO GOVERNMENT

By Brent A. Nelson  
Monterey, VA: AICF  
(American Immigration Control Foundation)  
148 pages, \$10.00

During his recent jaunt through Europe, President Clinton advised residents of the Baltic States that they should mimic the United States by embracing "diversity" and not insist that Russian colonists head back to Muscovy when the last battalions of the former Red Army decamp, as they are supposed to in the near future. But the Latvians, Lithuanians, and Estonians know from bitter first hand experience that "to populate is to govern" and so they have thus far rejected this bit of political wisdom from the mountebank of the Ozarks.

The assertion that the United States is a model multi-ethnic state that others would be well-advised to emulate becomes less and less convincing as we stagger from racial "incident" to "incident." Such overseas observers as John Gray of Oxford University view us as a "proto-Lebanon" riven by ethnic strife. Brent Nelson, the author of learned monographs on assimilation and Mexican irredentism, argues in his latest book, *America Balkanized*, that immigration policies pursued since the mid-1960s have brought about a demographic transformation that virtually guarantees a future dominated by chronic internal conflict. Unless these policies are soon ended, the 1990's may come to be viewed as "the good old days" by the demoralized 21st Century inhabitants of an ungovernable United States marked by economic decline and environmental degradation.

Drawing on important scholarship from the fields of political theory, demography, anthropology, sociology, biology, history, and ethics, Dr. Nelson confirms that a "nation" is not a mere set of geographic boundary lines, much less an unstable collection of various peoples swearing a vague allegiance to universalist concepts of "democracy." Rather, as he explores in his chapter, "What Is A Nation?," nationhood is perpetuated by a core ethnic group sharing what John Stuart Mill described as "fellow feeling." This sense of common identity is the foundation upon which a viable nation rests.

Discussing the "Limits of Assimilation," the author suggests that the legalization of group rights has brought traditional assimilation to an end, especially as economic and political rewards are no longer based on what critics dismiss as the "Eurocentric" concept of individual meritocracy.

Intergroup tensions and outright violence are becoming the rule, not the exception. New waves of immigrants concentrated in particular geographic areas are fostering "reverse assimilation" whereby *their* social, political, and economic institutions are coming to prevail.

Dr. Nelson surveys a broad range of political and economic literature to support his contention that the era of "American exceptionalism has ended." He cites Erazin Kohak of Boston University, who is convinced that the "dynamics of disintegration" that have re-emerged in Eastern Europe are not unlike the "strains barely concealed beneath the surface" in the United States.

From an economic standpoint, "diversity" can be a serious handicap. Robert Barro, a Harvard economist, posits that

*a central driving force in defining the state is the desire to have a reasonably homogeneous population within its borders...Political economy explains some of the benefits from having a homogeneous population within a given state. If diversity is great...then there is a strong incentive for people to spend their energies in efforts to redistribute income rather than to produce goods. In particular, a greater dispersion of constituent characteristics leads to the creation of interest groups that spend their time lobbying government to redistribute resources in their favor.*

Demography-driven "diversity," far from being a source of political and economic strength, leads to what Joseph Rothschild has dubbed the "politicization of ethnicity." Turning to the work of David Pimentel of Cornell University, who concludes that current living standards can be sustained only if the U.S. population is reduced to 100 million, Dr. Nelson questions the ability of governments to successfully manage crises as the U.S. moves into an era of scarce natural resources (such as arable land, clean water, and fossil fuels).

In his final chapter, "The Outlook for America," the author remarks:

*Simply because the United States or some other nation had a massive influx of immigrants in the past is no reason for that policy to be continued in the future. The suggestion that because something once was, it must always be is an example of a flaw in logic, the non sequitur, which particularly plagues discussions of the immigration question.*

*America's history as a nation of immigrants is not unique. What is unique is the extent to which America has opened itself to immigration.*

Like critic Lawrence Auster, Nelson sees the promotion of "multiculturalism" as an immigration-fueled assault on the United States' European core culture. Should the multiculturalists prevail,

*The Caribbean, however, will still be Caribbean in its culture and people; Mexico will remain Mexican; Japan will be as Japanese as ever, and so forth through the ranks of all the other nations outside the European-Western world. They will be unscathed, or even strengthened, by the demise of the old European America. After all is said and done, it will have been only European Americans who will have lost their cultural identity, their political institutions, their traditional standard of living, and much else.*

As sobering as the trends are, Brent Nelson does not contend that the ultimate demise of America is inevitable. Indeed the discrediting of comfortable assumptions and popular myths may actually "give the American people a fighting chance to win for themselves and their posterity a new vision and reality of nationhood that will be greater than any which they have theretofore known." But for that to be realized, immigration control will have to soon be effected. ■

## Exploding the Myth of "Progress"

A Book Review by John Rohe and Wayne Lutton

### POPULATION POLITICS

By Virginia Abernethy

New York: Insight Books/Plenum Publishing  
350 pages, \$26.50

Vanderbilt University anthropologist Virginia Abernethy explains in her new book, *Population Politics*, how foreign aid and development strategies, along with high rates of immigration, spur population growth in the Third World, as well as in the United States. Most importantly, she reveals that the "demographic transition model" embraced by both liberals and conservatives — which argues that economic development leads to population stabilization — is a dangerous myth. Dr. Abernethy concludes her critique by offering a number of sensible alternatives to current population policies, including a call for new restrictions on immigration to the U.S.

In the past, human fertility tended to maintain a state of equilibrium with available natural resources. To sustain this balance, cultural restraints evolved including sexual abstinence, delayed marriage, non-procreative sex, abortion, surgical procedures, and Victorian values. These cultural norms were passed from generation to generation. They may have been prompted by occasions when particular populations expanded beyond the capacity of their local environments to support larger numbers, triggering famines and tribal conflicts over scarce natural resources, such as water and grazing land.

During the 19th Century, the recognition of environmental limits contained within cultural rituals gave way to the American frontiersman's cornucopian imagery. Vast horizons and seemingly unlimited resources, along with the industrial revolution, contributed to this feeling of euphoria and liberation from the past. "Limitationism" went out of fashion. As Dr. Abernethy observes, "In the Western mind, scarcity is an aberration correctable by the appropriate application of capital, technology and labor."

This belief in unending Progress has been exported to non-Western "developing" countries. In the post-World War II era, foreign aid and other "humanitarian" gestures, such as emergency food subsidies, have eroded traditional cultural restraints on fertility. For example, Christian missionaries to the Inuit Eskimos characterized fertility-suppressing sexual practices as "a horror to our Lord." Likewise, in India, customs retarding population growth were abandoned faster than modern contraceptives could be substituted. As a consequence, net world population growth has reached 100 million per year, with no

reduction in sight.

A corollary to the belief in Progress was the "demographic transition" model which asserted that rising prosperity reduced human fertility and that, as Garrett Hardin explains in his Introduction, "excessive fertility cures itself whenever prosperity is conferred on a population." Dr. Abernethy dissects this model. She shows that this assumption overlooks the fact that "fertility transition occurred in the midst of desperate poverty and very high infant mortality ... the pattern of very small family size was established a full fifty years before any decline in infant mortality. Industrialization and urbanization seemed just as irrelevant...With so shaky a historical basis, predictions made for the Third World were bound to fail. The poor results are as unsurprising as they are disappointing...modernization and lower child mortality have led to more, not fewer, births." Every victory over hunger becomes a mere triumph of the moment.

Significantly, the prospect of migration also plays a role in population growth. The author notes that, "recent data from high-fertility countries in the Caribbean suggest that fertility *stays high because parents expect that some of their children will emigrate.*"

And many of those who managing to move to the U.S. do indeed have larger families than they might have had they stayed home. As Dr. Abernethy points out, Mexican women who move to the U.S. "have significantly higher fertility than those who remain in Mexico ... Mexican-born women in the U.S. average 119.3 births annually per 1,000 women. This rate compares with 78 births per 1,000 among black and 65 births per 1,000 among white, native-born women." Filipinos, some Russian refugees, Hmong and other South and Southeast Asians "also have extraordinarily large families ... Immigrants tend to bear children at the rate idealized in their country of origin and facilitated by the jobs, health care, subsidized housing, and welfare benefits in the United States. One should take into account that, where native-born Americans see deterioration in the standard of living, most newcomers perceive themselves as much better off than before."

Having undermined the cultural supports for population stability in the Third World, where over 90 percent of the world's population increase takes place, where do we go from here? "Population control," she emphasizes, "by modern or traditional means, is the irreducible bottom line by which third-world countries can respond to environmental limits. Indeed, they can save themselves in no other way." To help accomplish this end, she urges the implementation of the following:

- Support of family-planning assistance programs;
- Supporting job creation for women;
- Limiting immigration visas as an incentive to staying home and working out problems;

- Making the United States an example of a sustainable society.

*Population Politics* closes with an review of America's past and a consideration of future prospects. The closing of the frontier has prompted a reassessment of immigration policies. By exceeding the assimilative capacity of this country, narrow group rights now trump historic individual freedoms. Pollution, crowding, depleting aquifers, solid waste disposal problems, failed education systems, rising taxes, infrastructure and natural capital losses, crime, and a generally lower standard of living are among the long list of consequences related to our having grown beyond the carrying capacity of the U.S.

In her analysis, immigration is viewed as the single most prominent factor propelling continued population growth in the United States. To nurture democracy, build a genuine American identity, maintain individual rights and civil liberties, and provide employment opportunities for America's under-privileged, Dr. Abernethy calls for no more than replacement-level immigration. This means the number of new immigrants admitted would not exceed the net number of people who permanently leave the U.S. every year. She challenges policy makers to reform immigration laws in the light of known facts and existing public sentiment supporting sharp limits. ■