

John Tanton was the founding chairman of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) headquartered in Washington, DC. He wonders here if the immigration reform debate is entering a new and more mature phase.

Immigration Reform on the Newsstands

By John Tanton

Ever since FAIR was founded in 1979, our overriding goal has been to make immigration policy a legitimate subject for discussion among thinking people. This reflects our commitment to a rational approach to a highly emotional topic.

We posited that there would be three stages in reaching that hoped-for goal. First, in what we called the 'Statue of Liberty' stage, any and all questions about immigration could be answered by simply invoking the Statue of Liberty and reciting Emma Lazarus's famous poem, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses..." This is where we were in 1979 at the inception of FAIR.

The second stage we called the 'caveat' stage, in which thinking people would begin to have some doubts and questions about immigration policy, but still feel uncomfortable breaking the taboo that prohibits discussion of the topic. Thus, conversations would tend to begin with a caveat: "I want you to understand that I'm not a racist, a nativist, or a xenophobe, but I've been wondering about this aspect of immigration policy..." Thus excused, the questioner apprehensively would open the topic. We reckon that this phase began about the middle of the 1980s.

The stage we envisioned as one of 'rationality,' in which immigration policy can be discussed, analyzed and debated just like any other public-policy question — without having one's motives, intelligence, or ethics challenged. This mature phase would usher in immigration policy as a legitimate topic of discussion among thinking people and policy-makers — our prime goal from the outset.

There are signs that this last stage is now arriving, and on both sides of the political spectrum. The first major piece of evidence was the June 22, 1992 issue of the *National Review*, which carried a long critical cover article written by Peter Brimelow, a senior editor of *Forbes* magazine. Now, four months later, *The Atlantic* magazine has run as its October 1992 cover-feature an article highlighting the role of immigration in black / brown conflict and in the Los Angeles riots. The author, Jack Miles, is a member of the *Los Angeles Times* editorial board. [Both essays are reviewed following this note.]

Actually, both magazines had begun to address the topic somewhat earlier. The April 27, 1992 issue of

National Review carried a ground-breaking article by Lawrence Auster on multiculturalism, to which many conservatives object. Auster underscored the role played by immigration in engendering multiculturalism — a point which many conservatives have failed to see. *The Atlantic* has run a number of articles on immigration, and featured a two-issue series on the U.S.-Mexican Border (May/June of 1992), which challenged some liberal assumptions.

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Other items have begun to appear in the general print and electronic media, all indicating that more thoughtful people are starting to overcome the taboo, and are beginning to ask the hard and hitherto forbidden fundamental questions about immigration policy: 1. *How many* of the many millions who would like to come shall we admit? 2. *Who* should be chosen to immigrate, based on *what criteria*? and 3. *How* are we to *enforce* the rules we decide upon?

We arrive at this rational stage of the debate none too soon, for we face a paradox. Just as the numbers of migrants are reaching the highest levels in human history, we must also surely be reaching the end of the age of migration as a solution to human problems. The reasons are not far to seek: there are virtually no vacant habitable regions left on the globe, and precious few places where the current residents want more people — especially those drastically different as to race, ethnicity, language, and religion. Outside of the United States, Canada, and Australia, there's virtually no place left to go. All three of these countries are starting to rethink their circumstances, and may well join the other 165-plus members of the United Nations in concluding that they don't want and can't handle substantial numbers of newcomers. Australia recently cut its immigrant intake in half.

With worldwide human numbers increasing at 10,000 per hour, 250,000 a day, — a new Michigan

every month, a new United States every two-and-a-half years — the vast majority of people are going to have to live out their lives where they are born, and bloom where they are planted. Only a favored few, perhaps a million or two each year, will be able to emigrate. But this is just a drop in the population bucket. It is inconceivable that hundreds of millions will be able to move — and we're adding about one-hundred million to our numbers each year. Increasingly, home will be the country in which you're born and stay.

For most people, emigration will no longer be available as a solution to their problems. Collectively, we will have to stand and fight to fix things at home if they're unsatisfactory, rather than cut and run to some supposed nirvana.

This is a change of the most profound sort — the end of a whole era of human history. To get through it will require our best thinking and our soundest judgment. It will demand the long view, and many difficult, unpopular and unpalatable decisions.

So we welcome the appearance of thoughtful articles in the mainstream journals indicating that we have at last entered the third or 'rational' phase of the immigration debate. ■

Roy Beck, who is Washington Editor of *The Social Contract*, reviews the essay by Jack Miles in *The Atlantic*.

An Eye-opening Experience

A Magazine Essay Reviewed by Roy Beck

"Blacks vs Browns: Immigration
and the New American Dilemma"

By Jack Miles

The Atlantic

October 1992

An emerging national debate on immigration is likely to begin on the right but will "quickly be seized by the left" where there may be stronger ideological reasons for restrictionism, predicts Jack Miles, a *Los Angeles Times* editorial writer. In a 28-page *The Atlantic* essay promoted on the cover as "Immigration and the New American Dilemma: Blacks vs. Browns," Miles goes a long way toward making his prophecy come true by penning what may be the most visible and influential liberal argument to date for reduced immigration. A highly personal account of intellectual and moral struggle with the issue in the aftermath of the Los Angeles riots, it reveals Miles as a donor to activist Central American refugee groups, as having had close relations with illegal residents and their families, and as a person much more comfortable around Latino immigrants than poor black citizens. But the riots forced him to come to grips with the true meaning of the impact of mass immigration on African-Americans in Los Angeles. Although giving some credence to the view of the riots as a black-white issue, he finds most convincing the explanations that deal with the economic despair into which blacks have been plunged by mass immigration. In thousands of "quiet choices," Miles says, L.A. residents have contributed to the despair.

"The average white or Asian Angeleno prefers to have — and usually does have — a Latino rather than an African-American doing the work," he writes. "The result is unofficial but widespread preferential hiring of Latinos — the largest affirmative-action program in the nation, and one paid for, in effect, by blacks." Miles unmasks the racism that so often is behind statements that mass immigration is necessary to fill jobs that Americans refuse to do. "Are they thinking of black Americans?" he asks rhetorically. Well, of course they are. With extraordinary numbers of blacks crying out for jobs with liveable wages, talk of work that Americans won't do is a thinly-veiled judgment that jobless blacks are too lazy and demand too high a wage. But Miles writes: "If there were no Latinos — and no other immigrants — around to do all the work that is to be done in Los Angeles, would blacks not be hired to do it? I think they would be. Wages might have to be raised. Friction might be acute for a while.

But in the end the work would go looking for available workers."

Miles relies heavily on the writing of labor economist Vernon Briggs of Cornell University and on the literature and polling of the Federation for American Immigration Reform, (FAIR) which he calls an "anathema to some, but better a clearly framed agenda, however debatable, than free-range nativism." He salutes FAIR and Briggs for reminding us that the nation has choices on immigration and notes that FAIR is not anti-immigration. "FAIR would admit 300,000 a year. How many would you admit? And if blacks get hurt, whose side are you on?"

"...the riots forced [Mr. Miles] to come to grips with the true meaning of the impact of mass immigration on African-Americans in Los Angeles."

Although he doesn't directly answer the question for himself, Miles indicates that the needs of African-American citizens should have priority over the needs of citizens of other countries. He quotes Abraham Lincoln on the blood debt the nation owed for 250 years of unrequited toil of slaves, and concludes, in a passage quoted favorably by the *Washington Post*: "And by an irony that I find particularly cruel, unskilled Latino immigration may be doing to American blacks at the end of the 20th century what the European immigration that brought my own ancestors here did to them at the end of the 19th."

The Atlantic, in an editors' note, acknowledges that it allows Miles to "explore questions raised by the riot which well-meaning people usually avoid as inflammatory." And much change seems to be presaged for future liberal-oriented debate by the assessment of the editors that the proper context of immigration discussion is not good (in the form of compassion for immigrants) vs. evil (manifested as immigration restriction) but a conflict of good vs. good.

Miles claims compassion for citizens of Third World nations which he suggests could see the rise of their own terrorist versions of Peru's Shining Path movement if the United States shuts off the immigration safety valve. And he offers a challenge for groups like FAIR to address the push factors of immigration while leading the way on eliminating the pull factors.

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Scipio Garling gives us his view of one of the signal publication events of this quarter. Mr. Garling is in-house computer expert and librarian for the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR).

Liberals, Conservatives and Immigration

A Magazine Essay Reviewed by Scipio Garling

"Time to Rethink Immigration?"

By Peter Brimelow

National Review

June 22, 1992

According to Peter Brimelow, conservative writer and a senior editor at *Forbes* magazine, a conspiracy of silence between liberals and conservatives has completely distorted the immigration process — both as to who and how many people we let in, and what we do with the newcomers afterwards. Brimelow, himself an immigrant, asserts that the present wave of immigration is not a "natural phenomenon," but rather a definite policy choice — a choice that is utterly transforming the nation, and not for the better."

Brimelow's is not the first article in a conservative journal to question the wisdom of present immigration policies. This year alone there have been three such articles in the *Conservative Review*.¹ *Chronicles* has been covering the topic regularly for several years.² Lawrence Auster's article in the April 27 issue of *National Review* on multiculturalism and immigration entitled, "The Forbidden Topic," set the stage for Brimelow. The publication of Brimelow's 16-page piece indicates that there seems to be a growing consensus among some intellectuals on the right that it is time to talk about immigration. This is a "watershed in the development of conservative thought on immigration," according to Dan Stein, executive director of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR).

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Liberals and conservatives have supported immigration for different reasons, Brimelow observes, and both do so misguidedly. "American liberals, of course, are determinedly, even devoutly, incurious about this subject. ... The silence of American conservatives has a more complex cause. To a significant degree, it's due to sheer ignorance," he asserts.

Liberals' immigration stance is based on emotionalism and romanticism. In severing the connection between the cultural idea of 'nation' and the political idea of 'state,' they wishfully deny the need for any common bond among Americans other than political ones. In Brimelow's words,

Americans are now being urged to abandon the bonds of a common ethnicity and instead to trust entirely to ideology to hold together their state ... This is an extraordinary experiment, like suddenly replacing all the blood in a patient's body. History suggests little reason to suppose it will succeed. ... the much-touted 'Soviet Man,' the creation of much tougher ideologists using much rougher methods than anything yet seen in the U.S., has turned out to be a Russian, Ukranian, or Kazakh after all.

In their championship of 'cultural pluralism,' liberals are the unknowing progeny of turn-of-the-century "Kallenism" — an ideological opposition to 'Americanization' as it was practiced during the last great immigration wave (1880-1920).³ When they claim that immigration has only enriched the U.S., liberals fail to realize that long periods of 'digestion,' during which immigration intake remained low, have always been a necessary part of the process.

Some conservatives, Brimelow continues, have favored high levels of immigration for other, but just as specious, reasons. One is ideological:

Just as conservatives tend to think immigration is a natural phenomenon, they also assume vaguely that it must have been ratified by some free-market process. But immigration to the U.S. is not determined by economics: it is determined — or at least, profoundly distorted — by public policy. Inevitably, there are mismatches between skills supplied and skills demanded.

Closely related is the belief that the continued influx of cheap labor is a *sine qua non* for American business. Brimelow punctures this idea:

Absolute size can be useful while seizing a continent or fighting wars. But in the end it is output per capita that determines living standards. And, both proportionately and absolutely, in an increasingly technological age, what will count is not the quantity of people but their quality — and the quality of their ideas.

Present immigration policy, Brimelow notes, is only sparingly based on the qualities immigrants bring.

Brimelow also undercuts the unspoken political reasons for conservative support of immigration: first the mistaken idea that new immigrants are going to become conservative Republicans, and second, that Republicans can curry favor with minorities and liberals by buying them off with a liberal immigration policy. Even if these false assumptions were true, he points out, it profits a person nothing to gain favor if he loses his soul. Brimelow charges that, to a great extent, conservatives have internalized the naive idea

of "cultural pluralism," and thus betrayed themselves. This move "reveals an utter innocence about the reality of ethnic and cultural differences, let alone about little things like tradition and history — in short, the greater part of the conservative vision."

Brimelow challenges all intellectuals — liberals and conservatives alike — to take off the blinders of pro-immigration sentiment, and to see the situation as it really is. And it looks as if eyes are beginning to open. Citing the *National Review* article, syndicated columnist William Rusher has condemned conservative collusion in warping immigration policy (*Washington Times*, June 27, 1992). Later, *National Review* itself editorially debunked the pro-immigration arguments made in *Business Week's* July 13 cover story, "The Immigrants: How They're Helping the U.S. Economy" (*National Review*, August 3, 1992).

"Time to Rethink Immigration?" arrived just in time. ■

NOTES

¹ "Nationalism and the Immigration Question" by Llewellyn H. Rockwell in January; "Invasion USA: the Sequel" by George Sunderland in May; and "Immigration under Scrutiny" by Gerard Longspaugh in June. *Conservative Review*, 6861 Elm Street, Suite 4H, McLean, VA 22101, telephone (703) 442-8010.

² "Promises to Keep" by Chilton Williamson, Jr.; "The Impact of Immigration on Hispanic-Americans" by Richard Estrada; "Aliens and the Alienated" by William R. Hawkins — all in the July 1991 issue of *Chronicles*, published by the Rockford Institute, 934 North Main Street, Rockford, IL 61103-7061, telephone 1-800-435-0715.

³ Horace M. Kallen published books and articles during and after World War I affirming cultural pluralism over against the standard of the melting pot.