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Victor Davis Hanson: Mexifornia: A State of Becoming: Study Guide

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VICTOR DAVIS HANSON: MEXIFORNIA: A STATE OF BECOMING: STUDY GUIDE, 2003

Steven Alan Samson

PREFACE

Study Questions

1. What themes has Hanson tried to avoid? Why? What is his purpose for writing this book?

INTRODUCTION

Study Questions

1. How does the new Selma differ from the old one? What does an education in the classics offer to immigrants from Mexico? (1-4)
2. What has changed in immigration since 1970? How has multiculturalism as an ideology turned the “stubborn problem of assimilation into a social tragedy stretching across the generations?” What has helped earlier immigrants? What is the effect of ethnic chauvinism? What is the “Devil’s bargain” Hanson blames? What are some of the political, social, and psychic costs of the resulting double-mindedness? (4-8)
3. Why is it so difficult to estimate the financial costs of illegal immigration? Why does illegal immigration continue unabated? Why is it so difficult to obtain reliable data? What effects did the “population bomb” (Paul Ehrlich) warning have on population growth? Why then has California’s population exploded? (8-11)

	United States	California	New York	Virginia	
1850	23,191,876	92,597	3,097,394	1,119,348	
1880	50,189,209	864,694	5,082,871	1,512,565	
1910	92,228,496	2,377,549	9,113,614	2,061,612	
1940	132,164,589	6,907,387	13,479,142	2,677,773	
1970	203,302,031	19,971,069	18,241,391	4,651,448	
2000	281,421,906	33,871,648	18,976,457	7,078,515	
	Anaheim	Fresno	Sacramento	San Francisco	San Jose
1950	14,556	91,669	137,572	775,367	95,280
2000	328,014	427,652	407,018	776,733	894,943

4. What great moral problem looms ahead? How has the law of unintended consequences

- hurt the political goals of both the Right and the Left? Identify some of the resulting dilemmas. (11-15)
5. The post-war bracero program regulated seasonal migrant labor in California. How does California sum up the entire paradox of illegal immigration today? (15-18)

CHAPTER ONE: WHAT IS SO DIFFERENT ABOUT MEXICAN IMMIGRATION?

1. Distinguish between the first and second waves of immigrants. The question is why the old assimilationist model works more for second-generation Asian-Americans than for Mexican-Americans. Four possible explanations – proximity to Mexico (21-23), racism (23-26), the Mexican government (26-31), and Mexican chauvinism (31-34) – are discussed separately in the four sections. Discuss the evidence that is given in support of each explanation.

CHAPTER TWO: THE UNIVERSE OF THE ILLEGAL ALIEN

Study Questions

1. What would the absence of Mexican immigrants mean for California? Describe the world of the *trabajador* [worker]. [Robert D. Kaplan's works, including *An Empire Wilderness*, reveal much the same]. What are some of illegal immigration's subsidiary industries? (35-44)
2. What are the some of the real advantages that draw aliens to seek work in America? Why do their dreams remain mostly a fantasy? Why are opportunities still far better in America than in Mexico? Who are the coyotes and other predators and parasites that profit most from this industry? What is the role of the *abogados* [lawyers, advocates]? How are attitudes shaped by envy [*phthonos*]? Why is the contrast between wealth and poverty less psychologically injurious in Mexico than in California? How does the immigrant life cycle work against aging aliens? (44-55)
3. What sort of culture shocks confront the alien? What are some of the obstacles to "the good life"? (55-59)

CHAPTER THREE: THE MIND OF THE HOST

Study Questions

1. What are some of the realities of relying on sustained physical labor as an employment strategy? How has the culture of illegal immigrants affected life in Hanson's locale? What is behind the driver's license issue? [The electorate rejected the idea]. How has the two-tiered system of financing higher education been threatened? What are some of the complexities created by basing citizenship on place of birth [*ius soli*] rather than blood inheritance [*ius sanguinis*]? (60-68)
2. What are some of the cheap answers proposed to account for criminal activity? What are

some of the characteristics of summer programs for grade-schoolers on the university campus? Who is doing a better job of educating Mexican-American students? [*Bien pensant* means something like “right-minded” or politically correct]. Where has this left the aging Okies? (60-74)

CHAPTER FOUR: THE OLD SIMPLICITY THAT WORKED

Study Questions

1. Describe the new mythology of La Raza? [*La Raza Unida* was an early name for the Chicano movement]. What is the Big Lie, as Hanson characterizes it? How has history been distorted? What is meant by Aztlan? How did California deal with immigration before the 1970s? How does the American legal system differ from Mexico's? (75-80)
2. According to the educational theory that once held sway, what were some of the essential truths? What were some of the recognized cultural differences? What importance was placed on assimilation? (80-84)
3. Why is assimilation being ridiculed today? Why are balkanized ethnic enclaves expected? What do the politically correct “pundits” anticipate for the future? What does Hanson see as the real problem (p. 86)? How is this changed attitude reflected in the public school curriculum? (84-87)
4. How did the old assimilationist model work in Hanson's experience? What was the perceived role of education? What problem tends to be ignored by today's advocates of state-sanctioned bilingualism? Who does Hanson blame for the destruction of the old assimilationist model? Why did Cesar Chavez prefer dealing with agribusiness? How did the schools, popular culture, and society generally deal with prejudice in the 1950s and 1960s? What has happened to the American self-confidence of that period? What are the sources and consequences of the self-loathing deprecation endemic in the West today? (87-102)

CHAPTER FIVE: THE NEW GODS THAT FAILED

Study Questions

1. What is taught about Father Junipero Serra today? How have the Aztecs and the Mexican government been romanticized in the curriculum? What is the significance of the introduction of ethnic pride courses? What paradox does Hanson notice? Where may lingering racism be found? What do students in La Raza studies departments learn? What is the critical distinction between a multiracial and a multicultural society? What are some of the evidences of a growing separatism? (103-18)
2. How is today's racialist like the old-time union organizer? What are two indisputable effects of this emphasis on ethnic pride? How is California like the old Roman Principate? What threatens such a fragile state of affairs? How may civic education be recreated? What can we do? What makes the new vocationalism of the Right just as pernicious as the multiculturalism of the Left? (118-25)

CHAPTER SIX: THE REMEDY OF POPULAR CULTURE?

Study Questions

1. How does globalization play out in practice? How do its positives and negatives balance out in the ledger? (126-41)

EPILOGUE: FORKS IN THE ROAD

Study Questions

1. How do perceptive immigrants react to the cynicism, boredom and smugness of their hosts? What makes the relationship parasitic for both hosts and guests? What is the most perilous course among the alternatives for America? What possible solutions does the author offer? (142-50)