MEXIFORNIA:

SENSE, SOFTHEADEDNESS, AND SUBVERSION

Mexifornia: A State of Becoming
Victor Davis Hanson
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Reviewed by John Attarian

Immigration is profoundly transforming America, especially California, which receives millions of Mexican immigrants. In *Mexifornia*, Victor Davis Hanson, a classicist at California State University, Fresno, and a Central Valley farmer, takes a hard look at immigration into the state and its meaning. Drawing on his teaching and farming experience, Hanson challenges immigrationist dogmas, but his performance is mixed. An important addition to the immigration debate, *Mexifornia* merits sustained scrutiny.

California, he observes, is a bellwether, so how immigration plays out there prefigures America's fate. Our predicament is "apparently unsolvable": Americans want foreigners for unpleasant work, but wrongly assume they will assimilate. We probably want less immigration and more assimilation. "But caught in a paralysis of timidity and dishonesty, we still cannot enact the necessary plans for a workable solution." Rejecting historical determinism, Hanson maintains that our future is in our hands. He calls, therefore, for "honest discussion, without fear of recrimination and intimidation."

A VIEW FROM THE TRENCHES

Some 40 percent of our immigrants live in California. Half of all illegal immigrants are Mexican; our Hispanic population is over 70 percent Mexican. If current immigration continues, by 2050 America will have 97 million

Hispanics, 25 percent of America's population and over half of California's. What is new, Hanson argues, is not the immigration level but "a growing despair and uncertainty over how—or even whether—to assimilate the arrivals." Most Californians realize that they have made a "Devil's bargain" of admitting Mexican immigrants so as to escape menial labor. But since even timid attempts to discuss immigration honestly receive "the cheap slander of 'racist,'" most white Californians suppress their anger—and vent it in ballot propositions curtailing benefits for illegals.

Mexican immigration is unique, Hanson ably explains, because Mexico's proximity precludes immigrants' psychological amputation from their homeland and permits a steady influx of new immigrants, allowing immigrants to retain a Mexican milieu here. Both hamper assimilation. That white racism holds Mexicans back is only partially true, he argues, since it did not handicap Koreans, Armenians, and others, and in any case "belongs entirely to the past." Moreover, Mexico's government is complicit in our immigration problem. "Mexican elites rely on immigration northward as a means of avoiding domestic reform." They are "sitting on a demographic time bomb": a population of almost 100 million people growing at two percent a year, with provision of jobs, health care, etc. for such multitudes impossible. Without America receiving millions of her poor, Mexico might face either revolution or an African-style die-off.

Drawing on his farm experience, Hanson eloquently depicts the illegal alien's grim life. American teenagers won't pick crops, for good reason: it is physically hard. It pays well—provided you are young, healthy, and can find other work before you age. Crime and violence are pandemic; the Hispanic death rate from homicide is three times that of non-Hispanic whites. Drugs and drunkenness are pervasive; cirrhosis of the liver kills Hispanics at a higher rate than any other ethnic group, twice as frequently as whites. Likewise, sexually transmitted disease is widespread, and Hispanics have twice the HIV infection rate of the native white population. Vulnerable to many diseases, Hispanics are thirteen times as likely as whites to have tuberculosis.

Gradually illegals catch on that labor contractors and others are bilking them. They come to envy their rich white employers, and to realize despairingly that they are trapped: they will become decrepit and unemployable, and go on welfare. Those with large families are doomed to poverty and exhaustion. Their fates have a powerful demonstration effect on their sons, who opt instead to become gangsters and criminals. Assuming that Americans would understandably avoid dead-end labor, we blinked at the influx of poor Mexicans. "But what at first was a relief became a troubling dilemma, and is now a near-disaster," Hanson writes bluntly, revealing immigration's heavy burden on native Californians. His own life teems with immigrant drivers going off the road and wrecking his vineyard; aliens routinely dumping trash, including one trailer filled with garbage, beside and on his property ("perhaps

it is an atavism from the old country where trash is everywhere dumped outside city limits?"); Mexicans routinely trespassing to shoot wildlife, get drunk, and steal; vandalism and burglary. ("I pick up their needles and condoms, brandy bottles and tampons nightly near our farm pond. Some have tried to break into my house.") Increasingly, Hanson finds keeping Mexican illegals and gangsters off his land "a hopeless task;...some trespassers seem piqued that anyone in California should dare to insist on the archaic notion of property rights. One especially smart teenager told me in broken English, 'Hey, it's our land anyway—not yours.'"

So much for the immigrants' much-vaunted "strong values," and the poppycock that assimilation and American identity rest on assent to "propositions." On Hanson's evidence, Mexico's folkways jarringly differ from America's, which flow from the centuries-old northern European, especially English, ethos of privacy, private property, gratification deferral, and self-control, and owe nothing to "propositions" or libertarian abstractions. Hanson is a valuable corrective for fatuous immigrationists sheltered from immigration's ugly realities.

Hanson blasts giving illegals driver licenses without requiring documentation, while requiring it of legal Californians, which perversely rewards lawbreaking and penalizes the law-abiding, and the "bizarre" policy of granting instant citizenship to illegal aliens' infants upon birth in America. Vivid firsthand anecdotes illustrate the "exasperating" social costs of large numbers of illegal aliens, from hit-and-run drivers to the appalling loss of time and efficiency as banks and other institutions struggle with a clientele that does not understand English.

Handily, Hanson explodes the self-serving distortions of history by Hispanic grievance mongers. Many Hispanics prospered in America before 1970, and Mexico's history is rife with crime, cruelty, corruption, and violence. If Hanson's teachers met Mexican immigrants with "unapologetically coarse efforts to insist on assimilation," on the assumption that America was far superior to Mexico, that assumption, he frankly states, was grounded in observable fact. Unlike Mexican courts and police, ours were generally honest, and America was a better place for people trying to get ahead.

All this candor is welcome in a timid, dishonest era. Hanson's firsthand experience with immigration gives him special credibility, and his call for fearless, candid discussion is just what the doctor ordered.

Evasion and Denial

Deeper down, however, *Mexifornia* is profoundly disturbing. Hanson is no conservative. He dubs Pat Buchanan and other conservatives "reactionary," refers to "good-thinking liberals" deploring the defense

budget, and calls Operation Wetback, President Eisenhower's deportation of illegals, "infamous." A fervent racial liberal, dwelling in a town of integration and intermarriage, Hanson deems race "superficial and unimportant in my personal life." His liberalism leads him repeatedly into denial of reality, and worse.

A former resident of Mendota told Hanson that he left "when the last white people left"; another Mexican, living in Parlier, transferred his children to the nearby Kingsburg schools which have "lots of white people." Hanson interprets these as statements that these places had "too many unassimilated Mexicans...to ensure an American future for their children, a critical mass" making both towns resemble Mexico more than America, "and therefore less safe, secure and desirable places to live." Fair enough, but also an evasion of the reality that the real problem was not the presence of Mexicans but the absence of whites, and that a location's desirability usually depends on its being populated predominantly by whites. (And why are the societies created by whites the only ones which the world's nonwhite poor deem worth moving to?) Intellectuals, Hanson declares, insufficiently appreciate that such Western values as the sanctity of property and free markets "are not predicated on race or ethnicity, but on simple acceptance of a core set of rights and responsibilities." So why did these rights and responsibilities flourish above all in northern Europe? He proclaims, "The answer to our current dilemma has nothing to do with race. It has everything to do with the degree to which a society is openly Western, and can thereby create a culture that trumps its natural environment." But what Hanson doesn't grasp or won't admit is that Western civilization was produced by European whites and nobody else. It necessarily follows that being Western and adopting "a core set of rights and responsibilities" means adopting Western norms of conduct, which means—there is no escaping this—*acting white,* which means the answer has everything to do with race. The splendid performance of Hanson's white-acting Hispanic students proves this, but he fails to realize it.

Hanson's multicultural chapter reveals his confusions. He observes that Chicano studies remain in their 1970s mold, and whimperingly asks, "why should racism and oppression remain unchanged themes thirty years later," and can't we go from sixty-two such courses "to perhaps ten?" He finds Latino elites' fervor for bilingual education "baffling." Then he realizes that militant multiculturalism "emboldens the architects of separatism to demand even more concessions from appeasers." A good discussion of biased liberal journalism and the spoils system operated by Hispanic race hustlers follows, but Hanson stumbles again, asserting that "The professional Latino means well." As Churchill said of Stanley Baldwin, "Occasionally he stumbled over the truth, but hastily picked himself up and hurried on as if nothing had happened."

California, Hanson declares, is "a great, though risky experiment in a truly multiracial society, united by a common language, culture and law," unknown since the Roman Principate. "But that subjugation of race to culture is forever a fragile state, not a natural condition. Each day it erodes if not actively maintained. Race, chauvinism, ethnicity creep hourly back into social life if not battled by citizens of strength and vision."

This, necessarily, is a devastating confession that a multiracial society is unnatural, resting on a denial of reality that must be ceaselessly willed—that this "experiment" isn't for this world, that it entails forcing people to go against the grain of human nature, and that it is therefore doomed. Let classics professor Hanson ponder a certain quotation from the Roman poet Horace: "*Naturam expelles furca, tamen usque recurret.*" "Expel nature with a pitchfork, and she still comes back."

Hanson would cure multiracialism's fragility by maximizing the dose. Repeatedly he touts racial intermarriage as part of our immigration solution. His dream is of a society in which all share the same values "and gradually become indistinguishable through integration, assimilation, and intermarriage." Clearly attempting to foist intermarriage on his readers, he refers to "our group commitment to intermarriage," when no such commitment exists. And if "[t]he answer has nothing to do with race," why is Hanson hell-bent on obliterating distinct races?

Hanson's fervor for miscegenation is part and parcel of liberalism's perennial utopian project of contriving harmony by erasing distinctions. When Deweyite education has crippled every mind, there won't be any more hurtful differences between bright and stupid. When socioeconomic classes vanish, so will class antagonisms. When all religions are attenuated to nonjudgmental niceness, there won't be any religious conflict. Universal androgynous libertinism will end gender and sexual-orientation friction. When separate nations disappear, so will wars. When there aren't any more races, there won't be any more racism. And we'll live happily ever after in the brotherhood of interchangeable ciphers.

Liberalism's Huxleyan dystopia collides with the most powerful human drive of all: self-preservation. As Russell Kirk wrote in another context, "It seems to be a law governing all life, from the unicellular inanimate forms to the highest human cultures, that every living organism of every genus and species endeavors, above all else, to preserve its identity."

Here we must also confront, "without fear of recrimination or intimidation," something very ugly. Here liberalism's evil emerges, like something unspeakable crawling out from underneath a rock. Why any white woman in her senses would want to marry an illegal alien who by Hanson's own account is far more likely than a white man to be sexually infected, diseased, drugged, drunken, impoverished, criminal, and homicidally violent, with no future to offer her, and likely too to mistreat her for being white, is not

explained. That the probable fate of white women in such marriages is heartbreakingly grim goes unmentioned too; Hanson's commitment to fearless "honest discussion" has its limits. Yet this horror is what he apparently wants. Deep down, this man is a monster—or a fool. A devotee of economism ("Money always trumps race in America"), Hanson argues that globalization's popular culture and turbo consumption may provide short-term assimilation. They unite us in "shared appetites for material things that dissolve the old prejudices of race, class, language and culture." Though offensive, popular culture nevertheless assumes that "almost all Americans...find instant commonality with one another through the medium of desire." While it may harm long-term moral health, for now it is our "only tool" to prevent "racial separation and ethnic tribalism." Our "shared addiction" to popular culture "inexorably builds affinities across racial lines." Admittedly, this is a "Devil's bargain," trading "standards and taste for raw inclusiveness," but we're fortunate to have our popular culture. "No substitute for real civic education" in American heritage and values, it does "buy us a little time" before we must confront the "catastrophe" of our failure to control our borders and give millions an "elevated culture."

It is revolting to see a classics professor, of all people, lauding modernity's crass, demeaning reduction of people to sensate, glandular ciphers, bundles of appetites in search of gratification—and willing to sacrifice higher culture and civilized standards of being for a phony, skin-deep "assimilation." Hanson's argument is ridiculous; the September 11 terrorists long dwelled among us, consuming supposedly affinity-building popular culture, then slaughtered Americans anyway. And how we will give immigrants "elevated culture" after marinating them in lowest-common-denominator vulgarity is not explained.

Hanson is clutching at straws. And even if globalization could unite us, California's exploding water demand, the salinization of Central Valley croplands, China's hideous pollution and water crisis, and the coming peak and decline of global oil and gas extraction ineluctably doom consumerism. If consumerism fuels assimilation, what will irreversible economic contraction do?

He reassures us that "we are not quite killing each other, as happens daily in almost every multiracial society on the planet." But as Hanson must know, we *are* killing each other—America has much interracial violence and murder, mostly committed by nonwhites against whites. And this is yet another admission that multiracial societies are probably unworkable.

Hanson's muddles flow partly from failure to define the central concept of assimilation. "Assimilate" derives from the Latin *assimilare,* from *ad* plus *similare,* "to make like." My dictionary defines it as "To make similar or alike" and "To appropriate and incorporate into the substance of the appropriating body; to absorb." So assimilation means immigrants become like us, by adopting our values and folkways. We don't change, immigrants do—they "go

native." Hanson asserts that assimilation works "through both intermarriage and shared consumerism." The latter is trifling. The former is amalgamation, not assimilation. The difference is substantive, not semantic; amalgamation means *both* groups lose their identity.

Assimilation of immigrants in America does not mean miscegenation, wearing goofy T-shirts, or accepting a "proposition." It means acting white. This is not white supremacy, simply the truth that assimilation means adopting the ways of the host population; assimilation of whites in, say, Uganda means acting black. What else could it mean?

Yes and No

At the end, Hanson returns to reality—but only partially. Preserving the status quo, he rightly argues, will wreck California. We can keep open borders and insist on either assimilation sans bilingualism or separation, or we can slash immigration and let multiculturalism wither away with its clientele. Better, he argues, "to adopt sweeping restrictions on immigration and put an end to the separatist ideology along with the two-tier legal system for illegal aliens." Given this, "our present problems would vanish almost immediately," and wages would rise.

Hanson's proposal leaves millions of illegals here, so our problems would *not* "vanish." Deporting them and stopping immigration altogether would be better. This, however, is too much for him. Saying much that needs saying, *Mexifornia* is valuable, but *caveat, emptor!* Hanson's partial realism is welcome. But there is much that he has not faced or thought through. Sensible up to a point, *Mexifornia* is softheaded and ultimately subversive. "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau."

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