

# The Muddle of Everywhere

by Tom Andres

For those who still believe that the forced (We voted on this WHEN?) conversion of the United States into a “multicultural,” ever-less-European caldron of aggravated grievances and simmering sensibilities remains limited to places like Los Angeles and New York, they should read clinical psychologist Mary Pipher’s glowing account of the “transformation” of Lincoln, Nebraska. Lincoln is Pipher’s hometown, one of the quiet American towns targeted by the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement as a “preferred community for newly arrived refugees.”

One of the difficult problems Pipher had growing up in Nebraska was that her “state’s identity over the last 150 years has been mainly European.” As a child Mary would wistfully play the “globe game,” spinning a world globe, pointing her finger at some random spot, and imagining what wonders she would encounter there. Later, she was increasingly torn: travel to some exotic locale, or remain in monotonous old Lincoln, which many derided as the “middle of nowhere”? But now, thanks to her government’s refugee-immigration policies, the fun globe game has come to Mary Pipher!

Today, Pipher admits, when long-time residents of Lincoln drive down their quiet streets and see the same houses and trees, they are unaware that their town is becoming drastically altered. We will soon have a “brown Nebraska,” and this is “happening nationwide,” rejoices the “Irish-English” Mary Pipher. For, “We are becoming a richer curry of peoples.”

Now Pipher looks at sections of her once dreary hometown and is happily reminded of the exciting

colorfulness of “East Harlem” or “Bangkok.” And, luckily for her, “where cultures collide [as in Iraq?] is the best vantage point for observing human resilience.”

Pipher has “always loved Culture and Personality studies and now,” she writes, “I can be an anthropologist in my own town.” Yes, at last, Pipher can visit the public schools in Lincoln and find “children from fifty different nationalities who speak thirty-two languages.” Someone might easily write another, equally voluminous book, a handy companion to this one, entitled “The Incredibly Obvious Things that Never Occur to Dr. Mary Pipher.”

Pipher interviews three refugee Muslim brothers who are in tears describing how terribly American men treat American women, a sort of “mirror image” of how American men view Muslim men’s treatment of Muslim women. Yes, it is undoubtedly painful for immigrants to live in a culture they see as sinful. What is completely lost on Pipher is that this is exactly why it has made sense

historically for people of drastically different cultures to live in separate nations.

Also, one of the things that Pipher loves most about Nebraska is that it is a “vast farm and ranch state.” In fact, the “state’s best feature is our population density.” That refugees and other immigrants continually flowing into Nebraska, many with historically high birthrates, will eventually bring staggering population growth, pollution, crime and all the other urban ills to her beloved sparsely-populated state never seems to penetrate the otherwise infinitely sensitive and psychologically nuanced mind of Mary Pipher.

Different refugees, we read, prefer to live among themselves, since they can help each other cope. Sometimes interviewing refugees can be tricky. There are “highly charged political and personal questions” and “Religion and politics are danger zones.” In fact, “Everything is more complex than it seems.” Gosh, no

**The Middle of Everywhere: The World’s Refugees Come to Our Town**

by Mary Bray Pipher  
New York: Harcourt/Harvest Books  
416 pages, \$14.00 paperback




---

*Tom Andres is a freelance writer living in Sonora, California.*

kiddin' Mare?

So what will happen when large sections of America are splintered among these very different cultures, and they all start contending for power over these "highly-charged" issues? Another question left unconsidered by Dr. Pipher.

Sometimes these lapses in cognition are so extreme that it is difficult to see them as innocent.

"Globalization will change everything forever." Racially and culturally the world is becoming a cozy "bowl of salt and pepper." Oh, really? Is China becoming less ethnically Chinese? Mexico less Hispanic? Why is this "salt and pepper" paradise only thought to be beneficial for traditionally white nations? Don't ask. On this question, too n Sorry; the Doctor cannot see you now.

One of the strengths of this book, however, is its humor, no matter how unintended. What we are witnessing today is the slow 'unfurling' of the 'unity of mankind.' [Okay, I'll try to remember that when I'm watching the nightly news body count.] Now it is time for us to "see our common humanity and blow each other a kiss of welcome.

It is tempting to laugh at these things, but it is always chilling to see how easily pious, high-minded utopianism can slither down into evil consequences.

Pipher writes that some Nebraskans just want to be 'left alone.' But, No way, says the compassionate grandmotherly psychotherapist, because now "nobody gets to be left alone," which is the "great lesson" of 9/11. "Either we all are safe or none of us is safe." How sweet.

Besides, Americans are so "protected" that they know almost nothing about the rest of the world. Pipher tells us that some refugees are unaware that the world is round, or can't find the United States on a world map, but Americans are supposed to feel like insensitive dolts because they don't know, for example, that they "should not touch a Vietnamese child on the head." In a world of hundreds of cultures? What a double standard!

Even Pipher concedes that refugees "range from saints to psychopaths." But why should we take in psychopaths? Because n forget about Washington, Jefferson, or the moon landing n "the central fact for American identity" is that "we take people in."

Tragically, the very thing that Lincoln, Nebraska, was accused of being, it was not, but is now becoming.

It was once the middle of a strong and cherished culture; it was at the very heart of somewhere. Now Pipher almost swoons when she describes the colorful "diversity" of a downtown park, with women in hijabs next to women in tank tops, and so on. But a nation is not a costume ball, nor is it a bizarre anthropological experiment. Only now is Lincoln becoming "the middle of nowhere." •