

Flooding Long Island

Aliens invade the Hamptons.

By Richard Cummings

JUAN RENDON and his mother, Beatrice, both from Ecuador, are part of the endless stream of illegal immigrants pouring into Long Island. According to police detective Matt Sullivan, one night Juan, drunk and bitter over a break-up with his girlfriend, stormed into her home in Brentwood and beat her. Dragging her into her car, he forced her to drive him to his mother's house, where the assault continued. *Newsday* reported that Juan's mother gagged the victim with her hand while her son battered the girl. He then forced her back into the car, and they drove to a Bay Shore industrial park where he raped her.

Juan Rendon was charged with five crimes, his mother with two. But theirs was not one violent, isolated act. It was the realization of a new fear stalking Suffolk County as tides of unassimilated immigrants overwhelm the community.

In the late 1990s, 1,500 Mexican day laborers—virtually all of them undocumented—descended on Farmingville, a village of 15,000 located in the middle of Suffolk County. Overnight, this tranquil hamlet was confronted with large crowds standing on corners, waiting to be approached by prospective employers offering \$7 an hour to do landscaping and construction work. For shelter, the workers packed into small ranch houses—often as many as 40 of them to a house—paying rent to unscrupulous landlords who knowingly violated local zoning codes.

Most kept their heads down and worked hard, but those with no stake in the life of a community more easily turn against it. As immigration has increased,

so too has the rate of violent crime, and many of the perpetrators, unlike Juan Rendon, elude local authorities by blending back into faceless crowds of aliens. One illegal Hispanic day laborer, driving drunk, rammed the car of a pregnant Farmingville woman, killing her. He jumped bail and escaped, never to be found.

As residents organized to protest the refusal of local, state, and federal authorities to address concerns about their changing town, Farmingville became the lightning rod of the Long Island immigration debate. But a proposal to have the county sue the INS was voted down by the Suffolk County legislature. The presiding officer at the time, Paul J. Tonna, a Republican who still represents Farmingville and whose position reflected a consensus of the legislature, insisted that the day workers constituted a “slave labor force” that was necessary to sustain economic growth. Unable to find work at home, the day laborers would work under any conditions to make money to send home to their impoverished families, and the legislators argued that cheap labor without benefits more than offset the loss of taxes that the workers might have otherwise paid. Meanwhile, local residents, whose property taxes exceeded \$6,000 per year for modest homes, saw their property values begin to plummet.

As tensions mounted, two Mexicans were lured to a basement under the guise of a job offer by several men, who stabbed and beat them. The perpetrators were convicted of attempted murder and sentenced to 25 years in

prison. In response to the violence, several county legislators came up with a plan to build a hiring hall, so the workers would not congregate on street corners, where, local residents insisted, they made it impossible for children to go outside by themselves.

Various activists began to stream onto Long Island, from the Federation for American Immigration Reform and other immigration-restriction groups to La Raza and other open-borders contingents. When the legislature voted to build the facility, locals and their outside supporters rallied, forcing the county executive to veto the bill. The rationale was that a hiring hall for those here illegally compounded the crime and would serve as a magnet for more laborers to come to Long Island.

Pro-immigration lobbyists countered—and continue to argue—that their opponents are racists. They point out that Long Island has always welcomed immigrants, from the first Anglo-Saxon farmers to the Germans, Irish, Italians, and Jews who fled the crowded neighborhoods in Brooklyn, the Bronx, and the Lower East Side, transforming a bucolic environment of farms and open space, where farmers and fisherman flourished, into a vast suburban sprawl that developed thanks to the network of highways built by Robert Moses. Robert Caro, in his monumental biography of Moses, *The Power Broker*, makes it clear that Moses envisioned Long Island as a paradise for the working classes of European stock, where they could live the American dream of having a home and a car.

During the 1970s, when environmentalists organized to promote a county farmland preservation program, Democratic members of the Suffolk legislature opposed it on the grounds that farms brought with them migrant farm workers, whose presence was considered alien to the middle-class paradise Long Island was supposed to be. Mostly poor blacks, the farm workers were recruited by gang leaders and transported to Long Island by farmers, who provided them with primitive housing and no benefits. Excluded from national labor legislation, they were unable to organize unions unless state law authorized it, and to date only California has done so, as the result of Cesar Chavez's grape pickers and the legacy of John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*. They could be seen, huddling on street corners, drinking Thunderbird out of bottles concealed in paper bags, thus offending the aesthetic of the upwardly mobile whites.

Gradually, the black farm workers dwindled and were replaced by undocumented workers from Mexico and other Latin American countries. As the farms began to disappear, the immigrants remained and found work in landscaping, which was more lucrative. Word spread, and the hordes arrived. In the wealthy Hamptons, they catered to the wealthy summer residents as housekeepers, maids, and cooks. Fancy restaurants staffed their kitchens with them, no one bothering to ask if any had green cards. Complicit in the growing immigration crisis, employers adopted a "don't ask, don't tell" policy that fueled further immigration.

No one seemed to notice just how many Hispanics were living in the Hamptons until their children began to turn up at the schools, causing the Springs residents in East Hampton to go into shock when they saw their real-estate taxes soar. English as a second language became a standard feature

across the East End of Long Island as some of the Hispanics began to assimilate, starting landscaping businesses of their own and hiring undocumented workers.

Hostility grew, and Southampton residents began protesting the crowds of disheveled workers loitering around the 7-Eleven, turning a town that had been one of the nation's most famous watering holes for the rich and famous into another Farmingville. When a Hispanic worker stabbed to death his elderly female employer, there were cries of outrage. In East Hampton, a wealthy white resident declared at a town board meeting that the Hispanic workers were "genetically incapable of assimilating."

Enter Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy, a dynamic conservative Democrat whose tireless work habits have won him comparisons to the Energizer bunny. With his slim moustache and dark, wiry good looks, he might be Giancarlo Gianini in Lina Wertmuller's "Seven Beauties." Sometimes sardonically challenged, his entire focus is on politics and government, having moved from the Suffolk County legislature to the New York State Assembly and then to the county executive position, which he won in a heated

related in the minds of an increasing number of Long Islanders, Levy has singled out the criminal justice system to address the problem of noncompliance with the immigration laws. Until he acted, ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) had only a token presence in Suffolk County, with a small office in Bohemia to check on possible customs problems at McArthur Airport.

Levy moved to have the ICE facility upgraded so that it would be prompted to do more about illegal immigration. Instead of suing the federal government to enforce its immigration laws, as had been proposed prior to Levy's election and voted down by the county legislature, he initiated a strategy aimed at providing the courts with information about immigration status before a court would set bail. He petitioned ICE under a 1996 statute to have the Bohemia facility upgraded with more resources or, in the alternative, to have ICE deputize eight probation and correction officers.

What Levy envisioned was for his deputies to interview people arrested for serious crimes to determine if they were illegals because, as Chief Deputy County Executive Paul Sabatino II explains, initial computer searches will only show a

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campaign. Levy is a smart politician who understands the sentiments of his constituency. He is so popular that left-wing pro-immigrationists don't dare to challenge him seriously, while conservatives are more than willing to overlook his party affiliation.

Because Levy is a county official and has no authority over immigration policy, he has sought new and imaginative ways of obliging the feds to do their job. With crime and immigration closely

hit if the person is already in the system for having an expired green card or for getting married or if an arrest warrant has been issued for him. Sabatino estimates that since 90 percent of undocumented aliens don't fall into these categories, there is an urgent need to conduct in-depth interviews with suspected illegals accused of committing crimes. Without the co-operation of the federal government, cross-referencing is virtually impossible.

In response to the petition, ICE now provides a 24-hour contact person to conduct the interviews. If the accused is found to be an illegal, bail will be set accordingly or denied, and if he is convicted, he will be deported after serving his sentence. Thanks to the new co-operation agreement with Suffolk County, ICE determined that both Juan and Beatrice Rendon, who were charged with kidnapping, assault, and rape, were illegals. Juan, it turned out, had a history of prior convictions and was wanted on several other charges.

But defenders of illegals reacted with both outrage and hysteria to this modest and legitimate reform. Levy was wrongly accused of proposing to deputize the entire Suffolk County police force so it could conduct sweeps of day workers so they could be deported, even if they had not been accused of a crime. And illegal immigration advocate Rev. Allan Ramirez derided Levy's efforts. "Mr. Levy is simply using this to create the impression that within the Latino immigrant community, there is a crime wave," he told *Newsday*. "This reflects more on the incompetence of a department that should have been doing this all along."

Sabatino points to the fact that because of the information provided to the court by virtue of the co-operative agreement, the judge set bail appropriately in the Rendon case. When the Rendons were arraigned in First District Court in Islip, the court ordered Mr. Rendon held in lieu of \$250,000 cash or \$500,000 bond and his mother held in lieu of \$100,000 cash or \$200,000 bond. Sabatino also confirms that there will be a meeting with ICE in the near future to discuss the deputization of the eight county probation and correction officers to enhance this co-operation further.

Sabatino asserts that by dealing with the criminal issue as it pertains to immigration, Levy can diffuse tensions on other issues. Sabatino points as well to

Levy's determination to crack down on employers, hoping in this way to rid the county of the plague that has descended on it. Perhaps even a compromise on hiring halls might be possible, with ICE representatives screening the workers and county personnel screening the employers.

Meanwhile, in neighboring Nassau County, municipalities such as Hempstead have begun to crack down on private homes packed with illegal immigrants. But Nadia Marin-Molina of the Workplace Project that promotes what she calls "the rights of the illegals" to this sort of housing because it is all they can afford, claims "It's absolutely ridiculous." The immigrant advocates believe the crackdown on illegal housing to be catastrophic for "blue-collar families" who have no choice but to pack into what are otherwise single-family homes.

This sense of entitlement on the part of illegal aliens and their advocates can be traced to Justice William Brennan's decision in *Plyer v. Doe*, in which the Supreme Court held unconstitutional a Texas law that denied state funds to school districts that enrolled children who were not legally admitted to the U.S. Brennan declared that although the undocumented aliens in question were, "by definition," as Lawrence Tribe puts it in his *Treatise on Constitutional Law*, in the country unlawfully, they were nevertheless "persons" under the 14th amendment and thereby entitled to equal protection even though they were not what the Court has characterized as a "suspect class" justifying a higher level of scrutiny. Brennan acknowledged that this higher level of scrutiny was not possible because their membership in the statutory classification under the Texas law was the result of a "wholly voluntary—indeed—criminal act." But because the children were not the same as their parents, who were also illegal aliens, because they were brought to the United States involuntarily

by their parents, there was no justification for discriminating against them. Brennan then challenged Texas by holding that its education law would have to further a "substantial" state interest to be upheld, as if defending one's borders were an insufficient interest.

This 1982 decision has been responsible for a mindset in America about illegal immigrants: if a state can't deny the children of illegals a public education, how can one justify deporting their parents, since, *a fortiori*, they are entitled to a decent family life—a right to work and a right to housing and so on. And if this is the case, aren't these children entitled to the same rights even if they happen to live in Mexico? If that is so, their fathers have a right to be on Long Island so they can work in order to send money home.

Predictably, advocates for the illegals on Long Island tar any opposition to the *Plyer v. Doe* mentality as racist, and Paul J. Tonna, perhaps positioning himself for a run against Steve Levy for county executive, says Levy has created "a climate of fear in the Latino community." But Tonna might consider that when Emma Lazarus wrote, in her homage to the Statue of Liberty, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breath free" she didn't mean day workers who come here illegally and send what they earn back to Mexico.

Yet rain or shine, still they stand opposite the railway station in East Hampton, staring grimly at the cars, waiting for an SUV to drive up to take them to a building site. Each day, their numbers increase. They blend into an amorphous mass of humanity, "bowed by the weight of centuries." ■

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Losing Their Religion

Neoconservatives lay claim to the Puritans

By Paul Gottfried

THERE IS A VIEW of the American past that a reader of any of the several neo-conservative house organs recognizes at once. One of my former graduate students and I quiz each other about how the editors of these journals might describe specific figures and events. Factual accuracy is irrelevant. What counts is how neoconservatives, given their selective memories and stereotypes, might interpret historical phenomena. One answers correctly by relating not what really happened but what the neo-conservatives present as a meaningful past. They do not allow disconfirming facts to alter this construction.

It was therefore not surprising when last month *Commentary* ran an essay, "Americanism and its Enemies," recapitulating familiar half-truths. The essay concerns the evolution of "Puritanism" as "Americanism" and identifies the exemplars and opponents of this American and predominantly Protestant civic religion. David Gelernter, the Yale professor of computer science who prepared this tribute, does not offer a shred of independent thought that might distinguish his argument about the progress and permutations of "the American religion" from the neoconservative party line. Gelernter quotes religious historians Perry Miller and Sidney Ahlstrom (my dissertation advisor) to lend support to his contentions, but he draws on sources in such a way that Miller and Ahlstrom would not always recognize their ideas or intentions. What is amply recognizable, on the other hand, are the ideological roots of Gelernter's take on American history.

A statement of at least part of the historical vision of neoconservatism is offered in Allan Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind*, in which "the American project" is defined as "the triumphant and majestic march of equality." Bloom writes, "When we Americans speak seriously about politics, we mean that our principles of freedom and equality and the rights based on them are everywhere applicable." Although Bloom, Charles Krauthammer, Ben Wattenberg, and Bill Kristol have favored a secular American crusade, other neoconservatives make periodic attempts to ground the effort in a distinctly religious outlook. Such an approach was evident when Michael Novak began preaching about "democracy as a divine mission." In a Christmas 1988 syndicated column, Novak compared global democracy to the Incarnation of Christ, explaining, "citizens of the world demand the birth of democracy in history, in physical institutions: as physical as the birth in Bethlehem."

But such comparisons reeked of blasphemy and Novak, a self-advertised Catholic theologian, eventually put them away. A more palatable neocon theology has been an appeal to Hebraic-sounding ideals to buttress an interventionist foreign policy. This tactic has well-noted precedents; Richard Gamble's *War for Righteousness*, which looks at the millenarian rhetoric accompanying Woodrow Wilson's holy war for democracy, is particularly instructive here. Gamble documents the long-established American cultural receptiveness to democratic crusading clothed in biblical passages

and postmillenarian images. In the early 20th century, idealistic Americans believed that it was their duty to perfect the world politically in preparation for Christ's return. In the neoconservative reformulation, this rhetoric assumes an Old Testament resonance and stresses how the ascribed religious heritage matches the beliefs of Jewish immigrants and their descendants.

From this perspective, an assumed Puritan pedigree for neoconservatives may be seen as inevitable. George Will in *Statecraft as Soulcraft* had already highlighted the Puritans as a progressive religious force trying to overcome human deficiencies: their "overreaching as moralists" was "the most admirable and most American of the American excesses." That problematic virtue, which Will finds in the Puritans, has been customarily associated with the neoconservatives. In an isolated, qualified criticism, John Ehrman in *The Rise of Neoconservatism* notices his subjects' "overzealousness." Neoconservatives "frequently viewed their enemies as embodiments of evil who must be destroyed rather than as opponents who must be debated with and persuaded."

In a series of historical essays, moreover, Gertrude Himmelfarb has since the '80s celebrated the identifiably Protestant virtues of hard work and honesty in early 19th-century England. In a 1989 article for *Commentary* entitled "Victorian Values, Jewish Values," Himmelfarb attributes the same virtues to Eastern European Jews who immigrated to England and the United States.