
ments such as demography, global warming, biotechnology, and robotics that are bound to influence, if not dictate, the shape of a future social life—a life in which the sun becomes an enemy rather than a friend and nature a victim instead of a challenge, and in which babies are not only weighed but measured by the “environmental damage” they represent. (An American baby represents 280 times the damage of a Haitian one, which, Kennedy soberly observes, is “not a comfortable statistic for anyone with a conscience.”)

Of course, futurology is a hazardous trade, never more so than in the aftermath of the Cold War. While some changes may be somewhat predictable—population growth is the most important of these—others, such as ecological shifts, are much more uncertain, and political, religious and intellectual revolutions lie outside the range of every crystal ball known. Historians are typically opponents of prediction. Yet they are exceptionally well-equipped to grasp the parameters of the possible. Kennedy’s careful inquiry is a good example of this. At one level he might appear merely to be offering a prodigious digest of everything from genetic engineering to the origins of the nation-state, but that digest is informed by sober realism and held in focus by his governing question: How can people prepare for the future?

It is in attempting to answer this question that Kennedy’s analysis runs out of steam. Who is capable of systematically “preparing” on such a scale? Corporations, within their limits, maybe, but states are becoming ever less capable of solving major problems whose causes lie outside their borders. On Kennedy’s showing, indeed, the state is already obsolete in a technical sense. People’s thinking, however, has not begun to catch up with this fact: National sovereignty is still defended and pursued (as in Bosnia) with unremitting, even mounting, ferocity. Meanwhile, the logically necessary vehicle for preparing for the 21st century, the world-state, remains as unlikely as it has ever been. In its absence, the familiar disparate list of competing structures—countries, social groups, societies, states—jostle inconclusively through Kennedy’s final pages.

Within the context of nationality, Kennedy concludes with a poignant historical parallel. He

suggests that Britain a century ago was in something like the position of the United States today: uneasily aware that its supremacy was fast eroding, but still too mesmerized by faith in its uniqueness to learn lessons from others who were setting the new pace. He is right to fix on that sense of exceptionalism. Plenty of influential people in turn-of-the-century Britain could see what needed to be done, “but nobody was capable of getting it done. The British people thought it better to ‘muddle through,’ ” Kennedy writes. But even this implies a more deliberate strategic choice than is conceivable in a mass democracy. What present historians say about Britain’s failure to adapt, future historians (if any) may well repeat about America’s incapacity, for example, to tolerate a 50-cent gasoline tax. As Kennedy bleakly concludes, “Humankind will have only itself to blame for the troubles, and the disasters, that could be lying ahead.” Who else?

MEXICAN AMERICANS: The Ambivalent Minority. By Peter Skerry. Free Press. 463 pp. \$27.95

Americans tend to have one great concern about the millions of Mexican Americans who have crossed the border in recent years: Will they join the mainstream? Will they learn English, recite the Pledge of Allegiance, move to the suburbs, and adopt a pro football team as their very own? They almost certainly will, says Skerry, Washington director for the UCLA Center for American Politics and Public Policy. Unfortunately, he reports, that is not the important question. Mexican Americans face a collective *political* choice about their identity in America. They will be forced to decide whether to define themselves as a traditional ethnic group, like the Irish or Poles, or to adopt the status of a minority group, like the African Americans, and seek special protection under the law.

These alternative futures are already embodied in two cities. San Antonio, Texas, has a large and stable Mexican-American community, with relatively few newcomers and a modified machine-style politics rooted in the city’s churches, neighborhoods, and community organizations.

United in their resentment of the Anglos, San Antonio's Mexican Americans nonetheless eschew racial rhetoric for the politics of "getting ahead and getting even." Los Angeles offers a much quicker route to the American Dream. The city's Hispanic households had average incomes of \$33,500 in 1990, nearly \$10,000 greater than those of Hispanics in San Antonio, despite the California city's heavy influx of poor immigrants. Yet Skerry believes that San Antonio's political style promotes a healthier kind of assimilation.

Los Angeles politics, scrubbed clean of "machine" excrescences by Progressive-era reforms and dominated by the news media, discourages grassroots politics. Political organizing is made nearly impossible by the never-ending stream of new immigrants, which makes life in many Mexican-American neighborhoods highly unsettled even by Los Angeles standards. The city's Mexican-American politicians have little real connection to their constituents; instead, they attract media attention by playing the race card—raising issues such as bilingual education and immigration policy. The leaders who emerge from this system tend to be ineffective, with political careers as ephemeral as sound bites. The grittier San Antonio style has yielded more skilled leaders (including Henry Cisneros, now secretary of Housing and Urban Development), more municipal jobs for Mexican Americans at city hall, and twice as big a share (14 percent) of seats in the state legislature. Mexican Americans in Texas have what used to be called a stake in the system.

Skerry suggests that the San Antonio model offers Mexican Americans their best hope of political assimilation. But he fears that the American system today is rigged in favor of politics as practiced in Los Angeles.

PANDAEMONIUM: Ethnicity in International Politics. *By Daniel Patrick Moynihan.* Oxford. 221 pp. \$19.95

Plato's idea of a philosopher-prince seemed to acquire, after the Soviet empire broke apart, an artistic twist: Czechoslovakia elected a playwright president and Lithuania a musician. In



America the closest approximation to a philosopher-prince may be New York's senior senator. His politics and scholarship have certainly long reinforced each other. Thirty years ago Moynihan wrote (with Nathan Glazer) an influential study of ethnicity, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, and his awareness of ethnic conflicts has made him a shrewder observer of international realities than many Cold War "realists." Even a decade ago, when Henry Kissinger still defined world politics as an abiding conflict between communism and the free world, Moynihan was predicting that ethnic unrest would soon unravel the Soviet empire. Understanding ethnicity, however, left Moynihan with no illusions that the end of the Cold War could mean the end of history.

Expanding on his Oxford lecture of 1991, Moynihan here explains how ethnicity, conjoined with nationalist ambitions, has produced a recipe for endless conflict. It was Woodrow Wilson—with an addiction to phrasemaking that his secretary of state Robert Lansing privately criticized—who made "the self-determination of peoples" an active principle in world politics. Until recently, Moynihan says, Americans have tended to overlook the difficulties and dangers of this noble-sounding ideal. Conceiving rights in terms of individuals, not groups, Americans believed that governments, not people, caused all the world's problems. Now that international politics is no longer a Manichean struggle between good and evil governments, but rather an infinitely complex network of ethnic and national ambitions, Moynihan worries that America will retreat into a disenchanting isolationism. His main point, indeed, is that American participation is essential if there