
Loury does not seek to promote this course as a matter of government policy. Indeed, in his discussion of the work of Stephen Carter, he defends—against Carter—a fairly tough separation of church and state. He insists, like a good liberal, that public policies should be defended by appeal to secular principle. One can invoke moral principles that are rooted in religious experience and conviction in Loury's public sphere, but one cannot invoke the religious grounds themselves. It follows that public policy can play only a secondary role even in the worldly salvation of the truly disadvantaged.

If Loury's conclusions seem a little thin, his skepticism about the value of government action challenges liberals to

find policies that will be more successful than past efforts have been. Still, nothing he says persuades me that we *cannot* do better, or that racial and gender preferences will not continue to be a useful (if minor) part of the policy mix. The failures of government action are grounds for better action, not for the abandonment of the task. And the continuing challenge of Glenn Loury—the smart, morally engaged race man—is more a spur than an impediment to that enterprise.

—Kwame Anthony Appiah is professor of Afro-American studies and philosophy at Harvard University. His most recent book is *Another Death in Venice* (1995).

Rebirth of a Nation

THE NEXT AMERICAN NATION: The New Nationalism and the Fourth American Revolution. By Michael Lind. 300 pp. Free Press. \$23

Michael Lind is a renegade among American political thinkers, as independent in his reflections upon the state of the nation as his fellow Texan C. Wright Mills was in his earlier readings of American society. Lind, who recently became a senior editor of the *New Republic* after a brief stint at *Harper's*, has even created something of a stir among the intellectuals by publishing two scathing critiques of conservatives and conservatism in *Dissent* and the *New York Review of Books*. To some this was treason, or at least apostasy, for Lind in an even earlier incarnation was executive editor of the *National Interest*, the foreign policy journal founded by neoconservative Irving Kristol.

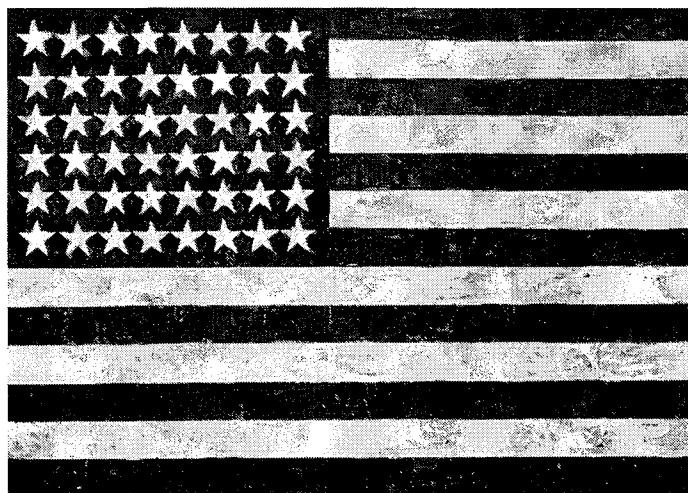
The book under review will not do much to restore Lind's relations with his former colleagues on the right. But his newfound liberal friends may find much to disagree with as well, especially his trenchant critique of affirmative action. No matter whose ox he gores, though, Lind has produced a highly original polemic, flawed and uneven but always provocative.

Lind's manifesto, calling for "a third way between laissez-faire capitalism and unworkable socialism," quite consciously follows the model of Herbert Croly's *Promise of American Life* (1909), the influential progressive blueprint for an activist national government. Like Croly, he offers a reinterpretation of American history, dividing the nation's political past into "three republics," or regimes—Anglo-America, Euro-America, and Multicultural America. After describing each, he posits a desirable fourth regime, the "Trans-American Melt-

ing Pot," which Lind hopes his manifesto will help usher in. Explicit in this fourth republic, in a way clearly reminiscent of Croly's book, is a revised and democratized version of Alexander Hamilton's program for a powerful national government.

At the heart of Lind's argument, as the names of the four republics suggest, is the notion that America, like other nations, has a national culture that binds its citizens together. Here Lind rejects the view of Croly and others who have argued that America is unique among states in owing its coherence to a set of core beliefs or ideas. And while he echoes the arguments against American exceptionalism recently made by *National Review* editors John O'Sullivan and Peter Brimelow, he builds his case on a subtler, more persuasive understanding of American culture that acknowledges its diverse elements and allows for its syncretic growth. So, for example, Lind quite rightly puts the history of black Americans at the center of the American experience, a positioning that would not sit too well with O'Sullivan and Brimelow, who emphasize America's British heritage. (While Lind joins them in arguing for greatly restricted immigration, he does so on strictly economic grounds.)

Rejecting the interpretation of the exceptionalists, Lind invokes America's cultural traditions as the basis of his nationalist credo, which he calls "liberal nationalism." Consequently, he de-emphasizes the role of the Founders—including Washington, Madison, and even Hamilton—in favor of "the conquerors of the national homeland" and "the culture-founders." Among the former, Lind includes General Sam Houston, "hero of the Texas war of independence," and General Winfield Scott,



"conqueror of Mexico." Among the culture-founders Lind includes Governor John Winthrop, Sir William Penn, and Frederick Douglass. Such individuals, Lind argues, founded the nation (in the territorial and, especially, cultural sense) before the nation-state was fully consolidated under a powerful federal government.

There are many virtues in Lind's rebuttal of the exceptionalists' perspective on American history. It reinforces the view of many recent scholars that most immigrants were not drawn to America by its laws or political ideals. Most came for economic gain, and many intended to return to their native countries. Those who remained, however, became assimilated into a distinctively American culture even as they added elements of their own heritages to the simmering pot.

Yet Lind's interpretation can also lead to problems. One is an unnecessarily strident stance that posits dichotomies where none may exist. For example, many conservatives who subscribe to the exceptionalist view are nevertheless highly concerned about recent cultural changes in contemporary America, including multiculturalism and multilingualism. In other words, the two interpretations cited

by Lind do not appear to be mutually exclusive. Yet Lind never bothers to address this possibility.

Another problem with Lind's brand of nationalism, particularly his emphasis on conquest and territorial expansion, is that it leaves black and Mexican Americans in a very difficult situation. If these (along with Native Americans) are in fact nothing more than the conquered peoples of North America, not unlike those brought to heel by other nation-states, are they not then relegated to the victim status that some of their leaders claim for them? If so, are these groups not entitled to the affirmative action programs that Lind is so critical of—and that he would like to see eclipsed by a revived class-based politics?

Despite this problem, the strongest part of Lind's argument is without doubt his critique of affirmative action, the defining policy of Multicultural America and its grievance-group politics. The essence of his argument is that affirmative action is the cynical response of a white elite, what Lind refers to as the "overclass," eager to buy social peace by co-opting racial-minority leaders. Resurrecting sometimes-forgotten history, Lind correctly points out that affirmative action, as applied to trade unions, got an important boost from the Nixon administration. In the same vein, he points to the racial gerrymandering resulting from the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and advanced under Republican and Democratic administrations alike.

Though not entirely original, Lind's argument here is forceful and persuasive, particularly when he points out that affirmative action has helped white elites—conservative and liberal—respond to minority demands without undertaking "the dramatic reforms of American government and business that are necessary to integrate working-class and poor blacks

and Hispanics, along with the absolute majority of the poor who are white, into the larger society."

What is perhaps most impressive about Lind's case is that, despite his condemnation of the group-rights logic of affirmative action, he does not subscribe to the trendy view that America is breaking up into feuding racial and ethnic groups. Far from it. Lind is too attuned to the absorptive power of our national culture to accept such scenarios. But if Lind is not concerned about Balkanization, he is very much alarmed by what he calls Brazilianization, by which he means the emergence of a rigid social hierarchy based roughly on color.

Confronted by economic forces exacerbating class barriers and political forces undermining class-based politics, Lind advocates an activist, interventionist welfare state. In characteristically high-handed fashion, he declares the debate surrounding the culture of poverty "over"—in favor of those who argue that culture is indeed the decisive factor. Arguing for "maximum feasible paternalism," Lind endorses proposals such as those by James Q. Wilson calling for orphanages and boarding schools for ghetto youth. He also insists on the need to "revitalize the public school system" by equalizing education expenditures and "imposing statewide and national standards," though he is skeptical of voucher and choice schemes.

But Lind is hardly prepared to stop there. He favors curtailing the entry of unskilled immigrants as part of a "social market contract" to restore the living standards of American workers. Included in this contract would be a "social tariff" designed to "deter American employers in some industries from responding to rising wages in a tight American labor market by transferring production abroad." Lind also proposes to substitute progressive

income and consumption taxes for payroll levies to finance Social Security and other social benefits.

Lind urges his readers not to get too caught up in the details of such proposals and instead to focus on his overall point that reducing class barriers should take precedence over affirmative action tokenism. Even so, many of his proposals seem dubious economically, though evaluating them is frankly beyond my competence and, I would wager, Lind's as well.

Lind gets into even more trouble with proposals for political reform. Convinced that we now live in a campaign-finance driven "plutocracy," he argues for the "separation of check and state" and calls for the prohibition of paid political advertising and the subsequent provision of free informational public-service notices in the print and electronic media. He also calls for European-style multiparty democracy and proposes that U.S. senators be elected by proportional representation in national elections every four years, concurrent with the presidential election.

Lind's goal here is to eliminate the factors "that are alienating an ever-growing number of Americans from the political process." His concern is surely on target, yet the remedies he proposes would just as surely exacerbate the problem. For the nationalized, mass democracy he envisions would almost certainly be dominated by the media (whether free or not) whose biases have already helped alienate millions of Americans from politics. But even more to the point, the minor parties that get increased clout under proportional representation would compete for media attention and thereby increase the stridency of our politics. Finally, it is particularly ironic, given Lind's concern with the class bias of today's politics, that his proposals in all likelihood

would do further hurt to the less affluent, for whom the political process would be all the more complicated—unless drastically simplified by the emotional appeals of media demagogues.

As for Lind's hopes for a more rational and substantive class-based politics, these too could founder on a nasty, media-fed brawl between the haves and the have-nots. What Lind completely overlooks is that the last time our politics was more class based, under the New Deal, we had much stronger locally based institutions—including churches, political parties, and labor unions—that not only articulated and organized interests but did so in ways that linked citizens to the process through everyday, face-to-face relationships. Such mediating structures and the vital role they play in making politics comprehensible to ordinary Americans are completely left out of Lind's analysis.

For all his iconoclasm, then, Lind falls into the same trap that snares many contemporary writers and intellectuals. Preoccupied with overarching historical themes and contemporary value conflicts, the chattering classes give short shrift to the messy and sometimes arcane details of the institutions that make society work. Nevertheless, at a time when political and policy debates seem increasingly locked into boring set pieces, Lind deserves credit for attempting to break the molds. He has written a book that, even when wrong-headed, challenges and stimulates in a realm where predictable cant is the norm.

—Peter Skerry, a Wilson Center Fellow, is the author of *Mexican Americans: The Ambivalent Minority* (1993).