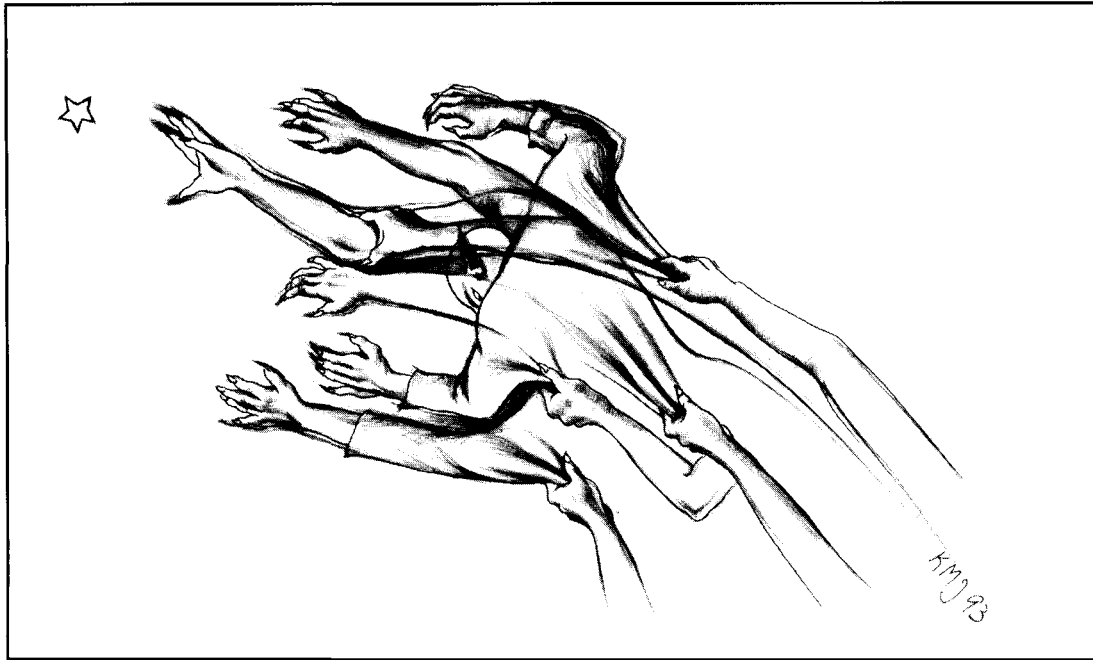


The National Question

by Peter Brimelow



Krystyna M. Jachniewicz

Peter Brimelow was supposed to deliver the keynote address at the John Randolph Club conference in Chicago last December, but he was marooned in New York by weather conditions. What follows is an extract from his prepared remarks.

I believe the central issue in American politics at the end of the century is what might be described as “The National Question”—whether America is that interlacing of ethnicity and culture we call a nation and whether the American nation-state, the political expression of that nation, is going to survive. It’s a problem that’s difficult even to discuss because of a peculiar semantic accident. American editors are convinced that readers will confuse the word “state,” used in the rest of the English-speaking world to mean a sovereign political entity, as in the French *état* or the German *staat*, with the component parts of the United States, like California or Illinois. So they make writers here use “nation” instead. And this has undermined people’s defenses against a heresy that has recently raised its head: that America is in essence a purely political construct, with no specific ethnic or cultural content at all.

Thus you used to hear American journalists refer to “the nation of Yugoslavia,” although the problem with Yugoslavia was clearly that it was not a nation but rather a state containing several small but notoriously sturdy nations. Anyone who confuses basic terms in this way must inevitably also get confused about what a nation-state is, what its function is,

and what it requires in order to survive.

I’m going to illustrate with three recent newspaper clippings. The first is an editorial from the *New York Times* (December 9, 1992) dealing with the disturbances in Germany caused by the collapse of its borders and the subsequent immigrant influx, which reached the astonishing rate of 60,000 a month. “Nobody,” the *Times* editorialists wrote, “can reasonably fault Germany for trying to limit and regulate a huge influx of refugees.” This means they *do* want to fault Germany for trying to limit and regulate a huge influx of refugees. The *Times* went on:

But Chancellor Helmut Kohl and the Bonn political establishment have regrettably taken the easy way out. They would do better to set a quota on immigrants and nurture a more pluralist society by adopting a formula for citizenship based on residence rather than blood ties. . . .

Equally distressing is Bonn’s failure to revise an outdated naturalization law rooted in ethnicity. Under the existing system, a Turkish guest worker who has lived in Germany for 30 years and speaks German fluently is denied the citizenship automatically granted a Russian-speaking immigrant who can prove German ancestry.

What we have here is a total absence of any understanding of the nation as a family, to which outsiders may indeed be admitted, but only under very special circumstances and with great care.

There is also the curious assumption that “naturalization

Peter Brimelow is a senior editor of Forbes magazine.

law rooted in ethnicity" is somehow "outdated." In fact, exactly the reverse is true. The nation-state, the sovereign political entity based on specific ethnicity, is the product of modernization. What are now regarded as archetypal nation-states like Germany and Italy were actually united only in the 19th century. Multinational and multilingual states organized on other principles, like the Hapsburg Empire, did not survive into the modern age.

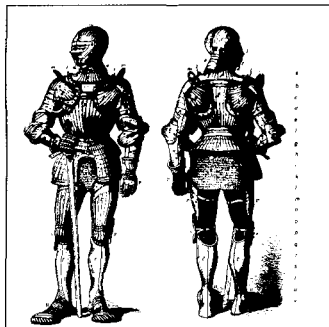
And for good reason. Modern society is organized around the free flow of information. So modernization inevitably puts a premium on linguistic unity. It doesn't matter what language the people in the next village speak if you have no truck or trade with them. But if you do, it does.

Which brings us to the natural enemy of the nation-state: the New Class. These are the people—politicians, educators, bureaucrats, and their assorted media parasites—who benefit from government's ability to control and tax the economy. They don't like the nation-state, basically for the same reason they don't like capitalism: both are machines that run themselves. The services of the New Class are not required.

A classic example of this reflex appears in my second clip, from *Insight* magazine (November 30, 1992). I like the *Washington Times*, so I don't mind crediting its publications although they have attacked my *National Review* cover story on immigration not once, not twice, but three times. Cokie Roberts, reporter for National Public Radio and ABC News, was quoted attacking the idea of term limits for congressmen. She argued that her father, former House Majority Leader Thomas Hale Boggs, Sr., was able to buck the prejudices of his Louisiana and vote against segregation because of the seniority he had accumulated.

Roberts claimed "some experienced souls" are necessary to provide "institutional memory, explaining the importance of protecting congressional prerogatives." She went on:

LIBERAL ARTS



CONDOMS SERVING PEACE

"A half million condoms, large and small, have been sent to Cambodia in order to make happy the 15,700 U.N. soldiers who shall shape the peace there, it has been reported from Phnom Penh.

"Between June and the end of October [1992], 1,251 U.N. soldiers had contracted venereal disease and three had been diagnosed as carrying the HIV-virus. Earlier a crisis-shipment of 300,000 condoms had been sent over, when the U.N. force's immediate need proved to be greater than calculated."

—from the January 25, 1993, issue of *Aftonbladet* in Stockholm.

To say that we want only non-professionals governing us is to show a basic disregard for government, and though that sentiment may be popular, it is dangerous. *We have nothing binding us together as a nation—no common ethnicity, history, religion, or even language—except the Constitution and the situations it created.* [Italics added.]

When Roberts says "nation," of course, she means "state" (or polity). And when she says, incredibly, that Americans have no common ethnicity, history, religion, and language what she really means is frankly if naively made clear: more power for the political class. Anything that further deconstructs the American nation—immigration, multiculturalism, bilingualism—will tend to bring about the situation Roberts hopefully describes. And the political class, driven by this view of its self-interest, will applaud.

Let me conclude now with my third press clip, from the front page of the December 2 *Wall Street Journal*. Many of you will have seen it. It was headlined "Mosaic of Hope: Ethnic Identities Clash with Student Idealism at a California College." So you know what to expect. The college in question was Occidental in Los Angeles, which the *Wall Street Journal* describes as a "prestigious private liberal arts college . . . founded in 1887 to educate the white elite." And I guess it was successful in achieving this reprehensible goal. One of its graduates, class of '57, was Jack Kemp.

Anyway, Occidental College has seen the light. Or the dark—whichever you prefer. Under its president, John Brooks Slaughter, whom the *Wall Street Journal* tells us "is black," Occidental "is reaching out for an emerging America." In 1987, it "went multicultural," aggressively recruiting minority students and revamping its curriculum to give more emphasis to non-Western cultures. Today, more than 40 percent of its 1,650 students are minority." I won't go into the details of what is going on at Occidental. Essentially, the students are dividing into warring tribes. I will note, however, what the *Wall Street Journal* typically describes as "the bedrock fact" underlying the Occidental experiment: "America's white majority is shrinking, both in relative size and importance." In fact, America's white majority is *not* "shrinking." It is being inundated, quite deliberately, as a matter of public policy following the 1965 Immigration Act.

I would also like to note the final lines of the story. The *Wall Street Journal's* starry-eyed hack, one Dennis Farney, is in a discussion class entitled "The American Dream." Let me quote this:

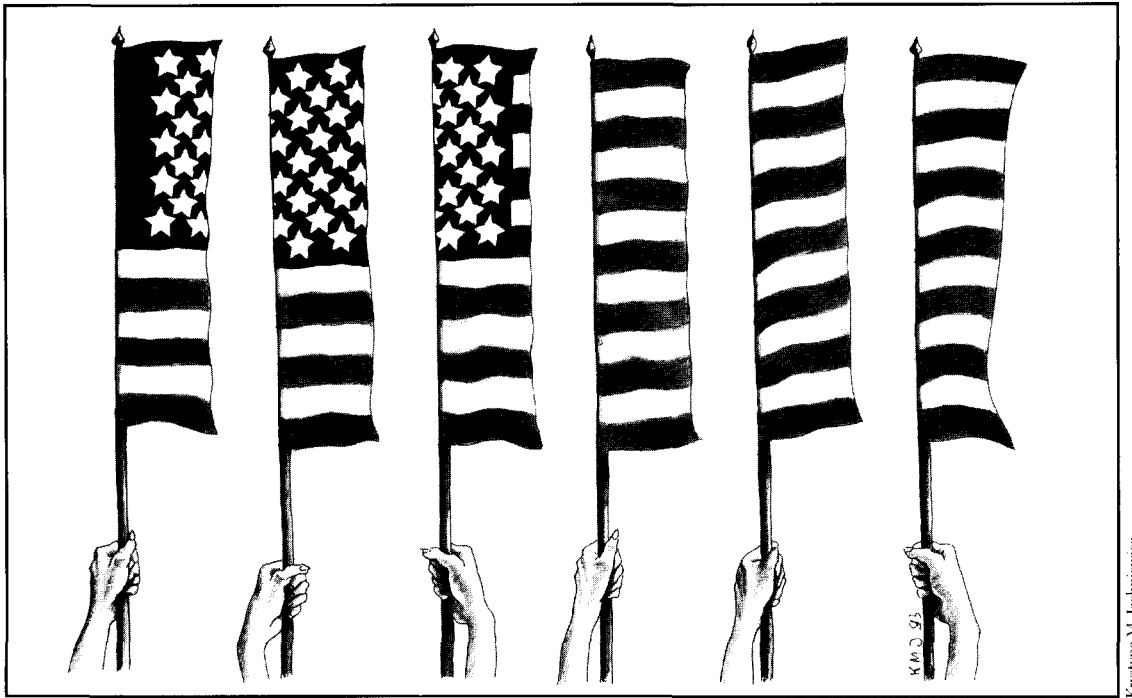
The students, as diverse as their America is diverse, are gathered around a conference table. And their visitor asks: suppose they were to grade the American civilization, grade it just as their professor grades them? How would they grade America?

It is freshman Jona Goong, a Hawaiian of Chinese ancestry, who says it best. "If I were to grade America," she says, softly, "I would give it an incomplete."

Well, my twin brother and I did have to grade America, from a distance of three thousand miles, in the summer of 1967, when for various reasons we decided all was lost in England. We gave it an A-plus. I still give it an A-plus, what's left of it. And I want it to stay that way.

Cultural Diversity and Unity

by Claes G. Ryn



Krystyna M. Jachmiewicz

There is plentiful historical evidence that cultural diversity and immigration need not undermine a society's cohesion. They can be sources of enrichment and renewal. Especially in a vital civilization, groups of different religious, ethnic, and national origin may be pulled, however reluctantly in particular cases, into a dynamic and fertile consensus.

One problem with immigration into the United States today is that, at current levels, it complicates assimilation. The number of foreign-born residents is higher than at any time in American history. Over 40 percent of the residents of New York City speak a foreign language at home. In Miami the figure is 75 percent. At the same time, many immigrants resist integration into a common national culture; some groups pursue separate ethnic or racial identities.

The impact of mass immigration and separatism cannot be assessed without considering the ever-present need to balance unity and diversity. It is important to ask whether American culture still has sufficient centripetal and harmonizing pull to avert social fragmentation. Whatever other problems may attend multiculturalism and immigration, they are straining an increasingly fragile social fabric. The question arises whether there are sources of order in American society, actual or potential, that can moderate and balance the centrifugal influences. Or does the strain on society need to be reduced?

Most Americans sense deepening social tensions but have difficulty identifying their central cause. A strong case can be

made that the fragmentation of society stems, in its most important dimension, from disintegration at the moral core of civilization. Arguments presented elsewhere (as in my recent book *The New Jacobinism*) can here be only summarized. American society faces large-scale legal and illegal immigration and multiculturalism at a time when a certain traditional ethic, a virtue of character and personal responsibility, is losing its strength and prestige.

The older virtue can be conveniently summarized in the phrase "love of neighbor." It stressed personal obligations to individuals up close. This virtue made possible a society that was at the same time decentralized and morally cohesive. The cohesion derived from recognition of a universal moral authority and from citizens' efforts to harmonize their lives accordingly. They were not unified mainly through doctrinal agreement. Neither were they unified mainly by national boosterism. Conflict was reduced through acts of self-discipline and kindness. Social harmony was understood to require moral character and good conduct first of all. There were no shortcuts to a better society. A larger social good, including the preservation of freedom, was seen as possible only if imperfect and sinful human beings would restrain and improve themselves. The importance of local and central government was recognized, as was the need for religious, moral, intellectual, and cultural authority, but the primary responsibility for dealing with problems was understood to rest with those who were most immediately concerned.

From this understanding of virtue and social life grew a decentralized, group-oriented society. The common good did not require conformity to a comprehensive plan—the conception of unity favored by the French Jacobins and their de-

Claes G. Ryn is a professor of politics at The Catholic University of America, chairman of the National Humanities Institute, and coeditor of Humanitas. His most recent book is The New Jacobinism (National Humanities Institute).