The Unexpected Result

Immigration and affirmative action

Book Review Essay by Frederick Lynch

In the late 1980s, while completing *Invisible Victims*, a book on the consequences of affirmative action upon both white males and the larger society, I included in the final chapter a section on the "Immigration with Preference Paradox." New and recent immigrants were being accorded preferential affirmative action status in education, employment and contracting — sometimes at the expense of American-born blacks, the original, intended beneficiaries of such polices. Yet, in numerous reviews and interviews, the obvious contradiction in expanding affirmative action preferences to recent Third World immigrants simply failed to elicit any notice or comment. Why?

In *Collision Course*, the late Vanderbilt political scientist-historian Hugh Davis Graham takes us inside the heretofore hidden politics of the quiet, jerry-built inclusion of minorities under the expanding affirmative action umbrella. This obviously important book is a workman-like, richly researched study of a long-neglected policy arena. But Graham's disciplinary blinkers, history and political science, also lead to neglect of underpinning sociological and cultural trends.

Collision Course: The Strange Convergence of Affirmative Action and Immigration Policy in America
by Hugh Davis Graham
New York: Oxford University Press
246 pages, $30.00

Graham seeks to "understand how the American political system, operating under significantly altered dynamics since the late 1960s, bent the parallel but largely unconnected trajectories of two liberal reforms of the 1960s toward a converging path that produced such unintended consequences" (p. 12). The topics were rarely connected in public or policy discourse because "though mountains of statistical data have been published to document trends in both policy areas, almost no connection is made between them." These research realms were "segregated" (p.3). Second, he cites the "desire of government officials and organizations representing minority groups to avoid the divisive issue" (p.4). But the "why" behind both reasons is left hanging and illustrates an early, running flaw in the book.

Affirmative action and immigration were understudied and disconnected because of the tremendous censorship of political correctness and its career-killing catcall of "racist." That is why the topics were "segregated" and why scholars, policy experts, television and print journalists, and other researchers also avoided these "divisive" issues. I'm not sure that there were "mountains" of data; but, in any case, critical interpretations of that data were taboo — as nearly all academics and journalists were well aware. Eventual debate by professionals and the public — a key ingredient in policy formulation — awaited the external, populist push of California's Proposition 187 and Proposition 209. These successful ballot measures, respectively, banned state aid to illegal immigrants and public sector ethnic preferences. In California and elsewhere, ordinary citizens were becoming increasingly aware of the granting of preferences to swelling numbers of legal and illegal immigrants. Their discontent registered first on talk radio and, ultimately, at the ballot box. Academics and policy experts were then forced to study the policies. Since then, however, conservative and liberal elites, along with the major media, have contained these political squalls and continue to avoid discussing the immigration-with-preference paradox. How has this been possible?

Graham's primary focus on all this is the maneuvering of interest groups in Washington,

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especially Congress and the federal bureaucracies. *Collision Course* furnishes sequential chapters on "Civil Rights Reform in the 1960s," "Immigration Reform in the 1960s," "Origins and Development of Race Conscious Affirmative Action," "The Return of Mass Immigration," and "The Strange Convergence of Affirmative Action and Immigration Policy."

The background chapters are excellent. Even for those familiar with these historical and policy territories, these chapters are a rewarding read. And — my later criticisms notwithstanding — Graham does draw upon sociologist John Skretney's *Ironies of Affirmative Action*, in noting that an early source of elite acquiescence to affirmative action theory (if not practice) was the desire for social control and stability arising out of the 1960s urban riots. "The riots spurred aggressive efforts by federal officials to dampen the violence by speeding delivery of benefits, especially jobs paying good wages, to urban minorities who found little payoff in the civil rights legislation of 1964-65" (p. 32). The chapter on immigration reform shows how the "family reunification" concept became almost a holy concept in emerging immigration policy in the 1960s — setting up the seeds of "chain immigration" in subsequent decades. (There is some deft analysis here, as Graham notes that business was not a driving force in 1960s immigration reforms, largely because the huge baby boom population was furnishing an abundance of young, new workers.)

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"Clientele capture" is Graham's key explanatory concept in explaining the rise of a "hard" or "race-conscious" mode of affirmative action in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Following others, Graham argues persuasively "the race-conscious model of hard affirmative action was developed in trial-and-error fashion by a coalition of mostly white, second-tier civil servants in the social service agencies of the presidency" (p. 66). Thus, we have the old story whereby the regulatory agencies were "captured" by their "clients." A Kennedy-Johnson era network within federal bureaucracies formulated the "goals-and-timetables" routine to which employers and universities became accustomed. Graham maintains that such policies preceded justifying theories of compensatory justice. I'm not so sure about that. "Blaming the system" and "institutional racism" were sociological staples by the mid-1960s — marking the shift in "elite wisdom" that Charles Murray described in *Losing Ground*.

Meanwhile, back at the borders, Graham shows that mass immigration from Latin America and Asia was surging, while European immigration fell dramatically. The effects of family-preferences were becoming pronounced by the 1980s: occupational preferences which had been 60 percent of the official immigration ceiling in the 1960s dropped to 17 percent by 1980; conversely, by 1980, 70 percent of those admitted were brothers and sisters and 20 percent were spouses and unmarried children of citizens or resident aliens. (There was also a third door avenue outside official limits for visas for relatives of U.S. citizens.) The growth of American medicine was creating a demand for foreign-born health care workers and additional "network job recruiting" along family and ethnic lines was generating more demand. But the unique "cross-cutting, bipartisan politics of the immigration issue" emerged to thwart any curbs to these changing conditions.

Graham is at his best in identifying and discussing the crucial roadblock to affirmative action and immigration reform in the 1980s: the inability of pro-growth business conservatives in the Reagan and Bush administrations to "just say no" to ethnic preferences and runaway immigration. Though initially committed to regaining control of the borders, within the Reagan administration conservative divisions neutralized decisive action. This hesitation provided the opening for savvy ethnic-group operatives to establish federal contracting set-asides, "a tour de force of policy entrepreneurship by leaders of the civil rights coalition in Congress" (p. 88) as well as the push for bilingualism that Graham terms "Latino affirmative

action."

Instead, business, pro-growth and libertarian interests (articulated by the *Wall Street Journal* and the Heritage Foundation) fought side-by-side with civil rights lobbying organizations to block restrictionist reforms. (Graham points out what others often neglect: that the proliferating ethnic group lobbies were increasingly bankrolled by major foundations.) As a result, the final 1986 Simpson-Mazzoli bill emerged as a deeply flawed compromise, a three-way bargain that included: (1) employer sanctions provisions— that proved largely ineffective; (2) a one-shot amnesty that still left large "shadow populations" of illegal immigrants in the nation's large cities, and (3) an agricultural worker program that "was an unambiguous victory for the growers and a defeat for virtually everybody else" (p. 117). Employers were ultimately pleased to use affirmative action pressures to hire more Hispanics as a trump card against the new prohibitions about hiring illegal workers. Further efforts at immigration reform in the 1990s — in spite of California's recession-fueled revolts against illegal immigration and affirmative action preferences — were eviscerated or otherwise bottled up in Congress by the now familiar left-right coalition.

As Harvard sociologist Christopher Jencks also has pointed out in a seminal two-part *New York Review of Books* analysis in November/December, 2001, immigration reform has failed because there have been few organizations to effectively articulate widespread public opinion favoring reform and restriction. There are no political rewards for voting for restrictions; but there are considerable payoffs for catering to business and ethnic group lobbies. Graham does provide a brief, balanced analysis of the origins and evolving role of the Federation of American Immigration Reform (FAIR). But they were a David against a well-heeled, bipartisan Goliath, anchored by business and the *Wall Street Journal* on the right and the Ford Foundation-funded phalanx of immigrant interest groups on the left. The defection of organized labor to expansionist policies during the 1990s was a crucial blow against further restrictionist efforts.

In discussing the mating of affirmative action with changing immigration patterns, Graham details the squalid, sloppy, and ad hoc bureaucratic formulation of racial and ethnic classifications. Especially depressing is Graham's account of the spoils-system style inclusion of "Indonesians" in the Small Business Administration's set-aside programs. As in other societal sectors, such lobbying ultimately jeopardized the original SBA rationale for helping blacks: by the mid-1990s Asian Americans more than doubled their nationwide take of SBA minority contract dollars, from 12 to 28 percent while the Hispanic share fell to 26 percent and the black share to 34 percent. (In California, Asians obtained nearly 40 percent of set-aside contract dollars.)

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Unfortunately, Graham pays minimal attention to the significance of the 1990s ideological shift from affirmative action to "diversity management" in business and government. A powerful alliance of corporate CEOs, bureaucrats, foundations, consultants, politicians, and academics — a "diversity machine" as I have elsewhere termed it — has successfully replaced the old rationale for affirmative action preferences. No longer are preferences justified solely as "righting past wrongs" against African Americans; today's demographically-driven mission in corporations and government is "getting right with the future" of burgeoning Third World workers and customers at home and abroad. The full impact of the diversity machine's predictions burst upon the nation with the publication of the 2000 census reports. Corporate CEOs and politicians in immigrant-magnet states such as Texas and California are now fully mindful of the new mix. And well before 2000, panicked GOP tacticians began emphasizing diversity rhetoric and appointments in response to repeated political wipeouts in demographically transformed California — harbingers of the dramatic "red and blue America" electoral map that mirrored ethnic divisions in the 2000 presidential election. The national implications of California's demographic revolution has permanently nullified GOP support for affirmative action reform or immigration restriction.

Graham mentions none of this, but in his final chapter he does assess other costs and benefits of

affirmative action, mass immigration, and their peculiar juncture. He credits the shift to "hard" racial preferences to accelerating the redistribution of opportunities for blacks, especially in union-ossified occupations, in colleges and professional schools, and in creating a black middle class — though one that is largely dependent upon government employment. Following George Borjas, Graham sees some slight overall benefits from immigration, but that these have been unevenly distributed. Graham sees the roaring 1990s economic climate as favoring the economic expansionist arguments and credits Hispanic organizations for neutralizing opposition by "racializing" immigration issues — a brief acknowledgment of political correctness by another name. On the downside, Graham cites the growing economic inequalities generated by globalizing markets both among and within nations — and the accompanying "exploding new market in human misery" posed by international smuggling of human beings.

Collision Course is a "must read" book on a huge topic, a work that packs a good bit of data and interpretation into about 200 pages of text. Nevertheless, while Graham provides carefully footnoted historical analysis within a framework of rational, interest group politics, the "big picture" which is driven by global capitalism, demographic change, and multiculturalism/political correctness, is only sporadically illuminated. The policy impact of the successful hitching of "diversity" ideology to the wagon of demographic change cannot be over-estimated. But Graham rarely mentions the word "diversity," and refuses to use the term "political correctness," much less emphasize its impact.

Any university-based scholar brave enough to approach these topics knows he or she must choose words and topics with utmost care, lest an article, a book, a career become marginalized, if not altogether killed. One senses that Graham was very much aware that he was walking through professional minefields as some sharp-edged studies and data are slighted. Aside from downplaying the formidable ideological censorship and increasing triumph of "look-like-America" diversity ideology in business and government, here are some significant topics and data omitted from *Collision Course*:

- Elites-versus-masses class conflict on immigration and affirmative action — made evident in public opinion polls, talk radio, and California proposition battles and political demography. (On the conversion of the elites to globalization and multiculturalism, see Christopher Lasch's seminal *Revolt of the Elites* . On the emerging interplay between growing class and ethnic divisions in the western U.S., read Robert Kaplan's Tocquevillian sociological tour of the region in *An Empire Wilderness.*)

- The polarizing impact of mass immigration and minority preferences upon predominantly white working and middle classes, especially in California. (In the second of his two-part *New York Review of Books* analyses, Christopher Jencks focuses on the Golden State's demographic revolution which he views as a massive "social experiment" by the elite in creating a semi-Third World, two-tiered society.)

- The subsequent large scale "diversity flight" of whites (and blacks) from these immigrant magnet states. (University of Michigan/Milken Institute demographer William Frey has numerous publications on this hot-potato phenomenon.)

- The implications of both affirmative action and mass immigration policies in subverting western culture and the nation state. (*Forbes* senior editor Peter Brimelow did much to open what national debate there has been on these issues — especially among conservatives. His warnings about mass immigration's danger to the GOP proved all too prescient. Graham nowhere mentions Brimelow, much less his analyses.)

- The unending attack on "victimology" and "blaming the system" by prominent conservatives in politics and the media — especially on talk radio — that blocked legitimate protest and mobilization against the policy excesses Graham so well describes.

- The erosion of public trust and loyalty in government and corporate America as top-down policies with which average Americans disagreed adversely affected their own and their children's occupational and educational opportunities while unchecked immigration transformed neighborhoods, cities, and regions.

There are also some "follow-through" issues that one wishes Graham had pursued. For example, Graham points out "network hiring" as an engine of immigration, but fails to even briefly discuss how subsequent emerging "ethnic enclave" economies are

affecting class and ethnic relations in regional economies like Los Angeles. (For example, growing Korean dominance of small, high-priced "mom and pop" retail stores in poor black and Latino neighborhoods of the city was a backdrop to the hostility and armed conflict during the 1992 riots.)

As mentioned, Graham is great on discussing conservative Republicans' acquiescence or outright indifference to affirmative action and mass immigration. But why were they so dense? An hypothesis worth greater exploration is that contemporary conservatives' radical individualism blinds them to how collective and structural forces mold individual behavior and cognition. Their fixation upon rational behavior in markets obscures recognition of powerful, collectively-based feelings (such as ethnic or religious loyalty) that over-ride economic models. Thus, they could not and would not see the diversity machine bearing down upon them.

Most of all, one wishes Graham were still alive to pursue his insights on the possible impact of economic downturn and the 9/11 terrorist attacks. (Graham could only acknowledge the latter on the book's last page — presumably just as it went to the printers.) He indicated that a severe recession or the 9/11 disaster would foster renewed policy debate on immigration and preferences. Yet, as I write this — nearly a year after September 11, 2001 — it hasn't happened. Political and economic elites remain wedded to the model of economic globalization, internationalism, and the new civic religion of "diversity." On the contrary, House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt is preparing to introduce a new amnesty proposal for illegal aliens, coupled with a temporary worker program — a model similar to that which George W. Bush was forced to abandon after 9/11.

The major media, at least, have been drawn to scandals resulting from the chaos in the Immigration and Naturalization Service's and the State Department's loose visa standards. (CBS' "60 Minutes" has reported on Canada's dangerously lax immigration policies and aired a segment on possible terrorist exploitation of sloppy security regarding huge shipping containers arriving daily at the nation's docks. *The New York Times Magazine* featured a cover story on the possibility of a nuclear detonation in the nation — with a graphic "what if" scenario of a one-megaton explosion in Times Square.)

Politicians will be politicians, constantly calculating the financial and political rewards and costs of what they talk about (or don't talk about) and how they vote. Businesses will do the same. But everyday talk remains the most potent medium of social change. What topics are — or are not — permitted in the public square is vital in raising awareness, suggesting solutions and promoting policy change. Graham's study of the convergence of mass immigration and affirmative action is a fascinating read. But ignoring politically correct censorship in the crafting and highly effective defense of these policies in and by corporations, universities, foundations, government, think tanks, the elite media, and important policy-forming centers is rather like ignoring the proverbial elephant in the living room.

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