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Granddad and the New Tide

By Don Feder

The typical immigrant of the 1990s isn't my grandfather. (Which is probably just as well: who wants to see the nation overrun by Jewish tailors?) Having reached that painful conclusion, it's easier to rethink my position on immigration.

In the past, I confess, my thoughts on the matter were clouded by emotion and tinged with nostalgia. What if they'd kept my family out? Images of savage hordes swamping the nation were dispelled by memories of a decent, gentle man who worked hard all of his life and struggled to become a good American.

That was then: this is now. Chinese wading ashore in New York and HIV-infected Haitians released from Guantanamo Naval base may elicit sympathy, but are symptomatic of a crisis that must be confronted.

Unlike past immigrant waves, those currently walking, wading and floating to these shores are a net economic detriment. By and large, they are impoverished, unskilled, poorly educated and far less-assimilable than their predecessors.

We are fast approaching the point where generosity and blind allegiance to the "nation of immigrants" mystique verges on national suicide. With 4.7 percent of the world's population, we take in half of its emigrants.

They arrive at a rate of a million a year (legally), perhaps twice that number in illegal immigration. Annually, new arrivals equal 16 percent of native births.

Even coming from the *shtetls* of Eastern Europe, my grandparents were closer culturally to turn-of-the-century Americans than are current newcomers to today's population. Of the 11.8 million legal immigrants who arrived in the past 19 years, 85 percent came from the Third World, most from societies culturally conditioned to failure.

The nation's racial-ethnic composition is being transformed overnight, against the will of the majority. Since 1970, the Hispanic portion of the population has doubled, from 4.5 to 9 percent.

There were crime problems with the old immigrants (witness the Black Hand), but not to the extent of the present invasion. In 1987, 20 percent of the total arrests in our six largest cities were foreign nationals. Nearly a third of the first 6,000 arrested in the L.A. riots were illegal aliens.

When Grandpa opted for the American dream, you worked or went hungry. Many of today's immigrants prefer the dream of the Kennedys and Clintons. While the number of Supplemental Security Income recipients grew 38.5 percent between 1982 and 1992, the number of immigrants partaking of this welfare program rose 370.2 percent. Economist George Borjas estimates that each year immigrants receive \$1 billion to \$3 billion more in welfare benefits than they contribute to the system.

All immigrants don't go on the dole, but those who work are a problem, too. They tend to be low-skilled and far more likely to take jobs than create them. In 1992, nearly 1.3 million foreign workers were certified for employment here, more than net job creation that year.

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How can our economy create enough new jobs for our own growing population, while straining under this burden?

Immigrants of the late 20th century are far less likely to assimilate than those who came before. In terms of past immigration, our genius was taking motley masses and turning them into little WASPS, in an ethnic sense. If not them, certainly their children.

Now, thanks to bilingualism, multicultural

education and easy welfare, far too many immigrants remain part of an alien subculture.

In South Florida, Southern California, Texas and parts of New York City, there are millions of people who want to live here, but have absolutely no desire to learn our language, history or culture — who may never develop the commitment to the American ideal that led my grandfather to lie about his age in an effort to enlist in the U.S. Army at the outset of World War I.

Is it racist or xenophobic not to want to see one's country become the Balkans of the Western world? A nation is more than a geographic entity, or a conglomeration of disparate, disputatious groups

that happen to share two rooms and a bath—something the proponents of de facto open immigration seem not to understand.

I began thinking, as opposed to emoting, on this highly emotional subject when I read a piece by Peter Brimelow, a Brit by birth, published in the *National Review* last year. Asks Mr. Brimelow rhetorically: "How can X be against immigration when the nativists wanted to keep his own great-grandfather out? This, of course, is like arguing that a passenger already on board the lifeboat should refrain from pointing out that taking on more will cause it to capsize." Which is where I came into this debate. ■

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John Lukacs is both an historian and an historical philosopher of international repute. His books include, A History of the Cold War, Historical Consciousness, and The Last European War. Evelyn Mackenzie has a Ph.D. in history. She lives in Louisville, KY where she works as a local historian.

The Triumph of Nationalism

A Book Review by Evelyn Mackenzie

THE END OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND THE END OF THE MODERN AGE

By John Lukacs

New York: Ticknor & Fields (Houghton Mifflin) 1993
291 pp., \$21.95

Nationalism, the defining political force of the twentieth century, is likely to remain the most prominent feature in the political landscape of the twenty-first. From under the rubble of collapsed communism, old nations and old feuds are struggling back to life, while myriad tribal wars are being fought by peoples seeking a piece of land to call their own.

All of this is the inevitable reaction against the artificial boundaries carved out in the aftermath of two world wars and held in place despite and not because of natural ties that create and bind a "people." What we are witnessing, then, is the triumph of the natural over the unnatural.

Yet for author John Lukacs, veteran commentator on Europe's shifting sands, the natural is not automatically right or desirable. At best ambivalent, he is more often downright gloomy when contemplating the probable victory of resurgent nationalism. The book can be read as his own struggle to put the historical events he describes into a moral context.

Lukacs argues that even the great historical forces generally thought to be driven by ideology are really expressions of national character. For example, he quickly dismisses the notion that the twentieth century has been dominated by the struggle between Democracy (U.S.A.) and Communism (U.S.S.R.). The Cold War was nothing but a "reciprocal misunderstanding": Stalin and his successors had such great difficulty absorbing Eastern Europe that the West mistook their digestive problems for hunger pangs, while the Soviet Union was deluded by the idea that the U.S. wanted to challenge its hegemony

in Eastern Europe.

Lukacs' repeated insistence that American patriotism has been identical to anti-Communism and is "the ideological cement that bound the American 'conservative' movement and the Republican party together," will infuriate some, as will his belief that the Soviet Union was not pushed by the West, but fell naturally. This latter point bolsters Lukacs' arguments about national character — eventually the Russian people would cast off an alien ideology held in place by artificial political restraints.

Lukacs well understands that "the character of a people molds their institutions" and not vice versa. No government can endure unless it recognizes that there is little difference between the cultural and the political, that is to say, when we speak of our country we are also speaking of our people.

Yet, for a man who sees this, Lukacs often fails to understand those engaged in nationalist struggles. While he points out that if there were no Serbs in "Croatia," there would be no civil war in the former Yugoslavia, he later argues that the whole sorry mess came about "because of tales told by national idiots, full of sound and fury, fighting for an 'independence' signifying nothing." When is a nationalist not a nationalist idiot? That is the question with which Lukacs wrestles for much of the book.

***"If America wants to survive
as a nation ... it must define
and maintain itself as a people."***

As a self-described "participant historian," Lukacs includes much of the personal in this book, quoting extensively from his prior works and including large extracts from his journals. Lukacs' own experience shows that nationalism springs from the soul. One's national identity is a part of oneself