

Blurred Visions of U.S. Citizenship

by Georgie Anne Geyer

As America observes Labor Day and then the anniversary of September 11, we look to both our work heritage and to questions of our future in the war against terrorism as we survey the national scene.

But an internal unraveling is occurring within the American fabric that is, I believe, the most serious issue confronting us as a nation.

To put it most simply, we are moving from a classically transformational society to a concessionary society. Instead of imposing our principles on others within America, or inspiring with them, we now grant cultural and political concessions to others.

National peace is kept not by a central system based on historical principles and adhered to by a majority of citizens, but with a balance of power by which a central monitoring government grants privileges and concessions to various demanding, diffuse special

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interests and ethnic forces that exist for their own purposes.

It is almost as if the central authority in American life were a carnival hawker, urging all comers to see what they can bargain for. "Step right up" is the cry.

Six years ago this fall, my last book, *Americans No More: The Death of Citizenship*, was published. In it, I argued that American citizenship was being tragically weakened, leaving large numbers of us without serious commitment to a true, historical, deep Americanism.

But even social nature abhors a vacuum, and in those six years, virtually nothing has been accomplished to raise Americans' knowledge of history or to deepen their understanding of citizenship. Thus the vacuum is being filled with spontaneous barter relationships between the government and just about anyone who comes here and chooses to make demands upon it. A few examples:

One of the most disturbingly exploited areas is language. Despite the fact that, for instance, bilingual education is totally discredited and has supposedly been legally abolished in many states, the government actually gives in to public and educational multilingualism at every turn.

The Bush administration, despite earlier promises to straighten out the bilingual education mess

(including a promise made to this writer by President Bush himself three years ago), has not even touched Bill Clinton's Executive Order 13166. In this astonishing presidential fiat, everyone has a de facto "civil right" to have an oral interpreter and translation service, paid for by American taxpayers, for any of the 176 languages spoken somewhere in the United States.

Everywhere you look in language concerns, the idea of English as the implicit language of America is losing. Special "Hispanic services" are being created in many communities. ATM machines offer Spanish services — and soon will expand to other languages. Increasing numbers of children born in America are growing up in "linguistically isolated" households and need English instruction in school. (The figures for Montgomery and Fairfax Counties are 35 percent in special English classes that were supposedly for foreigners.)

Politicians' books are now published concurrently in Spanish (Tennessee Sen. Bill Frist's new book on terrorism, for instance), thus further isolating Hispanics from the bigger world.

Still another disturbing area is that of law, as more and more ethnic or religious groups and individuals demand that the laws change for them, in place of their

obeying the laws of the land.

In Cook County, IL, Deputy Sheriff Crystal Clark, a Muslim, insists upon wearing a headscarf with her uniform. A national Muslim advocacy group says denial of her demand is “denial of religious accommodation.” In Florida, another Muslim woman, Sultanna Freeman, insists she be allowed to have her driver’s license photo taken with her face covered and only her eyes showing. Etc., etc., etc.

This country was founded on the Protestant ethic, which demanded that each man be judged only on his morality and work. Today, even the Protestant churches are adapting, changing their outreach and cultural principles to fit the new age.

The Episcopal Church in its

“Atlanta Manifesto” recently stated that it has become a “church in a state of mission, that is, a missionary church” to the Hispanics and others. The leaders of seven predominantly white Protestant denominations this summer stated that America is an “unchurched culture” and that they need to reach newcomers and others in their own language and culture.

Meanwhile, other powers reach into the vacuum at the center. So far this year, the Mexican government has distributed about half a million identification cards, known as “*matriculas consulares*,” to Mexicans living in the United States. They are recognized as official “American” IDs now by more than 200 U.S.

city police departments. America does not even insist anymore upon that most basic power of the nation-state, credentialing its own people.

All this cannot help but influence outsiders. A recent Zogby International poll showed that 58 percent of the Mexican population (in Mexico) believes the American Southwest belongs to Mexico and that Mexicans should have the right to enter it without American permission. (That time may not be that far off.)

We are about to pay a dear price for our refusal to teach and succor our principles. One can already see the consequences looming as we allow our once so beautifully transformational values to wither and die. •