

RETURN — of the — NATIVISTS

*The GOP has made the cynical decision to become
the anti-immigration party. But in addition to making no
economic sense, the nativist position is political suicide.*

When will the Republicans learn?

B Y S T E P H E N M O O R E

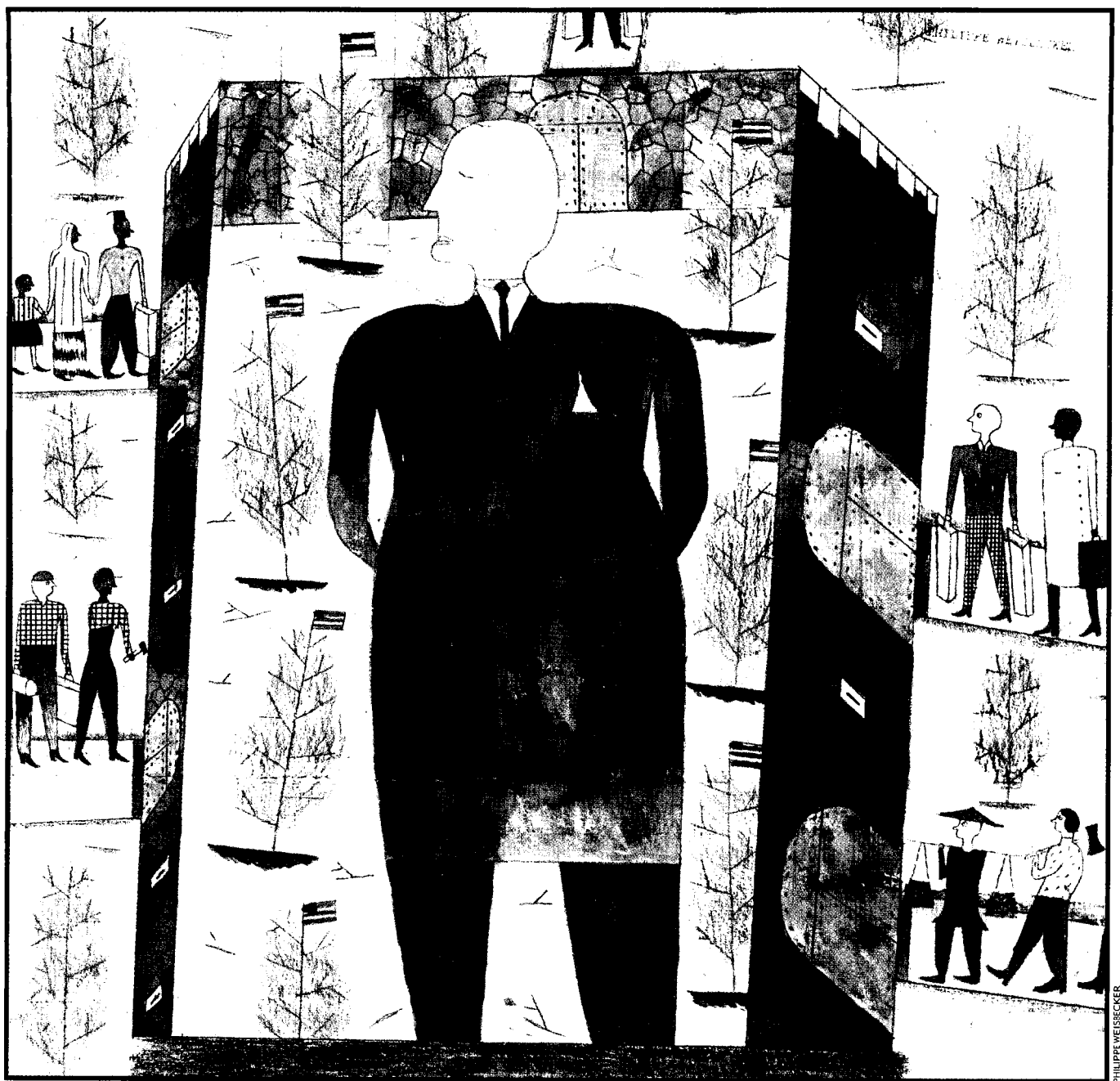
There was an east European immigrant who was asked, immediately after taking his oath of United States citizenship, how it felt to finally be an American. He responded in his thick German accent: "I'm suddenly overwhelmed with a sense that we have to do something to keep out all of these foreigners."

"Keeping out the foreigners" is a highly popular theme within the Republican ranks on Capitol Hill these days. If Wyoming Senator Alan Simpson and Texas Rep. Lamar Smith—chairmen of the subcommittee on immigration in

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the Senate and House, respectively—have their way, the first Republican Congress in forty years will leave as its most enduring legacy not a balanced budget, tax cuts, less regulation, or term limits, but instead the most restrictive immigration bill since the 1920's. Simpson and Smith are leading the charge to reduce legal immigration quotas by roughly one-third, from 750,000 to half a million per year.

Yet not even that drastic cut is enough to satisfy the most strident anti-immigration Republicans, who are calling for a "time out" on immigration. Arizona Rep. Bob Stump has proposed the "Immigration Moratorium Act of 1995," and has corralled more than seventy-five co-sponsors, most of them Republicans. On the Senate side, Alabama's Richard



PHILIPPE WEISCKER

Shelby, the recent defector to the GOP, has sponsored a similar bill—Alabama these days is apparently as overrun by foreigners as Simpson's Wyoming.

Meanwhile, hysteria over illegal immigration has led even the most anti-big government Republicans to embrace one truly horrific idea: a national worker computer registry. Under this scheme, designed to keep illegal immigrants out of the workforce, employers would be forced to phone in the Social Security numbers of the 65 million workers who change jobs each year, and then await Washington's permission to hire them. Steve Chabot of Ohio appropriately dubbed the computer registry idea "1-800-BIG-BROTHER." Chabot's amendment to eliminate

the registry idea was soundly defeated on the House floor.

It gets worse. In the House, where GOP nativism is much more intense than in the relatively moderate Senate, Republican Bill McCollum of Florida came within a hair's-breadth in March of winning an amendment designed to turn the Social Security card into a forgery-proof national photo ID card. This would force 261 million legal Americans to comply with a legal procedure aimed at four million illegal residents. (If you think it's an adventure dealing with your friendly neighborhood Department of Motor Vehicles when you lose your driver's license, imagine how much fun it will be requesting your new tamper-resistant national ID card from the Social Security

Administration when your wallet gets stolen.) Not to be outdone, Simpson has argued that any such card, to be truly effective, should really include not just a photograph, but a "biometric identifier." Whether that means a fingerprint, retina scan, or blood sample isn't certain as yet. Oh, for a return to the good old days when it was the Clintons who were peddling health-security cards and Republicans who were ridiculing the idea.

Make no mistake about it: the GOP—particularly its normally free-market conservative wing—has taken a decidedly nativist turn. While supply-side, pro-growth Republicans like Jack Kemp, Dick Armey, Newt Gingrich, William Bennett, Jeane Kirkpatrick, and Ronald Reagan have traditionally supported a liberal immigration policy, the new generation of Republicans tends to be dangerously attracted to the closed minds and closed borders attitude of Pat Buchanan. When Lamar Smith's anti-immigration bill was brought to the House floor earlier this year, Republicans voted with him by a two-to-one margin to slash legal immigration. Those who voted in favor of the cut included, with the exception of Armey, most of the GOP's conservative leadership: Bill Archer, John Boehner, Chris Cox, Tom DeLay, Henry Hyde, and John Kasich. (Speaker Newt Gingrich has kept out of the discussion.)

The debate over the Smith bill illustrated just how rancorous the immigration issue has become. Armed with charts and easels, a pair of California Republicans, Anthony Beilenson and Bob Goodlatte, took to the floor to dramatize the perils of U.S. population growth. "The Census Bureau now sees our population growing unabated into the late twenty-first century," Beilenson declared, "when it will reach 700 million, 800 million, a billion Americans—unless we start acting now to lower our levels of legal immigration." Sounding like the last disciple of the Club of Rome, he continued, "Population growth means that...future generations of Americans cannot possibly have the quality of life we have." Actually, the Census Bureau projected in March that the U.S. population will grow to 392 million in 2050. It required a liberal Democrat, Howard Berman of California, to remind everyone that Malthus had been proved wrong more than a century ago.

The bill was ultimately defeated, but not without the somewhat heroic efforts of Republican freshmen Sam Brownback of Kansas and Dick Chrysler of Michigan, who teamed with Democrats to defeat the measure. As Brownback and Chrysler walked from the House floor after the vote, they were greeted with icy stares and hisses from many of their GOP colleagues, who were displaying the kind of vitriol normally only reserved for left-wing Democrats.

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"Wherever you go," Bob Dole says with his usual grandiloquence, "illegal immigration is a big, big issue." In an election year, the topic takes on special importance—and Dole, to his credit, has distanced himself from the more inflammatory anti-immigrant Buchanan rhetoric. Still, he says he favors a "modest reduction in legal immigration." And his California campaign chairman, the border-hawk Governor, Pete Wilson, is urging Dole to make a tough stance on immigration "one of the most vivid points of contrast" between him and Clinton.

Why is it that the huddled masses have suddenly fallen into such disrepute within the hierarchy of the Republican Party? There are three primary factors: jobs,

welfare, and polls.

Alan Simpson has been bashing immigration advocates as "eager to see aliens hurt the job opportunities and depress wages of U.S. workers." But is this really what happens? Probably the most persuasive rejoinder to this age-old complaint was offered to me three years ago by a teenaged Mexican immigrant (legal or illegal, I don't know) who was picking crops for ten hours a day near the San Diego border. He gave me a puzzled gaze when I told him that many American workers suspect that immigrants like him were stealing jobs from U.S. citizens. "What is all this talk about not enough jobs?" he replied. "Why, I've only been in America for two weeks, and I already have three jobs."

In fact, it is not the immigrants who destroy jobs and depress wages—it's the liberals. The minimum wage destroys jobs, as do inane regulations like the Americans with Disabilities Act. The world-record tax increases foisted on the American people by George Bush and Bill Clinton destroy jobs. A government that squanders \$1.65 trillion a year destroys jobs. Anti-immigrant conservatives seem to forget just who the real enemy of prosperity is. The likes of Bill Clinton, Al Gore, Robert Reich, David Bonior, Pete Wilson, and Bob Dole have destroyed more jobs than have all the illegal immigrants of the last twenty years.

Indeed, if it were true that immigrants depress wages and working conditions, it surely should have happened in the 1980's, when 7.5 million immigrants entered the United States legally, one of the largest waves of immigration in absolute numbers since the great Ellis Island migration at the turn of the century. At the start of the decade unemployment was at nearly 8 percent and the economy was reeling from Jimmy Carter's mini-depression. Yet by the end of the Reagan era, unemployment was down to below 6 percent, household incomes had risen for every income group, and most McDonald's were paying well above the minimum wage—industry had begun to complain of a labor

Vince Foster's Death *The Cover-up*

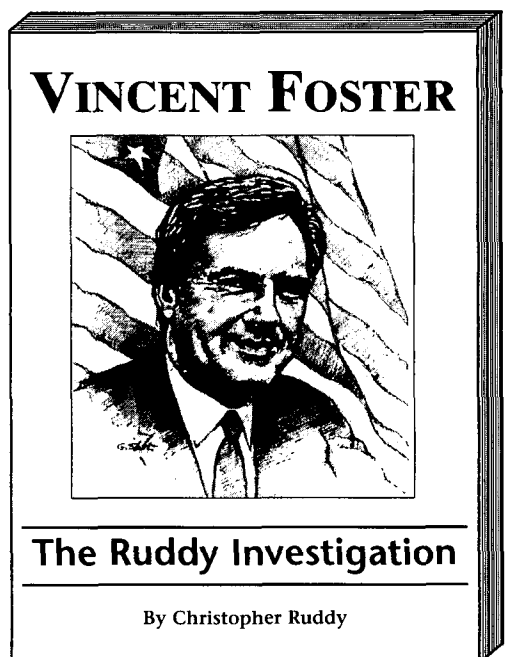
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shortage. The supply-side effects of Reagan tax cuts, free trade policies, and the anti-regulatory crusade had trumped the possible negative employment effects from a liberal immigration policy. California, which had absorbed roughly one-third of all newcomers in the decade, enjoyed the most rapid surge in incomes and growth of all.

Immigrants were a major contributor to this economic boom. Those who complain that the melting pot no longer works have never been to Silicon Valley. More than 100,000 inventive and enterprising immigrants, many with world-class skills, have helped propel the U.S. to unrivaled global leadership in virtually every high technology field—pharmaceuticals, bio-tech, computer software, semi-conductors, satellite technologies, electronics, and telecommunications. “A decision to cut back legal immigration today, as Congress is contemplating,” writes George Gilder, “is a decision to wreck the key element of the American technological miracle.”

Tom Gann, head of government affairs for Sun Microsystems, one of the hottest U.S. microchip producers, defends immigration as a key to his company's health. “If you took away the 200 top immigrant scientists and engineers from Silicon Valley,” he says, “it would bring the U.S. semiconductor industry to its knees.” This past February Microsoft Corp.'s Bill Gates echoed those sentiments, telling Congress that Alan Simpson's proposed immigration bill was “an absolute disaster.” Gates fumed, “If you want to prevent companies like ours from doing business in the United States, this bill is a masterpiece.”

Anti-immigrant conservatives aren't moved by arguments about the value of importing the high-skilled talent pool. Norman Matloff of the University of California, Davis, recently wrote in *National Review* that Gates and others in hi-tech industries could prosper just fine by relying on good-old Yankee ingenuity alone. The United States doesn't need to recruit high-skilled foreigners, he contends, because there are now more U.S.-born computer science and engineering graduates than there are jobs. Ergo, the immigrant scientists must be simply displacing the natives or depressing wages. Yet according to a new study published by Empower America, foreign-born workers in virtually all engineering fields earn substantially more than the prevailing wage for U.S. workers. In other words, immigrants who earn more can't be pushing down wages.

What is really at issue here is whether immigrants add value and create wealth. One could argue that America has plenty of basketball players, so the NBA clearly doesn't need Hakeem Olajuwon. But Olajuwon is not just a foreign-born basketball player. He's arguably the best player in the world. This is what immigration does—it doesn't only import workers, it imports talent, uniqueness, even genius. This human capital is, as T.J. Rodgers, CEO of Cypress Semiconductors, insists, “the scarcest resource in the world today.” The U.S. is virtually alone in its ability to attract it. This is what drives innovation, productivity, and higher living standards—for all American workers.

Which brings us to our second issue: the United States as a welfare magnet. As Lamar Smith puts it, “immigrants make heavy use of the welfare system” and thus impose large costs on American taxpayers. Let's skip over the logical contortions here: that one moment the immigrants are taking all the good jobs and the next they're deadbeats on welfare.

The truth is that there is disturbing evidence, uncovered by George Borjas of Harvard University, that immigrant use of welfare is increasing—especially by refugees. Welfare is now having the same destructive effect on the foreign-born that it has on American citizens: it saps people of their economic energies and entraps them in an odious culture of dependency. Welfare use is now slightly higher for the foreign-born than it is for U.S.-born citizens. The most abused program is Supplemental Security Income (SSI), a cash assistance program for seniors. Over the past twelve years SSI immigrant case loads have exploded by more than 500 percent, draining the federal treasury of \$4 billion a year. Conservative restrictionists, such as *Alien Nation* author Peter Brimelow, triumphantly seize on these figures as evidence that immigrants are a fiscal drain on U.S. taxpayers.

Yet despite their higher use of means-tested welfare programs, immigrants are still a bargain for U.S. taxpayers when their total fiscal impact is accounted for. Brimelow and others conveniently omit from their balance sheets the two income-transfer behemoths in the federal budget: Social Security and Medicare. Together these welfare programs for senior citizens are roughly three times larger than the rest of the social safety net combined.

Given that most immigrants come to the United States at the start of their working years (between the ages of 18-35), they make substantial and prolonged payroll tax contributions to the system without any corresponding outlay—since their parents are either not here or ineligible. By the time the immigrants reach retirement age and begin to collect benefits, they have children paying taxes to match the outlays. The actuaries at the Social Security Administration calculate that each year immigrants constitute a net windfall to the system of more than \$10 billion annually. University of Maryland economist Julian Simon has proved that when this fiscal effect is properly accounted for, each foreign-born worker contributes about \$2,500 per year more in taxes than he uses in services. In other words, fewer immigrants would mean higher budget deficits.

Nonetheless, let's all accept the proposition that immigrant use of welfare is a bad thing. *Newsweek* columnist Joe Klein had it right when he wrote recently, “Immigrants aren't destroying America; America is destroying the immigrants.” What we have here is two classic American institutions colliding: immigration and the welfare state. One has for more than 200 years been an unqualified success. The other for the past thirty years has been a source of social and economic decay. So wouldn't it make more sense for conservatives to abolish welfare and preserve immigration? Make

non-citizens ineligible for all public assistance benefits. The immigrants will still come without hesitation. The magnet is economic opportunity and freedom, not hand-outs.

Finally, there is the politics of immigration. *National Review*, which has provided the intellectual cover for the nativist drift within the GOP, warns that if Republicans fail to pass steep reductions in admissions, the GOP will be committing "electoral suicide." The Republican National Committee, which recently enjoined the nativist wing of the party with a memorandum crammed with immigrant-bashing myths entitled "America: Welcoming Mat or Door Mat," believes that the immigration issue is political pay dirt for the GOP. The RNC's strategy is to paint the Democrats as "soft on immigration."

To buttress the claim that nativism is good politics, we are forever bombarded with poll numbers. At one point during the House floor debate, Lamar Smith even quoted an immigration survey from *Glamour* magazine. (Who says congressmen don't have time to read!) But what are these polls really telling us? Yes, two-thirds of Americans want less immigration when asked the generic question whether they want more, less, or the same amount of immigration. In fact, that's what the polls have been telling us at least since Pat Buchanan's ancestors arrived in the U.S. only to be confronted with "IRISH NEED NOT APPLY" signs in shop windows. But the hostility has never been deep-rooted. A March 1996 poll by GrassRoots Research found that 61 percent of Americans agree with the statement: "Anyone from any country in the world should be free to come to America if they are financially able to provide for themselves and their family."

In the 1992 election George Bush managed to capture a majority of the votes from just two major demographic groups: evangelic Christians and Asians. Yet more than half of the immigrants who would be denied entry into the U.S. under the Smith-Simpson restrictions were Asians. And Michigan freshman Republican Senator Spence Abraham, who in late April defeated Simpson's effort to limit legal immigration, says that his high profile on the issue has improved his popularity in the state and broadened his support among Asian and Hispanic voters. A strong anti-immigration position could be electoral suicide for the GOP.

So where's the evidence that nativism translates into votes? Proposition 187 in California, which denies public assistance benefits to illegal immigrants, is held up as the model, but that was as much an anti-welfare measure as it was an anti-immigrant initiative. There hasn't been a single

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major candidate for Congress or the White House in the past thirty years elected on an immigrant-bashing platform. Just prior to the California primary, Peter Brimelow hopefully predicted that the broad appeal of Buchanan's new nativism would "persuade Californians to send Washington a message on March 26." But on March 26, Buchanan was trounced by Dole, and barely outdistanced his alter-ego, the pro-immigrant, free-trader Steve Forbes, who had already dropped from the race.

Even so, throughout the Republican primaries, whenever the topic of immigration reared its ugly head, there were no symbolic references to America as a "shining city on a hill." Instead there was a debate over whether it would be preferable to (1) bring the troops home from Europe and place armed guards along the border of the Rio Grande or (2) build a Berlin Wall around the United States.

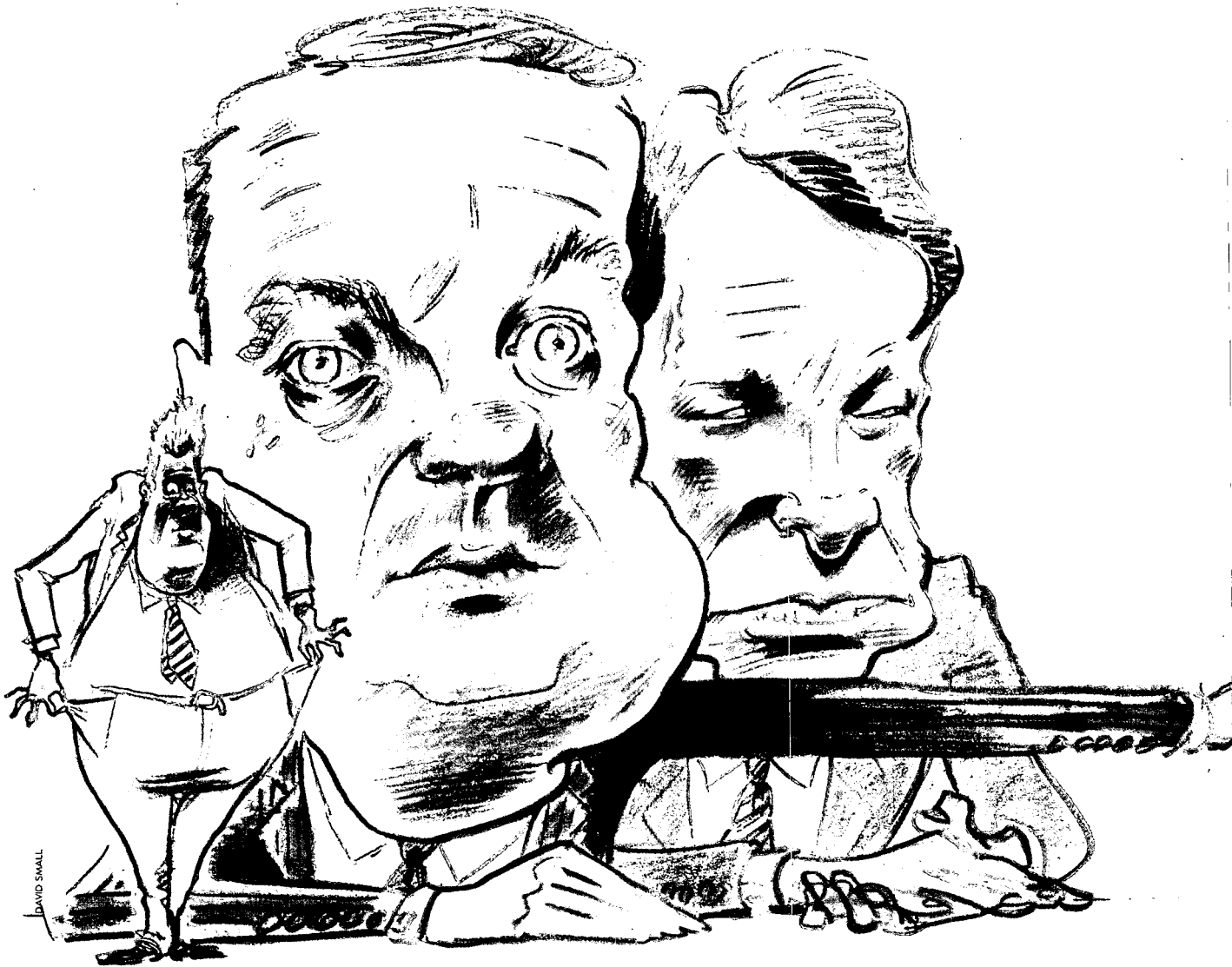
Though Steve Forbes rejected Buchanan's imagery of America "under siege from a foreign invasion," Lamar Alexander and Phil Gramm seemed all too comfortable with the Buchananite "fortress America" mentality.

Somehow the conservatives have failed to learn from the most successful politician of our lifetime: Ronald Reagan. The overtly pro-immigration Reagan was elected in 1980 when the economy was reeling and xenophobia was at its zenith, and yet he managed to carry forty-one states. That lesson shouldn't be lost on congressional Republicans who've gone off-message: Americans fear big government far more than they fear immigrants.

Perhaps this is precisely what is most insidious about the nativist ascent within the GOP. The position undermines the rest of the Republican theme of less government, more freedom. It muddies the message and belies a crisis of conviction on the part of Republicans that the freedom solution to America's economic malaise and social decay will work.

Worst of all, to accept the nativist proposition is to accept, by default, all of the great modern-day liberal lies: that markets are dysfunctional; that we live in a zero sum society; that there are limits to growth; that America is an empire in decline.

It impels normally level-headed politicians to endorse policy quackery. "NO ENTRY" signs draped over the Statue of Liberty. Militarization of the border. Twenty-foot fences around America. An infatuation with internal passport systems. And perhaps most distressing of all: a prevailing Malthusian attitude that there's simply no more room at the inn. Not a very attractive picture of America as it enters the twenty-first century. ❀



WHITE HOUSE LIFE & CASUALTY

Last year Bob Bennett was faced with a tricky problem: What to do about a client who can't pay his bills? By the middle of 1995, the Washington super-lawyer had run up more than \$900,000 in legal charges defending Bill Clinton against the Paula Jones sexual

harassment lawsuit. It was an enormous tab—an indication that the \$475-per-hour Bennett and his lower-priced associates had spent thousands of hours on Clinton's defense. But it was just the beginning. Bennett's strategy was to avoid the substance of the suit and argue instead that the president cannot be sued while in office—a constitutional issue sure to end up in the Supreme Court and thus drag on into 1997

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