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Raising the National Question

A Book Review by Brent Nelson

Peter Brimelow is a native of England, a naturalized U.S. citizen, a graduate of Stanford University, a senior editor at *Forbes* magazine, and a contributing editor at *National Review*. Such credentials would seem to establish that he has a bona fide concern for the immigration question. Nonetheless, Brimelow devotes the lengthy introduction to his *Alien Nation* to a defense for his writing of the book — a defense which assumes a personal stance that is unusual even in a work on public policy directed to the common reader. Moreover, this embattled position is held throughout the work, and reinforced in the conclusion in which he considers the possibility that he may be wrong in his argument.

Between introduction and conclusion, Brimelow arrays the evidence for his argument, fairly evenly divided between "Truth," most of which is ignored by what he calls "the American political elite," and "Consequences," which are economic, cultural, social, environmental, and political. Ignorance (or suppression) of basic truths about immigration has led to what Brimelow calls "a one-sided debate" about the immigration question. He recognizes a force of denial so great that bringing these truths to the average citizen involves combating daunting resistances within that reader's own (previously conditioned) consciousness. He suggests that most of this resistance derives from the Great Society taboo in the U.S. which surrounds any frank consideration of issues even tangent to race relations. He does not go so far, however, as to recognize that the suppression dictated by the political elite is motivated as much by fear as by ignorance.

The first installment of the truth which Brimelow delivers to the reader is numerical in nature, the understanding of which is facilitated by a series of charts. These show graphically:

- that the American tradition is not one of continual immigration, but of intermittent waves;
- that, contrary to expectations raised by the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1990, the trend of immigration is still up;
- that America is in a second "great wave" of immigration ("the first great wave" from 1880 to 1920 was followed by the lull between 1924 and 1954);

- that immigration as a percentage of the total U.S. population now is comparable to that of previous waves if one includes amnestied illegal aliens;
- that, in absolute numbers, net immigration to the U.S. has reached a new high;
- that immigration contributes disproportionately to U.S. population growth;
- that the foreign-born as a percentage of the total U.S. population is beginning a rise to levels attained only 50 years ago;

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COMMON SENSE
ABOUT IMMIGRATION
AND THE AMERICAN FUTURE
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- that immigration will lead to a projected total U.S. population — according to the U.S. Bureau of the Census — of 383 million in 2050, as contrasted with a projected total, assuming no net immigration, of 244 million;

- that even with these high immigration levels, the burgeoning Third World population is best described as an "overhang" under

which the American contribution to "relief" from Third World population pressures is almost vanishingly small;

- that the U.S. and Canada alone among nations of the developed world have failed to stabilize their population growth; and, finally,
- that the current great wave is composed disproportionately of persons from the Third World.

The telling of a more controversial (and most unwelcome) truth is reserved for a separate chapter. This truth is graphically presented in what Brimelow calls "The Pincer Chart." The far right side of the chart represents 2050 and portrays the population of "Non-Spanish Whites" who, totalling only 52.7 percent of the U.S. population, will be caught between pincer tongs representing "Hispanic" and "Other/Asian/Non-Spanish Black." Brimelow devotes most of the chapter to combating the anticipated incredulity of the reader. He notes that the projection is that of the U.S. Bureau of the Census, a projection which was not extended to that point in time when the "Non-Spanish White" population will cease to be a majority. Brimelow cites the demographer Leon Bouvier as pronouncing the year of minority status for whites to be 2060. The Pincer Chart is supplemented with a second graphic illustration: a map of the U.S. showing that the ethnic/racial blocs are even now, through selective migration, developing into what will

be areas of regional concentration; i.e., a predominantly Hispanic and Asian Southwest, a predominantly black Southeast and East coast, and a predominantly white Midwest and inland Northwest.

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"How did it happen?" Brimelow answers this (his own) question in a chapter which presents a relatively noncontroversial truth: It (i.e., the current great wave of immigration and the impending racial transformation of the U.S. population) is an unanticipated outcome of the 1965 Immigration Act, and secondarily of the immigration acts of 1986 and 1990. There is nothing inevitable or irreversible (much less accidental!) about the immigrant influx and the concomitant racial transformation of the U.S. Both phenomena are the outcome of governmental policy, which can be reversed. A return to a national origins quota system could once again lead to a growth in the European segment of the U.S. population.

It is in answering the question "Why did it happen?" that Brimelow reveals a truth which is rather more controversial. The post-1986 immigration policy, "seen as part of the civil rights triumph," has been placed "above criticism." In addition, the whole debate on immigration policy (or, rather, lack of debate), has been shaped by what Brimelow calls "alienism." This concept, alluded to in the title of the book, is needed to understand U.S. immigration policy "because," according to Brimelow, "just as everyone has heard of 'nativists' and their dislike of foreigners, so there are also 'aliens' who dislike the natives, and the America that the natives built. To these 'aliens' (who are quite often not immigrants, but the disgruntled, 'alienated' native-born) mass immigration offers potential reinforcement and support." Furthermore, Brimelow believes, "this concept of alienism is crucial to understanding American politics — and, indeed, American culture."

Brimelow becomes his most daring in truth-telling when he responds to what he calls "the 'So What?' reflex." This is the implicit argument of the opponents to immigration control that any concern about the shifting racial composition of the U.S. as an outcome of immigration policy can only be a manifestation of "racism." Brimelow believes that the entire question needs to be "refocused" as follows: "The onus should not be on critics of current immigration policy to explain their motives. Instead, supporters of current

policy must explain why they wish to transform the American nation from where it had evolved by 1965." Brimelow believes that the "alienist" answer to the refocused question is that "American whites must be swamped by immigration to make it impossible for them to act on their racist impulses." A survey of the contemporary world and a look into history reveals, however, the unwelcome truth that multi-ethnic or multi-racial states are as subject to the plagues of bigotry and racism as are ethnically/racially homogeneous states.

Brimelow gives much attention to the economic consequences of immigration, buttressing his argument with figures and formulae relegated to the appendices. The first consideration, the economic quality of the immigrants, is in itself cause for concern. Skill levels of immigrants are moving downward steadily in a decline which can only partially be accounted for by the policy of family reunification. Welfare dependency rates for the current immigrant influx are higher than at any time in the past. Welfare dependency has begun to affect adversely not only communities (e.g., Wausau, Wisconsin, whose story has been ably told by Roy Beck in the April, 1994, issue of *Atlantic Monthly*), but entire states, most notoriously California. The downgrading of California's bond rating has been directly attributed to "above-average population growth and shifting demographics," in particular the "degree of public assistance required by two of the fastest growing groups, Latinos and political/ethnic refugees." (Brimelow here cites the report of Sanford J. Bernstein and Company.)

Next, Brimelow examines in depth the popular notion that immigration is a stimulus to "economic growth." Noting that what (e.g., lower wages) is favorable for one party (employers) may be detrimental for another (employees), he recognizes that "economic growth" is an ambivalent concept. A lowering of wages during the first great wave of immigration (1890 to 1920) has been demonstrated, and is at least likely during the current wave. Certain, moreover, is the fact that "immigration has exploded since 1985 ... but overall economic growth has slowed." Accounting for growth, Brimelow admits, draws one into a thicket of conflicting theories and assumptions, but, again, it is certain that Japan, the locus of unparalleled economic growth by anyone's standard, has also been anything but a nation of immigrants, admitting a total of only 222,000 to citizenship in the decades since 1945. It may be debated how the Japanese have done it — whether by capital investment or by institutional innovation — but they certainly have done it without immigrants. Finally, Brimelow raises the possibility that the functioning of capitalism depends on certain cultural patterns, patterns which can be swept away by the immigrant influx, thereby eliminating the social prerequisites to sustain capitalism.

Brimelow gives only cursory attention to the

cultural, social, and environmental consequences of immigration, but these are most apparent. While the absence in the future U.S. of a uniting central culture, now anathematized as Eurocentrism, may not be a fatal flaw, few readers will be able to deny the gravity of the problems of crime and public health which are imported with the immigrant influx. Brimelow cites in particular the Russian Jewish "Organizatsiya," which threatens to displace La Cosa Nostra, and also the remarkable level of involvement (70 percent according to U.S. Justice Department estimates!) of Nigerian immigrants in organized crime. He does not cite the threat represented by Asian organized crime. The spoliation and plunder of the environment which will ensue if there are 400 million Americans in 2050, all demanding the highest possible standards of living, is also worthy of more explication.

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Cursory attention is also given to the political consequences of immigration. Brimelow mentions the possibility of irredentism in the Southwest and notes that, even now, Mexico seeks some sort of extraterritorial rights over Mexican immigrants in the United States. Most of his attention is given to the partisan consequences. Republicans, he believes, are unrealistic in their hope to win many votes from the new immigrants when they finally become citizens. Democrats, on the other hand, who seemingly have a firm grip on the greater portion of the votes of the newcomers, do not adequately appreciate the problems involved in maintaining their "rainbow coalition," preserving it from internal dissension as well as from a possible "backlash" among European Americans. Finally, immigration, if it becomes a volatile issue, may overturn all partisan expectations. The Canadian Reform Party, for example, vaulted from one to fifty-two seats virtually overnight when it attacked immigration.

The most significant political consequence of immigration is "a less perfect union." "Massive, heterogeneous immigration" is but one policy leading in that direction. Brimelow also cites, as leading to "deconstruction of the American nation as it existed in 1965," the policies of bilingualism, multiculturalism, affirmative action, and a "systematic attack on the value of citizenship, by making it easier for aliens to vote, receive government subsidies etc." Brimelow believes that America is, or should be, a nation, not just an idea, but he warns that "the outlines of what might be

described as the new American Anti-Idea are already clear. It's a sort of bureaucratically-regulated racial spoils system, rather like Lebanon before its ethnic divisions finally erupted. Government power is used not to achieve economic efficiency, which traditional socialism has ceased to promise, but ethnic equity...." Government today, in effect, promotes and rewards the devolution of one into many.

The final consequence of immigration today is "the war against the nation-state," a war which begins with a refusal to acknowledge that, in Brimelow's words, "a nation is the interlacing of ethnicity and culture. And a nation-state is its political expression." He cites Trudeau as a prime example of a warrior against nationalism (i.e., the conscious awareness of what a nation is), and notes that his endeavor to suppress nationalism, to condemn it as a premodern remnant, has failed. Brimelow maintains that the nation-state is a *product* of modernization, sustained as it is by "information flows," which can only be impeded by a lack of linguistic unity (which, in turn, is dependent upon cultural and, perhaps, ethnic unity). Nonetheless, Brimelow warns, "The New Class dislikes the nation-state. The New Class dislikes the nation-state for exactly the same reason it dislikes the free market: both are machines that run of themselves, with no need for new-class-directed government intervention."

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Before suggesting what should be done about the immigration problem, Brimelow considers the morality of immigration restriction. He soundly rebuts those (a group of law school students, horrible to relate!) who have tried to tell him that "immigration is a civil right." He argues against the entreaty that there is a moral obligation to accept immigrants into the U.S. He invites the religious to ponder the fact that Leviticus 19:33-34 (welcoming the stranger) is counterbalanced by Deuteronomy 28:43-44 (caution: strangers may take over). He demolishes the plea that the U.S. must accept all political refugees by asking the (rhetorical) question, "Does that mean that you want to accept 5 million white South Africans?" Most appropriately, he refers to the lesson regarding stewardship of resources which has been so ably presented in Garrett Hardin's classic essay on "The Tragedy of the Commons." Finally, he surveys the immigration policies of a number of Third World nations and discovers (to no one's surprise) that many of them simply will not even consider accepting

immigrants.

In considering what should be done, Brimelow first suggests that the immigration acts of 1965, 1986, and 1990 be repealed. Future immigration policy must be shaped by four principles:

1. "The United States must regain control of its borders...."
2. "Immigration must be treated as a luxury for the United States, not as a necessity."
3. "The costs of any immigration should fall on the immigrant, not on native-born Americans."
4. "Any immigration must meet a fundamental test: What does it mean for 'The National Question'? Will it help or hurt the ability of the United States to survive as a nation-state — the political expression of that interlacing of ethnicity and culture that now constitutes the American nation?"

It is Brimelow's raising of the National Question, with its implicit assertion that a nation has a right to retain its cultural and ethnic identity, which will call down an anathema upon his head from those conservatives who have accepted what he calls "the bland bargain"; i.e., conservative acquiescence regarding multiculturalist demands in exchange for a modicum of respectability. It will bring forth an icy silence from the left, both liberal and extreme, along with a methodically carried out plan to suppress this work in every way possible. Unfortunately, alienism is not limited to the New Class, probably because (as Christopher Lasch has demonstrated in his posthumously published *The Revolt of the Elites*) the New Class is not all that separate and distinguishable from the rest of the elite. Furthermore, "alienism" easily co-exists with a general indifference among the elite about the great ethnic shift, which alternates only with an angry alarm at those who dare to discuss it.

Intelligent concern, if not alarm, should be the general reaction to the fact that the U.S. still does not have control of its population growth. If the total U.S. population grows to almost 400 million by 2050 (and this is only the middle-level projection), a growth which will largely have been due to the immigrant influx, far too many "Americans" will then be contending for the scarce economic goods produced from limited natural resources. Since this population will be organized politically into three or four major blocs of visible minorities, the electoral process will tend steadily and irreversibly to devolve into something like an ethnic census. Will this U.S. of 2050 arrive on schedule, or will the U.S. itself be restructured out of existence long before 2050, as was the U.S.S.R. long before the triumph of communism? Brimelow does not ask this question, but it is implicit in his discussion of the consequences of uncontrolled immigration.

Probably Brimelow does not place greater stress on the dire prospects for America's future because he recognizes that the prevailing attitude among the elite is epitomized in the observation that "Posterity has

never done anything for me!" This tradition of lighthearted plunder of the commons has combined with a religious obscurantism, anachronistic in a developed nation such as the U.S., that militates against the elite's acceptance of a long-term policy of population control (which would necessitate immigration control). Not helping matters any is that when members of either the New Class or the Old Class — assuming that those distinctions mean anything — think seriously about issues of public policy, they are inclined to be influenced by ideologues — either radicals of the left (Marxists) or extremists of the right (libertarians) — both of whom refuse to admit that there are limits to growth.

Given the negative reaction which will greet *Alien Nation*, Peter Brimelow is to be commended for having written it. Random House is to be commended even more for having published it. Not since the publication in 1947 of Henry Pratt Fairchild's *Race and Nationality as Factors in American Life* has a book addressing the National Question found a mainstream publisher. While there is little likelihood that Brimelow's common sense will begin to permeate the mass media, it may reach great numbers of opinion leaders. Those are the people — the only real actors in America's political process — who must be reached if anything positive is to be done. ■