

# The Dialectic of Suicide

by Samuel Francis

“A nation never falls but by suicide.”

—R.W. Emerson

Who Are We? The Cultural Core of American National Identity  
by Samuel P. Huntington  
New York: Simon and Schuster;  
408 pp., \$27.00

The ambush was prepared and actually triggered several months before Samuel Huntington's *Who Are We?* appeared in print. When Mr. Huntington, the author of *The Clash of Civilizations* and a leading political scientist at Harvard, published last winter an excerpt from his new book dealing with the threat posed to American national cultural identity by mass immigration from Latin America, he was lambasted almost at once in the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times*, and the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, while the *Washington Post* ran a tinny *Style* section satire ridiculing his thesis and the idea that immigration could ever possibly be a “threat” to anyone. Probably not since the publication of *The Bell Curve* in 1994 have the serried ranks of the establishment media and the ruling class they serve closed so quickly on a book offering ideas they find inconvenient to their myths and interests.

The threat they perceived had nothing to do with mass immigration or the loss of a cultural core identity that Huntington laments but, rather, with the prospect that anyone, especially a major Harvard academic of Huntington's stature, might think immigration could threaten the American nation's “cultural identity,” let alone that such an “identity”

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exists. Just as the hereditarian and anti-egalitarian implications of *The Bell Curve* had to be concealed as quickly as possible, so Huntington's ideas had to be strangled in their cradle. What the Harvard professor is saying in *Who Are We?* is—in many but not all respects—very much the same as what Pat Buchanan, Peter Brimelow, *Chronicles*, Chilton Williamson, Jr., and I, among several others, have been saying about mass immigration for years or decades. And when these ideas seep down to places like Harvard, the ruling class sniffs trouble.

Huntington argues that America indeed has a “cultural core identity,” that it is not just a “creedal nation” as liberals and most neoconservatives and libertarians like to assert, and that this identity is the “Anglo-Protestant core” created by British settlers of the 17th and 18th centuries—an identity that produced

American political institutions and values, national economic and intellectual achievements, and national coherence as a unified society. He argues further that, today, this identity is under threat from two major forces: mass immigration, mainly Mexican but also Hispanic generally, by peoples who, owing to their numbers and their own cultural attachments, do not and cannot assimilate to the Anglo-Protestant core; and “America's business, professional, intellectual, and academic elites” who have rejected national identity of any kind and (in the case of intellectual elites at least) have abandoned “commitment to their nation and their fellow citizens and argue the moral superiority of identifying with humanity at large.” On the latter point, Huntington joins the late Christopher Lasch, James Burnham, and other analysts of the American ruling class.

So far, the argument will be thoroughly familiar to *Chronicles* readers, since various writers have pushed virtually the same ideas here; there are, however, differences between their ideas and Huntington's. In the first place, while paleoconservatives have, for the most part, rejected the very concept of an “American Creed” as the defining element of the national identity, Huntington, for all his qualifications of the idea, insists on retaining it. Against the creedal nationalists (who mainly tell us that the equality language of the Declaration of Independence and the Gettysburg Address constitute the abstractions to which American society must be made to conform by the federal government, and to which the rest of the planet must be made to conform by America), Huntington insists that the United States is defined by more than that. Nevertheless, he argues that the na-

tion does have a creed, the main exponents of which have been “foreign observers from Crèvecoeur to Tocqueville, Bryce, and [Gunnar] Myrdal.” These he understands, with the creedal nationalists, to incorporate the “political principles of liberty, equality, democracy, individualism, human rights, the rule of law, and private property,” and the “American Creed” — in other words, liberalism.

Huntington rightly insists, however, that the creed is not all there is; that the creed itself is simply the result of the “Anglo-Protestant core” that created the nation in the first place and that, so far from being universal or existing *in abstracto* as an independent metaphysical substance, the creed cannot exist apart from the cultural core from which it arose and upon which it depends for its survival. It never appears to dawn on Huntington that his claim contains a central contradiction: The creed purports to be universal, but, if it is really *not* universal, it is false.

Insofar as a creed exists, Huntington is entirely correct in calling it a cultural artifact specific to American society and not a universal truth that all human beings everywhere and at all times yearn to embrace, nor a force of nature or super-nature. The liberalism that the creed embodies is simply an ideology boiled down from various philosophical writers of the 18th and 19th centuries and adapted to suit convenient political purposes and group interests of the hour: the aspirations of the middle classes in the Industrial Revolution; the working classes of the 19th and 20th centuries; and, more recently still, the sexual, ethnic, and racial collectives that have crept out of the cultural woodwork in our own day. Like any other “creed,” that of liberalism may be true or false, and must be judged accordingly. It is not (as the very term, in capital letters, suggests) a dogma like the Apostle’s Creed or the Nicene Creed that defines divinely revealed orthodoxies and to which all must adhere on pain of excommunication.

**I**n truth, there simply is no such thing as the “American Creed” at all. There are a Declaration of Independence, a Constitution, a Bill of Rights, a Gettysburg Address, and lots of other documents, speeches, laws, books, and statements of one sort or another thrown up over the course of American history, but there is no such document called by anyone the “American Creed.” American society, like every other human society that is not

the concoction of ideologues, has no creed. It has a way of life, a culture, an identity manifested in the actual institutions, values, and conduct of its people; any formula that seeks to reduce that identity to the kind of sound bites that the editors of *National Review* and the *Weekly Standard* can understand necessarily distorts, falsifies, and (in Michael Oakeshott’s term) abridges the real tradition.

That is why not just Mexican or Hispanic immigration but immigration generally — the introduction of any new element that is foreign to the society — threatens the cultural identity of the nation. In the 19th century, as Huntington acknowledges, the United States passed from an “Anglo” nation (defined by its almost entirely British, and largely English, population) to a “Euro” one (in which European immigrants and their descendants played an increasingly important and shaping role). He is correct in saying that the European immigrants assimilated much more easily than today’s non-European immigrants are doing because, despite not being British, they were close enough to Anglo-American cultural identities to conform relatively easily to the main patterns of language, religion, political institutions, and folkways. The pan-European immigration of the 19th century did, however, change the Anglo-Protestant core in significant ways. One can argue that this change was for the better, or at least had a neutral effect, but its reality should not be doubted, despite the far tougher enforcement of assimilation by the elites of that era.

The other major problem with Huntington’s argument stems from his evident nervousness about how his book will be received. He hastens to assure us in the Foreword,

This is, let me make clear, an argument for the importance of Anglo-Protestant culture, not for the importance of Anglo-Protestant people. I believe one of the greatest achievements, perhaps the greatest achievement, of America is the extent to which it has eliminated the racial and ethnic components that historically were central to its identity and has become a multiethnic, multiracial society in which individuals are judged on their merits. That has happened, I believe, because of the commitment successive generations of Americans have had to the Anglo-Protestant culture and

the Creed of the founding settlers.

There are two major problems here. First, it is by no means evident that there can be any Anglo-Protestant culture at all without an Anglo-Protestant people. Culture does not fall out of the sky. It is a product of the human beings who create it, and, as Huntington keeps insisting, when masses of people carrying one culture enter into another society with another culture, the result must be conflict (dare we say a “clash of civilizations”?) and change. The newcomers assimilate to the host, or the host assimilates to them, or both assimilate to each other. The impossibility of retaining a given culture intact with an entirely different population from an entirely different culture may be the result, in part, of biological differences, but, in most cases, it is more likely to reflect the difficulty or impossibility of one people stripping away their cultural legacies and garbing themselves in another. If this metamorphosis is possible at all, it would be nice if someone who advocates or celebrates it would tell us when and where it has ever been accomplished.

The second problem with Huntington’s claim, deriving from the contradiction mentioned above, is that, by his own argument, the “Anglo-Protestant core” has promoted and legitimized its own destruction. The major part of his book is a well-documented and well-articulated explanation of how contemporary non-European mass immigration threatens to undermine the core cultural identity of the country; yet Huntington starts off in the above-quoted passage telling us how that same core culture, and the “Creed” supposedly drawn from it, have made mass immigration possible by the elimination of “racial and ethnic barriers.” Of course, eliminating our racial and ethnic barriers has done nothing to eliminate the immigrants’ racial and ethnic barriers, which are retained and enforced against the dwindling population that made the “Anglo-Protestant” culture possible in the first place. The “Creed,” like other forms of liberalism, is a formula for the suicide of the race and civilization that bred it, but there is no evidence that Professor Huntington gets the point.

Does this mean that America, with its Anglo-Protestant core identity, was a suicidal society from its very beginnings? If the “Creed” that Huntington thinks to be the greatest achievement of American culture were what he claims it is,

then, yes, that is what it would mean. It is simply not true, however, that “the Anglo-Protestant culture and the Creed of the founding settlers” were as Huntington and other creedalists describe it, and, at various places in his book, he seems well aware of this, though at others he does not. In some places, his account borders on the absurd, as in the statement, “For over two hundred years the creedal principle of equal rights for all without regard to race had been ignored and flouted in practice in American society, politics, and law.” If Americans persistently flouted their own “Creed,” in what sense can we say it was their creed at all?

In fact, it was not. The “Creed” that Huntington insists is such an important part of the national identity barely existed until the early 20th century and acquired dominance in American culture and politics only during its course. The Protestant Republic the British settlers and pioneers created in North America knew nothing of it, or of its happy talk about “eliminating racial and ethnic barriers.” As Huntington also acknowledges, the first naturalization law in American history confined citizenship to whites. The republic was a racial state and remained one, in principle, until the 14th Amendment was imposed at the point of bayonets and, in practice, until the “civil rights” era.

Having eliminated these barriers, we now discover that the mass immigration that ensued does not much care for the Anglo-Protestant culture and, in fact, offers its own creeds. Mr. Huntington’s book is an excellent documentation of the process by which the incoming races and their civilizations are in a protracted clash with those of the old America and of how the ruling elites of the present are facilitating the destruction of the latter, but he gives little sign of understanding how the old America might yet resist the conquest and recover its own country again.

LIBERAL ARTS

SIGNS OF THE APOCALYPSE

“Same-sex Marriage: A Lesbian Christian Perspective” with Rev. Eva O’Diam, pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church of Harrisburg, 7:30 p.m., at the Young Center for the Study of Anabaptist and Pietist Groups.”

—from an event listing for Elizabethtown (PA) College

## Why Johnny Shouldn’t Vouch

by Laurence M. Vance

**School Choices: True and False**  
by John Merrifield  
Oakland: *The Independent Institute*;  
97 pp., \$15.95

**Voucher Wars: Waging the Legal Battle over School Choice**  
by Clint Bolick  
Washington, D.C.: *The Cato Institute*;  
277 pp., \$20.00



For some time now, the panacea offered by conservatives and libertarians for improving the education of American youth has been vouchers. There is no question that government schools are failing miserably. There is plenty of teaching about the wonders of diversity and multiculturalism, but not enough instruction in the basic skills required for work or college. The need for reform of the public educational system is trumpeted by both parties at election time, while the fact of private education’s superiority in every respect (except, perhaps, in sports programs and sex education) is tacitly acknowledged.

The idea behind the voucher plan is that the federal government should provide a voucher sufficient to fund an education for each school-age child. Parents could choose the school on which to expend the voucher. The school would then redeem the voucher for payment from the federal government. In other words, vouchers are an income-transfer program, as well as a subsidy to private education, courtesy of the U.S. taxpayer.

It is not that vouchers are a bad idea *per se*. There are, in fact, many private voucher programs. Even in the case of a complete separation of school and state, vouchers would still be a viable alternative to the existing scheme for educational funding. Truth be told, however, all parents have “school choice” right now—just as they have a choice in cars, clothes, and food. What voucher proponents really mean when they complain of an absence of “school choice” is that parents do not have the opportunity of choosing where to spend other people’s money for the education of their children.

Two recent books attempt to make

the case for vouchers. John Merrifield’s *School Choices: True and False* is a critique of current school-choice programs and proposals that emphasizes competition in education as the means to effect real reform. Clint Bolick’s *Voucher Wars: Waging the Legal Battle Over School Choice* is an account of the 12-year legal battle that culminated in the Supreme Court’s 2002 decision, *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, which upheld Cleveland’s school-choice program. Although the two books are totally different in their approach to the subject of vouchers, they contain some of the same fallacies.

Merrifield, an economics professor at the University of Texas at San Antonio, is no neophyte on the subject of school choice. He has already written widely on the subject and is a frequent guest on television and radio programs where the issue is discussed and debated. Bolick, the author of several previous books on civil rights, is the vice president and national director of state chapters at the Institute for Justice. He also has the dubious distinction of having worked for the government at the Equal Employment Opportunity Center and in the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division.

*School Choices* progresses from the current state of the public-school system to problems with current reform proposals to the author’s policy proposals for a competitive education industry. Although the main focus of the book is on vouchers, Merrifield also addresses charter schools; tax credits; the politicization of public education; government inefficiency, bureaucracy, and regulation; educational systems in foreign countries; magnet schools; school districts; and teachers’ unions. Merrifield treats both the identification and discussion of “the critical elements of a competitive education industry” and the failure of current voucher programs and proposals, which he attributes to the fact that “choice advocates have forsaken and endangered the only truly effective reform catalyst—competition—mostly unwittingly, but often intentionally.”

Numerous myths have been perpetuated on both sides of the school-choice debate, and Merrifield exposes many of them. The independence of charter schools is, he claims, “largely an illusion,” and the charter ideal of an autonomous public school is a “fantasy.” Merrifield further points out that the system of nonrefundable tax credits, by which every dollar of private-school tu-