

# Who Are We? Fears and Facts in Samuel Huntington's Attack on Latino Immigration to the United States

BRITTA WALDSCHMIDT-NELSON

The high level of Latino, especially Mexican, immigration to the United States is endangering America's National Identity« – this is the latest thesis of Harvard political scientist Samuel P. Huntington. According to his new book, »Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity«, Mexican and other Latinos have – in contrast to previous immigrant groups – not assimilated into mainstream American culture and can therefore not be integrated into American society.<sup>1</sup> They make up the majority of illegal entries into the United States; most have no interest in learning English; and – worst of all – they settle in their own Spanish-speaking communities, which keep growing through further immigration and high birthrates. These new Hispanic cultural spheres are slowly but continuously taking over more and more cities; indeed, whole regions have already been »Latinized«. This is a process, Huntington believes, that threatens to »divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages«, which would mean »the end of the America we have known for more than three centuries« (pp. 30; 45).

Huntington's theory instantly provoked reactions from scores of scholars, journalists, and political activists, although the ideas are not entirely new. Peter Brimelow's popular 1995 book »Alien Nation: Common Sense about America's Immigration Disaster« raised almost the same issues as Huntington's »Who Are We?«; and an almost identical analysis of and warning against Latino immigration with regard to California can be found in Victor Davis Hanson's »Mexifornia: A State of Becoming«,

---

1. The book was published by Simon & Schuster in May 2004, but Huntington issued a summary of his views under the title »The Hispanic Challenge« in the March/April issue of *Foreign Policy* – page numbers in the present article refer to the latter. Some of the – mostly critical – reactions of other scholars and a brief response to them by Huntington can be found in the May/June issue of *Foreign Policy*.

published in 2003.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the theme of the United States as a nation endangered by the influx of too many foreigners, too much multiculturalism, or a so-called »balkanization of the college campus« should be familiar to anyone who has read Allan Bloom's »The Closing of the American Mind« (1987), Dinesh D'Souza's »Illiberal Education« (1992), or James Traub's »City on a Hill« (1994). Thus the discourse in which Huntington's new book seeks to participate is well established. However, this is the first time that an internationally acclaimed political scientist has entered the debate; a scholar whose standing – especially after September 11, 2001 – is such that many people will take seriously whatever he writes simply because it was written by him.<sup>3</sup> The present article is an attempt to put the arguments of Huntington (and his predecessors) into the context of the current American immigration debate and to evaluate their significance for questions of American national identity and also political decision-making.

## Truths and Myths about Latino Immigration

### The »Us vs Them« Approach

First, it is noteworthy that Huntington uses the same method in »Who Are We?« that he employed in his world-famous 1993 book »Clash of Civilizations«, portraying the relationship and interaction between certain foreign cultures and American/Western culture as an inherently dangerous process which threatens to endanger, perhaps even destroy the latter. With an amazing sense of timing, Huntington in his first essay – pub-

- 
2. Brimelow, a senior editor at *National Review* and *Forbes*, argued that the high number of »colored« immigrants (he didn't differentiate between Asians, Hispanics, Indians or other non-white immigrants) was harming the United States economically and degrading the character of American society. Himself a British immigrant, he called for limiting access to the US mainly to high-skilled white people. The argument of Hanson, a classics professor at California State University, Fresno, is more refined and less openly racist. Coming from a white family of Swedish descent, Hanson explains that the lack of Hispanic assimilation in California has created a dangerous subculture which could eventually transform all of the state into a »Republic del Norte«.
  3. One colleague described Huntington, who co-founded *Foreign Policy* and chairs Harvard's Academy for International and Area Studies, as »the single most influential and relentless political scientist of the last half century«. See *Foreign Policy* (May/June 2004), p. 6.

lished shortly after the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union as the West's public enemy number one – portrayed Eastern civilization, especially Arab and Muslim culture, as a major threat to Western civilization, especially the so-called Judeo-Christian tradition and the values of democracy and consumer capitalism. By offering the Western nations a new »Feindbild« and a new ideology to rally around and so develop a sense of unity, »Clash of Civilizations«, while viciously attacked by many critics, became immensely popular and had a major impact on the political discourse of the 1990s. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and in view of the ongoing »War against (Islamist-Fundamentalist) Terrorism« many Americans now regard Huntington's theory as a prophetic warning. He is therefore guaranteed a receptive audience now that he has turned his gaze directly towards the United States, portraying the fastest growing immigrant group, Hispanics, as *the* cultural threat to American values and national identity – especially in an election year in which immigration policy is one of the hot political issues.

In doing so, however, Huntington is following an approach that proponents of American Nativism have used since the founding of the Republic: combining facts with fiction (or distorted use of statistical data), playing on popular fears and drawing on cultural antipathies as well as ethnic prejudices to provoke some sort of reaction against an internal minority which supposedly threatens the »American way of life«. Huntington's charges that Hispanics are different from previous immigrants, not just because of their numbers, but because of their adherence to their native tongue and culture have been raised against many other immigrant groups in the past: »Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a colony of Aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of us Anglifying them?«, asked the young Benjamin Franklin in 1751. And while he soon stopped worrying about this problem, many other Americans continued to perceive German immigrants – who spoke German for up to three generations, founded their own towns and cultural associations (some of them still exist today) – as a dangerous, subversive group. In the mid-nineteenth century, Scottish and Irish Catholics, whose »un-American faith« and assumed loyalty to the pope were also deemed highly suspect, became prime targets of violent nativism, while in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries nativist hostilities were directed mainly against Eastern and Southern European – especially Jewish – as well as Asian immigrants. This anti-immigrant fervor culminated in the infamous National Origins Act of 1924 which severely

curtailed immigration for anyone not coming from Western Europe and practically excluded Asians altogether. When signing this law President Calvin Coolidge proclaimed: »America must be kept American« (a statement that Huntington could easily have adopted as a subtitle for his »Who Are We?«).<sup>4</sup>

---

Huntington's charges that Hispanics are different from previous immigrants, not just because of their numbers, but because of their adherence to their native tongue and culture have been raised against many other immigrant groups in the past.

---

Despite nativist claims to the contrary, all these immigrant groups did eventually assimilate into the mainstream culture, broadening the ethnic as well as the religious components of American national identity. Not only immigrants, but also religious minorities who formerly existed at the margins of society have become widely accepted parts of the American mainstream (for example, Jews, Mormons, and Evangelical Christians). The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 ended the discriminatory national-origins quota system of 1924, opening the door to a stream of new immigrants mainly from non-European countries (many from Central and South America, but also from Asia). Since then, the image of the »Salad Bowl« has started to replace the »Melting Pot« ideal, giving credit to the diversity of the American people, and the term »Judeo-Christian tradition« as opposed to WASP (white Anglo-Saxon Protestant) has been used more and more to describe the American cultural mainstream.

While not denying this history of successful assimilation of previous immigrant and minority groups, Huntington still claims that Hispanic immigrants are inherently different and will never fit this pattern. A closer look at the numerous examples and statistics he quotes to prove his point reveals some major argumentative as well as empirical weaknesses to his approach.

---

4. For an excellent survey of this topic see, for example, John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860–1925*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick: JML Rutgers University Press, 1988) and »Instead of a Sequel, or How I Lost My Subject«, *Reviews in American History* 28 (2) (June 2000), pp. 327–39.

## The Extent of Latino Immigration and the Threat of »White Nativism«

It is true that the size of the so-called Hispanic population has increased tremendously since the mid twentieth century (from less than three percent to 13 percent of the American population: since 2003 they have replaced African Americans – 12.7 percent – as the largest minority group in the United States). If current trends continue, the US Census Bureau projects that by the mid twenty-first century one in every four Americans could be Hispanic.<sup>5</sup> However, it is important to note that the term »Hispanic« (which was introduced by the US Census Bureau in 1970 and can be used interchangeably with »Latino«) is not a racial or ethnic category but applies to all people in America who trace their origin to a Spanish-speaking country. While a majority of these Hispanics (about 60 percent) have Mexican roots, there are many other groups of »Hispanic origin«, such as Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Cubans or immigrants from Spain or Central and South America. Hispanic Americans can be white, black, or brown (48 percent of all Hispanics marked »white« as their racial category in 2000).<sup>6</sup> In contrast to other minorities in the United States (for example, African Americans), there are significant cultural differences between the various Hispanic groups, since many of them do not have the same racial or ethnic background, do not share a common history, have widely divergent socioeconomic situations, and do not have a common political agenda – facts that Huntington largely ignores in his analysis.<sup>7</sup>

Most scholars of immigration believe that the geographic dispersion of an immigrant group is an important indicator of its assimilation into the host society. The regional concentration of Mexicans in California, Cubans in Miami, and Dominicans and Puerto Ricans in New York is therefore, in Huntington's view, a sign of their failed assimilation and presents, at the same time, a strong cultural threat to the regions con-

---

5. This and all following population statistics are taken from the 2002 US Census figures: see US Census Bureau, *Current Population Reports*, P60/222, US Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 2003 ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)).

6. Only four percent of Hispanics marked »African American«, six percent marked »more than one race«, and 42 percent marked »some other race« as their category in the 2000 census.

7. For example, Spanish, Argentinean, and Puerto Rican immigrants do not have much in common, and while most Mexican Americans in California support the Democratic Party, Cubans in Florida usually vote Republican. In New York the poverty rate of Dominicans is 32 percent, that of Colombians only eleven percent.

cerned. While it is true that, compared with the national average, Hispanics in the US are still an urban, highly concentrated population and over half of them live in just two states (11.6 million in California, 7.2 million in Texas), there are many other states with a sizable Hispanic population (for example, New York, Florida, Illinois, Arizona, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and New Mexico). According to a study by the Pew Hispanic Center and the Brookings Institution, Hispanic immigrants are actually dispersing geographically at a faster rate than the great European immigrant waves a century ago. Huntington himself points out that during the last decade there has been a tremendous increase in the Hispanic population of traditionally non-Hispanic areas, for example, in Nevada, North Carolina, Arkansas, Georgia, Tennessee, and Alabama.<sup>8</sup> However, rather than seeing this as a positive development Huntington interprets it as the establishment of Mexican »beachheads«, which further threatens the destruction of authentic American culture (p. 35).

Predicting a scenario in which these unwanted immigrants will outnumber white Americans and threaten the Anglo-Protestant heritage of the United States, Huntington warns that this would inevitably provoke a violent backlash by the beleaguered whites who would feel like »strangers in their own land«. To demonstrate the possible consequences of such »white nativism« (a term he takes from Carol Swain's 2002 book »The New White Nationalism in America«) Huntington cites the ethnic-cleansing tragedy of Bosnia as an example of what can happen if the growth of a minority group into a majority (in this case Muslims) comes to constitute a cultural threat to the former majority (Serbs). While admitting that there is little chance that California whites would suddenly try to kill all the Mexicans in their state, he does imply that »the chance that they will not react« in some drastic, potentially violent way »is also about zero« (p. 41) Again, Huntington fails to notice that America has been able to deal successfully with surges of immigration that were proportionately larger than the present one in the past without becoming a divided nation or turning to genocide (for example, the rate of Irish immigrants in the mid nineteenth century was more than twice the Mexican one of the 1990s; nineteenth-century German and early twentieth-cen-

---

8. See Population Resource Center, Executive Summary: A Demographic Profile of Hispanics in the US, [www.prcdc.org/summaries/hispanics/hispanics.html](http://www.prcdc.org/summaries/hispanics/hispanics.html), and Daniel T. Grisworld, Associate Director of the Center for Trade Policy Studies, Cato Institute, letter to the editor, *Foreign Policy* (May/June 2004), pp. 84–86.

tury Russian, Italian, and Austro-Hungarian immigration rates each surpassed current levels of Mexican immigration, and approximately 10.5 percent of US residents are immigrants today as compared to nearly 15 percent at the beginning of the twentieth century).<sup>9</sup>

### Questioning Hispanic-Americans' Patriotism and Work Ethic

In common with many others who lament high levels of immigration Huntington has little faith in the integrative power of American culture. Moreover, his arguments demonstrating the alleged inherent Mexican unwillingness and inability to assimilate do not stand up to scrutiny. For example, Huntington describes how, during a 1998 Mexico-United States soccer match in LA, there were many Latinos waving Mexican flags and that in a 1992 study a majority of Latino immigrant children identified themselves as »Hispanic« or »Mexican« as opposed to »American« (pp. 40; 42). From these and similar examples, he concludes that Latinos do not respect American culture, do not have any patriotic feelings or sense of duty to the US, and that they will never consider themselves American. More recent studies have shown, however, that over 90 percent of US-born Latinos and naturalized citizens answer »yes« when asked »Are you proud to be American?«. And regarding the supposed lack of Hispanic-American patriotism or sense of duty, it is worth pointing out that a disproportionately high number of Hispanics serve in the US armed forces.<sup>10</sup>

Huntington claims that Hispanic immigrants do not share the same (Anglo-Protestant) work ethic that has led other groups to succeed in America because they lack initiative, self-reliance, and ambition, dislike hard work and have a concept of time (the »mañana syndrome«) which is incompatible with American business. While there may be a grain of truth in some of these arguments (as in any prejudice) the economic success of many Hispanic Americans shows that they certainly cannot be generalized. Huntington himself in another chapter (pp. 42f) decries the fact that industrious Cuban-Americans have taken over almost the entire

---

9. See Demetrious Papademetriou, US Immigration: Fact, Fear and Fantasy, [www.afsa.org/fsj/jun01/papademetriou](http://www.afsa.org/fsj/jun01/papademetriou) (June 2001); Grisworld (footnote 8), p. 84.

10. See Mary Jo McConahay, Latinos, Cowboys, and Samuel P. Huntington: A Community Responds to »The Hispanic Challenge«, Pacific News Service – Hispanic Vista (April 5, 2004) ([www.hispanicvista.com](http://www.hispanicvista.com)); Dan Glaister, »On the Border of Disaster?«, *The Guardian* (March 15, 2004).

Miami business district. Also, US Census data show that the labor force participation rate of Hispanic Americans is higher than that of any other ethnic or racial group in the United States.<sup>11</sup> It is true that substantially more Hispanics than non-Hispanic whites live below the poverty line (21.8 percent as compared to eight percent of non-Hispanic whites), but their poverty rate is lower than that of African Americans (24.1 percent). Besides, their lower income is not necessarily the result of a different work ethic: also important – and this applies especially to Mexican immigrants – is the fact that most of them are recent immigrants with little formal education and employed in low paying agricultural or domestic service jobs. The poverty rate for Hispanic groups who have been in the US longer and who have had time to »work their way up« is much lower (for example, 17 percent for Cubans and eleven percent for Colombians), and 68 percent of all Hispanic-Americans who have been in the United States for 30 years or more own their own homes.<sup>12</sup>

### Bilingualism: Danger or Advantage?

The most threatening aspect of the »Hispanic Challenge« is, in Huntington's view, their failure to learn English, which is, of course, a central prerequisite for assimilation. Huntington is particularly upset by the fact that, instead of forcing the issue and finally declaring English the only official language of the United States, the US government spends money on bilingual education schemes and seems to embrace Spanish as an alternative mode of communication. Since May 2001 George W. Bush has even broadcast the weekly presidential radio address to the American people in both languages, and some of the debates between the Democratic Party's presidential candidates have also taken place in English and Spanish. Huntington sees this as a sign of the impending collapse of traditional American values and concludes that soon »Americans« (of course, he means only the non-Hispanic ones) »will not be able to receive the jobs or pay they would otherwise receive because they can speak to their fellow citizens only in English« (p. 39). While additional language skills

---

11. 80 percent of all Latino males over the age of 16 are in the workforce as compared to 75 percent of non-Hispanic white males.

12. As immigration historian Roger Daniels points out, the level of Hispanic-American economic success is actually very high given the fact that »the majority of Hispanic immigrants came here with nothing. Yet by March 2002, 78.6 percent of them were living above the poverty line.« Cited in *Foreign Policy* (May/June 2004), p. 10.

– like any educational accomplishment – are certainly helpful in any professional career, Huntington's prediction of an American job market in which knowledge of Spanish is more important than fluency in English seems rather far fetched. Of course, the issue of bilingualism and the merits or disadvantages of bilingual education are hotly debated (not only in the US), and cannot be discussed in detail here. However, regarding the claim that bilingualism and bilingual education constitute a unique impediment to Hispanic assimilation, as well as a threat to American national identity, one may point out that as late as 1880 four out of five students of German descent in St Louis were attending bilingual schools.<sup>13</sup>

It is particularly noteworthy that Rodolfo de la Garza, a Columbia political scientist whose research on linguistic developments Huntington cites to prove his point, strongly disagrees with the presentation of his data in »Who Are We?«. He claims that Huntington misread the data, has »no knowledge of the available published work«, and his assumptions are »based on prejudice« rather than research. Like most other experts in the field, de la Garza stresses that – contrary to Huntington's assertions – the Latino propensity for learning English hardly differs from other immigrant groups: Hispanic immigrant families are usually »English-dominant« by the second generation, with most American-born children being fluent in both English and Spanish, and by the third generation, Hispanic families speak »very little Spanish« (60 percent of third generation Mexican-American children speak only English at home). Even in the Hispanic enclaves of Southern California and South Florida 88 percent of second-generation Hispanics prefer to speak English rather than Spanish.<sup>14</sup>

---

13. As Roberto Suro, Director of the Pew Hispanic Center, points out, many indicators show that »linguistic assimilation is proceeding faster today among Latinos than it did during the golden past that Huntington extols«. Cited in *Foreign Policy* (May/June 2004), p. 6.

14. See Rodolfo O. de la Garza, cited in Kathy Gilsinan, »Who We Are: Columbia Professor Says Huntington Misinterprets Research on Assimilation«, *Columbia Spectator* (online edition, March 11, 2004) ([www.columbiaspectator.com](http://www.columbiaspectator.com)). See also Rodolfo O. de la Garza et al., »Mexican Immigrants, Mexican Americans, and American Political Culture«, in Barry Edmonston and Jeffrey S. Passell (eds.), *Immigration and Ethnicity: The Interaction of America's Newest Arrivals* (Washington: Urban Institute Press, 1994), as well as Richard Alba and Victor Nee, *Remaking the American Mainstream* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

## The Significance of Interracial/Interethnic Marriages

As one more proof of the Hispanic failure to assimilate Huntington notes that in 2000 only 28.3 percent of all Hispanic-American marriages crossed ethnic lines, and he claims that with their increasing numbers this figure will decline since »the opportunities for them to marry each other will increase« (p. 37). This is an interesting conclusion considering that the very figures he cites show a three percent increase in Hispanic-non-Hispanic marriages over the past six years. Less than nine percent of first-generation Hispanic immigrants marry outside their ethnic group, but more than 26 percent of their children and over 33 percent of their grandchildren do so. Thus the Hispanic pattern of »integration by marriage« is entirely comparable to other immigrant groups (only Asians have a higher rate of ethnic intermarriage). Given that the intermarriage rate between white and African Americans is less than one percent, and that all other social indicators (including the rate of violent conflict) clearly indicate that relations between Hispanic and non-Hispanic white Americans are far better than between blacks and whites, Huntington's assertion that the »Anglo-Hispanic cultural division« will soon replace the »racial division between blacks and whites as the most serious cleavage in US society« (p. 40) simply lacks credibility.<sup>15</sup>

In view of the fact that Huntington repeatedly stresses that of all Hispanic groups he considers the Mexican immigrants the most troublesome and the most alien to American culture, one may also wonder with Dan Glaister if he re-read the conclusion of his »Clash of Civilizations« before writing »Who Are We?«. There he stated that »the cultural distance between Mexico and the United States is far less than that between Turkey and Europe« and even added that »Mexico has attempted to redefine itself from a Latin American to a North American identity«.<sup>16</sup>

---

15. Figures taken from Gregory Rodriguez, *From Newcomers to New Americans: The Successful Integration of Immigrants into American Society* (Washington, National Immigration Forum, 1999), quoted in Huntington, »The Hispanic Challenge« (footnote 1), Sidebar: Failure to Assimilate – Intermarriage; see also National Academy Study of Racial Trends, Racial Intermarriage, 1960–1994 ([www.newsbatch.com/race/intermarriage](http://www.newsbatch.com/race/intermarriage)).

16. Glaister (Footnote 10).

## The Debate on American Cultural Identity and Immigration Policy

### »Salad Bowl« vs »Tomato Soup«: Different Perceptions of American Culture

It is revealing that Huntington at several points in his essay speaks of an »Anglo-Hispanic« rather than an »American-Hispanic« cultural division. This shows the true nature of his concern, namely that deep inside, despite disclaimers to the contrary, he does not conceive of American culture as pluralistic, but as Anglo-Saxon Protestant. Coming from a family of English settlers who arrived in Boston in 1633 and helped to found Norwich, Connecticut, Huntington openly displays a certain pride in his old WASP heritage. »There is no Americano dream«, he states, »there is only the dream created by an Anglo-Protestant society« (p. 45): if Hispanics want to participate in it, they must do so in English and adapt to Anglo-Saxon norms of behavior. This underlying belief in the superiority of WASP culture is a common feature of almost all books warning against the consequences of Latino or other non-white immigration.<sup>17</sup> It is not so much the inability of Hispanics to integrate into American society which seems most to alarm Huntington, but the possibility that they may actually succeed in doing so without giving up all adherence to their native language and culture. His statement that this »would be the end of the America we have known for more than three centuries« (p. 45) indicates that he thinks of American culture as one whose greatness depends mainly on its endowment with certain Anglo-Protestant values that should forever remain unchallenged. Huntington thus dismisses the »salad bowl« in favor of a new culinary metaphor for American national identity, plain old Anglo-Protestant »tomato soup«, to which new immigrants may add some spices or croutons, but should never be allowed to change its basic ingredients. While the soup-image is one that adherents to the melting-pot ideal can certainly live with, it still ignores the fact that from its very foundation American culture has never been exclusively Anglo-Saxon (fortunately, one may add, thinking of the darker sides of that heritage, such as the extermination of American Indians, witch hunts, slavery or racial segregation). Even if one were to disregard Native Ameri-

---

17. Brimelow, Bloom, D'Souza, Traub and Hanson, for example, all criticize »liberal multiculturalism« or »cultural relativism« and most of them endorse the reinstatement of old models of assimilation as the only way of integrating immigrants into American society.

can influences on American culture, one cannot deny that the first enduring European settlement in America was a Spanish one (St. Augustine, Florida, founded in 1565); that until the mid-eighteenth century over half of current US territory belonged to Spain or the United States of Mexico; and that the American Republic could never have been built the way it was without the labor of African Americans. Furthermore, over the centuries American culture has been continuously broadened and changed by the many immigrant groups that have become part of it. The dominance of white Anglo-Saxonism in America has long been challenged – especially since the 1960s – and an increasing number of white and non-white Americans have embraced the notion of cultural pluralism.

---

It is not so much the inability of Hispanics to integrate into American society which seems most to alarm Huntington, but the possibility that they may actually succeed in doing so without giving up all adherence to their native language and culture.

---

Having said all that, it is unlikely that Anglo-Americans will feel like »strangers in their own land« any time soon. Even if current trends continue (and they may not), white non-Hispanic Americans will continue to be a majority of the US population for a long time to come. And while Anglos may come to be outnumbered in some states (for example, California, Texas, and New Mexico, all territories which originally belonged and are geographically adjacent to Mexico), the access of Hispanic Americans (and other non-white minorities) to socio-economic and political power is so limited that it does not threaten to replace white dominance in these areas in the foreseeable future. For example, as already mentioned, more than one fifth of all Hispanics live below the poverty line, and while Hispanic voter turnout in presidential elections has increased from 32 percent to 45 percent over the past 20 years, it is significantly lower than the rate for non-Hispanic whites (62 percent) or African Americans (57 percent). Hispanic-Americans account for less than five percent of all Members of Congress, and there is no Hispanic (or indeed African American) senator at all. It is also noteworthy that the rate of Hispanic-Americans obtaining a college degree is less than one third of that of non-Hispanic whites.

Taking all of this into consideration, it is not surprising that »Who Are We?« provoked a great deal of protest: many Latino groups, as well as a

number of journalists and scholars, have denounced Huntington's ideas not only as inaccurate and misleading, but also as promoting a culture of intolerance and antagonism towards Hispanic Americans. Some claim that the book »reflects a new stage of the culture wars«, and Huntington's colleague Gary Orfield, Harvard Professor of Education and Social Policy, called his work »a disgraceful example of the kind of anti-immigrant attitudes that appear recurrently in American history«. <sup>18</sup> According to Roger Daniels, one of the most eminent American immigration scholars, Huntington's »insistence that American culture is ›Anglo Protestant‹ is not only offensive but false«, and he believes that an article of such »unscholarly chauvinism« would not have been published in *Foreign Policy* if the author had not been a cofounder of the journal. <sup>19</sup> Despite this harsh criticism and the evidence of serious flaws in Huntington's research, many Americans apparently take his work very seriously and are now actively joining those forces that have been demanding harsher restrictions on Mexican immigration for years. It would lead us too far astray to go into the complex detail of US immigration and the debate on its reform, but some issues should at least be mentioned to explain why Huntington's theory has triggered such an intense public reaction.

### New Initiatives for Immigration Control

First of all, the effect of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 on the immigration debate in the United States cannot be underestimated. Ever since, immigration and its control have become a major concern to Americans, who have come to question the functionality – and especially the safety – of their immigration system (after all, the hijackers entered the US legally). Politicians across party lines agree that in order to combat terrorism America must strengthen the weak links in its immigration system. Thus 9/11 shifted the immigration debate in the United States from liberalizing procedures (especially with Mexico) to deep misgivings about border control. In October 2001, the USA Patriot Act was passed, restructuring the federal government (for example, merging the Immi-

---

18. See Daniel J. Hemel, »Critics Claim Huntington Is Xenophobic«, *The Harvard Crimson Online* (March 16, 2004), pp. 1–5 ([www.thecrimson.com](http://www.thecrimson.com)); Mary Jo McCohnahay (footnote 10); and Andrian Kreye, »Die braune Gefahr: Samuel P. Huntington erweitert mit seiner Theorie zur Einwanderungspolitik sein Weltbild vom Kampf der Kulturen«, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (March 22, 2004), p. 14.

19. Daniels cited in *Foreign Policy* (May/June 2004), p. 10.

gration and Naturalization Service into the newly created Department of Homeland Security) and reforming national security policies, including admission policies, border controls, and the treatment of aliens within the United States. Some of the more drastic of these changes have been sharply criticized: for example, the fact that non-citizens can now be deported for their political associations or speech and can be arrested and detained indefinitely if they are suspected of terrorist connections, even if there is no proof. Many human and civil rights groups – above all the American Civil Liberties Union – have condemned these provisions as violating not only the spirit of American liberalism and the traditions of a free society, but also the First and Fifth Amendments of the US Constitution.<sup>20</sup>

Other groups, such as the »American Patrol« or the »Federation for American Immigration Reform« (FAIR), think that the present measures do not go far enough and argue that a drastic limitation of immigration is essential not only for the country's national security, but also for its economic survival. With their membership swelling since 9/11 these groups will have a significant influence on the upcoming presidential election. FAIR, for example, continuously publishes ratings of the »immigration stand« of all political candidates, funneling money and support to those candidates who in their view support the most restrictive immigration laws and border control measures.<sup>21</sup> The issue is a bi-partisan one: not only conservative Republicans but also many Democrats support FAIR. Furthermore, the organization's chairman, former Democratic Governor of Colorado Richard Lamm, is currently running for election to the board of directors of the Sierra Club (the nation's oldest and largest environmental group) on a platform of limiting immigration to protect the environment.<sup>22</sup>

---

20. For a more detailed analysis of this issue see, for example, Doris Meissner, *After the Attacks: Protecting Borders and Liberties*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Policy Brief (November 2001) ([www.ceip.org/borders](http://www.ceip.org/borders)), and David Cole, »Trading Liberty for Security after September 11«, *Foreign Policy in Focus* (September 2002), pp. 1–4 ([www.fpif.org](http://www.fpif.org)).

21. For more information on FAIR see their website network under [www.fairus.org](http://www.fairus.org).

22. The Sierra Club Leadership – for example, executive director Carol Pope – disagree with Lamm's position, as well as with the political stand of a new splinter group »Sierrans for US Population Stabilization«, calling this approach »environmental racism« or »the greening of hate«. See John Leo, *A Really Ugly Shade of Green* (March 29, 2004) ([www.townhall.com](http://www.townhall.com)), pp. 1–2.

In California, home to the Sierra Club and the state most affected by Mexican immigration, political activism against Latino immigration has surged during the last few years. FAIR and other groups are now supporting a new legislative initiative that would deny all public services, including education and health care, to undocumented immigrants. The proposition, which is basically a remake of the 1994 Proposition 187 (passed in California in 1994, but later overturned by federal courts which declared it unconstitutional), has already gained widespread popular support and might have a better chance of succeeding than its predecessor because of the changed focus of the US immigration debate.<sup>23</sup>

One could easily regard the popularity of measures such as Proposition 187 as part of the new »white nativism« or »white nationalism« that Carol Swain has described (and Huntington referred to). However, qualifying this phenomenon as a response to Hispanic immigration is also a case of blaming the victim.

## **Immigration and the 2004 Presidential Campaign**

The issue of limiting Hispanic influence in California is probably less a cultural than a political one. With over 34 million people (35 percent of those are of Hispanic origin), California is the most populous state in the nation, and no other state has as many Hispanic representatives in Congress (nine out of 25). The California vote is decisive in the presidential election, and although the state tends to have a Democratic majority, this is not always the case. As a result of the spectacular public referendum (recall) in October 2003, which replaced long-time Democratic Governor Gray Davis with Republican (and famous movie star) Arnold Schwarzenegger, the California vote, including its significant Hispanic contingent, has become a coveted prize in the upcoming election.

President Bush is trying to implement a dual strategy with regard to immigration: catering to the anxieties of anti-immigration groups, he has been promoting the strengthening of border patrols and the building of

---

23. California Proposition 187 was adopted with 59 percent of the vote on November 8, 1994, becoming law the next day. However, as early as November 11, 1994 federal judge Matthew Byrne issued a temporary restraining order against it. The case worked its way through the courts until in 1998 the newly elected Governor of California, Democrat Gray Davis, dropped the appeals process before the courts, which brought down the final curtain on the law.

a huge electric fence (a kind of high-tech version of the Berlin Wall) on the US-Mexican border. On the other hand, the former Governor of Texas (with a Latino population of 33 percent) naturally also tries to court the Hispanic vote. Bush is well aware of the fact that (in contrast to African Americans, who have solidly voted for the Democratic Party since the 1960s) Hispanic Americans, who are mostly Catholic and generally hold conservative views on so-called »moral issues«, usually give at least one third of their vote to the Republican Party. In 1998 George W. Bush was able to win 49 percent of the Hispanic vote in Texas (his brother, Florida Governor Jeb Bush, received as much as 61 percent in his state), and in the 2000 election Hispanic support provided Bush with a winning margin in Florida, ultimately gaining him the Presidency. Trying to build on this success, not only Bush's weekly radio address to the nation, but almost all his election ads are now aired in English and Spanish. He often stresses his exceptionally good relationship with Mexico's President Vicente Fox (whom he invited to his Crawford Ranch in March of this year, an honor which many other world leaders – including German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder – have not been granted). And, against the strong opposition of some members of his own party, Bush is supporting an initiative to grant amnesty to millions of illegal aliens, most of them Mexicans. The difficulties facing anyone, especially a Republican, wishing to engage in such a bifocal approach on immigration become obvious from the websites of conservative groups: they are filled with harsh criticism of President Bush for his alleged leniency towards Mexican and other aliens who may harm American interests and endanger American national security.<sup>24</sup>

His Democratic challenger John Kerry is also trying to appeal to Hispanic voters. Being a »first-generation American« from an immigrant family himself Kerry obviously has much sympathy for those who want to improve their lives by coming to the United States. Also, since the 1960s the Democratic Party has traditionally embraced minority issues. Being a Democrat, it is therefore less risky for him to support immigrant-friendly policies than it is for George W. Bush: although, as already mentioned, opposition to immigration can be found across party lines, it is

---

24. See, for example, the »American Patrol«, who claim that Bush »has been terrible on immigration issues« and has »done nothing to secure the borders ... even after the events of September 11, 2001«. See American Patrol website, [www.americanpatrol.com](http://www.americanpatrol.com) (April 6, 2004); see also Samuel Francis, »What California Really Teaches«, *Chronicles Magazine* (October 10, 2003) ([www.chroniclesmagazine.org](http://www.chroniclesmagazine.org)), pp. 1–2.

still more prevalent among Republicans than among Democrats. In this context, it may be noteworthy that Huntington identifies himself as an »old-fashioned Democrat« and has already announced publicly that he intends to vote for Kerry in November, despite his different views on immigration.<sup>25</sup>

On his official campaign website, Kerry openly stresses his long-standing support for civil rights and clearly goes further than Bush in supporting »progressive« immigration reform. Among Kerry's goals are, for example, full restoration of welfare and health care benefits to legal immigrants (many of which they lost as a result of the 1996 welfare reform); family reunification programs; expedited citizenship for immigrants who serve in the armed forces; and »earned legalization«, that is, giving undocumented immigrants a chance to legalize their status if they have been in the US for a certain time and can pass a background check. He also supports the so-called DREAM Act which would provide aid to undocumented, but promising young people who have spent their formative years in the US and graduated from high school there so they can attend college.<sup>26</sup>

All these measures are highly disputed. As Demetrious Papademetriou of the Migration Policy Institute and other experts on US immigration have pointed out, there are no simple answers on how to deal with the high level of legal immigration, not to mention the problem of illegal immigration. Their research has also shown that drastic unilateral measures (for example, highly restrictive immigration laws, militarizing borders, introducing national ID cards or conducting intrusive workplace raids) cannot solve this problem; neither can huge blanket amnesty programs (this is also true of other immigration countries, such as France, Germany, or Japan).<sup>27</sup> The United States should therefore abandon its prac-

---

25. After the southern white democrats left the party and joined the Republicans in protest against Democratic support for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Democratic Party became the main supporter of the interests of racial and ethnic minorities, of gay Americans and of the women's rights movement. Today most minorities – especially African Americans – feel more akin to the Democratic than to the Republican party. For Huntington's comments on Kerry, see Interview with Deborah Solomon in *New York Times Magazine* (May 2, 2004); [www.nytimes.com/2004/05/02/magazine/02QUESTIONS.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/02/magazine/02QUESTIONS.html).

26. For more information on Kerry's immigration policy agenda, see [www.johnkerry.com/issues/immigration](http://www.johnkerry.com/issues/immigration).

27. See Demetrious G. Papademetriou, »Think Again: Migration«, *Foreign Policy*, No. 109 (Winter 1997–98), pp. 15–31.

tice of swinging between extremes with regard to immigration policy and try to generate a system that carefully balances the needs of the country's employers with the interests of its workers. Also, the US government should collaborate closely with other governments, particularly that of Mexico, to achieve three goals: (i) better enforcement of immigration regulations, (ii) the promotion of legality, safety and proper treatment of immigrants in the workplace and (iii) helping to build up other countries' social and physical infrastructure, which will in turn reduce the incentives for migration to the United States.<sup>28</sup>

---

By coming forward with his thesis of »The Hispanic Challenge« at this time, Huntington is pouring additional oil onto the flames.

---

While these scholarly arguments are logical their chances of being translated into policy are not very high at the moment. In the fraught immigration debate which has emerged since 9/11, especially in the tense pre-election atmosphere, most politicians – especially Bush and Kerry – will have a hard time resisting calls for easy fixes and radical prescriptions. And many members of the general public engaged in this debate seem to be guided more by emotion than reason. The issue has become a very divisive one, and by coming forward with his thesis of »The Hispanic Challenge« at this time, Huntington is pouring additional oil onto the flames. Defending his work, he has claimed repeatedly that »there is obviously nothing racist about it« and that his study »is not a policy-oriented book«. <sup>29</sup> However, his assertions have been enthusiastically embraced by anti-immigration groups and by those who also want to limit opportunities for Hispanic-Americans in the United States (for example, social

---

28. Ibid. See also website of the Migration Policy Institute, [www.migrationpolicy.org](http://www.migrationpolicy.org), and Papademetriou, »We Need a Fresh Start on Immigration – The Old Policies Don't Work«, *Los Angeles Times* (September 4, 2001) and Papademetriou, *US Immigration: Facts, Fear and Fantasy* (footnote 9); see also Meissner (footnote 20).

29. Cited in Daniel J. Hemel (footnote 18), p. 2; see also *Foreign Policy* (May/June 2004), pp. 90–91. Huntington's responses to his critics have been rather brief and unelaborated. In most cases, he refuses to take their evidence seriously, denounces their arguments as slander or simply repeats his original theories. When challenged in an interview by Deborah Solomon (see footnote 25) about the dangers of promoting negative stereotypes, Huntington sternly replied: »Wait a minute. You're talking about people. I am not talking about people. I am talking about ideas and practices«.

services or bilingual education). One cannot help but wonder why (besides ensuring that he becomes the center of national and international attention again) an eminent American political scientist like Huntington would want to take such an apocalyptic, incendiary and, arguably, scientifically untenable stance?

## **Cultural Pluralism: A Core Component of American National Identity**

Rather than getting entangled with anxieties and fears about inevitable changes in the world, Americans – Anglos and others – should try to deal with the problems of immigration control in a rational way. The influx of new Hispanic (and other) immigrants certainly presents a challenge, but it should be seen as a positive rather than a negative one, as an opportunity rather than a threat. Just like millions of immigrants before them, these newcomers will bring new energy, tastes and impulses to America which will broaden, not destroy its culture. Like German, Italian and other non-English speaking immigrants, Hispanic immigrants will follow their vision of the American(o) Dream, no matter how much Huntington may deplore it. After all, this Dream is not about language, but about opportunity and values (especially the core tenets of the US Constitution, that is, individual freedom, rule of law, and democracy). What makes American society special is its extraordinary diversity. America has integrated more groups into its mainstream culture than any other nation. Thus cultural pluralism – including the promise to grant all the different racial, ethnic, and religious groups freedom and equal access to socio-economic and political opportunities – has become an essential part of American identity. As the current debate shows, American society has not lived up to this promise yet, but certainly most Americans would like to think so, when they reflect upon what America stands for and who they want to be.