

Our Country, 'Tis of We . . .

by H.A. Scott Trask

What's So Great About America
by Dinesh D'Souza
Washington: Regnery; 227 pp., \$27.95



Dinesh D'Souza is a classic example of the immigrant imperialist. Others are Fouad Ajami (professor of Middle Eastern studies at Johns Hopkins University), Fareed Zakaria (managing editor of *Foreign Affairs* and a contributing editor to *Newsweek*), and Ramesh Ponnuru (a senior editor at *National Review*). These writers, all hailing from the Orient, identify not with historic or regional America but with the American world empire and its increasingly multiethnic/multicultural domestic base. They exult in the United States wielding unchallenged military, economic, and political hegemony in the world. They relish using the first-person pronoun when recommending policy for the U.S. government, because it signifies that, while their fathers may have served tea to British officers in Baghdad or Bombay, *they* are part of the editorial cadre of imperial America. It clearly thrills them to be able to say that “we” should invade Iraq or that the Europeans are jealous of “us” because “we” rule the world now, not “they.”

D'Souza has tailored his book to appeal to Americans who may be wondering why Islamic terrorists flew two planes into the World Trade Center. He serves up a big slice of neocon baloney (they attacked us because “America is a subver-

sive idea”), while claiming his book will help steel Americans for the long war against “the militants of the Islamic world” by reminding us of what we are fighting for, which is the “best life that the world has to offer.” D'Souza, however, has another objective—quite different, unstated, but clearly far more important—and that is the reconstruction of American identity and nationality. D'Souza's book tells Americans not what they already assume is great about America but what *they should think* is great about America—open borders, racial diversity, and a militarized world empire.

D'Souza's exercise in political narcissism should have been titled *Why America Has Been So Great for Me and for Immigrants Like Me*. Everything he finds “great” about the country is great from the point of view of a Third World immigrant. America is not an impoverished, oppressive, custom-bound country like the one he abandoned: America “is a country where everything works.” Still better, America exercises global hegemony, making it a country where he can, at least vicariously, lord it over those former masters—the snobbish, nationalistic, “anti-American” Europeans. Best of all, it is a country where a “person of color” can marry white. (D'Souza informs us, with evident satisfaction, that he is married to a white girl from Louisiana.) As a result, “patriotism comes easily to the immigrant who has chosen to become an American.” Besides, “it is simply more fun than living elsewhere.”

America is a country where you can “construct” your own identity.

In most parts of the world your identity and your fate are to a large extent handed to you; in America, you determine them for yourself. In America your destiny is not pre-

scribed; it is constructed. Your life is like a blank sheet of paper and you are the artist.

D'Souza complains that, if he had remained in India, he would have had to marry an East Indian and remain one himself, since “ethnicity in the Old World is involuntary.” He cites the injustice of Mario Cuomo's Italian grandfather, who had his Italian identity “imposed” on him, having been born to Italian parents and reared in Italy. But America is different. Here, you can choose your “ethnicity.” Dinesh has chosen his. He announces that he is now one of “us,” and he is not going back.

D'Souza has little feel for the rich and complex American past before 1980, nor does he have any appreciation for, or understanding of, the country that exists outside the confines of an Ivy League college (Dartmouth), the Washington-New York corridor, and the Left Coast. American “greatness” has nothing to do with such eclipsed traditions as economic liberty, constitutional government, noninterventionism, or federalism. (Keep in mind that D'Souza is measuring America not against its more libertarian and disciplined past, nor against cultured Europe, but against the dysfunctional, feverish Third World.) Old-stock Americans, who built this country and fought its wars, figure not at all in his book. D'Souza explicitly denies that Americans who are opposed to mass immigration or who deprecate the demographic revolution that has transformed their country can be patriots. He accuses them of “nativism, which is based on resentment,” while patriotism “is based on love.” D'Souza instructs us that, to be a patriot, we must love America “for what she is and for what she might become.” He claims to be disturbed by the debauchery and vulgarity of American culture, while demurring that the former is not really *that* bad and that the latter is the price we pay for freedom. He has no idea that America was, or even could have been, both more free *and* less depraved half a century ago.

D'Souza has been influenced by Harry Jaffa, the political philosopher who maintains that American history contains an outer and an inner doctrine—one for the masses, the other for the ruling elite. Thus, he argues that the United States in 2002 is the planned outcome of the *secret* designs of the Framers: “The experiment that the founders embarked upon two

RECEIVED WISDOM

“[I]s it not psychological naivete to think that I, now, in middle age, rooted in my language, culture and history, could suddenly do a *volte-face* and see myself as English only by accident, free at every moment to change? If I go elsewhere I take my Englishness with me, as much as I take my attachment to family, language, life and self. I go as a colonial or as an exile, and either sink like the Tibetans or swim like the Jews.”

—from *The Meaning of Conservatism*, by Roger Scruton (St. Augustine's Press)

centuries ago has largely succeeded in achieving its goals”—racial egalitarianism and free entry for immigrants of color. America “is now the hope for countless immigrants and a magnet for the world,” and New York City is “a glittering symbol of America.”

D’Souza makes astonishingly inaccurate and anachronistic assertions about the American past, all of them typical of a follower of Jaffa. The Framers were “not orthodox Christians—but Deists.” They “invented” a “new regime” (which turns out to be the current government). They were *secret* abolitionists who introduced camouflaged antislavery principles into the Constitution. D’Souza even substitutes the anachronistic “separation of religion and government” for the hallowed “separation of Church and state”! He also claims that the “founders solved two great problems—the problem of scarcity, and the problem of diversity,” thereby revealing his ignorance of economics to be as great as his ignorance of history. (Of course, the Framers never attempted to “solve” either “problem,” recognizing the first as a fact of life and rejecting the second as incompatible with republicanism.) And he betrays total ignorance of the two great political achievements of the Founding Fathers—a *written* Constitution and a *federal* republic.

D’Souza’s final chapter, curiously titled “America the Beautiful,” is simply a paean to the American empire. He exclaims that America “saved the world” on many occasions, that it enjoys “evident moral superiority,” that it is “an abstaining superpower” with “no interest in conquering and subjugating the rest of the world.” While the United States often “intervenes to overthrow a tyrannical regime or halt massive human rights abuses in another country,” “it never stays to rule that country.” In Bosnia, “the United States got in and then got out.” (Does he really not know that the U.S. military is *still* in Bosnia?) American foreign policy is usually “on the side of the angels.” We also learn that “America’s goal” today is “to turn fundamentalist Muslims into classical liberals.” D’Souza’s ridiculous views reveal his Wilsonian naiveté about the world, as well as his ignorance of classical liberalism.

D’Souza’s “conservatism” is—naturally—of the “national greatness,” “big government” variety. He does have certain credentials: domestic-policy analyst in the Reagan White House (1987-88); fellow at the American Enterprise Institute

and now at the Hoover Institution. Yet there is nothing in his thought that is derived from, or even slightly consistent with, the thought of the fathers of Anglo-American and Continental conservatism—Edmund Burke and Joseph de Maistre. What would Russell Kirk have thought of D’Souza’s claim that “America is a subversive idea; indeed it represents a new way to be human”? He would likely have considered it an example of Rousseau’s “idyllic imagination,” which he contrasted unfavorably with Burke’s “moral imagination.” (D’Souza, by the way, thinks rather highly of Rousseau. He also believes in “progress,” “ideology” over “nationality,” “the pursuit of happiness” as the highest end of life, and the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights.)

Like most neocons, D’Souza is obsessed with affirming not only America’s diversity but its unity. Though he assures his readers that “Americans remain a united people with shared values,” his evidence for this statement is far from compelling—a marketing survey, a vague anecdote, and the national reaction to September 11, a catastrophe he hopes to exploit in the interest of further revolutionizing the country of “our” fathers and European ancestors.

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Homage to Montenegro

by Alex N. Dragich

Montenegro: The Divided Land
by Thomas Fleming
Rockford, IL: Chronicles Press;
172 pp., \$15.00



Not until I was well into this book did I realize how much it is needed. The son of illiterate Serbian immigrants from Montenegro, I knew almost no early Montenegrin history. Some of

that history is noble, some confused, and some characterized by treachery and double-dealing. There were plots and counterplots. Agreements were always of short duration, and reliability and trust were rare. Significantly,

there were no ancient peoples whose territory corresponded to modern Albania or Serbia, much less to Montenegro . . . it was only when Serbs from different regions were able to unite in opposition to Byzantium, under the Nemanjic dynasty, that they were able to create a successful Serbian state.

Thomas Fleming describes the rise of Zeta as a prelude to “The Serbian Golden Age”—when the Serbian state, for over 100 years, was the strongest empire in the Balkans. The period saw the building of the finest of the Serbian monasteries and the creation of Tsar Dusan’s legal code, one of two of Europe’s historic codes. Before his death in 1355, Dusan was on the verge of conquering what was left of the Byzantine Empire. But following his death came division and decline and, in 1389, the defeat by the Ottoman Turks at the Battle of Kosovo. In the centuries after Kosovo in all Serbian lands, and especially in Montenegro,

the national myth was nourished on the tales and songs of the Kosovo heroes. . . . throughout the cold dark years of misery and oppression, [the Montenegrins] warmed themselves by the fire lit in the Serbian imagination by the Kosovo story.

The chapter entitled “The Struggle for Liberation” is packed with facts, detailing Montenegro’s confrontations with Turkey, Venice, and other powers, to say nothing of domestic quarrels. What saved Montenegro from the internal disunity that afflicted Bosnia and Serbia was the institution of the *vladika* (bishop-prince), which gained Montenegro’s *de facto* independence 168 years before its formal international recognition at the Congress of Berlin. An interesting side issue was that of Scepan Mali, an impostor, who nevertheless managed what other rulers had not: He united the people and taught them respect for law and order, which helped them in the coming struggle with the invaders.

An equally important chapter, “The