

Immigration and the 'Culture War'

The Conservative View

by Carl Horowitz

By any reasonable expectation, the Islamic fundamentalist holocaust of September 11, 2001 should have triggered a reassessment of U.S. immigration policy as a whole, and not simply its terrorism-related aspects. Egalitarian liberals and their favored institution, the Democratic Party, true to form, have been unable to draw a connection between mass immigration and mass murder. More to one's dismay, neither have most mainstream conservatives and libertarians. They, like liberals, have grown comfortable with the consequences of the lifting of national-origin quotas back in 1965. How this state of affairs came to be underscores not simply the Right's weaknesses on the immigration issue, but its grand vision for the nation as well.

The mainstream conservative view – propagated by the *Wall Street Journal* and the American Enterprise Institute, among other opinion leaders – is that mass immigration, on balance, has been highly favorable to American interests, and that current levels ought to be retained if not expanded. The Right continues to place an extraordinary faith in the assimilationist model of immigration which holds that America has a nearly inexhaustible capacity to absorb newcomers and inculcate them with an American identity. But as their traditionalist streak would have it these enthusiasts also have thrown a new curve in the past decade. The inevitable problems associated with the process of Americanization, they argue, pale in significance before

Carl Horowitz, with a Ph.D. in urban planning from Rutgers, is a Washington-area domestic policy consultant. Previously, he had been a Washington correspondent with Investor's Business Daily, and before that a policy analyst with the Heritage Foundation.

the consequences of a steady moral and cultural decline in the U.S. that began in earnest during the 1960s. Many on the Right see the issue implicitly as “uncorrupted immigrants vs. corrupted Americans.”

This is an odd notion, but it has understandable roots in the Cold War. Taking in refugees from Communist countries, whether from Poland, Cuba or Vietnam, was a noble undertaking. These were, after all, people who hungered for liberty in their native countries and, unable to find it, came here. Conservatives viewed such asylum seekers as having lessons to teach us, as having the ability restore our frayed patriotic bonds. In a real sense Rev. Sun Myung Moon was the ultimate Cold Warrior immigrant, a South Korean anti-Communist and a voice in the modern moral wilderness. His Unification Church theology elevated families – his own, in particular – to supreme significance.

With the collapse of the Soviet empire, conservatives far from abandoned this idea. Indeed, many came to view immigrants, and not just from formerly Communist countries, as providing economic and moral capital to a nation whose supply of the latter was dwindling rapidly. Immigrants still seek to develop an American identity, the Right argued. They still seek to master the English language, learn our nation's history, work hard, own property and develop sound personal habits and hygiene.

But in recent decades immigrants have faced an obstacle to assimilation unknown to previous generations of newcomers: the decay of the culture into which they are assimilating. Today's America, ever slouching toward Gomorrah, is an America of high crime rates, drug abuse, sexual recklessness, declining educational standards, family breakdown and vulgar entertainment. The 1965 immigration amendments did not set these trends in motion. A homegrown adversarial force – the counterculture – did. Thus, rather than scapegoat immigrants, policymakers and the general public instead should wage a culture war against moral “polluters”

operating out of New York, Hollywood, and other chic locales. Today's Latin American and Asian immigrants need all the encouragement they can get to ward off Marilyn Manson and Oliver Stone – or so the argument goes.

Mainstream conservatives don't simply exonerate immigrants from contributing to decay; *they exalt them as the antidote to it*. Embodying such virtues as close family ties, thrift, sobriety and religious piety, immigrants are "natural conservatives," standing as a rebuke to the pornography and heavy metal-besotted native-born population. In the long run, mass immigration is good principle and strategy. Inoculating first-generation immigrants from the depredations of the counterculture would ensure the second and successive generations will take pride in being American, and create a ballot-box revolution that would undo the legacy of the 60s. The Republican Party should look abroad for future votes.

Who Are These Conservatives Anyway?

Traditionalists who propagate this view are legion. One is political theorist Francis Fukuyama. Fresh from publication of his heralded book, *The End of History and the Last Man*,¹ Fukuyama, in the May 1993 issue of *Commentary*, argued, *contra* Pat Buchanan, that while America's culture war was indeed real, the enemy lay within:²

Those who fear Third World immigration as a threat to Anglo-American values do not seem to have noticed what the real sources of cultural breakdown have been....(T)he ideological assault on traditional family values – the sexual revolution; feminism and the delegitimization of the male-dominated household; the celebration of alternative lifestyles; attempts ruthlessly to secularize all aspects of American public life; the acceptance of no-fault divorce and the consequent rise of single-parent households – was not the creation of recently arrived Chicano agricultural workers or Haitian boat people, much less of Chinese or Korean immigrants. They originated right in the heart of America's white, Anglo-Saxon community. The "Hollywood elite" who create the now-celebrated Murphy Brown, much like the

establishment of "media elite" that Republicans enjoy attacking, do not represent either the values or the interests of most recent Third World immigrants.

Fukuyama worried not about the corruption of our own predominant culture by Third World immigrants, but vice versa. "In the upcoming block-by-block cultural war," he concluded, "the enemy will not speak Spanish

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or have a brown skin. In Pogo's words, 'He is us.'"³

Such ruminations also could be found in *Commentary's* fiftieth anniversary issue of November 1995, which featured a symposium, "The National Prospect." At least a few of the more than seventy contributors worried that immigrants might not want to become Americans. Zbigniew Brzezinski denounced today's "style-setting culture," with its catering to base consumer instincts and manufacturing of empty celebrities. Such as culture turns immigrants away from sharing in a national vision. Dinesh D'Souza and Gertrude Himmelfarb each explicitly exempted immigrants from moral opprobrium, pointing their finger instead at the counterculture's successful packaging of anti-bourgeois animosity as personal liberation.

Given that immigrants, for now, lack the numbers to outvote spiritual and cultural decay, conservatives lately have been imagining ways to rewrite the law. Jeffrey Kuhner, deputy editorial page editor of the *Washington Times*, argued Puerto Rico should be admitted as the nation's fifty-first state. Far from creating a Quebec-style separatist cauldron, Puerto Rico would be more like a Catholic Hawaii:⁴

Although the island's residents tend to favor statism and lavish entitlement programs, they

are also deeply Catholic and socially conservative. This renders them receptive to the Republicans' message on abortion, family values and homosexual marriage. In fact, Puerto Rican statehood can help buttress the GOP against the onslaught of the forces of social liberalism, which have defeated the Republican Party on every cultural front for the past decade.

Conservatives also would amend the Constitution to hasten the immigrant-virtue revolution. John J. Miller, writing in the August 6, 2001 issue of *National Review*, called for scrapping the clause in Article II, Section 1 banning the foreign born from serving as President.⁵ "An immigrant president," wrote Miller, "most likely would embrace the United States with the fervor of a convert – a flag-waving nationalist whose public displays of love for country would match Joe Lieberman talking about his faith. People would start rolling their eyes by the third Pledge of Allegiance in every stump speech." Miller believes such a move would yield massive political dividends for Republicans. "America's twenty-seven million immigrants – roughly a third of them citizens – would look up to Bush with a new appreciation," he noted.⁶ Taking such logic to its conclusion, conservatives should put the other two-thirds on the fast track to citizenship and completely open our borders to accommodate tens of millions more future "conservative" voters (and not a few insufferably maudlin foreign-born presidential candidates).

Some pro-immigration conservatives actually see Muslims, an estimated four-fifths of whom were born abroad,⁷ as GOP political gold. Washington activist Grover Norquist, writing in the June 2001 issue of *The American Spectator*, argued Muslims are "natural conservatives," so much so that George W. Bush owed his margin of presidential victory to them.⁸ Norquist referred to an exit poll conducted by the Tampa Bay Islamic Center showing Bush got 88 percent of Florida's Muslim vote, compared to 4 percent for Al Gore and 8 percent for Ralph Nader. Norquist also cited surveys showing most Muslims support school choice and would ban most abortion. As the large increase in the number of American Muslims has been due to "high immigration and relatively large families," one need not guess too hard as to where Norquist stands on controlling immigration from Islamic countries.

The *Spectator* might not want to be reminded of the fact that its December 1993 issue ran a fawning profile of a Southern California Muslim grammar school by conservative author Edward Norden.⁹ Noticing how well-behaved these students were, Norden snidely noted that by the time they finish sixth-grade and transfer to public schools, "Madonna won't distract them." Norden also approvingly quoted Dr. Hassan Hathout, a physician and

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frequent lecturer at the school. In language eerily reminiscent of Sun Myung Moon's 1976 Yankee Stadium speech, Dr. Hathout addressed a school gathering in the following manner, "We want the children of the Americans to be clean and pure. The sickness from which America suffers has its cure in the pharmacy of Islam and we as Moslems should make this known – come and take your medicine!" This is the true voice of pro-immigration conservatism as well as Islamic fundamentalism.

Was America to Blame for September 11? Some Conservatives Think So

The idea of the uncorrupted immigrant (and its corollary, the uncorrupted visa holder) ought to have been dealt a mortal blow in the wake of the World Trade Center and Pentagon massacres. Yet remarkably, any number of traditionalists make the point that America "provoked" the terrorists by exporting its culture. The best-known case of this syndrome was the Jerry Falwell-Pat Robertson tag-team commentary on the latter's "700 Club" TV program on September 13. Having removed God from the public square, Robertson argued, we brought this course of events upon ourselves. "God Almighty," he said, "is lifting his protection from us." Falwell echoed this line. Tearing into abortionists, feminists, pagans, gays and the ACLU, he concluded, "What we saw Tuesday....could be miniscule if, in fact,

God continues to lift the curtain and allows the enemies of America to give us probably what we deserve.”

Minus overt theological references, columnist and former *National Review* publisher William Rusher harped on the same theme. He noted, “Muslims are fiercely proud of their religion, which they regard as

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infinitely superior to the materialistic, libertine ways of the West....(W)e must admit that many aspects of American culture – the widespread pornography and the popularity of drugs, to mention only two – are far from edifying.”¹⁰ Pat Buchanan, hardly an immigration enthusiast let alone a Muslim, listed several reasons, all justifiable, as to why radical Muslims hate us. Here’s one of them: “We pollute their culture and countries with drugs, alcohol, abortions, blasphemous books, filthy magazines, dirty movies and hellish music that capture and corrupt their young.”¹¹ Philip Lawler, editor of *Catholic World Report*, saw things much the same way. Denouncing modern America as “a stream of secularism and materialism,” he noted, “If we are honest with ourselves, American Christians must recognize that there is some merit in the Islamic critique of our culture.”¹²

Anthony LoBaido, a columnist for *World Net Daily*, took this self-flagellation perhaps to its nuttiest extreme. Concurring with the terrorists that contemporary America is the Great Satan, he observed, apparently without tongue in cheek, that New York must be its capital. “All that is evil in the world can be found in New York: MTV, the United Nations, the U.N. abortion programs, the Council on Foreign Relations, New Age Church of St. John the Divine, Wall Street greed, Madison Avenue manipulation and of course more confirmed AIDS cases than the rest of America combined....Are we innocent with our porno, filthy Jay

Leno monologues, our idolatry, materialism and consumerism?”¹³

It is difficult to distinguish any of these commentators from the terrorists’ own rantings. The head of the Taliban, Mullah Mohammed Omar, had railed against “filthy and ugly Western cultures” which, among other things, “allow women to be dishonored.”¹⁴

Now citing these remarks might seem to distort the overall context of immigration debate. After all, many more immigrants in the U.S. are from Latin American and East Asian countries than from Middle East Islamic ones. What is central here is the spectacle of American conservatives viewing foreigners, even murderously anti-American foreigners, as wholesome traditionalists properly disgusted over America’s moral condition. Had the terrorist attacks of September 11 been inflicted by deeply religious Colombians or Vietnamese, cranks such as LoBaido or Lawler would have rationalized them with exactly the same language.

Immigrants as a Counterculture

If conservatives were attuned to sound principles and their own interests they would cease to view foreigners as moral rejuvenators. Consider three recent reports published by the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS). In one, Steven Camarota, the center’s research director, using data from the Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey, estimated the proportion of immigrant households using means-tested anti-poverty programs now ranges anywhere from thirty to fifty percent higher than usage levels among the native-born.¹⁵ The proportion of immigrants age 21 or over lacking a high school diploma is 33.1 percent; among Mexican arrivals the figure is an alarming 65.5 percent. By contrast, only 13.2 percent of the native born had less than twelve years of schooling. The old virtues of self-reliance and deferral of self-gratification are well and alive, but such figures suggest persons other than immigrants are carrying the torch.

Immigrants also produce their share of sociopaths, a share likely proportionately larger than that of the native-born population. In a CIS report issued in April, 2001, I raised several reasons, supported by empirical evidence, why immigrant crime has gone substantially under-reported.¹⁶ A few of these reasons: Ethnic crime networks, local or international, can be as sophisticated as they are ruthless, and thus difficult to penetrate; immigrants from the Third World tend to brush off

domestic violence and even slavery as a “family matter” not requiring police intervention; and FBI crime reports rely on data furnished by state and local law enforcement agencies, which typically do not break crimes down according to whether committed by immigrants or the native born.

Those conservatives who equate immigration with family values, and hence project broad immigrant support for the Republican Party, would do well to consult another CIS paper by University of Maryland political scientists James Gimpel and Karen Kaufmann.¹⁷ The study details why the GOP’s full-throttle Hispanic outreach efforts are likely to backfire. Hispanic citizens almost across the board prefer Democrats by wide margins, and even the lone exception, Cubans, prefer the GOP less than convincingly; George W. Bush would have won Florida in a cakewalk if the Miami-Dade County Cuban ethnic vote were as conservative as its reputation would have it.

The assertion that immigrants, legal or otherwise, are the cure for America’s putative cultural decay is difficult, if not impossible, to support. Aside from being less conservative in their political views than their admirers on the Right imagine,¹⁸ the conservatism of immigrants, particularly from the Islamic world, manifests itself *outside* an American context. In a recent survey of Los Angeles County Muslims, Kambiz Ghanea-Basiri, a fellow at Harvard’s Center for the Study of World Religions, found that “a significant number of Muslims, particularly immigrant Muslims, do not have close ties or loyalty to the United States.” He reported that four in five Islamic immigrants felt more allegiance to a foreign country than to the U.S.¹⁹ An anti-American who promotes family values is still an anti-American.

Lest one believe that the younger generation isn’t absorbing anti-Americanism from its elders, consider the views of students at an Islamic school in wealthy suburban Potomac, Maryland, in the wake of September 11. Here’s how one student, an eighth-grader named Ibrahim, put it to a *Washington Post* reporter: “If I had to choose sides, I’d stay with being Muslim. Being an American means nothing to me. I’m not even proud of telling my cousins in Pakistan that I’m American.”²⁰ The utter lack of attachment of immigrants to a destination country, whatever their own origins, is fast becoming a worldwide phenomenon. The ideal of assimilation is difficult to sustain in an era of free trade, high technology

and volatile ethnic and religious minorities. Australian sociologists Stephen Castles and Alastair Davidson rightly point out that despite the massive obstacles modern nations have in enforcing the mutually reinforcing goals of exclusion and assimilation, “many people in western countries cling to the idea that immigration will not bring about major changes in their societies.”²¹

Conservatives in this country are clinging to a fantasy if they believe mass immigration, especially among groups prone to anti-Americanism, will not revolutionize America. It can and, if unchecked, it will. Our homegrown “counterculture” is not the problem. Henry Rollins, Woody Allen, Hugh Hefner and Madonna, contrary to what *Commentary*-style culture-war pugilists believe, do not pose a threat to our nation’s survival. But youngsters such as Ibrahim – and their parents – do. Immigration policy must be revised to discourage, rather than encourage, such people from coming, and remaining, here. •

NOTES

1. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York: Free Press, 1992.
2. Francis Fukuyama, “Immigrants and Family Values,” *Commentary*, May, 1993, pp. 29-30.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
4. Jeffrey T. Kuhner, “Puerto Rico, 51st State?” *Washington Times*, June 21, 2001.
5. John J. Miller, “Immigrants for President,” *National Review*, August 6, 2001. Pp. 22-24.
6. The true pool of the “conservative” foreign-born exceeds even Miller’s figure. The Census Bureau not long after his article appeared, issued a report estimating the total number of the U.S. foreign-born, as of 2000, at roughly thirty-one million. About 8.7 million were not here legally. See D’Vera Cohn, “Illegal Immigrant Total Is Raised,” *Washington Post*, October 25, 2001; August Gribbin, “8 Million Illegals Reported in U.S.,” *Washington Times*, October 25, 2001.
7. See Larry Witham, “U.S. Muslim Community is ‘Diverse,’” *Washington Times*, September 27, 2001. The four-fifths estimate is based on a 2000 survey by the American Muslim Council. Witham’s article also cited an ominous statistic furnished by the Congressional Research Service in 1994: a third of the funding for radical Muslim groups abroad comes from the U.S.
8. Grover Norquist, “Natural Conservatives,” *The American Spectator*, June 2001, pp. 18-19. The terrorist attacks of

September 11 did nothing to dislodge Norquist from his position. If anything, he visibly aligned himself with Islamic organizations in the U.S. with clear sympathies for Mideast terrorists, a stance that has alarmed even some of Norquist's longtime conservative movement allies. See Franklin Foer, "Fevered Pitch," *The New Republic*, November 12, 2001, pp. 22-24.

9. Edward Norden, "Allah in L.A.," *The American Spectator*, December 1993, pp. 38-41.

10. William Rusher, "Why They Hate the U.S.A.," *Washington Times*, October 11, 2001.

11. Pat Buchanan, "Into the Big Muddy – Again?," Creators Syndicate, reprinted as <http://www.supplysideinvestor.com/showarticles.asp?articleid=1681>.

12. Philip F. Lawler, "The Looming Showdown," <http://www.catholic.net/rcc/Periodicals/Igpress/2001-10/essay.html>.

13. www.worldnetdaily.com, September 13, 2001, quoted in *The New Republic*, Notebook, October 8, 2001, p. 11.

14. Quoted in Cathy Young, "Liberty's Paradoxes," *Reason*, December 2001, p.27.

15. Steven A. Camarota, *Immigrants in the United States – 2000: A Snapshot of America's Foreign-Born Population*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Immigration Studies, January 2001.

16. Carl F. Horowitz, *An Examination of U.S. Immigration Policy and Serious Crime*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Immigration Studies, April 2001.

17. James G. Gimpel and Karen Kaufmann, *Impossible Dream or Distant Reality? Republican Efforts to Attract Latino Voters*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Immigration Studies, August 2001.

18. Though some seventy percent of Hispanics in the U.S. are Roman Catholic, they tend to show far more interest in health care, unemployment, and other economic policy issues (and from a welfare-state Democrat standpoint) than in abortion, stem-cell research, and other major concerns of Catholic social conservatives. See Howard Fineman and Arian Campo-Flores, "Como Se Dice 'Realignment'?" *Newsweek*, August 6, 2001, p. 30.

19. Cited in Lance T. Izumi, "December 7th, September 11th and Immigration Assimilation," www.vdare.com, October 18, 2001.

20. Quoted in Marc Fisher, "Muslim Students Weigh Questions of Allegiance," *Washington Post*, October 16, 2001.

21. Stephen Castles and Alastair Davidson, *Citizenship and Migration: Globalization and the Politics of Belonging*, New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 61.