

The Social Contract asked Ira Mehlman to interview Frederick Lynch, author of *Invisible Victims: White Males and the Crisis of Affirmative Action* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1991). The remarks of Professor Lynch are substantially unedited. As is often the case in long interviews, discussions of various issues overlap. In those instances, remarks concerning related topics have been consolidated for the purposes of continuity, and the comments by The Social Contract are an introduction to those collected responses. Ira Mehlman is media consultant for the Los Angeles office of FAIR, the Federation for American Immigration Reform.

Affirmative Action, Immigration: Threat to the Nation-State

An Interview with Sociologist Frederick R. Lynch

By Ira Mehlman

Claremont McKenna College sits just at the easternmost edge of the sprawling megalopolis of Los Angeles, just close enough to have a bird's-eye view of the social tumult of the area and just far enough removed to maintain some perspective. Designed around the Oxford model, the several institutions that comprise Claremont McKenna have the bucolic feel of the British countryside, with a few palm trees thrown into the landscape.

From here, Frederick R. Lynch has been thinking and writing about some of the social and political phenomena that are taking place both within and beyond the green quads of these college campuses. Suddenly, the subject that until recently he had been writing about in relative obscurity — affirmative action — has become the dominant political issue in California and is spreading across the nation.

In 1994, Californians challenged political taboos by approving, by a 3-2 margin, Proposition 187. In 1996, the California Civil Rights Initiative (CCRI) may be on the California ballot (although the petition drive to qualify the measure for the November ballot appears to be in a good deal of trouble). The controversial CCRI would prohibit race, ethnicity and gender-based preferences in California, effectively ending affirmative action.

Seven years ago, when it was first published, Lynch's book, *Invisible Victims: White Males and the Crisis of Affirmative Action*, was among the first to examine the social consequences of a policy he describes as "the biggest social engineering program in American history." In the book's preface, Lynch asserts that "affirmative action has been a radioactive topic among both professionals and laypersons. The issue has been heavily self-censored by social scientists, journalists, personnel managers, and even those who lost jobs and promotions due to affirmative action barriers." He goes on to argue that "affirmative action should no longer be regarded as an article of political faith; rather, it should be seen as a major social revolution to be studied sociologically."

Since Lynch published his book, the country has begun to examine critically and even make significant changes in policies that as recently as the late-1980s were regarded as articles of political faith. In an interview in Claremont on December 11, Lynch discussed some of the trends in political thinking regarding such difficult and emotional issues as affirmative action, immigration, racial, ethnic and class tensions, and the status of the nation-state.

THE SOCIAL CONTRACT: *Like many other social experiments of Lyndon Johnson's era, affirmative action has gone way beyond what its architects envisioned, and has become an end in itself, rather than a means to correct historic injustices against black people in America.*

FREDERICK R. LYNCH: The unintended consequences of affirmative action, and nobody saw it coming, was that the other non-black minority groups would be added on. This was done in the '60s — it was the civil rights era and everybody was talking black and white. It had an East Coast point of view. And so, when the enforcement machinery started converting from just making sure people were just advertising positions and doing outreach in a nondiscriminatory way, into hiring proportionally, [when government] started adding groups like Hispanics, and saying, "you are going to prove [compliance with] affirmative action by hiring Hispanics and ... other groups," — this was just done without anybody really realizing it.

"What I find most dangerous about affirmative action is that it has become a de facto revolution."

What I find most dangerous about affirmative action is that it has become a de facto revolution. You have a lot of people even in high places now thinking that if some group isn't proportionally represented, then there

must be discrimination — that is the only answer. It's now taken for granted by the number of students we have coming in, the number of top level executives, that if 10 percent of the population is black, but only 5 percent of your work force is black, you're guilty of discrimination. It may not have anything to do with it.

Affirmative action [has given rise to] the world being seen in terms of ethnicity, race and gender and this gives rise to political correctness, which is basically an obsession with race and gender in a very egalitarian way. I think PC has arisen in large part to justify, rationalize and hide to some extent the abuses of affirmative action. I think it has been very dangerous and led to the re-tribalization of America, as some people say. Nobody stopped this machine — which, I think, is really our biggest social engineering program of the century, essentially reallocating economic and educational opportunities according to proportional representation. [This is] a pretty tall order.

THE SOCIAL CONTRACT: Affirmative action has strayed far from its original intent and has been extended far beyond its initial objectives, and yet it has taken nearly 25 years for there to be a significant organized protest against racial, ethnic and gender preference programs.

LYNCH: The reason for the silence on this is because the people affected didn't want to be called racist, they didn't want to be called wimps or whiners and there's a blackout on TV and in newspapers about this topic. Unless there was a Supreme Court case on this matter, it was never talked about. So a lot of people were just afraid that they wouldn't be believed if they talked about this. There was a spiral of silence.

The polls have shown all along that there were great majorities opposed to preferential treatment as a form of affirmative action, where you give preferences particularly over merit. But the majority didn't realize they were a majority. The people who were on TV and had access to talk shows were by-and-large noisy minorities, which were mistakenly assumed to be the majority. When most people talk about controversial issues, we put out our antennae and say "What's the majority opinion? I want to be in the majority." And if you don't think you are, you shut up. People falsely assumed that the majority opposed to preferences was really the minority and kept silent.

White males have really been given a bum rap by both the right and the left. The left, if you complained about this, would call you a racist. Lately, coming very strongly from the right, you were a whiner. You're supposed to be John Wayne. You're supposed to get back on your horse and keep riding. If you're a real tough guy you go start your own business.

One definition of a victim is someone who's been swindled. There's no question that millions of white males took employment exams, took promotion exams and then their exams were race-normed behind their backs. That's a swindle. That's a screw-over. They have

every right to complain.

"...people are going to band together in communities ... it might as well be the nation-state."

THE SOCIAL CONTRACT: Just as with the benefits of affirmative action, which have disproportionately accrued to the more advantaged minorities, the pains of affirmative action have not been experienced equally. Working class whites have been more negatively affected than those at the top of the socio-economic hierarchy.

LYNCH: It is also the fact that it's a class issue that has kept this quiet. The white elite and the people in the board room were willing to maintain the industrial peace on affirmative action by selling out the jobs of younger white and working class males in order to stay out of court. As Chancellor Young said at UCLA, "It's a form of riot control."

The political spectrum does not run from right to left. It runs from top to bottom. The people at the top are now very different from those at the middle. They're globally oriented. They don't care about the nation-state.

The only way to settle the affirmative action debate is to say, "nondiscrimination and that's it. We are not going to divvy up people by race and ethnicity for anything anymore." To some extent this is going to come to a head with the 2000 Census. There's one group, very strong, that wants a mixed category. If you do that, that's going to upset the apple cart altogether. Race and ethnicity are really bogus concepts. They are so permeable that we really ought to just throw them out. Instead, since the mid-'70s they have gotten revived in order to serve social policy.

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In California the mechanics of affirmative action are breaking down. How do you classify someone whose mother is Japanese and whose father is Hispanic? The mechanics for classification of affirmative action are unwinding to some extent if we let it.

THE SOCIAL CONTRACT: On countless social and political issues, the American people clearly believe that something has gone seriously wrong, and yet we cannot seem to forge a political consensus about what needs to be done.

LYNCH: There's a lot of inertia, unfortunately, that

determines social policy. The machine keeps cranking. The people who want to stop affirmative action and immigration have to stop this big truck from going downhill just through inertia. Money and organization are going to be crucial.

Ultimately — and this is the point of my new book, *The Diversity Industry* — it's going to depend on who gets the White House. We are an administrative state. A lot of this stuff comes through the regulations, it comes through the courts. And if you get Bill Clinton in there with four more years with no threat of reelection, and he is able to appoint all the administrators and judges and possibly three or four new Supreme Court justices, that's how this stuff is done.

Something like CCRI and [Proposition] 187 — obviously 187 was a fire bell, it sent a loud message — that's the significance of something like a 187 or a CCRI. It operates as a check or an attention-getting device that says, "We are fed up." But as far as getting anything done, it is going to depend on who has the power of appointment of the great state bureaucracies. You can pass laws and they can be gutted through lack of enforcement or what have you.

THE SOCIAL CONTRACT: *Affirmative action was instituted at a time in our nation's history when large-scale immigration was just being revived. Intended or not, the benefits of affirmative action have been extended to identifiable minority groups, other than blacks, whose ranks are being swelled by immigration.*

LYNCH: Affirmative action and immigration are obviously feeding off one another. You're ballooning the protected classes. Again, it's something nobody in their right mind really thought about when this started out. But if you have an open border and you have immigrant groups as protected classes... It's kind of ironic, it could lead affirmative action to self-destruct and explode.

It's also pitting non-black minorities and blacks against one another. Immigration is ultimately driving a wedge into the civil rights establishment over what to do about this. As a sociologist, this is what's driven me nuts all these years. People who were looking at this as a coalition of people of color against the evil white male establishment ignore all the other differences and of course some of these exploded in the LA riots.

THE SOCIAL CONTRACT: *In spite of the obvious evidence of trouble, the establishment black leadership in the U.S. has been silent on the negative impact it has had on African Americans and continued to support policies which promote high levels of immigration.*

LYNCH: There has been the idea on the left that people of color can form a super-proletariat. What has happened with affirmative action thinking is that it is "two-factor thinking." You have had the colorization of the class struggle. Instead of the bourgeoisie versus the proletariat, we now have white males versus people of

color. An amazingly simple but accurate statement of what has happened is that people of color are assumed to be oppressed and victims and poor. And, of course, all white males conversely are presumed to be privileged and powerful folks. It's amazing how long this sort of thinking went on and how far it got.

Among black leaders, the immigration issue is seen as a minor problem. The black establishment is East Coast centered, as is the white, and it ignored what was going on on the West Coast and in Texas and in Florida. This was seen as kind of a local phenomenon. I don't think they saw it coming.

The animosity between blacks and other minority groups has been a relatively recent phenomenon. People are locked into the black-white paradigm, as the title of Andrew Hacker's book, *Two Nations*, suggests — and that's being toasted still by people on the left. We ceased to be two nations a long time ago.

THE SOCIAL CONTRACT: *Michael Lind, in his new book, The Next American Nation, has looked at these phenomena and concluded that since the late 1970s, there has been a war waged against the American middle class. As a nation built on the foundation of a strong middle class, the economic, social and demographic changes we are seeing may radically alter this country.*

LYNCH: We are getting to the point where we have to debate, "do we want a nation-state, or do we just want to have a huge global economy and let every person fend for himself?" The *Wall Street Journal*, the Cato Institute, are saying, "Why bother with the nation-state? Let's just have everything a market." To me that's very fallacious, it's lousy sociology, because people are going to band together in communities, whether it's on the basis of religion, the nation-state, ethnicity — they're going to find some sort of big tribe to plug into, and as far as I'm concerned it might as well be the nation-state, because it is the most tameable and most civil arrangement we've got. The idea of a national community is to some extent a good one. A national community with shared norms and values, that's your basic sociology. Any society or social system has to have shared values and norms and boundaries.

THE SOCIAL CONTRACT: *Some have suggested that perhaps the nation-state, in an age of the global economy and cyberspace, is an antiquated concept more suitable to the world of the 19th century than the 21st.*

LYNCH: The nation-state can be modified. It need not have as much centralization and regulation as it does. But I think the idea of a nation-state is to try to create a little bit of heaven on earth. You try to take care of your people; maybe you give them a little bit of health care so that if someone is an American citizen they don't have to die in the streets. That's worth preserving. If you have to have some border control, not only in terms of immigration but as we integrate into the global

economy, how do you do it? Do you do it overnight or do you cushion people along the way a little bit?

"Even in an age when goods and capital move freely around the globe, you cannot have a similar movement of people."

Immigration brings up the whole idea of, "Do you want a nation-state or not? Do you want a common good? Do you want a people with boundaries?" You cannot talk about a society without boundaries. The political right is [currently] very split on this. They think you can have open borders and preserve Western civilization. You can't.

THE SOCIAL CONTRACT: *In the past several years, as global economies and technology have exploded, we have been trying to adapt people to the requirements of this "New World Order," rather than adapting economies and technology to the realities of human nature.*

LYNCH: One of the big, looming battles in the world may be religion. The Moslems versus the Christians and so forth, as Samuel Huntington has suggested.¹ Talk about the role of the emotional and the irrational, when it comes to religion, Holy Moses! The economic rationalism that is really behind open borders has to deal with the question, "Is there anything else besides the market?"

Even in an age when goods and capital move freely around the globe, you cannot have a similar movement of people. We want to preserve a nation-state and we want to have rights and obligations. We want to be a civic entity, and a civic entity has to have borders. That means for people and to some extent for goods. I think the debate gets polarized rather quickly. You get the free-traders screaming protectionism, the protectionists screaming, "Aw, you just don't want any borders," and I think the truth, as usual, is somewhere in the middle. You do integrate the nation into the global economy, but you do so gradually, and you protect your own people to some extent — there has to be a balance point. But I think the problem with the [political] right is that they are all economy and no society. [They have] the idea that everything is market. Good conservatives will say, "What about family? What about religion? What about community?" The world is not just market, and I think that's the problem with a lot of conservatives. They look only at the bottom line. They look only at economics.

There was a recommended curriculum published by the Heritage Foundation a few years ago for people going on to law school. What should you take as an undergraduate? There was no psychology, no sociology, no anthropology, very little history — it was economics

and government. That's kind of the problem here. There are such things as families, and churches, and ethnic groups and so forth and you've got to have a place for them. The Bosnians. You can scream at them all the time, "Your bond ratings are going to hell!" They don't care. There has to be an appreciation of the role of the irrational in life. The free market rationalist would say the Bosnians and the Serbs shouldn't be killing each other — it's bad for their economy. Well, yeah, people are doing that all over the planet. They do all kinds of things that are bad for the economy because they hate one another. We must also consider the role of the emotional. People get juiced up about the idea of belonging to a certain religion or belonging to a certain ethnicity or belonging to a family. No feud like a family feud. They'll blow the place up and if you say, "Well that's bad for tourism." Tough apples.

THE SOCIAL CONTRACT: *One of the immutable realities often overlooked amidst the scramble of social, economic and demographic change is that human nature craves stability.*

LYNCH: There will be a public backlash to any sort of "overdoing-Gingrich," — "We're just going to send all power back to the states and let free markets reign." We've had these factories closing down on people and suddenly people are out of work. People care about communities, particularly as the baby boomer generation grows older.

A lot of us care about stability. A lot of what is going on in California with regard to white flight is related to this. You want to buy a house, you want to have a community. You don't want it suddenly being transformed into Little Mexico — and not only culturally, but classwise. You don't want to have gangs in the neighborhood and stuff like that. That is going to cut against large-scale immigration. People don't want to have to scramble to get out of a Little Mexico, or Little Honduras, or whatever.

The idea of the topsy-turvy consequences of immigration, that suddenly our neighborhood is a slum, worries a lot of people. In Los Angeles County there has been this dramatic demographic make-over and it's not just cultural or language differences — it's class differences. You don't want the house next door to wind up with people living ten to a room.

It's becoming harder and harder to escape. I teach (about) juvenile delinquency — the gangs fly United, just the way anybody else does.

THE SOCIAL CONTRACT: *Proponents of current policies — open border advocates and free marketeers — argue that the kind of change we are experiencing is healthy and will promote American dynamism. They warn of an emerging hyper-nationalism springing up in the U.S.*

LYNCH: It's an American idea — "Progress is our most important product." We've always been pro-change. There is an argument to be made for immigrants

promoting certain change and being innovators. The question is balance. There are a lot of backward tradition-bound societies that don't like change. We've always been very open to change and I think that is something we would want to keep — the Internet opening up, all kinds of things on the way. Freely developing technology poses a lot of benefits and risks. I think the real question is, change in values? Change in culture? We have a dynamic culture, we've always been able to absorb all the different ideas. What is being raised more and more is, "Do we have a core culture that we want to preserve and teach?"

I don't think that after 20 years of civil rights, you're going to go back to some jingoist, nativist sort of thing. Also, the global economy. The global economy is here to stay. The question is, "How do we put some sort of overlay of the nation-state on that?" No one wants *Blade Runner* [a futuristic novel by Philip Dick, later made into a movie starring Harrison Ford, about 21st century Los Angeles] — this hellish two-tiered society, where the whites are literally moving off-world.

THE SOCIAL CONTRACT: *In the seven years since Invisible Victims was first published, there has been a greater willing-ness to consider ideas about affirmative action, immigration and other tough issues that were considered sacred cows.*

LYNCH: More people are thinking about issues like affirmative action. That's the joy I find in the last two or three years. People are thinking! The amazing thing is that for 20 years nobody talked about this. How did the biggest social engineering program in American history escape being discussed by the news media, escape being studied by social scientists? There's no data on this stuff!

This book of mine was supposed to be the first book on white males and affirmative action. It's the *only* book by a sociologist about white males and affirmative action — and it shouldn't be. There's a handful of books about affirmative action by social scientists. It's appalling. It's the biggest social engineering program in history and we've got a handful of books on it. I think that is the biggest development in the past several years, both with affirmative action and immigration — people are talking, and talk is the most important medium of social change.

Where is it going to lead? We've got a history full of revolts and rebellions that failed. We'll just have to wait and see. I'm a person who looks at social change as dependent upon unexpected events and charismatic personalities more than planned social change.

THE SOCIAL CONTRACT: *The changes in the nature and the terms of the political discussion of affirmative action can be dramatically altered as they have been in the immigration debate. Once people begin to think differently about an issue, change can occur.*

LYNCH: Pre- and post-Proposition 187. Look at the

difference. I remember one of the first stories that the *Washington Post* did about what was going on out here. Some reporter came out and rode around with this couple and they were saying what was going on in their neighborhood. And he was so con-descending and so smug and so liberal, "Oh, these poor little people who moved out here from Iowa and now their neighborhood is going down — poor dears." 187 sent a signal.

It's people feeling like a stranger in their own nation — a stranger in a strange land — that is beginning to be talked about and is beginning to be legitimized as a topic of discussion.

THE SOCIAL CONTRACT: *With the ascendancy of Newt Gingrich and the Contract With America, the engine of social change seems to be coming more from the political right. However, the role of the political left should not be discounted, because of its historic role in bringing about social reform and because the political right is divided between cultural conservatives and economic conservatives.*

LYNCH: The ball is, to some extent, on the left now. The left traditionally, particularly with the unions, has been very wary of immigration. There are these little societies now in town, Coalition for a Living Wage (or something like that) — they're going around, sort of on a voluntary basis, trying to bid up wages. I think the ball is really going to be more with the left than with the right on this. Blacks now begin to realize they are being badly undercut by cheap immigrant labor — that, as in Miami, the hotel jobs now go to immigrants and that immigration is no friend to them. I think the polarization is going to increase as the inner city kids are left further behind. The crime situation is a time bomb. The huge increase in violent crimes, particularly by the youth, is certainly giving people on the left with their cultural relativism pause. Their idea that gangs and graffiti, "Well, that's just an alternative lifestyle" — that's not going to wash anymore. Not when you have kids getting killed. The crime issue is fascinating, obviously as far as immigrants get involved in crime — the Russian mafia, look out. That could be a major issue, making people more nationalist, more conservative, more (of them) saying, "We've got to have borders, we've got to take care of our community."

If you think about the nation-state as an FDR type of thing — that is the left's territory. If you want a welfare state, you cannot have open borders. The majority of Americans do favor a reasonable welfare state. As the baby boomers get older they are going to think, "What's this about taking away Medicare? What about Social Security?" It's going to have to be reformed, no question in terms of the economics. Do we want a nation-state? Do we want an America?

Conservatives think of Western values as universal (ideals) that will be respected around the world. Everybody who comes in will be open to them. Not necessarily. The jury is still out. If we have a revival of

religious fundamentalism around the world — we have the New York City bombing — you have to consider that. Culture counts. Ideas count. Obviously there has been a split on the conservative side between the economic conservatives and the cultural conservatives. The "econ" people say, "All this cultural stuff is bull. It doesn't matter. What drives everything is the market." But I think the more intelligent conservatives will say that culture counts. ■

¹ "The Clash of Civilizations" by Samuel Huntington appeared in the Summer 1993 edition of *Foreign Affairs*.