

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*.<sup>1</sup> *Chronicles* has been covering the topic regularly for several years.<sup>2</sup> 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).

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.

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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, Ukrainian, or Kazakh after all.*

In their championship of 'cultural pluralism,' liberals are the unknowing progeny of turn-of-the-century "Kallenism"<sup>3</sup> — an ideological opposition to 'Americanization' as it was practiced during the last great immigration wave (1880-1920). 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

<sup>1</sup> "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.

<sup>2</sup> "Promises to Keep" by Chilton Williamson, Jr.; "The Impact of Immigration on Hispanic-Americans" by Richard Estrada; " and "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.

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