

MIDDLE AMERICA'S POLITICAL REVOLT

The New White Nationalism in America: Its Challenge to Integration

Carol M. Swain

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Reviewed by Robert S. Griffin

Carol Swain, the author of *The New White Nationalism in America*, is an academic, a professor of political science and law at Vanderbilt University. The publisher of this book, Cambridge University Press, is an academic publisher. That might well lead one to assume that this volume provides a detached, objective, and even-handed treatment of this topic. But not so fast. A sentence on the last page is an indication of what awaits the reader: "By now I hope the readers of this book are convinced of the need to take white nationalism and the other challenges to American society highlighted in these pages as seriously as they would a diagnosis of cancer."

One might also assume from her credentials—Vanderbilt, and an earlier book of hers, *Black Faces, Black Interests*, which won prizes—and Cambridge University Press's solid reputation that this author brings a wide range of experience with white nationalism and a deep understanding of it to this writing. Again, not so fast. Take into account that there is no evidence in this book that Professor Swain has ever spoken to, corresponded with, or been in the presence of a white nationalist. The only personal contact reported in the book is her encounter with "a middle-aged cab driver of Jewish-Irish descent whom I will call Jerry."

She asks Jerry, "What do you think the future holds for American race relations?" While she takes "copious notes," Jerry the cab driver tells her he thinks there is going to be a race war, recounts a dream in which he is taken captive by some blacks and escapes, and admits occasionally to reading white supremacy literature. As for how much Dr. Swain has learned about white nationalism from secondary sources, it appears that she has read a few things

and scanned the Internet a bit. I am reminded of my mother referring to something so little “you could put it in your eye.” It would be an overstatement to say that Swain’s level of understanding of white nationalism meets that standard, but it doesn’t miss it by much.

In the preface Swain informs the reader that she has written this book “especially for people who consider themselves to be liberals on public policy issues,” and then goes on to say that “by liberals I refer to individuals who favor vigorous governmental intervention to ensure the advancement of racial and ethnic minorities and to protect them from official and private discrimination.”

The fact is the title of this book is a misnomer. This book isn’t really about the new white nationalism; for that matter, it isn’t even about the advancement of minority groups, plural. It is about furthering the agenda of the group to which Swain herself belongs, native-born black Americans. There is no evidence in this writing that Swain has the least concern for Asians or Hispanics or any other minority group. For instance, she makes it clear she thinks that racial preference policies should lump Hispanics together with whites, and that immigrants—ninety percent of whom are minorities in recent years—should not be eligible at all.

Essentially, and quite remarkably, *The New White Nationalism* is about affirmative action for African Americans. Huge chunks of the book are devoted to the topic. By my count, seven of the book’s fifteen chapters make no pretense of including a treatment of white nationalism. Really, they could have been written for another book, and frankly, I suspect they were. For instance, there’s the chapter, “Affirmative Action Past and Present,” which goes into great detail about the history of affirmative action, the 1964 Civil Rights Act and all the rest and offers the conclusion that “many forms of affirmative action... are destructive to peaceful and productive race relations in America and are not needed to combat the very real discrimination that racial minorities often encounter.”

Swain goes on to say that these policies and programs have outlived their usefulness to blacks because they “they threaten to undermine public support for those principles of racial integration and racial justice that so inspired the nation during the civil rights era of the 1950s and 1960s.” In other words, whites are catching on to them. Swain believes that replacing race preferences with what she calls, with perhaps a Marxist overtone, “class-based preferences,” ones that “take into account the obstacles an individual has had to overcome in his life,” will keep blacks at the head of the line and at the same time mute hostility from whites, who will be less likely to see this arrangement as grossly unfair.

There is no evidence in this book that Swain cares a whit about the status or well-being of white people. There is every indication that she wants whites exactly where they have been for decades: splintered and deferential to blacks. The very thought of white racial consciousness and solidarity gives her the

shivers. She worries about multiculturalism in this regard: "minority defenders of multiculturalism, in making their case for racial, ethnic, and cultural minorities to organize and celebrate group pride and self-determination, have unwittingly laid the foundation for a corresponding white-centered racial movement that celebrates the racial pride of white people."

On college campuses, she notes, multiculturalism has had the "desired effect of sensitizing white students to minority concerns," but it has also had an unintended and unanticipated consequence: white students have been prompted to establish parallel white organizations that "seek recognition as genuine cultural contributions to university life." And we certainly can't have that. Why not? "Any trend toward the establishment of white student organizations could imperil traditional racial and ethnic studies programs by decreasing the limited resources available to these groups and exacerbating ethnic rivalries and tensions." Read, whites won't roll over and play dead anymore.

And where does white nationalism fit in all of this? It's a big threat to Swain's action. White nationalism, she writes,

has the potential for considerable expansion beyond its present scope and threatens to disrupt the fragile racial situation in America and elsewhere.... Contemporary white nationalists draw upon the potent rhetoric of national self-determination and national self-assertion in an attempt to protect what they believe is their God-given natural right to their distinct cultural, political, and genetic identity as white Europeans. This identity, they believe, is gravely threatened in contemporary America by the rise of multiculturalism, affirmative action policies that favor minorities, large-scale immigration into the United States from non-white nations, racial intermarriage, and the identity politics pursued by rival racial and ethnic groups.

The very thought of that keeps Swain up nights. And what makes white nationalism a particularly strong threat to the racial status quo—one in which Swain's people are ears-deep slopping at the trough—is that the "polish and sophistication" of the current white nationalist leaders and organizations are enabling them to get the white nationalist message across very effectively. Bad news to Swain.

Interspersed throughout the book are transcripts of phone interviews with white nationalist figures conducted by Princeton instructor Russell Nieli. Among those Nieli interviewed were Jared Taylor, the editor of *American Renaissance* magazine; Michael Levin, professor of philosophy at City University of New York; David Duke, who heads the European Unity and Rights Organization; Don Black, the founder of the Stormfront web site; William Pierce, the chairman of the National Alliance; and Matt Hale and Lisa Turner from the World Church of the Creator. Swain concedes that these individuals are more intelligent and sophisticated than most Americans realize, which makes them, in her eyes, "more dangerous." Actually, the

interview transcripts are the best part of the book. The interviewees are articulate, and taken together their comments outline the basic tenets of white nationalism quite well. Swain promises that a forthcoming book edited by Dr. Nieli and herself, *White Pride, White Protest: Contemporary Voices of White Nationalism*, will present the interviews in their entirety. That would seem a book to check out—don't pay money for this one.

So what does Swain do with the interview transcripts? For all practical purposes, nothing. She doesn't work with the substance of what the white nationalists say. Either she goes forward as if their statements never existed, or the individuals or their organizations or both (not what they say) are incorporated into what she spends her time doing in this book: talking about herself—she is a GED high school graduate, ex-welfare recipient, and born-again Christian—quoting and summarizing writers who support her stance, reporting the comments of organizations and individuals antagonistic to white nationalism, name-calling, and pontificating.

I find this ironic because a theme of the book, repeated time and again, is the need for interracial dialogue. Swain demonstrates little or no desire to deal with the particulars of what these white nationalists say, and she seems incapable of empathizing with anyone's frame of reference or needs other than her own.

A David Duke transcript has him saying that his organization "is about the preservation of our [European-American] entity as an ethnic people, our existence, our values, our culture, our traditions, and the things that really go to make up traditional America." Swain doesn't relate to that. Preservation of the European-American entity? What does that have to do with black people and racial integration and her version of racial harmony? She ignores Duke's comment and says that Duke's group "seems to flirt with some vaguely defined ideal of racial separation"

In another transcript, Jared Taylor is quoted to the effect that powerful forces are destroying European man and European civilization on the American continent. "If we do nothing, the nation we leave our grandchildren will be a grim Third World failure, in which whites will be in a minority [and Western Civilization, if it exists at all,] will be a faint echo." Swain doesn't bother responding to that. Instead, she points out that many white nationalist groups have "innocuous-sounding" names and lists Taylor's New Century Foundation as an example. That sets up her comment that "casual listeners are unlikely to be alarmed or tipped off about a friend or colleague's affiliation with such groups since their names raise no red flags." But what really bothers Swain about Taylor is that his organization has a sizeable Jewish membership. Three guesses why that puts her off. Jews have tended to be supporters of blacks. "[I]t is most troubling when I see groups like Taylor's finding Jewish

recruits, leaving African Americans more isolated than ever before." It is important to remember that the Swain book is not about how you are; it is about how she is.

William Pierce, in one of the transcripts, asserts that the membership of his organization, the National Alliance, has seven times the percentage of academics as does the general population. Matt Hale states that the Church of the Creator does not welcome people who are irresponsible, and that college students are the bulwarks of his organization. Rather than confront any of the implications of these claims, Swain is content to fall back, in the book's conclusion, on a fifty-year-old quote from longshoreman philosopher Eric Hoffer about "failures, misfits, outcasts, criminals, and all those who have lost their footing, or never had one" and how these "inferior elements of a nation can exert a marked influence on its course [because] they are wholly without reverence for the present." Swain pronounces that "[t]he truth of that statement is evident in the styles and leadership of contemporary white nationalist groups." Case closed.

Swain gets a lot of mileage out of quotes from individuals representing the so-called "watchdog agencies" – the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, the Simon Wiesenthal Center, and the Southern Poverty Law Center – to the effect that white nationalists and their organizations are a menace to decent people everywhere.

"The Internet... permits bigots to communicate easily and anonymously, cheaply raise money for their activities, and threaten and intimidate their enemies." "Colleges and universities are experiencing hate, racism, and homophobia." "The World Church of the Creator is a religion for sociopaths." And so on.

Yet, early in the book Swain quotes two writers as saying that the ADL and the others are "intensely hostile to the people and organizations they monitor and have a tendency to portray them in the worst possible light." The goal of these organizations, say these writers, "is to have the public regard the racist and anti-Semitic right with the same affection they would the AIDS epidemic or the outbreak of ebola fever." That doesn't stop Swain from referring to one of these groups as a "public interest organization," to another as an "organization that monitors hate groups" and reporting their broadsides against white nationalists and their organizations as if they come from an unbiased source. One wonders whether Swain can remember what she wrote and if she is capable of grasping contradictions in her presentation; or if she actually wrote everything that is in the book.

Swain ends *The New White Nationalism in America* with a series of recommendations, both general and directed specifically at black leaders. A number of the general ones reiterate what she advocates throughout the book: replacing race-based with class-based affirmative action, open discourse and candid dialogue, and directly confronting the issues of black people.

Her general recommendations also include the following (keep in mind this is a book about the new white nationalism in America):

- Ensure that all public school districts offer vocational training. “What I found in each city [I lived in] was the all-too-familiar tracking of African-American students into low-level courses and a lack of vocational education for those minority youth who are not suited for college. My oldest son struggled through high school and although it was clear that college was not a realistic option for him, he never had the opportunity to learn a marketable skill....”
- Invest public dollars such that all who seek to attend a community college are able to. “I found my own educational options quite limited, so I chose to attend a community college.”
- Establish financial partnerships between car dealers and government agencies to allow the working poor to tap into car loans and grants for automobiles. “Until I financed an automobile for a niece of mine, she regularly paid \$12 a day in taxicab fares for transportation to her job at Kentucky Fried Chicken.”
- Establish humane child support guidelines. “Several of my brothers have had children out of wedlock by different partners... One brother had child support payments for five illegitimate children... which left him with take-home pay of less than \$25 a week.”

The recommendations directed at black leaders include appeals to reduce black crime, rioting, illegitimacy, and AIDS, and to drop their call for reparations (because it alienates potential allies).

What can one take away from reading *The New White Nationalism in America*? More than anything, the reader will be left with the sober realization of who gets on the faculty at Vanderbilt University and who gets published by Cambridge University Press.

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