



Hail Cesar

Perhaps we are less racially sensitive in Britain than you are in the United States. Most people here, at any rate, would not have been as concerned as Sarah Palin was

by Harry Reid's remarks about "Negro dialect." Most people here would have thought that Senator Reid was just being charmingly old-fashioned.

Britons tend to focus on immigrants rather than on racial minorities, no matter how dark-skinned (or light-skinned) those minorities are. There is a feeling on the street now that there are too many Poles and Romanians in London. In Piccadilly Circus on Christmas Eve, I came across four young men wrapped in sleeping bags and blankets. One was awake and rolling a cigarette. I assumed the men were Scottish drunkards and asked the smoker where they were from. "Poland," he said. He was ingratiatingly contrite about the state he was in. I gave him a small amount of money and, like a neurotic nun, asked him whether he'd be going to Mass on Christmas Day. "Oh, yes," he said, and grinned.

But without immigration, where would we be? Many of the most distinguished Englishmen and women have been immigrants: William the Conqueror, William of Orange, George I, Joseph Conrad, Henry James, T.S. Eliot, Lady Randolph Churchill, Lady Astor, the Duke of Edinburgh, Conrad Black, Mary Reid. What is true of England is even truer of the United States. The roll of honor is thunder in our ears: Alexander Hamilton, Andrew Carnegie, George Shearing, Bob Hope, Oscar Peterson, Henry Kissinger, Cary Grant, Lucky Luciano, Captain James T. Kirk.

Perhaps the greatest immigrant in recent years, however, is Cesar Millan, the Mexican-American dog trainer who has taken the world by storm with his TV show. Not only is he a good advertisement for immigration—he is a good advertisement for illegal immigration. He slipped across the border 20 years ago, and while still undocumented set up the Pacific Point Canine Academy. In 2000, he regularized his status and, in 2004, launched "The Dog Whisperer" on the National Geographic Channel, subsequently winning two Emmys. Last year, he became a U.S. citizen. Good for Cesar; good for the United States.

And good for all of us. There is something about this cocky, strutting, brave Mexican that is instantly appealing. But has he got anything to teach me? Hard to say. Just after Christmas, I adopted Harry, a freckled, 8-year-old Springer Spaniel, and a few days later I did the only thing possible under the circumstances: I bought Cesar's *Be The Pack Leader: Use Cesar's Way to Transform Your Dog ... And Your Life*.

Now I feel guilty. Here's why. Harry is a coward. I like that in a dog, but I am not sure that Cesar does. The other day in the park, Harry and I were approached by a tough Afro-Caribbean geezer accompanied by an even tougher Staffordshire Bull Terrier. No doubt both were pussycats, but I am pleased to report that Harry gave them almost as wide a berth as I did. His eyes were in the back of his head as we passed the

man and his dog, and Harry looked shiftily sideways at me, perhaps for reassurance. He didn't get any, and that's where I went wrong.

According to Cesar, I am supposed to be the leader, not the cringer. I am supposed to show "calm assertive energy" like Oprah. I am supposed to recognize Harry's energy level, which, ideally, ought to correspond to my own. There are four types of energy in a dog, Cesar teaches: very high energy, high energy, medium energy, and low energy. Who'd have thought? In the dog world, says Cesar, "energy is personality." When I read that passage to Harry, he looked at me with big, sad, reproachful eyes and shrugged. "Whatever," he said. "Who is this guy?"

Much of this stuff could have been dreamt up in a solar-powered Los Angeles tanning parlor, but I come to praise Cesar, not to bury him. The man is a genius, the American Dream made virtual reality, and as savvy as they come. Twenty years ago, he could not speak American. Now he speaks it more fluently than most natives, instructing us, for example, to get in touch with our intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and instinctual sides. At the same time, though, he has little time for gringo sentimentality. "Your dog is a dog," he says, "not a baby or a small furry person with a tail" and "This is a choke chain—learn how to use it."

Nothing Cesar says applies to Harry, of course, or to me. Harry is not just a dog, and I am not a leader. There will be no transformation. Still, thank heaven for the Dog Whisperer. He may not please the American Humane Society, but he sure pleases me. ■

Old World Charm

In Belgium, I have seen the past and it works.

By R.J. Stove

Arthur Hastings: Mind you, it's very different in France, isn't it?

Hercule Poirot: I would not know. I am not French, I am Belgian.

Arthur Hastings: Well, it's the same thing, you both eat horse-meat.

—Agatha Christie, *The Alphabet Murders*

ONE OF MONTY PYTHON'S 1970s sketches contains the profound observation, "Suddenly—nothing happened." It is a line hard to resist recalling when one ventures into Belgium's capital. For anyone who has arrived in Brussels after London's horrors, resistance is not merely hard but hopeless.

At the cross-Channel Eurostar train's London depot are all the appurtenances of the terrorism-obsessed Nanny State: endless perusal of one's passport, as if mere staring at each of its pages in turn would reveal the key to the origin of the universe; CCTV screens everywhere; swaggering boors in uniform who subject passengers to almost every possible body-searching technique short of outright indecent assault. But at the Eurostar's Brussels depot—zilch. No third degree, no screaming intercom announcements, no foot- (or knuckle-) dragging customs guards. Even the station's much dreaded pickpocketing gypsies are nowhere to be seen. I arrived on a Sunday; perhaps for the gypsies, as once for Melina Mercouri, Sunday is a day of rest.

After London, Brussels has an atmosphere difficult to describe yet somehow evoking freedom. How unpatrician. How inimical to every concept

of "national greatness." How lovely. The tribute Alistair Cooke once paid to Ireland seems relevant for Belgium as well: "The great thing about this country is—there's always somebody who doesn't care."

Belgium might not be everyone's first choice for a pleasure jaunt, but then I was here less for pleasure than business. Before arriving, I had done everything that Australia-based sources and abundant international interlibrary loans allowed to research my biography of Belgium's leading composer, César Franck. This book has occupied me for more than a decade. It threatens to surpass in length, if not in readability, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*.

What I could no longer postpone consulting were Franck-related archival materials available solely in two Belgian cities, one of them Brussels itself, the other Liège, Franck's birthplace. Understandably, neither Brussels's Bibliothèque Royale nor Liège's Conservatoire would allow such materials to be removed from the premises. So here I was, 11,000 miles from home, wondering if the whole project would prove an expensive disaster.

I need not have worried for a second. From both Brussels's and Liège's librarians I experienced civility, efficiency, and generosity that made me feel like no one so much as a starving Italian peasant in 1948 receiving his first taste of Marshall Plan largesse. Not even my earlier, protracted e-mail correspondence had prepared me for the conscientiousness with which these librarians smoothed my

research route. On their goodwill I shall not expatiate here. Perfect intellectual happiness has its own Chatham House rules. And what I underwent, when confronted with rare documents that I had never expected to see—including two Franck manuscripts of whose existence I had not hitherto learnt—came as close to intellectual bliss as anything I am likely to know in this life. What I supposed would require weeks of labor took mere days. There are many worse destinies than to spend extra free time in Belgium.

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While Belgium occupies no bigger an area than New Jersey, it contains more than 10.6 million people, 1.7 million of whom live in Brussels itself. The specter of loneliness is unlikely to haunt Belgians. But strangely, the place seldom feels cluttered. After the insane overcrowding of London life, Brussels seems almost like a somnolent country town, free from excessive vehicular traffic, from London's grotesque polyphony of incessant car horns (what P. J. O'Rourke called "Egyptian brake pedals"), and from the caged-rat rudeness now compulsory with public London discourse. Merely to ask directions from a stranger is to appreciate the contrast.

Me (in French): Excuse me, sir, where is the cathedral?

Brussels Stranger (in French): Over there, to your left.

This was the outcome of a similar request, several days earlier, in London: