

Why Blame Mexico?

To grasp American immigration policy, one needs only remember that the United States frowns on smoking while subsidizing tobacco growers.

We say to impoverished Mexicans, “See this river? Don’t cross it. If you do, we’ll give you good jobs, drivers licenses, citizenship for your kids born here, school for said kids, public assistance, governmental documents in Spanish for your convenience, and a much better future. There is no penalty for getting caught. Now, don’t cross this river, hear?”

How smart is that? We’re baiting them. It’s like putting out a salt lick and then complaining when deer come. Immigrant parents would be irresponsible not to cross.

The problem of immigration, note, is entirely self-inflicted. The U.S. chose to let them in. It didn’t have to. They came to work. If Americans hadn’t hired them, they would have gone back.

We have immigration because we want immigration. Liberals favor immigration because it makes them feel warm and fuzzy and from a genuine streak of decency. Conservative Republican businessmen favor immigration, frequently *sotto voce*, because they want cheap labor that actually shows up and works.

It’s a story I’ve heard many times—from a landscaper, a construction firm, a junkyard owner, a group of plant nurserymen. “We need Mexicans.” You could yell “Migra!” in a lot of restaurants in Washington, and the entire staff would disappear out the back door. Do we expect businessmen to vote themselves out of business? That’s why we don’t take the obvious steps to control immigration. (A

\$1,000 a day fine for hiring illegals, half to go anonymously to whoever informed on the employer would do the trick.)

In Jalisco, Mexico, where I live, crossing illegally is regarded as casually as pirating music or smoking a joint and the coyotes who smuggle people across as a public utility, like light rail. The smuggling is frequently done by bribing the border guards, who are notoriously corrupt.

Why corrupt? Money. In the book *De Los Maras a Los Zetas*, by a Mexican journalist, I find an account of a tunnel he knew of that could put 150 illegals a day across the border. (I can’t confirm this.) The price of passage is about \$2,000 a person. That’s \$300,000 a day, tax-free. What does a border guard make? (And where can I find a shovel?) The author estimated that perhaps 40 tunnels were active at any given time. Certainly some are. A woman I know says she came up in a restaurant and just walked out the door. Let’s hear it for Homeland Security.

There is much noise about whether to grant amnesty. The question strikes me as cosmetic. We are not going to round up millions of people and physically throw them across the border. Whether we should doesn’t matter. It’s fantasy. Too many people want them here or don’t care that they are here or don’t want to uproot families who have established new lives here. Ethnic cleansing is ugly. Further, the legal Latino population is just starting to vote. A bumper crop of Mexican-American kids, pos-

sessed of citizenship, are growing headlong toward voting age. These people cannot be thrown out, even in principle.

People complain that Mexico doesn’t seal the borders. Huh? Mexico is a country, not a prison. It has no obligation to enforce American laws that America declines to enforce. Then there was the uproar when some fast-food restaurant in the U.S. began accepting pesos. Why? Mexican border towns accept dollars. Next came outrage against Mexico because its consulates were issuing ID cards to illegals, which they then used to get drivers licenses. Why outrage? A country has every right to issue IDs to its citizens. America doesn’t have to accept them. If it does, whose problem is that?

If you want to see a reasonable immigration policy, look to Mexico. You automatically get a 90-day tourist visa when you land. To get residency papers, you need two things apart from photographs, passport, etc. First, a valid tourist visa to show that you entered the country legally. Mexico doesn’t do illegal aliens. Second, a demonstrable income of \$1,000 a month. You are welcome to live in Mexico, but you are going to pay your own way. Sounds reasonable to me.

You want a Mexican passport? Mexico allows dual citizenship. You (usually) have to be a resident for five years before applying. You also have to speak Spanish. It’s the national language. What sense does it make to have citizens who can’t talk to anybody?

It looks to me as though America thoughtlessly adopted an unwise policy, continued it until reversal became approximately impossible, and now doesn’t like the results. It must be Mexico’s fault. ■

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A. Because people have forgotten the alternative.

Q. But what else is there?

A. The old vision in this new book.

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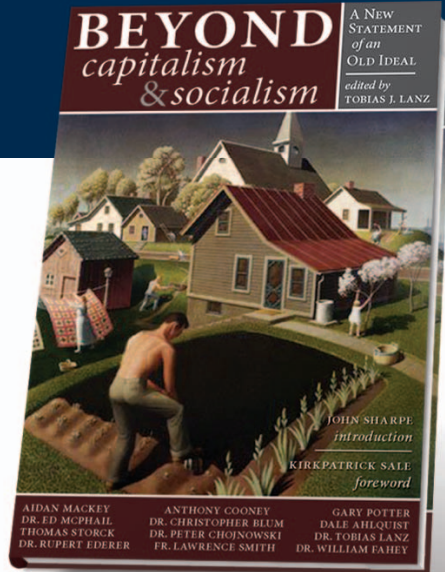
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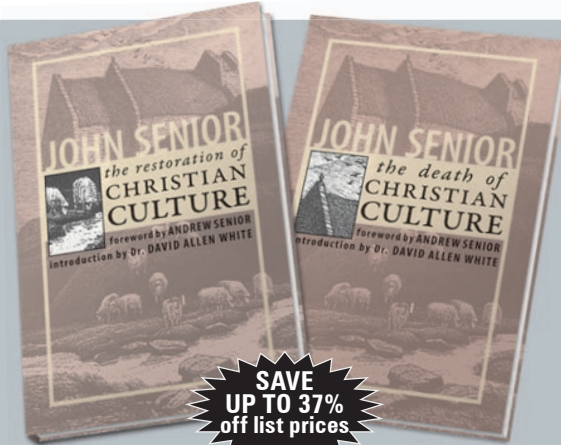
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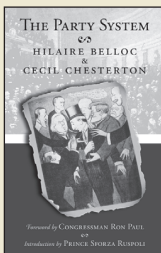
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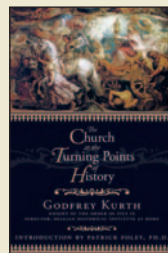


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