

Eric P. Kaufman,

*The Rise and Fall of Anglo-America*

Harvard University Press, 2004

In the spring of 2004 veteran Harvard political scientist Samuel P. Huntington published *Who Are We?*, an alarmist account of the crisis in contemporary American national identity. Huntington claimed that the values of the Anglo-Saxon founders of the Republic are today challenged by an 'invasion' of immigrants from an alien Latino culture. Eric P. Kaufman, a lecturer in politics and sociology at Birkbeck College, covers much of the same ground in this compelling study. Whereas Huntington wrote as a self-proclaimed 'patriot' and pointed swiftly to guilty *hombres*, Kaufman writes with admirable detachment and objectivity, and reveals the mechanism by which the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant founders of the United States lost their political and cultural dominance. Kaufman shows how a long-standing cosmopolitan element within WASP ideology shifted from a symbolic role to the core of national life, and the WASP population recast their own role accordingly. In other words, they did it to themselves.

Kaufmann opens with an account of the creation of the WASP culture showing how American intellectuals from Jefferson through to Henry Adams seized on Dark Age Anglo-Saxon culture as a mythic point of origin. He portrays the 'double consciousness' of the nineteenth century in which WASP Americans saw no contradiction between preserving their dominance and their rhetoric of equality. Kaufmann attributes the change to the Progressive social reformers of turn of the century – citing especially Jane Addams – who argued for a more inclusive vision of America. He relates the career of the Goodwill movement among American churches in the 1920s, reaching out to Jewish leaders and building a sense of shared 'Judeo-Christian' values. He also emphasises the role of bohemian intellectuals and artists as an alternative nation within the nation. The cosmopolitan *avant-garde*, Kaufmann

writes, captured America from the top down, leaving Anglo-Saxon identity for the less educated. World War Two brought these multi-cultural values into government propaganda – Hitler had given racism a bad name – then the Cold War gave a fresh imperative to their pursuit in peace. It only remained for the 1960s to complete the shift to a new America of Catholic Presidents and Black Supreme Court justices. By the 1980s WASPS were actually underrepresented in the boardrooms of America's corporations. Today only 20% of Americans claim British ancestry and the ethnicity of choice for those shopping around for a grandparent to define the totality of ones identity is Italian American.

In his final chapter Kaufmann introduces his own background: a Canadian born in Hong Kong with Jewish, Chinese and Hispanic ancestry, but who is effectively just another North American Anglo in most social situations. With this mixed heritage established he proposes a cultural regeneration of America based around what he terms 'Liberal Ethnicity'. He suggests that WASP identity be accepted as just another ethnic option within the range of identities available for American people. He looks to a future in which the state is culturally neutral and all ethnic identities are expressed in cultural rather than racial terms, and are hence open to anyone who wishes to participate in them, on the understanding that those buying into a new culture do not expect it to change to suit them. He even postulates in due course a future mixed American identity blending Anglo, African and Indian akin to the fusion of Aztec and Spanish in Mexico. It is so refreshing to read a generous, open and positive book on this subject – what a pity that it is Huntington who has attracted the attention.

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