

Downplaying the Immigration Factor

Book Review by Wayne Lutton

When it comes to immigration-related issues, the media pours out a steady stream of heart-warming stories of men and women who by the dint of hard work, perhaps unusual intelligence, and a bit of good luck, overcome hardships and come to “live the American dream.” I don’t doubt that there really are many such cases. But the “downside” to the immigration policies in force over the past three decades or more rarely gets mentioned, at least in the mainstream press.

The nexus between unselective immigration and crime is one of the “inconvenient” themes rarely given the attention it deserves. On the contrary, ethnic “Diversity” is always portrayed as a good thing and locales with lots of unrelated groups squeezed into a given territory are described as enjoying a “rich Diversity.”

Not long ago I heard the editor of *Gangs in America*, C. Ronald Huff, Professor of Criminology at the University of California at Irvine, discussing gang wars in greater Los Angeles during a news program, prompting me to take a look at the latest edition of a book that first appeared in 1991. This third edition includes 18 new articles written by 29 contributors – all of whom come out of law enforcement and/or academic backgrounds.

There is less useful information here than one would expect in a book of over 300 pages that costs \$44.95 retail (I borrowed the university library copy). I will pass along some of the points I found to be of interest.

As most of us know, at least intuitively, there has

Wayne Lutton, Ph.D., is Editor of The Social Contract.

indeed been an explosive growth in the number of gangs over the past twenty years. The latest National Youth Gang Survey, which polls law enforcement jurisdictions across the country, counted 26,000 gangs with a total enrollment of around 850,000 members at any given time. Gangs are no longer just a “big city problem,” but this variety of criminal enterprise has extended to smaller communities as well. In the West, 72 percent of the reporting jurisdictions described extensive gang activity, as did 48 percent in the Midwest and South, and 29 percent in the Northeastern states.

The first chapter, “The Changing Boundaries of Youth Gangs,” by James Howell, John Moore, and Arlen Egly, provides some basic data:

Age: Gang members tend to be older than they used to be, with 63 percent estimated to be young adults and only 37 percent juveniles.

Gender: Girls and young women form a larger percentage of gangs than in previous generations. A 1997 survey found that 38 percent of gang members were female. Most were very young. Females tend to leave gang life earlier than males do.

Race and Ethnicity: A hundred years ago, large proportions of gang members were White. By the late 1970s, about 80 percent of all gang members were Black or Hispanic. Nationwide, among 12-to-16 year old males, 2 percent of White youths, 6 percent of Black youths, and 5 percent of Hispanic youths reported some association with gangs. The corresponding percentages for females were 1 percent White, 2 percent Black, and 2 percent Hispanic.

The 1999 Youth Gang Survey disclosed that 47percent of gang members are Hispanic; 31 percent are Black; 13 percent White, 7 percent Asian, and 2 percent “other.” The author’s don’t go on to note that

Gangs In America

(Third Edition)

C. Ronald Huff,
ed.

Thousand Oaks, CA:

Sage Publications

332 pages, \$44.95



this does confirm that criminal gang activity is much more prevalent among Hispanics and Blacks than it is among Whites, since Hispanics now make up around 13 percent of the U.S. population, Blacks 12 percent.

Level of Organization: Some are well organized, and others are not. In Chicago, the Gangster Disciples are far better organized than are the Latin Kings. Some gangs are spreading tentacles across the country. Others try and fight turf wars.

Gangs in Late Onset Localities: Here the authors note, "A new generation of youth gangs has emerged. The Overwhelming majority of gang problem localities first experienced the emergence of gangs within the past 15 years." Of the locales reporting gang problems by the late 1990s, 87 percent said the onset occurred during the previous ten years.

John Hagedorn discusses, "Gangs and the Informal Economy." While drug sales are a major source of income for all gangs, "Latino drug sellers were more likely still to be drug users, consistent with more regular drug use by Latinos in our earlier studies." Hmmm. But hasn't President Bush praised them for their "strong family values"?

James Meeker and Bryan Vila discuss the challenge of collecting data on gangs. They point out that many "ethnic leaders" do not want to document the extent of gang activity and "community groups" often object to collecting crime data, since they claim such information leads to "ethnic profiling."

Part 3 of the book, dealing with "The Increasing Diversity of Gangs," points out that as Whites have fled Los Angeles and other metropolitan areas experiencing high levels of non-White immigration, Mexican, Central American, and Asian gangs have become entrenched.

Many of the contributions are littered with sociological jargon ("multiple marginality" and "racism and cultural repression" are two of the favorites) that does little to focus on the key issues that should be seriously considered here. However, Jody Miller, an assistant professor of criminology at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, does touch on an important point in her discussion of "Girls in the Gang." In earlier generations, gang members could opt-out, and find alternative sources of income and support, since there were relatively well-paying, often unionized factory

jobs, located in major metropolitan areas. De-industrialization, with good jobs deliberately sent overseas, has resulted in deteriorating hiring conditions. Today, for youngsters who are not particularly bright or motivated, there are fewer sound alternatives to gang membership and welfare use than there were before "Free Trade" and NAFTA transformed one-time centers of industry into economic ghost towns.

All of the authors make policy recommendations, many of which are oh so predictable (viz. fight "racism" and poverty; "intervene" early, etc.). Not one of them suggests that immigration should be reduced; that maybe "Diversity" is not always and everywhere a good thing and that less "Diversity" might actually result in less tension. De-industrializing the American economy, while at the same time importing hundreds of thousands of unskilled people who simply haven't the intelligence and temperament to accomplish a whole lot under the best of conditions, seems to be a recipe for the sort of unfolding disaster we witness in greater Los Angeles and other destinations of preference for non-Western immigrants. •

America Extinguished: Mass Immigration and the Disintegration of American Culture

by Samuel Francis

Americans for Immigration Control
215 pages, \$6.95



In this collection of insightful columns, Sam Francis illuminates many of the political realities surrounding mass immigration, unmasking the motives of the political and business interests responsible for the crisis we are in.

Available from The Social Contract Press at: