# Demons on the Loose

BY JOHN TANTON

Senator Moynihan (1927–2003), in this 1993 book, is out ahead of the pack once again, or perhaps off at right angles to the herd, or even running 180 degrees to it. It's the direction of the stampede that is hard to follow, not Moynihan's. Ethnicity, he believes, is primal; it trumps other less powerful groupings such as class, and is enduring. And it provides a powerful analytical tool for understanding human history.

In an extended introduction to *Pandaemonium,* Moynihan wrestles with definitions. A nation (following Walker Connor; see p. 74) is a "'group of people who *believe* they are ancestrally related. It is the largest grouping that shares that belief.'" A nationstate is "a nation matched with a territory." While not explicitly defined, a state is apparently a geographic area where various nationalities (and/or languages and religions) are cooped up together within a political boundary.

Moynihan then considers in detail the rising tide of ethnic conflict *within* many of the 170 or so states of the contemporary world. The United States is not exempted from this examination. Recollecting his joint authorship with Nathan Glazer of *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1963), he writes:

> Nor for a moment do I think of ethnic conflict as something that happens elsewhere. *Beyond the Melting Pot* was an account of real, if contained, conflict. A

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*John Tanton is the founder of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) and publisher of* The Social Contract.

third of a century later, the social condition of American cities is hugely deteriorated. We have just, as I write, suffered our worst urban riot in a half century [the Los Angeles riot of 1992]. A riot with a difference, new yet old. Asians were among the principal victims of violence against property. The current small arms fighting in American cities is bound to escalate in terms of both weaponry and of aggression against whites; a role reversal, but the same drama.

Hence the book's title. It comes from Milton's *Paradise Lost,* in which *pandaemonium* was the capital of Hell. Dissecting the roots of the word, we find it to mean a "place of all demons." Concerning the present world political situation, Moynihan states explicitly that "much of the present was foretold" but no one would pay attention. The means of foreseeing the future? Eth-

## Pandaemonium:
## Ethnicity in International Politics
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nicity as a discipline, which is the title and content of chapter one.

In this chapter, the Senator describes the *fin de si ècle* view of liberals and Marxists alike that ethnicity would fade as either liberalism or

socialism gained sway. This view lasted until mid-century. Moynihan argues that rather than ethnicity quietly vanishing from the sociopolitical landscape, just the opposite has happened. In fact, "the ethnic perspective can lay claim to some predictive power." Further, "an ethnic perspective made it possible to forecast the breakup of the Soviet Union with some accuracy." He then notes how he and a few others started—about 1980—to predict the collapse of the U.S.S.R., precisely because it was a "state" and not a "nation." That is, it was a concoction of nations, imprisoned in an empire.

A substantial part of this chapter is devoted to reviewing how the accumulating evidence for an ethnically induced breakup of the Soviet Union was largely ignored. Moynihan also makes an initial excursion into a *bête noire*

**Daniel Patrick Moynihan**

of his: government policies that reward ethnicity, i.e., affirmative action. He returns to this later, with fervor.

Moynihan then moves to what he considers one of the great political blunders of our century, namely Woodrow Wilson's "self-determination of peoples." In chapter 2, he explains how this new principle of international relations was thoughtlessly

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formulated by Wilson, and how it eventually made its way into Article I, Section 2 of the UN Charter. The principle immediately raises the definitional question of what constitutes a "people" and how this is to be ascertained and validated. It militates against the concept of various "peoples" getting along with one another within a political state, and puts forth the notion that each identifiable group should be able to rule itself, on its own territory.

By one estimate, there are 6,170 languages in the world, many of them defining a people or a culture. Walker Connor again: there are "just seven homogeneous states with no border problems Denmark, Iceland, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, and Portugal, accounting in all for less than 4 percent of the world's population." It looks as if we are in for a rough ride if the self-determination of peoples is the basic principle.

Nor is North America free of separatist movements. Regarding Puerto Rico, Moynihan writes:

> Just now, for example, the United States government is caught up with the seemingly intractable problem of resolving the status of Puerto Rico.... Congressional resistance arises largely from the question of whether the island should have the option to choose statehood, whilst retaining Spanish as an official language. In two centuries, the United States Congress has admitted thirty-seven new states to the original union of thirteen. But always a stated or unstated condition was that English be the official language. Louisiana, for example might and did retain the Code Napoléon, but trials were to be in English. This position may seem arbitrary, but it is defensible. *E pluribus unum*.

Moynihan also states that the U.S. Civil War should have taught us a lesson. "The lesson (is) that minorities not infrequently seek self-determination for themselves in order to deny it to others. *Homo homini lupus.*" That brings to mind the little couplet by Leonard Harman Robbins:

> *How a minority*
> *reaching a majority*
> *seizing authority*
> *hates a minority!*

In the chapter entitled "National Proletarian Internationalism," the author chronicles the problems that Lenin and the Soviet Union had on the "National Question": how to grant all of those constituent peoples (nations) *de jure* self-determination while keeping *de facto* central control? Moynihan is hard on Marx and his scions:

> With the 20th century, praise God, coming to an end, it will seem a trifle late and a bit much to pore over yet again the interminable and innumerable tracks of this hardy band of idealists and sociopaths and psychopathic idealists, who so affected the beginning of the century. And yet, there is still something to be learned. Which is that for all it proclaimed a doctrine of internationalism, from the outset communist politics were the politics of ethnicity.

Throughout the book, Moynihan touches in several contexts on Communism's relationship to ethnicity. He again draws on the work of Walker Connor, who pointed in an October 1969 *World Politics* article, "Ethnology and the Peace of South Asia," to "the communist tactic of destabilizing multi-ethnic regimes by promising selfdetermination" (p. 155). Further, "Communism in America was largely an ethnic phenomenon" (p. 23). "The emergence of a labor movement in the late nineteenth century, and the advent of socialist and Marxist parties (this latter was largely the aftermath of immigration from central Europe)..." (p. 31). "A great proportion of American Communists were ethnically 'Russian'" (p. 118). Perhaps the recent immigrant origins of much of the American Communist Left explains in part their opposition to controlling immigration, along with their hopes of still fomenting a revolution by bringing in a proletariat.

He also cites George Will's statement that "'proof of Trotsky's farsightedness' was that even then, years after his death, none of his forecasts had yet become true."

How deep and long-lasting are these ethnic and national attachments upon which the U.S.S.R. foundered? Moynihan turns to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who "described an 'all-pervading ethnic bitterness': 'From the vantage point of today, the more peaceful resolution, and the one holding much greater promise for the future, calls for a decisive parting of the ways for those who should separate.'" He then returns to Walker Connor: "'the vertical category of nationalism has proven far more powerful than the horizontal category of class consciousness.'" Amen.

Chapter 4, "Before the Fall," discusses the efforts to set up political states in the ethnically diverse Middle East at the turn of the century. Shifting his focus to the United States, Moynihan then takes on Emma Lazarus for her "huddled masses" and "wretched refuse" labels, saying that the folk who came were not from the bottom of the barrel and often left behind societies more civilized than the one they joined.

In a passage especially pertinent to current debates on NAFTA, Moynihan observes:

> There was a huge wave of immigrants [from Europe to the United States at the turn of the century]. I would expect it was, in considerable proportion, a response to the huge wave of agricultural exports that began to reach Europe once the railroads reached our Middle West. Stanley Lebergott reckons that a third of a million European farms in the long arc from England and Denmark through Prussia on into Russia were closed down by American competition. Wheat acreage in England dropped 40 percent between 1869 and 1887. "The small capitalist farmers of North America hacked away at the economic base of the ruling land classes in Europe more destructively than all the revolutionaries on the Continent." The displaced peasantry arrived [in the United States] just in time to catch the industrial dynamic that commenced in the Civil War.

Some are currently projecting that NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) will displace millions of Mexican corn farmers since U.S. farmers can deliver corn at about one-third the price at which their Mexican counterparts can. Will these displaced farmers follow the model cited above, and end up in the U.S.?

Moynihan ends this section with a passage

from Isaiah Berlin: "'In our modern age, nationalism is not resurgent; it never died. Neither did racism. They are the most powerful movements in the world today, cutting across many social systems.'" Berlin then closed with a lament I've often heard while trying to recruit older people to work on some social cause: "I'm glad to be as old as I am." Translation: "There is no point in my working to avert some problem that will likely not arrive until I'm dead and gone. No sense in planting the olive tree that won't bear for thirty years."

In his closing chapter, "Order in an Age of Chaos," Moynihan returns to the problems inherent in the concept of the self-determination of peoples. "...what is to be the basis of legitimate, political order? The will of the people? Well, yes. But which people?" With the number of states in the world approaching four times the 50 that existed at the turn of the century, Moynihan approvingly quotes James Crawford: "'There is no generally accepted and satisfactory modern legal definition of statehood.'" Moynihan goes on to say, "...when the question arises as to whether an ethnic sub-unit within a state is entitled to self-determination and recognition, the legal complexity grows exponentially."

The two most populous countries in the world, China and India, are highly variegated. The former "...contains fifty-six so-called National Minority peoples, numbering some ninety million persons..." China has been at pains for decades to make the Mandarin language (that of the Han majority) the official language of the whole country. India has literally hundreds of ethnic groups, and a dozen official languages that may be spoken in parliament (out of more than two-hundred in the country). Moynihan addresses the difficulties of trying to fashion an Indian state out of these many nations.

In his summation, Moynihan, with a nice touch of irony, takes up the question Lenin posed: "What is to be Done?" Clearly one thing he'd like to have us do is develop an ethnic perspective on human affairs. Another is to reevaluate the whole concept of the "self-determination of peoples" and the schism and separatism it both fosters and demands. We need to "reconsider what Reinhold Niebuhr once called "The Myth of Democratic Universality," the idea that democracy is 'a universal option for all nations.'"

Coming closer to home, Moynihan writes: The United States will need more than a few of these virtues [humor and intellect], and will know more than it has known of grief. Grief of a different kind. We have known the grief of caste-imposed subjection; we must now expect caste retaliation. It is already there on the streets. Insofar as the Lord loves the United States, this otherwise ominous evolution is complicated by the huge immigration of the 1970s and the 1980s. Race—black and white—has been a primal division in American life, but never the sole division. It will now be dissolved further by the vast numbers of new Hispanic- and Asian-Americans (among others), with some surprising role reversals that many of the principals have, as yet, barely noticed. Thus, at any given moment in the last decade of the twentieth century, something like half the ten largest cities in the United States will have a black mayor or a black police chief or both. To the million legal immigrants in New York City (to which add, say, half a million illegal immigrants), this is the "power structure," with all the attendant tensions.

Moynihan then inveighs against affirmative action as highlighting differences and raising tensions. He concludes by envisioning that: "The challenge is to make the world safe for and from ethnicity, safe for just those differences which large assemblies, democratic or otherwise, will typically attempt to suppress." And: "For the moment, the more pressing matter is simply to contain the risk, to restrain the tendency to hope for too much, either from altruism or from common sense."

Moynihan does not say how to reach these goals. Might not one way of "containing the risk" be to take the pressure off the system by placing a moratorium on immigration, as we did successfully a half-century ago, while we attempt to reach an accommodation among the highly diverse populations that are already here? ∎