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# Nationalism and Anti-Immigrant Movements

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Ivan Light

**B**efore we can ask whether the public rhetoric of nationalism has created a renewed emphasis on national character, national phenotypes, and national culture, we must first define nationalism. After all, if nationalism already means fervent phenotypic and cultural loyalty and identification, then this question contains its own answer. If, however, we mean by nationalism the self-interest of the nation-state both as policy and principle, then we have asked a much shrewder question, one that does not resolve itself into tautology. That second question really asks whether the nation-state must be numbered among the causes of popular racism and ethno-religious chauvinism. This question can be answered yes very simply if we propose that prior and spontaneous popular racism and ethno-chauvinism frame the ideology and actions of ultranationalist states, which then feed back to the public the same chauvinism and racism the public required, fanning the flame that created the state in the first place.

This case is not very challenging. Much more challenging is to ask whether the mere existence of nation-states in a world of nation-states tends to promote fervent phenotypic and cultural loyalty and identification in publics at home and abroad. If this were so, then the coming into existence of nation-states where none previously existed, as in Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia, would tend of itself to inflame ethno-phenotypic awareness and, on the fringe, racism and xenophobia. A case for this proposition might run as

follows. When proclaimed as a principle, nationalism is the nation-state's self-interest. The nation-state derives its legitimacy from the nation it serves. Since many historic nations represent an ethno-cultural tradition and a phenotypic stock, the nation-state, on this neo-Hitlerian interpretation, exists to benefit that ethno-culturally and phenotypically defined people. Serbia exists to benefit the Serbs; Russia to benefit the Russians; Germany, the Germans, and so on. Nation-states also use nationalism to promote internal acceptance of their nation-strengthening policies, bombarding the public with ethno-phenotypic awareness in the process. In short, the legitimacy of the nation-state ultimately derives from the service of the nation, and the practical work of statecraft tends continually to arouse and inflame the ethno-phenotypic awareness and even chauvinism of the nation while reactively arousing the same feelings in their nation-state's neighbors, who turn to their own nation-state for protection.

If this theory were correct, every nation would ultimately become quite racist and chauvinist, thus fulfilling its essence. Since all states do not, in fact, turn into local versions of Hitler's Germany, which was quite extreme, there must be some flaw in the theory. In the discussion that follows, I propose that this neo-Hitlerian, neo-Hobbesian theory, while not wholly wrong, drastically overstates the actual encouragement that nation-state nationalism affords popular ethno-cultural and phenotypic loyalty and identification. In essence, this superficially plausible theory overlooks

recurrent instances in which the self-interest of the nation-state requires it to ignore, dampen, or even to suppress popular ethno-chauvinism and racism rather than to intensify them. In these cases, states actively discourage what, according to the neo-Hitlerian theory, their very existence and claims to legitimacy compel them to encourage. Moreover, when nation-states do so, they act legitimately in the interest of the nation they represent because, in point of fact, the self-interest of neither nation nor nation-state is invariably served by encouraging or catering to the intense and passionate attachment of citizens to the dominant phenotype or traditional ethno-religious culture of their nation. Sometimes this is the case, but sometimes, and this is important, it is not.

To illustrate this point, I turn to a comparative analysis of anti-immigrant movements in Europe and North America. A social movement is anti-immigrant when it seeks the reduction of immigration, the speedy end of immigration, the rapid and entire cultural assimilation of immigrants, or the expulsion of at least some of the existing immigrant population from the host society. Anti-immigrant movements stress ethno-cultural and phenotypical continuity of the host nation. Indeed, this continuity is the heart of the resistance to immigration that is the *raison d'être* of anti-immigrant movements. And there is some justification for these movements. In actuality, immigrants may threaten the ethno-cultural continuity of the host nation. For example, Muslim immigrants threaten the underlying Christian identity of European and North American nations. As matters stand, there are already more Muslims than Episcopalians in the United States, and, when the Muslims have overtaken the Catholics too, the United States will have become a predominantly Muslim nation. If permitted to intermarry with native people, immigrants also threaten the phenotypical continuity of the nation. For example, if Asian immigrants intermarry with white Americans, their native-born offspring will be Eurasians, not Caucasians. Americans will no longer look like white people from Europe.

Anti-immigrant movements resist changes in the dominant phenotype of their nation and in its ethno-cultural character out of intense loyalty to that dominant phenotype and ethno-religious cultural tradition. In this sense, anti-immigrant movements are *conservative* because they cling to an existing phenotype and traditional ethnic culture. Anti-immigrant movements also epitomize that intense popular loyalty to and identification with dominant phenotype and culture that the neo-Hitlerian theory attributes to the very existence of the nation-state itself.

Anti-immigrant movements have existed in the past and exist now in both North America and Europe. The Le Pen movement in France, the Republikaner Party in Germany, the Proposition 187 campaign in California, and the Official English movement in the United States all illustrate contemporary anti-immigrant movements that have undertaken political action. At the cultural level, signs of popular opposition to immigration are present in all the immigrant-receiving countries. In Canada, Sikhs were refused permission to wear turbans during school athletic periods. The wearing of turbans in public school undermines the cultural continuity of Anglo-Canadian society based upon Christianity. Even if the boys play rugby, a traditional sport, players in turbans represent unwelcome cultural change in Canada. In France, Muslim girls have been denied permission to wear veils to school for the same reason. In Germany, skinheads attacked immigrants on the street, and, in some well publicized incidents, burned their homes. In the United States, "patriot militias" and "Christian identity" churches mix violence, racism, religious chauvinism, and anti-immigrant fervor in a common ideological pot. In California, Light Up the Border sends citizens to illuminate the U.S.-Mexican border at their own expense, in hope of compelling more vigilant enforcement of border controls.

Anti-immigrant movements are self-proclaimedly nationalistic. That is, they declare that the interest of the nation is the touchstone of their policy, and they define the interest of the nation as phenotypical and ethno-cultural continuity. "This is a Christian nation, and it should remain one" epitomizes their demand. Although rarely challenged directly, both claims are quite wrong. One cannot assume that phenotypic and ethno-religious loyalty and identification are synonymous with the interest either of the nation-state or of the nation itself. In reality, the self-interest of both the nation and the nation-state often require immigration, even at the risk of cultural and phenotypical change. A nation's welfare may justify either accepting or excluding immigrants, depending partially upon circumstances and partially upon who determines what the nation's true interests are. Thus, Adolf Hitler and Helmut Kohl express quite different policy conceptions of what Germany's national interest is. National self-interest is rarely unambiguous. For the most part, in pursuing its self-interest, a nation has to make trade-offs between different and often conflicting components of its interests, only one of which is the continuity of its ethno-cultural and phenotypical stock. A nation, as well as its nation-state, has many interests, and the

service of one may undermine another, creating awkward and difficult policy choices.

Just for starters, nations and nation-states both have economic and political interests that sometimes conflict with one another. For example, a nation's self-interest may require foreign policies that undermine its economic interest, or vice-versa. Thus, writing in the context of the post-NAFTA debate over Mexico's \$40 billion loan guarantee, Henry Kissinger declared that the national security interests of the United States required a stable and prosperous Mexico. In Kissinger's opinion, despite its economic risks, the loan guarantee was justified by its political advantages. Experts have long made comparable arguments about the foreign policy advantages of Mexican immigration to the United States. Because immigration from Mexico to California strengthened consumer demand in Mexico, stabilized Mexico's internal politics, and reduced its unemployment, thus giving Mexico time to reform and democratize and to stabilize its population growth, immigration from Mexico arguably benefited the United States and the U.S. nation. Weighed against these overriding international stakes, localized and transitory economic discomfort from Mexican immigration was inconsequential. Compared to this big issue, who cares whether illegal aliens abuse welfare? Certainly, the experts claimed, the complaints of the Southwestern and Pacific regions about illegal aliens should not endanger the overriding national interest that the United States has in propping up Mexico. Whether one agrees with this line or not, the line is simultaneously nationalistic and *pro-immigration*.

If we acknowledge that nations and nation-states can have or, at least, think that they have racial and cultural interests in addition to economic and political interests, we set the stage for yet more complex trade-offs. A nation's racial interest means here its preference for the continuity of a racial stock and its dominant phenotypes. A nation's cultural interest means its strong preference for cultural continuity, implying, at a minimum, an assimilationist demand upon any immigrants present and, at the maximum, the fearful exclusion of any and all immigrants who might, were they admitted, change the ethno-cultural character of the nation. These are conservative interests, because they seek to safeguard the ethno-cultural and phenotypic status quo. We can imagine a nation that requires immigration for economic or political purposes but that rejects immigration for cultural and racial reasons, or vice-versa. In such a case, a nation does not have a simple national self-interest. Rather, it has to make a tough policy choice among alternative values. It can-

not have everything. Therefore, its policy determination of what is national self-interest must evolve from a balance of conflicting internal interests, giving pre-eminence to whichever interests most need attention at any given time. These are tough and controversial decisions that cannot count upon internal consensus.

For example, when debating the racially motivated exclusion of Asian immigrants in 1912, the U.S. Congress had to decide whether California's loudly proclaimed racial and cultural interest in Japanese exclusion was worth antagonizing the Japanese Empire. California was a white man's society, and it wanted to stay that way. President Taft did not think that California's racial purity was compensation enough for antagonizing the Japanese, so he vetoed the bill. Undeterred, and under pressure from racist voters in California, Congress passed a more exclusionary immigration bill in 1916, but President Wilson vetoed it for the same foreign policy reason as had President Taft. However, Congress overrode Wilson's veto in 1917, writing into law the Immigration Act of February 5, 1917, which first created an Asian "barred zone" from which immigration to the United States was prohibited. In effect, the five years of deliberations that preceded this legislation determined that ethno-cultural and phenotypical continuity in California were more important to national interest than were affronts to the Japanese Empire. As expected, the racist immigration legislation enraged the Japanese. This rage embittered U.S.-Japanese relations for decades and surfaced again in Japanese plans to bomb Pearl Harbor, partially an act of racial revenge. Indeed, the Japanese still nurse this anger. To the extent that the racist immigration bill of 1917 damaged U.S. relations with Japan and helped to bring on U.S. involvement in World War II in 1941, the racial exclusion of Japanese from the United States, however ardently demanded in California, was not really in the self-interest of the United States in 1917. In hindsight, we now see that the policy definition of national self-interest ought to have paid more attention to the long-term diplomatic and military implications of immigration policy and less attention to the racial and cultural complaints of California. However, the United States had to choose which dimension of its self-interest was most important, and it chose badly.

Nations differ in the prominence they award their political, economic, cultural, and racial interests. In Germany, the law virtually excludes fully acculturated, German-born Turks from citizenship, but the same law expedites the naturalization of just-arrived non-German-speaking *volksdeutsch* from Russia or Poland.

This contrast suggests that German nationalism sets high priority upon the continuity of Germany's ethno-racial stock and its dominant phenotypes. Culture does not matter nearly as much as does phenotype in Germany. In Israel, in contrast, defending dominant phenotype counts for nothing in national immigration policy. Instead, Israeli nationalism seeks maximum immigration, but religion (not phenotype) determines the fitness of immigrants for citizenship: Only Jewish immigrants are acceptable, and all Jewish immigrants are awarded immediate citizenship. However, Israel expects total and swift Hebraization of all immigrants, a tough policy of total cultural assimilation. Discouraging immigration, France nonetheless permits the naturalization of fully assimilated aliens; however, it rejects cultural pluralism among new citizens. All citizens must become wholly and exclusively French. French means having cultural continuity with the past, so one cannot be French who does not speak French as his or her native tongue. This demand is compatible with France's long-standing "mission to civilize," a cultural interest of the French nation. Thus, both Israel and France impose cultural tests of fitness for naturalization, and these tests suggest that cultural interests outrank phenotypical ones in these states.

The United States and, especially, Canada have long conceived of immigration as an economic resource and have promptly admitted to full citizenship unacculturated individuals, who, moreover, because of policies of multiculturalism, are released from any obligation to learn English. Additionally, the United States and Canada currently have immigration policies that are virtually color-blind. These are *liberal* policies, in the sense that they ignore the conservative interest in cultural and phenotypical continuity of the nation. Do these liberal policies mean that North American states crafted immigration policies without regard to perceived national self-interest? Such is the usual claim of anti-immigrant critics. However, the legislative history of immigration debates puts that idea to rest. When one examines the actual congressional debates that accompanied U.S. immigration legislation, one finds that hard-headed and often naked self-interest is and always has been the supreme arbiter of immigration policy. In effect, the behavior of these North American states simply shows that on this continent, policy makers have ranked the nation's and the nation-state's economic and political interests ahead of any cultural and racial interests.

When the United States abandoned the national origins quota system in 1965, thus opening the door to immigration from Latin America and Asia, a liberal

action, several nationalistic reasons obtained. First, and arguably most important, the United States was then wading into an unpopular war against North Vietnam, an Asian adversary. In the context of the domestic Civil Rights movement, a domestic policy crisis of that decade, the U.S. State Department concluded that liberalization of immigration policy was a top-priority foreign policy issue. Competing with the communists for world leadership, the United States simply had to clean up its racist international image. For political reasons, the United States could not accept the opprobrium of a racist immigration law in the context of world condemnation of its segregationist civil society. Secretary of State Dean Rusk bluntly told Congress that foreign policy required a color-blind immigration law, and Congress gave him that law. Second, labor force projections showed that catastrophic shortages of engineering and medical personnel would materialize unless the United States opened its doors to foreign engineers, doctors, and nurses. These projections were well founded. Currently, about a third of our medical personnel and engineers are foreign born. Were it not for these immigrants, many of them non-white and non-Christian, the economy and health care systems of the United States would be in much worse shape than they are, bad as that current situation is. In this sense, a liberal immigration policy was arguably in the national self-interest of the United States and of the American nation.

One can legitimately object that "this is now, that was then." True, whatever national purposes immigration laws may once have served or been intended to serve, a critic can always claim that they outlived that purpose and now undermine the nation's interest. Such claims give rise to anti-immigrant social movements. Anti-immigrant movements arise when citizens sense that immigration no longer serves national self-interest and has become a bad deal for the recipient country. This turn of events is nowhere clearer than in Germany, which welcomed guest workers to participate in building its postwar economic miracle. No one complained about too many foreigners in 1955. However, with the miracle completed and the country facing slower growth, ordinary Germans began to feel that the economic benefits of guest workers no longer outweighed the cost to the nation's ethno-cultural and phenotypical continuity. Indeed, many declared that immigration's economic impact, once a benefit, had become adverse because guest workers took jobs from Germans instead of making it possible for Germans to obtain better jobs, as had originally been the case. When in 1989 reunification dumped cheap East Ger-

man labor on already saturated West German job markets, it became harder than ever to make a case for the continuing economic benefit provided by non-German workers, who appeared, indeed, to have the better of the immigration bargain. Under these circumstances, Germany's anti-immigrant movement and the right-wing parties affiliated with it threatened to take control of the government away from the mainstream parties on this issue.

When immigration policies are reviewed, the final judgment depends upon what motivates voters and policy makers, who often hold different conceptions of national self-interest. If voters are wholly indifferent to phenotypic or cultural continuity in their society—a rare state of affairs—they will evaluate immigration laws strictly on economic, political, military, and even humanitarian grounds. Even conservative voters become pro-immigration when they perceive overriding economic and political benefits of immigration that compensate the perceived racial and cultural costs of immigration. Conservatives can make a trade-off. In conservative countries, liberal immigration laws arise when enough conservatives agree that the nation's interest demands immigration even at some inconvenience to the phenotypical and cultural continuity of the population. In a society like Germany, whose population stresses racial and cultural continuity, many voters are conservative in this sense. Only very substantial economic and political benefits will induce German voters to open the doors to foreigners and immigration. And, should those benefits diminish in perceived value, the nation's doors slam shut quickly. Conversely, in societies like Canada and the United States, whose voters are by European standards unusually materialistic, slight economic and political benefits will justify pro-immigration policies.

Even in North America, one must from time to time ask whether immigration laws still make nationalist sense under current conditions, or whether they have outlived their utility. The answer depends in part upon our evaluation of what have been the economic and political costs of this immigration. For decades, there was no sign of any such cost. In the 1980s, social science research in the United States began for the first time to turn up some evidence of limited and sector-specific job competition between immigrant workers and native blacks and Latinos. Additionally, as Governor Pete Wilson's reelection campaign in California made very clear to everyone in the United States, research has universally concluded that illegal immigrants take slightly more in state-supported medical and educational services than they contribute to Cali-

fornia in taxes. True, the immigrants provide a useful and ubiquitous low-wage labor force in farm, factory, and home. Were they excluded in the interest of cultural and racial continuity, California would pay an economic price. Nonetheless, these recent reports suggest that immigration's domestic economic effects are not completely positive anymore. There is some basis for claiming that the economic effects only became negative in the 1980s. These changes certainly weaken the electorate's conviction that current immigration is in the national self-interest of the United States. Under the circumstance, the baseline conservatives find fewer compensations for the perceived racial and cultural costs of immigration.

Even with these damaging changes, there still remains some case for existing U.S. immigration laws. First, the United States still needs Asian engineers and health professionals for the very reasons anticipated in the 1965 legislation. The United States still does not produce enough of these personnel to fill critical domestic needs. Second, as assassinations and peso devaluation make clear, Mexico is teetering on the verge of political and economic collapse. To restrict Mexican immigration now would increase the political turbulence within Mexico, increasing the likelihood of civil war and Guatemala-style repression on the southern border of the United States. Mexicans are also quite sensitive to the racist implications of California's Proposition 187 and of anti-immigrant talk elsewhere in the United States. A new Mexican government, arising from the chaos of PRI collapse, might well be anti-U.S. in spirit. Arguably, immigrant competition in the jobs and housing market is a sacrifice California must make to reduce that political risk to the United States.

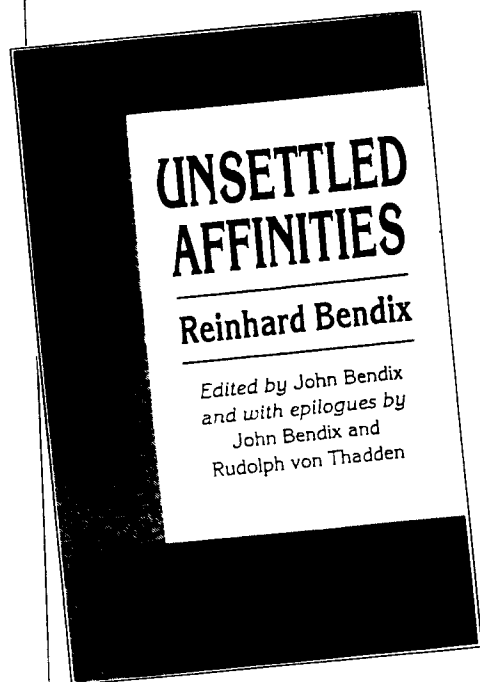
If we now ask who sees which side of this debate, an important fact is comes to light. Whether in Europe or North America, policy makers have superior access to the international picture. That is, balancing indignant conservative voters, who worry about ethnocultural and phenotypical continuity, and economic and foreign policy issues, they look for the supreme national interest at stake in immigration policy. If they cannot act upon that supreme national interest, restrained by domestic politics, at least they think about what it might be. This international perspective permits policy makers to sacrifice pawns when necessary, obtaining the greater national interest by surrendering the lesser. Conversely, voters generalize the national interest from their own perceived cultural, racial, economic, or political interest. They think that immigration harms the country just because it harms them, their

region, or their race or diminishes their culture's dominance. In a way, immigrant-bashing citizens must take this perspective because they are otherwise open to the objection that their parochial interest should be sacrificed in the greater national interest. Of course, nations must sacrifice pawns, but no one wants to be that pawn.

We again and again encounter the spectacle of nationalistic politicians trying to hold anti-immigrant movements at bay. From the politicians' point of view, the anti-immigrant movement often reverses national priorities, sacrificing long-term national interests to the transitory, partial interest of some ethno-racial group or region. For example, a senator might plausibly believe that having enough engineers and doctors is worth some decline in cultural and phenotypical continuity. Conversely, at the grass roots, people see their

personal, their ethno-racial, and their regional interests most clearly and can hardly be induced to contemplate the political and economic interests of the whole nation. If an immigrant has taken Smith's job, or the jobs of people like Smith, Smith's probable political response is anti-immigrant protest, even if that protest undermines the stability of a friendly government or jeopardizes his nation's access to foreign-trained engineers. One Smith makes no difference. However, if enough Smiths come forward, politicians must redefine national self-interest to Smith's short-sighted advantage—or be replaced by others who will.

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## UNSETTLED AFFINITIES

Reinhard Bendix

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Reinhard Bendix's consideration of Germany in the post-Communist world was not completed. Using notes, letters, and lectures, John Bendix, the author's son, has provided an epilogue that gives an indication of the direction he was heading, and Rudolph von Thadden has contributed a final chapter entitled "Endangered Affiliations."

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