

REVIEW ESSAY

What Are We to Make of Samuel Huntington?

Who Are We?: The Challenges to America's National Identity, by Samuel P. Huntington. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004. 448 pp.

Reviewed by Peter Skerry

At one point in *Who Are We?*, Samuel Huntington relates a little-known episode of the Mexican War, in which Irish immigrant soldiers deserted the American army to serve with their fellow Catholics in what became known as the San Patricio Battalion of the Mexican Army. He then notes that several years later many other Irish immigrants served honorably in the Union armies and thereby "sounded the death knell for organized anti-Irish Know-Nothing nativism."

This is vintage Huntington. Ever alert to context and the fragility of social order, he highlights conflicting immigrant loyalties in the midst of war. And while he notes that many Mexican—and Muslim—immigrants are serving with distinction today in Iraq, he is not convinced that such a limited war will afford them the same opportunity to prove their loyalty to the United States as World War II did for earlier immigrants.

I wonder how Huntington would react to my experience interviewing Mexican-American political elites during the 1980s, when I heard frequent mention of the San Patricios. Typically when my interviewee asked about my ethnic background and heard it was Irish Catholic, he (rarely she) would slap me on the back, order another beer, and tell me how much the Irish and the Mexicans have in common. At first, I was so grateful to establish a connection that I only gradually realized that we were celebrating trai-

tors to the United States! Yet I never doubted the loyalty or patriotism of my interviewees, many of whom were World War II or Vietnam vets. Mostly, their telling of the San Patricios story seemed like working-class, anti-establishment braggadocio.

To judge by *Who Are We?*, Huntington would interpret these incidents, along with others, such as booing "The Star-Spangled Banner" at Los Angeles soccer matches (which he cites more than once), as evidence of disloyalty among Mexican immigrants and their children. On this point I believe he is wrong—as do most academics I know, as well as most reviewers of his book. Yet I find disquieting the ready dismissal of this important work by one of our most original and thoughtful political scientists. It is too easy for liberal or left academics to indulge their pro-immigrant sympathies by pouncing on Huntington for the flaws in his argument and then to ignore his basic point: that American national identity is undergoing stressful change that should concern even those who regard as inevitable, or approve of, the forces driving it.

A case in point: about the emergent "white nativism" among working- and middle-class Americans, Huntington writes: "...millions of nonelite whites have very different attitudes from those of the elites, lack their assurance and security, and think of themselves as losing out in the racial competition to other

groups favored by the elites and supported by government policy. Their losses do not have to exist in reality; they only have to exist in their minds to generate fear and hatred of the rising groups." Huntington then argues that such sentiments should not be confused with the "paranoid fantasies" of hate groups, while criticizing "denationalized" elites who have promoted "measures consciously designed to weaken America's cultural and creedal identity to strengthen racial, ethnic, cultural, and other subnational identities."

Rather than making Huntington a "nativist" and a "populist," as my colleague Alan Wolfe has asserted, this perspective is broadly similar to that of John Higham, the dean of American immigration historians, whose book, *Strangers in the Land*, is the classic treatment of nativism. In several re-evaluations of that book's thesis, Higham has argued against interpreting negative reactions to immigration as irrational outbursts, and in favor of examining them as likely rational responses to real conflicts of interest resulting from social and economic change. At a time when ordinary Americans have been organizing themselves as "Minutemen" to prod the government into doing more to secure our borders, Huntington is surely not wrong to reflect on such currents.

Further, Huntington's perspective is consistent with his long-evident Burkean conservatism. No populist, he is a shrewd, self-conscious member of the elite, who presumptively defends established institutions and traditions—not because he is a chauvinist or a racist but because he is preoccupied with the destabilizing effects of change. Hardly a reactionary, he is Burkean in not resisting all change but rather discerning which changes require adoption. "Conservatism is not just the absence

of change,” he wrote in an essay almost fifty years ago. “It is the articulate, systematic, theoretical resistance to change.” Central to this view is the maintenance of order, as articulated in his classic, *Political Order in Changing Societies*: “The primary problem is not liberty but the creation of a legitimate public order.” This is how Huntington understood the situation in Vietnam, arguing in 1968 that the establishment of political authority there would require accommodation with the Communists.

In *Who Are We?*, Huntington is keenly attuned to the brittleness of nation-states, including America. “More than many European nations, the American nation is a fragile and recent human construction,” he writes, recalling that the United States has absorbed so many newcomers from different national cultures and religions, and that it has relied more than most other nations on political ideas to hold things together. But as he also emphasizes, ideas are typically not enough: “People are not likely to find in political principles the deep emotional content and meaning provided by kith and kin, blood and belonging, culture and nationality. These attachments may have little or no basis in fact but they do satisfy a deep human longing for meaningful community.”

America’s dilemma, of course, is that the deep emotional bonds that are so important in binding people together—into families, communities, or nations—are not reliably susceptible to reason. Nor are they readily shaped or manipulated by bureaucrats and politicians. So leaders should respond very carefully to change, mindful of the constraints under which they act, as well as of likely unintended consequences of their efforts. In this respect, Huntington’s alarms about the strains associated with mass

immigration are reminiscent of neo-conservative efforts during the 1970s to alert liberals and political elites to the folly of dismissing as racism the fears of crime among ordinary whites. For a variety of reasons, neo-conservatives have not raised similar alerts about the anti-immigration backlash. Of course, most recently, neo-conservatives have shifted their focus to foreign policy, and sloughed off all Burkean restraint in support of the Bush administration’s democracy-exporting agenda.

Huntington, by contrast, remains the cautious Burkean. Recently, he told the *New York Times* that he is “an old-fashioned Democrat” who voted for Kerry and “was dead-set against us going into Iraq.” To anyone who knows Huntington’s work, this is no surprise. Still, it is noteworthy that the author of *The Clash of Civilizations* has argued against the notion that “there is anything inherently violent in Muslim theology.” In the case of Algeria and Turkey, he has opposed military repression of Muslim radicals and concluded, “If Islamists can come to power democratically, we need to try to work with them.” More generally, Huntington has warned against assuming too blithely that other societies either can or ought to share our apparently universalistic values.

Such arguments appeal to liberals, who have properly criticized neo-conservative foreign policy for abandoning neo-conservative teachings about the limited capacity of government to shape society. Yet liberals should reflect on how Huntington applies that same Burkean perspective to immigration. Specifically, Huntington expresses in the domestic context the same concerns about the volatility of non-rational bonds of ethnicity, tribe, and religion that liberals express in the Iraqi context. Such con-

sistency is a tribute to the breadth and detachment of Huntington’s thought.

Yet while fascinating and insightful, *Who Are We?* is not without flaws. Most of these have been dutifully spotted by Huntington’s many critics. One challenge that no one has raised, not surprisingly, is why a Burkean conservative is so little interested in the many challenges to social order posed by today’s massive and continuing stream of immigrants. But there is a still more intriguing shortcoming that has been overlooked. How is it that this eminent student of the interplay of political institutions with values and ideas has almost nothing to say about how contemporary American political institutions influence the way America responds to this unprecedented influx of newcomers? Indeed, it is a reflection of the state of contemporary political discourse that this omission has gone unnoticed.

Before proceeding, it is important to note that *Who Are We?* is particularly prone to misinterpretation. In part, this is because Huntington is one of those rare analysts capable of remarking on a political phenomenon without necessarily approving of it, and of empathizing with the individuals involved without necessarily “identifying” with them. Huntington also tends to be scholarly and cautious in setting forth his most provocative propositions, typically phrasing them as hypotheses or qualified predictions. But then his skill as a polemicist often leads to some sharper assertion. Thus, his insistence in *The Clash of Civilizations* that his civilizational paradigm is just a “simplified map of reality,” hardly meant to explain or predict everything, sometimes gets lost in the heat of argument. At one point in *Who Are We?* Huntington observes:

“Without national debate or conscious decision, America is being transformed into what *could* be a very different society from what it has been.” Yet a paragraph later, he concludes: “To ignore that question [about becoming a bilingual, bicultural society], however, is also to answer it and acquiesce in the eventual transformation of Americans into two peoples with two languages and two cultures.”

Setting aside for the moment Huntington’s neglect of political institutions, it is clear that culture lies at the heart of his Burkean understanding of America. “The principal theme of this book,” he writes in *Who Are We?*, “is the continuing centrality of Anglo-Protestant culture to American national identity.” And looming front and center is his argument that “the high level of immigration from Mexico sustains and reinforces among Mexican-Americans the Mexican values which are the primary source of their lagging educational and economic progress and slow assimilation into American society.” Huntington argues further that in the past, “most immigrants came from European societies with cultures similar to or compatible with American culture.” Throughout, Huntington identifies the lack of European values as part of the current dilemma over immigration. He acknowledges the success of non-European Asian immigrants as a counter-example and the challenges of Muslim immigrants as perhaps unprecedented. But his main concern remains with Hispanics, especially Mexicans.

Yet how helpful is it to regard Mexican values as non-European? To the extent that there is a cultural mismatch between family-centered Mexicans and individualistic Americans, doesn’t it resemble the strains with immigrants from Catholic Italy, when they con-

fronted Anglo-Protestant America a century ago?

Sociologist Douglas Massey is undoubtedly correct to say that Huntington’s understanding of culture is not as sophisticated as an anthropologist’s. But Massey is incorrect and unfair to conclude that “for Huntington, culture determines human circumstances and not the reverse.” For while Huntington places great emphasis on values as explanatory variables, he is no cultural determinist. In *Who Are We?*, he argues repeatedly that the values of Mexican immigrants are problematic because of various *structural* factors, such as large and increasing numbers, disproportionately illegal status, geographical concentration in the Southwest with its historical ties to Mexico, and public policies like bilingual education and affirmative action. Whether or not Huntington’s analysis is correct, it is not monocausal.

Indeed, Huntington’s treatment of culture as conditioned by other factors leads to one of his more startlingly original and controversial insights. Virtually alone among serious analysts, he notes that in spite of America’s preoccupation with diversity, today’s immigrant wave is actually the *least* diverse in our history. To be sure, non-Hispanic immigrants are more diverse than ever. But overall, the 50 percent of immigrants who are Hispanic make for a much less diverse cohort than ever. For Huntington, this diminished diversity makes assimilation less likely—another point that he shares with Higham.

Lest there be any doubt about his conclusion, Huntington drives it home: “When Americans talk about immigration and assimilation, they have tended to generalize about immigrants without discriminating among them. They have thus hidden from themselves the peculiar characteristics, chal-

lenges, and problems posed by Hispanic, primarily Mexican, immigration.” This is absolutely on target. Befuddled by the presumption of even-handed treatment of all nations that formally defines our post-1965 immigration policy, and distracted by the rhetoric and influence of immigrant advocacy groups, we have simply refused to see what is before our eyes.

Others charge that Huntington is a cultural essentialist. He is not. He understands that values change. Playing off Horace Kallen, he emphasizes that “one cannot change one’s grandparents, and in that sense one’s ethnic heritage is given.... One can, however, change one’s culture. People convert from one religion to another, learn new languages, adopt new values and beliefs, identify with new symbols, and accommodate themselves to new ways of life.” Many object to Huntington’s assumption that immigrants will do most of the accommodating. I will take this up momentarily. But for now, I underscore that he has no illusions about the ease of such change. On the contrary, his sensitivity to the fragility of cultures, and to the potentially explosive consequences of cultural change, alert him to the developing backlash. And his understanding that immigrants do not adapt as readily or thoroughly as they might leads him to a realistic assessment of the ordeal of assimilation.

Of all the cultural domains that preoccupy Huntington, language looms most ominously. But here, too, his perspective has been misunderstood. For while he is highly critical of bilingual education (at one point referring to it unhelpfully as “educational apartheid”), he is not by and large worried that Hispanics are not learning English. Rather he is concerned that, due to “creeping bilingualism,” America “*could become* divided into a large

number of people who know English and little or no Spanish...a smaller number of people who know Spanish and little or no English...and an indeterminate number of people fluent in both languages." Characteristically, Huntington makes this point tentatively, then sharpens it by noting the growing market of Spanish-speaking consumers being eagerly courted by Anglo capitalists. In my view, he exaggerates the significance of the booming Spanish-language media by ignoring its diminished audience among second- and third-generation Hispanics. Nevertheless, his concerns about a persistent and divisive bilingualism are not entirely misplaced.

As mentioned above, culture is at the core of Huntington's understanding of American national identity. Noting that it is hardly an accident that Hispanics routinely refer to non-Hispanic whites as "Anglos," he elaborates in Burkean language: "A nation may, as America does, have a creed, but its soul is defined by the common history, traditions, culture, heroes, and villains, victories and defeats, enshrined in its 'mystic chords of memory.'" Part of Huntington's argument is with the "overly simple" dichotomy typically drawn between culture and ideas (or the American Creed) as alternative bases of national identity. It's not either-or, he says; it's both. Yet he also argues that culture plays a fundamental, constitutive role: "The Creed is unlikely to retain its salience if Americans abandon the Anglo-Protestant culture in which it has been rooted."

Not surprisingly, Huntington's liberal critics reject his insistence on culture, never mind religion, as the core of American national identity—preferring ideas as more inclusive and rational. But though their preferences are strong, their

case against him is not. The best they have been able to do is charge that Huntington's position today contradicts what he argued a generation ago in *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony*. In that book, Huntington clearly argued in favor of ideas. As he wrote in 1981: "The political ideas of the American Creed have been the basis of national identity."

Yet I would maintain that Huntington has not contradicted himself. In *Who Are We?*, he explains that historically, American national identity has had four components: ethnic, racial, cultural (especially language and religion), and political ideas. The salience of each has varied in different eras. For much of the twentieth century, when America faced ideological foes in fascism and communism, political ideas were especially important. Over the same period, but especially since the end of World War II, the components of race and ethnicity have been delegitimated. Then, echoing his analysis in *The Clash of Civilizations*, he holds that the end of Cold War ideological battles has led to the resurgence of culture as the basis of national identity.

Now, what Huntington's critics overlook is that the earlier book anticipated this shift. As he wrote in *American Politics*: "The historical function of the Creed in defining national identity could conceivably become less significant.... History, tradition, custom, culture, and a sense of shared experience such as other major nations have developed over the centuries could also come to define American identity, and the role of abstract ideals and values might be reduced. The *ideational* basis of national identity would be replaced by an *organic* one." Again, one does not have to agree with Huntington's analysis to acknowledge that it has been remarkably consistent over the

decades. More to the point, his understanding of American national identity has changed because the world has changed.

Perhaps least palatable to Huntington's critics is his emphasis on religion as the most vital cultural component of our national identity. And his bluntness doesn't help: throwing back the complaint of the atheist who recently went to federal court to get "under God" removed from the Pledge of Allegiance, he writes that "atheists are 'outsiders' in the American community." Then he adds, "Non-Christians may legitimately see themselves as strangers because they or their ancestors moved to this 'strange land' founded and peopled by Christians." He hardly uses the term "Judeo-Christian tradition"—not even to say that it was stitched together in response to the challenge of fascism.

Yet again, it will not do to underestimate Huntington. In fact, he is supremely aware of how American religion has adapted to all variety of newcomers, and how the resulting civil religion is pervasive and powerful precisely because it is so widely and thinly spread. Of the old battle between Protestantism and Catholicism, he writes: "For more than two hundred years Americans defined their identity in opposition to Catholicism. The Catholic other was first fought and excluded and then opposed and discriminated against. Eventually, however, American Catholicism assimilated many of the features of its Protestant environment and was, in turn, assimilated into the American mainstream. These processes changed America from a Protestant country into a Christian country with Protestant values." Elsewhere he concludes: "While the American Creed is Protestantism without God, the American civil religion is Christianity without Christ." Athe-

ists may feel out of place in this America, but not very.

Unfortunately, none of this will placate those who are offended by Huntington's unapologetic emphasis on Protestant values. But again, the strength of such objections has seldom been matched by equally strong counter-arguments. The notion that Anglo-Protestantism is *not* the core of American identity would have come as a surprise to my Irish Catholic grandmother, who steered her eight surviving children to endure the cold gaze of her Boston Brahmin employers. It would also come as a surprise to sociologist Herbert Gans, for whom "American religious individualism, and the originally Protestant notion of direct communication between deity and individual...have now spread over most mainstream American religions.... Except among Orthodox Jews, temples and synagogues have taken on Protestantism's democratic and communitarian trappings."

The Protestant core of America is also evident to the record numbers of Hispanic immigrants now converting to evangelical Protestantism. Observes the Jesuit scholar Alan Figueroa-Deck: "For Hispanics the principle source of resistance to evangelical Protestantism has to do with its intimate connection with the North American ethos, especially its perceived individualism and consumerism. Hispanics in this regard view evangelical Protestantism as the quintessential expression of U.S. religion and culture.... The more democratic, egalitarian ethos of evangelicalism is somehow foreign to the hierarchical configuration of both the Hispanic family and society. Hispanics have often experienced serious family divisions when a member becomes a Protestant. In Hispanic culture this is not just a religious matter. It is a profound cultural, social, and familial rupture."

None of this is lost on Huntington, who grows no more misty-eyed about nation-building in Iraq than he does about massive immigration at home. Never one to wax lyrical about his favorite ethnic restaurants, he grasps fully the wrenching ordeal of assimilation—and not just for the receiving society. "During the nineteenth century and until the late twentieth century," he writes, "immigrants were in various ways compelled, induced, and persuaded to adhere to the central elements of the Anglo-Protestant culture." While hardly ignoring that immigrant cultures can and do change the dominant society, he firmly restates the Anglo conformity model, by which immigrants are "mixed into the tomato soup, enriching the taste, but not significantly altering the substance."

This is not arrogance. Huntington may be blunt, but he is never smug, chauvinistic, or triumphalist. Indeed, it is not even clear that he regards Anglo-Protestant culture as superior to any other. Certainly, he believes that it has served America well. But just as certainly, he does not claim that it would do the same for other societies. As a self-avowed "nationalist," he warns us against the temptations of both cosmopolitanism at home and imperialism abroad. Huntington thus argues that America loses sight of its values at great peril; that those values cannot be changed without great turmoil and risk; and that in the final analysis, immigrants must adopt those values if they, and the nation, are to survive and prosper.

However one interprets Huntington, it is worth looking at where his analysis leads in terms of policy. He has been correctly criticized for being short on specifics. But we can reasonably infer that he would advocate immigration policies that would diminish the disproportionate number of Hispanics. Likewise,

he would also probably support efforts to reduce the overall numbers of immigrants as well as the number of illegals.

The other area where inferences about Huntington's positions are reasonably straightforward is "Americanization." Clearly, he supports it, and regrets that we ever lost sight of it as a policy goal. But in practice today, Americanization does not seem to mean much more to Huntington than improved and expanded English-language programs for immigrants. Needless to say, none of these policies deserve the fury with which critics have rejected Huntington's presumed retrograde preoccupation with the cultural basis of American national identity.

More problematic is Huntington's misreading of the evidence on socioeconomic mobility among Mexicans and Hispanics. He makes a persuasive case that the educational and occupational mobility of Mexican-origin immigrants and their offspring stalls after the second generation and in general lags significantly behind that of other Americans. But his attempt to explain these gaps by focusing on immigrant values and culture is not as persuasive as it could be. Nor does he address the social class barriers confronting this population. Indeed, Huntington completely overlooks evidence indicating a stranded working-class—perhaps even an underclass—among Hispanics.

Huntington's analysis is not much stronger with other indicators. Acknowledging that Hispanic intermarriage rates parallel those of earlier European immigrants, he nevertheless strains to interpret the data in the worst possible light. He is certainly correct to point to the extraordinarily high proportion of illegal immigrants from Mexico (69 percent) and the low naturalization

rates of eligible Hispanics. While these data raise questions about the strength of political identification with the United States, he makes too much of findings that very few Mexican-origin school children label themselves “American”—as opposed to “Mexican,” “Chicano,” “Hispanic,” or even “Mexican-American.” Indeed, as I will elaborate below, Huntington never adequately explains why any of these identities among Spanish-speaking immigrants and their offspring today is necessarily more troubling than similar identities among immigrants in the past.

With regard to residential mobility and integration, Huntington drops the ball altogether. Emphasizing the concentration of Mexicans in the Southwest and Cubans in Miami, he argues that these groups have “deviated significantly from the historical pattern of dispersion” that has facilitated assimilation. Unfortunately, missing from his analysis are 2000 census data, which reveal that over the 1990s Hispanics were, in fact, dispersing across the nation. Also missing are the numbers demonstrating that Hispanics have been moving out of urban enclaves and into more integrated neighborhoods, in a pattern that parallels that of earlier European immigrants.

At the same time, Huntington ignores other evidence that speaks to his broad concerns. For example, he never mentions Puerto Rican statehood. If that scenario seems unlikely, recall that in the early 1990s the first Bush administration, enjoying the full flush of post-Cold War triumphalism and wishing to reach out to Hispanics, advocated it. Fortunately, the proposal died, since a genuinely Spanish-speaking society as the fifty-first state would have been the opening for bilingualism and biculturalism that would make bi-

lingual education look as innocuous as Berlitz.

Neither does Huntington mention the many fiscal and social strains that immigration imposes on communities. In this era of “broken windows” policing, when minor threats to social order are taken so seriously, it is striking that beyond a reference to some European scholars working on “societal security,” he passes over such problems as overcrowded schools burdened with non-English-speaking students, hospital emergency rooms overflowing with immigrants without health insurance, or controversies over code enforcement in neighborhoods where newcomers are burdening public services and housing stock. He also ignores day-labor hiring sites, an issue roiling communities from Farmingville, New York to Pomona, California—where groups of young men seeking manual labor in exchange for a day’s wages look to some like eager new entrants into the American Dream, but to others like unruly, threatening loiterers. And finally, Huntington says nothing about more serious criminal activities, including auto theft and drugs, which have been linked to Hispanic gangs both along the border and in our interior.

Huntington similarly neglects the worrisome competition between immigrants and African Americans. Several studies have documented employer preferences for immigrants (often Hispanics) over African Americans, sometimes described as having “attitude problems.” At the same time, Hispanics complain of being denied employment at the U.S. Postal Service, where African Americans have long tended to be over-represented. More generally, the two groups compete, or feel that they compete, for social services—a reflection of a larger political competition that I

heard echoed in Los Angeles ten years ago, when black politicians insisted, “There’s only room for one minority in this town.” Such fissures can be overcome, as evidenced by the recent election of Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa at the head of a black-brown coalition. But the leadership needed to accomplish this is always in short supply.

Recent years have seen outright conflict. As Michael Jones-Correa reports, “Four of the top immigrant-receiving metropolitan areas were convulsed by serious civil disturbances by the early 1990s.... Riots occurred in Miami’s Liberty City and Overtown neighborhoods in 1980, 1982, 1987, and 1989; in Washington, D.C.’s Mt. Pleasant and Adams Morgan sections in 1991; and in Crown Heights, New York, and the South-Central area of Los Angeles in 1992.” Commenting on the role of Caribbean immigrants in the Crown Heights riots, African-American activist Rev. Herbert Dougherty described them as “alienated, angry, and fearless.... These young people did not belong to anybody’s anything.” Noting that 51 percent of those arrested during the Los Angeles riots were Hispanic, RAND researchers Peter Morrison and Ira Lowry attribute the conflagration to “a long accumulation of grievances against ethnically different neighbors who were accessible for reprisal, combined with the availability of a large pool of idle young men who had little stake in civil order.” They conclude that in multiethnic states like California, “We ought to expect more riots.”

Why would the author of *Political Order in Changing Societies* ignore such developments? Perhaps because *Who Are We?* is about national identity, not social order. Yet such racial and ethnic conflict does threaten national cohesion. It also

fuels the white nativism that Huntington so prudently identifies as a source of concern.

A major reason for Huntington's oversight is his preoccupation with multiculturalism, which he maintains is "in its essence anti-European civilization." Warning that "a multicultural America will, in time, become a multicreedal America, with groups with different cultures espousing distinctive political values," he cites obscure Hispanic academics who seek "to prevent the assimilation of Hispanics into America's Anglo-Protestant society and culture." Yet while some fringe elements do harbor such agendas, for most Hispanics multiculturalism is the path to inclusion. Hispanic leaders who call for voting rights, affirmative action, and bilingual education may be misguided or divisive, but they are not anti-European. Nor are they anti-American. On the contrary, they are drawing on such components of the American Creed as minority rights, higher law, liberty, and equality. But because, as Huntington put it in *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony*, "no theory exists for ordering these values in relation to one another," we experience intense conflict over the political ideas we agree on—"the consensus is the conflict." As he also notes there: "Inoculated against the appeal of foreign ideas, America has only to fear her own."

Huntington writes that he has spent his career grappling with the question posed at the beginning of his Ph.D. oral examinations: "Mr. Huntington, what is the relation between political thought and political institutions?" All the more perplexing, then, is his attempt to explain our present predicament almost exclusively in terms of values and ideas. At one point in *Who Are We?* he does remark that today "the institutions and processes re-

lated to assimilation are different." But he spends remarkably little time explaining how those institutions—especially *political* institutions—have changed. To be sure, Huntington complains about activist judges and other out-of-touch elites. Yet as I indicate below, he tells us little about how these influence today's immigrants.

Nor does Huntington have anything to say about the role played by political machines in the integration of immigrants. This omission is particularly striking in light of the scholarly consensus that, whatever their shortcomings, machines contributed to the maintenance of stability amid wrenching demographic and social change.

In today's vernacular, the machines also "empowered" uneducated, politically unsophisticated workers and peasants, encouraging them to take a few steps out of their ethnic neighborhoods toward the wider civic arena. To be sure, the path was crooked and the method usually a corrupt one. But in the course of pandering to economic self-interest, machines taught immigrants important, if flawed, lessons about the value of their vote. Ironically, the process has rarely been better described than in *Political Order*, where Huntington explains how political institutions in modernizing societies help newly mobilized participants to "unlearn much that they have learned from family, ethnic group, and social class, and adapt to an entirely new code of behavior."

Machines were also local party organizations, and as Huntington also observed in *Political Order*, "the political party is the distinctive organization of modern politics" and "the one major political institution invented in America." In *Who Are We?*, he astutely observes that "minority group politics has

displaced political party politics with respect to immigrants," but fails to elaborate. Had he done so, Huntington might have been drawn into a more thorough analysis of what he calls our increasingly "unrepresentative democracy." He is right to blame controversial policies like affirmative action, racial gerrymandering, bilingual education, and high immigration on the widening chasm between ordinary Americans and "denationalized, cosmopolitan elites." Yet he fails to examine how these policies reflect significant changes in our political institutions. Pointing primarily to multiculturalism, Huntington lacks a persuasive answer why racial and ethnic advocates repeatedly support such unpopular and divisive policies. This would require more attention to what political scientists variously call the administrative state or the New American Political System.

In brief, the New American Political System began with the New Deal's expansion of the regulatory and administrative capacities of the federal executive branch. This facilitated the creation of more direct links between the voters and Washington, which laid the foundation for today's plebiscitary presidency. A more immediate result was the circumvention of locally based Democratic Party elites, including the machines.

Machine patronage is part of our political lore. But contrary to that lore, patronage was not distributed primarily on the basis of ethnic group loyalty, but on support of the machine. Discrete "favors" were granted to individuals on a quid pro quo basis, typically through tailored enforcement (or non-enforcement) of existing laws. Benefits did not typically accrue from the passage of new laws. These would have led to public discussion and debate, which were hardly the

forte of politicians like Chicago's famously inarticulate Mayor Daley.

Machine politics was then largely devoid of issues. Politics today is all about issues. We argue over programs that do not provide benefits directly to individuals, but collective goods to categories of individuals. What should the programs address? Who should be in the categories? Such questions are one reason why politics is now dominated by campaign consultants and policy wonks. So long, Mayor Daley. Hello, President Clinton.

In making the case for collective goods, the language of rights has become critical. But rather than the natural, or negative, rights specified in the Declaration of Independence, these are positive, programmatic rights to health care, education, housing, and other such benefits. Forged in the New Deal, these programmatic rights morphed during the postwar period into "entitlements," as more and more benefits were justified as "rights" but were nevertheless subject to the vicissitudes of legislation. Finally, the 1960s civil rights movement reinforced the notion of rights as moral claims that transcend the horse-trading of everyday politics. And to the extent that such rights were granted by the courts, political mobilization became de-emphasized in favor of litigation.

The next step was to bring into the political process groups or interests that had been too weak or difficult to organize during the New Deal: non-unionized farm workers, working women, the handicapped, and (eventually) endangered species. To represent these constituencies, a new type of organization was perfected during the 1960s: the public interest organization, which relies less on membership dues than on third-party funders, such as wealthy patrons and foundations. Because their

members tend to be widely dispersed and bound together more by ideas and symbols than by face-to-face interaction, public interest entrepreneurs must sustain the loyalty of members—and patrons—by pursuing "outside strategies" that attract media attention and raise the funds to pay large professional staffs. Thus, public interest organizations benefit from controversy and typically have few incentives to resolve conflict.

The implications for American politics have been enormous. Despite the name, public interest organizations represent relatively narrow interests and have, in fact, hastened the decline of the one institution that does represent broader interests: the political party. Meanwhile, the public-interest style permeates our politics. One result, as Morris Fiorina observes, is that we are now better at interest articulation than at interest aggregation. This undoubtedly helps explain why, to address Huntington's concern, "minority group politics has displaced political party politics."

Indeed, there are clear implications for the political assimilation of today's immigrants. This depersonalized, professionalized system of media buys, focus groups, and computer-targeted direct mail disadvantages the informal networks and social capital that immigrants relied on to get here and now depend on to make it in America. Deprived of patronage and barraged with "rights-talk," hard-pressed newcomers are difficult to mobilize, because they see no connection between their families' immediate needs and the unfamiliar, perhaps threatening arena of politics. Not surprisingly, immigrant leaders respond by adapting to what they encounter. For Hispanics, in particular Mexicans, this means following the trail blazed by Afri-

can Americans and defining their interests as those of a racial minority group that has been discriminated against and therefore deserves such controversial remedies as affirmative action and the Voting Rights Act.

Mainstream America has a hard time accepting such arguments when advanced by African Americans. When Hispanic immigrants make them, many ask why this group cannot adapt as others have done. To be sure, American memories are short and rosy when it comes to what earlier immigrants went through. But the political reality is that when Hispanics define themselves in terms fundamentally different from those that defined their predecessors, ordinary Americans (including many Mexican-Americans) are troubled and even offended.

Paying scant attention to these institutional changes, Huntington fails to note their subtlest but most pervasive impact: how our post-civil rights regime has altered the criteria by which we measure immigrant progress. We now interpret statistical disparities across groups through a lens ground in the black civil rights struggle. For example, in California, where 35 percent of the population is Hispanic, observers routinely ask why the student body at the University of California isn't also 35 percent Hispanic. In essence, we have institutionalized impatience. This is undoubtedly a virtue when directed toward the inequalities experienced by the descendants of enslaved Africans. But when transposed to immigrants, this same impatience causes us to forget the long and arduous process by which earlier newcomers became full participants in American life.

Without our noticing, these post-civil rights institutions have altered one of the most fundamental vari-

ables in political life: time. Bernard Crick reminds us that time is how politics manages to reconcile the inevitable tensions between ideals and realities. Yet time is precisely what today's institutions afford us little of. For immigrants and non-immigrants alike, time has been foreshortened, and our expectations for immigrant progress unrealistically heightened. We are all impatient now.

Back in 1968, Huntington included in *Political Order in Changing Societies* a comparison between the political party and bureaucracy. He found that while the party was a modern innovation, it was not entirely a modern institution. Unlike bureaucracy, which follows modernity's logic of efficiency, the party follows the logic of politics and "operates on patronage, influence, and compromise." Elsewhere in *Political Order* Huntington argued that America's antiquated, decentralized Tudor polity, which until that point had contributed greatly to our political development, would probably need to modernize, in response to "the needs of national defense" and "the problems of race relations and poverty."

Substantially, this is what has transpired. As Huntington anticipated, the last four decades have seen both the bureaucratization of our political parties—because of complex rules about post-1968 delegate selection, campaign finance strictures, or the demands of high-tech campaigning—and their diminished capacity to "organize participation, to aggregate interests, to serve as the link between social forces and the government."

Thus, it is all the more disappointing to see that in *Who Are We?* Huntington fails to take on the theoretical challenge of helping us understand what Hugh Hecló refers to as "postmodern policy-

making." Are the strains we are experiencing over immigration and multi-culturalism just another version of the creedal conflict Huntington analyzes in *American Politics*? Or do the extraordinary changes in our political institutions constitute the emergence of a new political regime? In this essay I have not been able to tackle these questions. Would that Huntington had done so.

One also wishes that Huntington had addressed the relationship between private interests and the public good. Again in *Political Order*, he shows how in modernizing societies the critical problem is the development of stable political institutions that are not mired in kinship or tribal ties but are based on trust and therefore capable of mediating competing social forces. The opposite scenario is what he calls "praetorian politics," in which social forces mobilize for political struggle but are not disciplined by authoritative political institutions. In other words, the praetorian dynamic arises when "social forces interact directly with each other and make little or no effort to relate their private interest to a public good."

In American politics today we appear to have the opposite problem. Our political institutions are so professionalized and bureaucratized, they have become weakly tethered to social forces and grow increasingly autonomous. As one scholar puts it, we suffer from "over-institutionalization." At the same time, public interest claims crowd out private interests, with social forces tending to exaggerate the public good that follows the pursuit of their private interests.

The pattern here has been established by public interest politics, whose methods and rhetoric now appear across the political spectrum. With so many political ac-

tors working "in the public interest," we have become confused about the nature of interests and inordinately distrustful of self-interest—which is, after all, the bedrock of our Madisonian system. Seduced by the anti-political moralism of "rights-talk," we delegitimize interests we don't like as "special" interests, and seldom pause to reflect on how these might be different from "ordinary" interests—from our own interests. Self-interest hardly disappears. But it is increasingly obfuscated by the high-minded rhetoric that now pervades political discourse.

At the center of this maelstrom are interests associated with race. Because of America's original sin of racism and slavery, these private interests are permitted unmediated into the public sphere. Indeed, as moral desiderata, racial claims are routinely regarded by strategically placed elites as transcending politics. But they are not so regarded by large segments of American society, which is precisely why race is so controversial. Indeed, the reaction against affirmative action and other race-conscious policies is now so visceral that many Americans have adopted an extreme position that expresses outrage at the presence of *any* racial, or indeed ethnic, ties or claims in the public domain. Conservative Jacobinism completely ignores our long and successful experience with what John Higham refers to as "pluralistic integration," in which ethnic and even racial ties function as bridges—not barriers—to the wider society.

The final irony with regard to Huntington is that although his reading of our immigrant past generally accords with Higham's, his interpretation of our present situation partakes of this new Jacobinism. As I noted, Huntington rejects the possibility that His-

panic or even Mexican-American identity can be anything other than an opening for destructive multiculturalism. Not unlike another unapologetic nationalist, Theodore Roosevelt, Huntington has moved from an acceptance of hybrid identities to a rejection of hyphenated Americanism.

Huntington adopts a similar stance on immigrant citizenship, curiously insisting that "naturalization is the single most important dimension of assimilation." Given his emphasis on culture, wouldn't English be a much better indicator of assimilation? He never elaborates. But more to the point, Huntington goes on to express dismay that immigrants today become citizens "because they are attracted by government social welfare and affirmative action programs." Now,

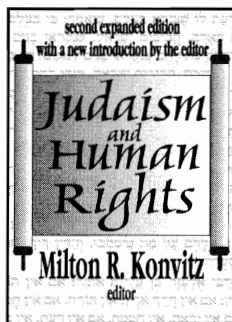
I happen to agree with him that there has been "a significant devaluation of American citizenship"—for immigrants and non-immigrants alike. But despite his otherwise astute reading of our immigrant past, he again manages to overlook our experience with political machines, which in their own way pandered to the self-interest of newcomers. Indeed, Huntington might well have noted how the skill and speed with which machine politicians got local magistrates to turn newcomers into citizens eventually led to federalization of the naturalization process.

One would hardly expect Huntington to condone such practices. But they do suggest, as does our experience with machines more generally, the possibility of an alternative understanding of an ap-

propriate basis of citizenship—one that regards self-interest as a starting point that can be built on, broadened, and refined. As Jean Bethke Elshtain has recently reminded us, this was how Jane Addams, parting company with many fellow Progressives, confronted these issues. This understanding is certainly embedded in Burke's deference to society's "little platoons." One would have hoped for a similar response from a scholar steeped in the same broad political tradition. That Huntington offers no such response is a reflection of his predicament, which is also our own.

Peter Skerry teaches political science at Boston College and is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. He is a frequent contributor to Society.

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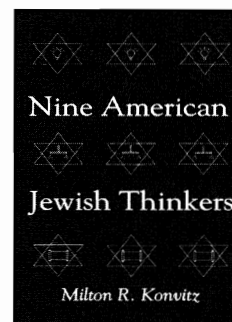
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