

Samuel Francis is a columnist with The Washington Times whose material is distributed by Tribune Media Services. Reprinted with permission..

BONFIRE OF THE BORDER VANITIES

By Samuel Francis

The race is on to cast the blame for the five days in May of the Los Angeles riots, with conservatives claiming the Great Society did it and liberals making out it was the Reagan budget cuts.

Meanwhile, hardly anyone has considered the role of illegal immigration in helping to deliver America's second-largest city to the furnace of anarchy. This is too bad, for while politicians and ideologues exploit the riots for their own purposes, Americans can expect only further disorder unless illegal immigration is halted.

One group that does understand how immigration helped ignite the L.A. tinderbox is the Federation for American Immigration Reform. FAIR's executive director, Dan Stein, points out that, according to Attorney General William Barr, more than 30 percent of the persons arrested in the riots were undocumented persons.

"Hardly anyone has considered the role of illegal immigration in helping to deliver America's second-largest city to the furnace of anarchy."

"For 20 years," writes Stein in a letter to the California congressional delegation, "Congress has ignored the devastating impact of unmanaged illegal immigration on the wages, working considerations and opportunities for poor, urban Americans. It's time to stop pretending that ill-managed immigration policies are a free lunch."

But the economic damage of mass immigration isn't the only problem it causes. The rootless mass of recent immigrants themselves constitutes kindling for urban violence. East Los Angeles, the part of the city where relatively long-established Mexican-Americans live, was largely spared by fires and fury that devoured other parts of the city.

But, as *The Washington Post* reported last week, "The Latino neighborhoods and businesses that bore the brunt of the devastation were largely communities of recent immigrants living in the South Central Los Angeles area, Koreatown and Hollywood, where Hispanics occasionally outnumber blacks." One Hispanic county supervisor notes that recent immigrants who rioted "weren't people protesting the (Rodney) King verdict." Their main concern was loot

and destruction pure and simple. And why not? It wasn't their country that burned, was it?

Nor were the L.A. riots the first to be fueled by ethnic and racial conflicts arising from immigration. Almost exactly a year before, the District of Columbia's Mount Pleasant area went up in flames after a black police officer shot an Hispanic suspect; and Miami also has reaped the fruits of multiculturalism in its own race riots. The real problem of racism in the United States, as former Colorado governor Richard Lamm, now candidate for Senate, has noted, comes not from white-black animosities but from the hatreds, misunderstandings and alienation that rise out of a racially fragmented society.

"One lesson of history," writes Lamm, "is that all successful nations have a social glue that holds them together. Nations must have a common language and a common core of assumptions and beliefs. We need only look at Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Quebec, the Balkans, to observe what happens when people don't develop a common core and believe in a common destiny. Societies that don't melt fragment."

Or, it might be added, if they don't fragment, it's because they're held together only by force, like the multicultural and multi-ethnic empires of ancient times and the late, unlamented Soviet Union. In Los Angeles, it was force that put the city back together again and soon, if not already, it will be force alone that holds it and other American megalopolises in one piece.

Moreover, as demographer Leon Bouvier writes in his recent study, *Fifty Million Californians?*, published by the Center for Immigration Studies, "No other industrial nation, let alone state, has ever experienced such a dramatic shift in its ethnic composition" as California will undergo in the next 20 years due to high levels of immigration and the changes in fertility that come with it.

"Seldom, if ever, has a longtime dominant majority seen its population base erode to the point that that majority becomes just another minority." Aside from the obvious and profound cultural impact of such a change, it doesn't augur well for California's or the nation's economic future.

"Will the increasing share of immigrant workers, many without a high school education and with a limited knowledge of English, entrench a dual economy and society?" asks Bouvier.

How long can technological progress persist if the population base lacks the educational and language

skills to maintain it?

So, far from being an endless free lunch, uncontrolled immigration is more like the last meal of the condemned prisoner. Unless Americans learn to control it, Los Angeles' lost weekend may point the way toward America's lost future. ■