

countries are reason enough to stay put.

But the continued presence and spread of the foreign population is a small problem compared to the massive influx of poor non-Westerners, which is certain to continue until and unless the populist parties either win control of Western European governments or exert enough pressure to force a thorough going reform of immigration laws. Amartya Sen, in an essay published in the *New York Review of Books*, observes that the populations of the so-called developing countries are rapidly expanding even as per capita incomes in those countries are sharply declining. In countries that are too poor to tackle the problems involved in feeding their current populations, Sen suggests, a skyrocketing birthrate will only make existing strains on resources even less tolerable and increase the temptation to emigrate.

If this is true, then the current populist uprising may only be a prelude to a far wider conflict. Whether Western Europe will escape colonization by the very people it once subjugated may depend on the outcome of that battle.

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Maybe Forever

by John C. Vinson

The Immigration Invasion

by Wayne Lutton and John Tanton
Petoskey, Michigan: The Social Contract Press; 192 pp., \$4.95



Is the current wave of immigration to America, mainly from the Third World, an invasion? Wayne Lutton and John Tanton maintain that it is. The authors effectively argue that our unprecedented level of immigration, forced on the country by selfish interests, is re-making America in many negative ways, especially by eroding our national culture. But are Lutton and Tanton justified in using a term suggestive of violent conquest? After all, the arrival of approximately 1.2 million foreigners each year is mainly peaceful, even if about 300,000 of that total come illegally. But

even if "invasion" is not the best word, the authors are correct to imply that the term "immigration," by itself, does not do justice to our predicament.

Say "immigration," and the average American will call to mind the image of Emma Lazarus's "huddled masses," or maybe an arriving Old World couple viewing the Statue of Liberty for the first time with admiration in their eyes. Schools and the media have carefully planted and cultivated these mental images—sometimes with honest intent and sometimes on behalf of interests that stand to reap power and profit from streams of newcomers. Yet lest we have any misgivings, "immigration," we are assured, will one day result in assimilation of the immigrants to the American way of life. The image is that of the Melting Pot.

But as Tanton and Lutton show, all trends indicate that the overload of immigrants and their unprecedented diversity are causing a meltdown of the pot: that immigrants are changing America more than America is changing them. If "immigration" is no longer the appropriate word, then what is? One possibility is "colonization." Though the term may connote military action, it also suggests the idea of a group of people arriving in a land and imposing itself on the inhabitants, even if the process is relatively nonviolent. Many immigrants today are not bashful about flying the colonial colors, and some, like past colonialists, even believe they are rendering a service to the "natives": a Korean immigrant recently proclaimed in a newspaper column that the mission of his people was to improve the moral climate of American life. Some humility, however, may be in order for this Asian Kipling with his *Yellow Man's Burden*. For example, the proliferation of Korean-owned liquor stores in South-Central Los Angeles has made many of the locals restless; they do not appreciate this influence on their moral climate. Other self-proclaimed gift-bearers are those Hispanic immigrants who would offer us the superior "family values" of Latin American culture, even as the Hispanic illegitimacy rate (immigrants and native-born together) considerably exceeds that of the white American majority.

Some immigrants, like many pro-immigration Americans, maintain that newcomers have special vigor and energy that native-born Americans somehow lack. In their view, America, like Count

Dracula, needs regular supplies of "new blood" for health and well-being, and particularly for the American economy. Left unexplained is how such countries as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan get along quite well with their own blood.



Not all colonists, of course, have good intentions, or even claim to have them. Many Mexican immigrants make it plain that they are coming to recover California and the other "lost territories" of Mexico. Once here, they hope to reinforce their claim to these lands through high birthrates generously subsidized, as Tanton and Lutton point out, with taxes from the rest of us. Particularly troubling is a group called MEChA, based on a number of campuses in California and other states. With the help of unchecked immigration, it advocates ethnic cleansing to rid the American Southwest of all non-Hispanics. Admittedly, MEChA is a fringe organization, but even the mainstream of the pro-immigrant movement seems to view the frontier between the United States and Mexico as hardly more significant than the state line between California and Nevada.

In October, illegal aliens and their American supporters organized a mass rally and march of 70,000 people in Los Angeles to affirm the inalienable right of aliens to utilize the tax monies paid by American citizens; large numbers carried Mexican flags. Though Tanton and Lutton may exaggerate by using the term "invasion," in another sense they understate the problem. An invaded country may hope that the invader will depart some day, leaving it to return to normal. Once Hitler's troops left France, the country went back to being French. But foreign populations, as opposed to foreign armies, are another matter. Can Miami and Los Angeles ever become American cities again?

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Lies, Damn Lies, and Absurdities

by Loxley F. Nichols

Recovering American Literature

by Peter Shaw

Chicago: Ivan R. Dee;

203 pp., \$22.00



Despite its optimistic title, *Recovering American Literature* is really about the severity of illness, the magnitude of loss. In a book weighted with evidence, Peter Shaw shows how literature has suffered by subverting art to politics. Substituting the dogma of political correctness for universal themes and metaphysical questions, academics since the 1960's have been reinterpreting the masterpieces of our literature solely as testaments to political subversion, thereby rendering American masterpieces decidedly anti-American.

Not content merely with bending them, critics of the last 30 years have essentially dispensed with traditional rules of literary discussion. Ideas considered marginal in the 1950's have now gained general acceptance by even the most respected critics. While grains of truth often lie buried in revisionist discourse, they have been amplified to such proportions that the part is taken for the whole. To illustrate the distortions of this politicizing trend, Shaw outlines the historically evolving critiques of *The Scarlet Letter*, *Moby Dick*, *Billy Budd*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Bostonians*, and Melville's *Typee*.

Making these works acceptable (and "relevant") has often meant turning them into polemics devoid of their original meaning. Whereas traditional critics of *The Scarlet Letter*, for example, exonerated the law as just, contemporary ones now condemn it as tyrannical, while rejecting out of hand James's validation of the natural world in *The Bostonians*. Often arriving at such transformations by claiming an ironical intention, modern critics simplistically resolve troubling complexities and irreconcilable ambivalences and synthetically flatten symbolism to allegory. Although black critics still praise *Huckleberry Finn* as a book that "reaffirms the values of our democratic faith,"

many of their white counterparts, outraged by Twain's depiction of race and ignoring the book's mythic or symbolic levels of meaning, have decided that Twain must have been writing *ironically* about the false promises of Reconstruction. Some critics have gone so far as to insist that "from a correct historical point of view, the American slaves were never truly set free." To Neil Schmitz, the notion of Jim's freedom "seems actually obscene." Regarding *Moby Dick*, too, political interest preempts all other considerations, including the spiritual. Melville's magnum opus has been narrowed to a diatribe against capitalism and its exploitation of nonwhites, the working class, and women. It is really meant, some specialists declare anachronistically, as a warning against nuclear warfare and misuse of the ecosystem! In 1988, Professor Elizabeth Schultz proclaimed, "*Moby Dick* convinces me to work to prevent ecological, economic, and political catastrophe."

Characters and plots are subjected to similar reassessments. Certain commentators on *Huckleberry Finn* go so far as to find *all* the characters contemptible, including and perhaps especially the genial Jim (why has he no murderous instincts against whites?), and the plot insipid (why doesn't Twain have Jim lynched?) Hester Prynne, we are told, is not sufficiently radical either. One critic believes that Hester's restraint renders her a "hypocrite" and a "liar." Another is unhappy because she "will not surrender her commitment to her new, desexed intellectual self." Verena Tarrant, whom both Henry and William James warmly praised, has been labeled a "nonentity" and a "fool" by feminist critics disappointed in Verena for succumbing to "nature's ploy" and choosing marriage over political life with Olive Chancellor. Feminist criticism of *The Bostonians* can be egregiously hypocritical. Dismissing negative reaction to Olive as an "embattled phallic principle making a desperate stand," Judith Fetterly, claiming license to "a different subjectivity," has herself said that Olive is "morbid," "has the psychology of the loser," and "believes ultimately neither in herself nor in women nor in their cause or movement." In *Billy Budd*, it is now Captain Vere rather than Claggart who is viewed as the true villain, Melville's description of Vere's virtues being taken ironically. Indulging in wishful thinking, critics from the 1960's on have sought to show how

Captain Vere could have spared Billy's life. In fact, both the martial law of the time and Melville's well-documented conservatism at the end of his life, when he wrote *Billy Budd*, preclude such "resistance readings." The real crime is not committed by any one of the characters but by the critics themselves: "For by assuming that there is a way out of the dilemma posed by Melville, and by denouncing Captain Vere for not taking it, the resistance reader spares himself the philosophical and moral conundrum posed by the story as written."

What cannot be rendered politically correct by reductions, omissions, and inversions is traced to authorial defects. Hawthorne's ambivalent treatment of Hester, once considered an aesthetic accomplishment, is now explained as a symptom of "repressed authorial anxieties" issuing from "sublimated incest wishes." In trying to defend such positions, however, professionals often make embarrassing blunders, sometimes confusing fiction with real life: "The phrase 'punitive plotting' . . . charged Hawthorne with mistreating a Hester in effect conceived of as a real person." Hawthorne denies Hester her capacity to act and "condemns her to silence." In denigrating James as a "masculinist" for his satirical treatment of feminism and the victory of heterosexuality over lesbianism in *The Bostonians*, critics forget that James himself was not heterosexual: "That nature's process did not apply to all was something he knew from personal experience. But he was not interested in reducing his art to a reflection of his own peculiar essence."

In comparison with Shaw's essay "The Assault on the Canon" (*Sewanee Review*, Spring 1994), *Recovering American Literature* is curiously reserved in tone, but the evidence speaks for itself. The clarity and understated wit of Shaw's prose style make this book enjoyable as well as informative. Remarking the equivocations of one critic of *Typee*, Shaw says: "Stern unfortunately perpetuated this kind of verbal imprecision by referring to the scrounging for edibles aboard Melville's ship when stores were low as an example of 'western spoilation and cannibalism.' This is a highly inaccurate way to describe eating the captain's pig."

The seeming arbitrariness of Shaw's choice of classics and of his organization of his material somewhat diffuses the work's focus. Treating each of four books in a separate chapter isolates the indi-