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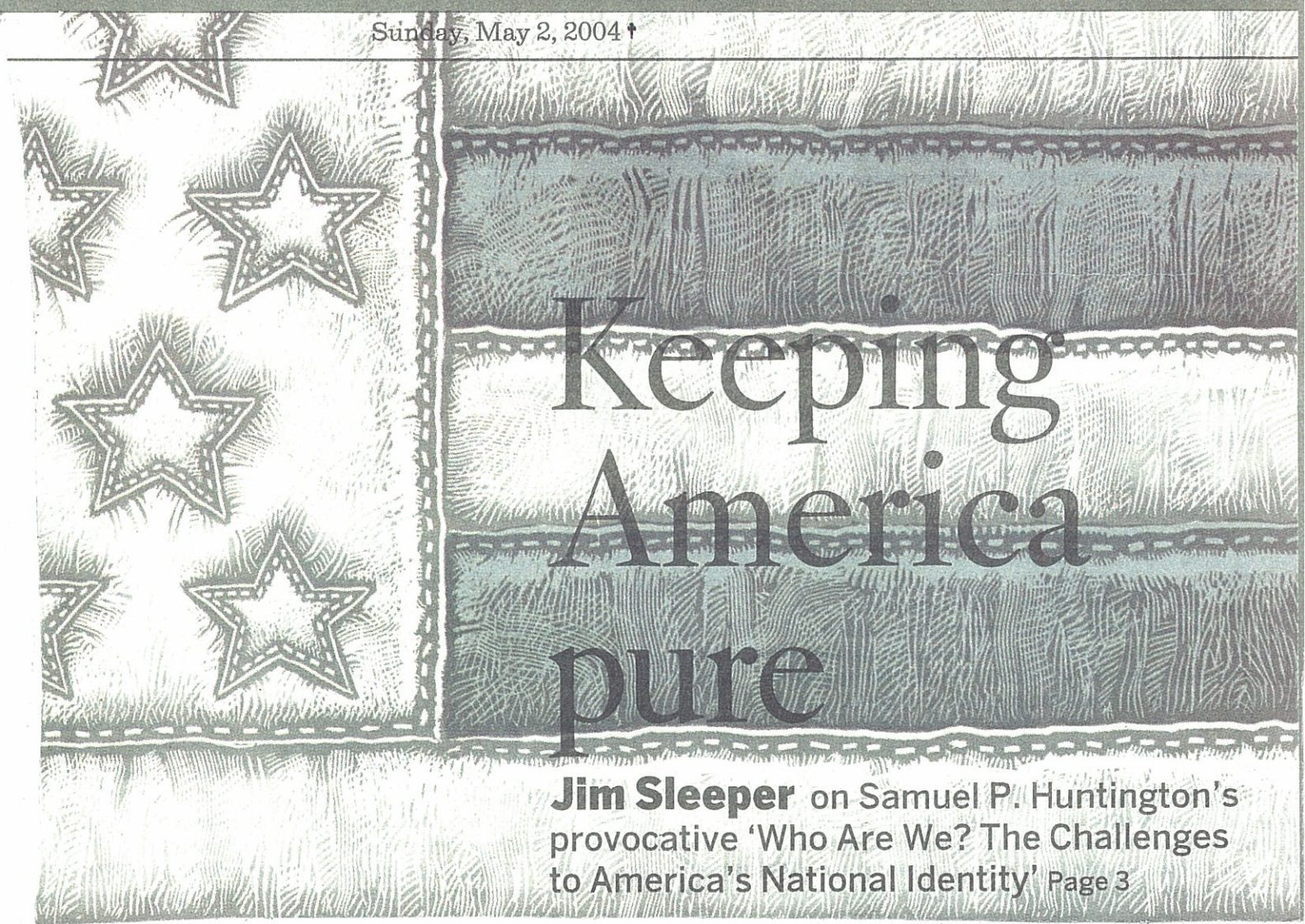
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Sunday, May 2, 2004 †



Keeping America pure

Jim Sleeper on Samuel P. Huntington's
provocative 'Who Are We? The Challenges
to America's National Identity' Page 3

Who Are We?

The Challenges to America's National Identity

Samuel P. Huntington

Simon & Schuster: 428 pp., \$27

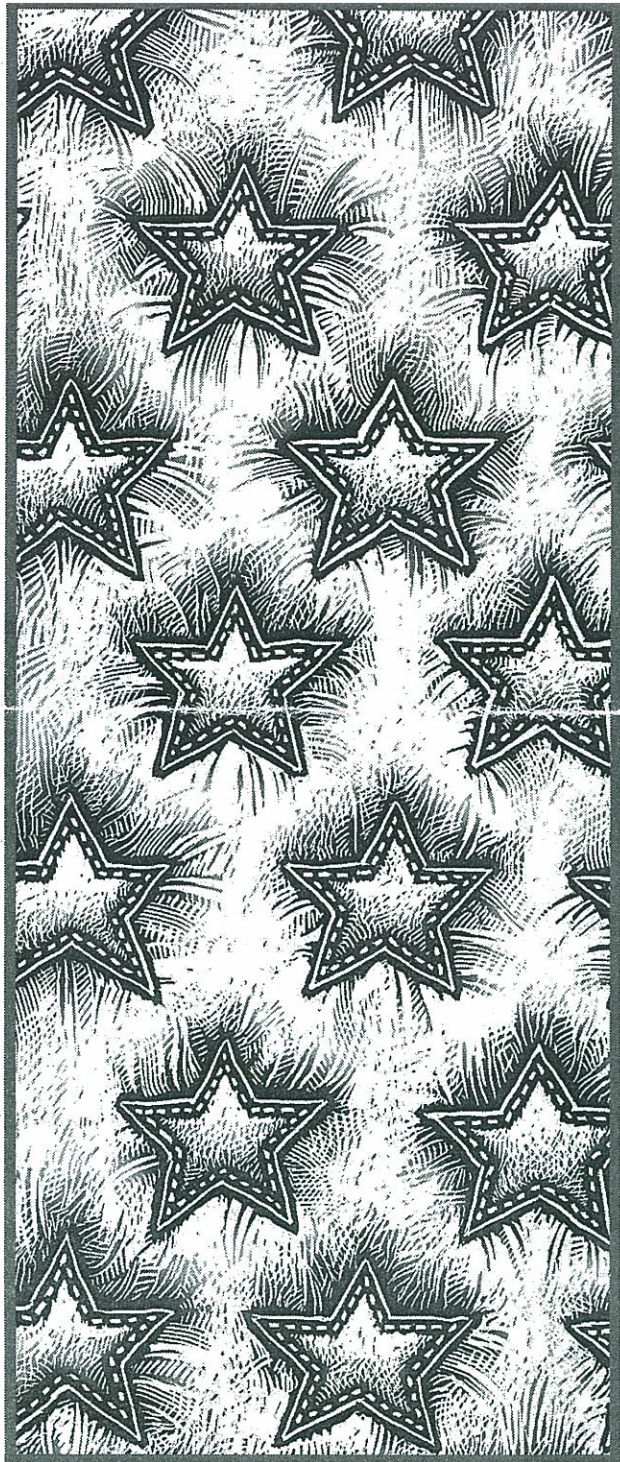
WITH the publication of this, his 13th book, the magisterial, sometimes dyspeptic Harvard political scientist Samuel P. Huntington has once again indulged — nay, has stage managed — his inclination to administer jolts of counterintuitive, debate-changing Truth to distracted American elites. Once again, establishment players of many stripes are swooning in dismay at his dark revelations or girding up their loins to join him in another long, twilight battle for Western civilization. Once again, Huntington is arrestingly right about challenges facing liberal democracy that many liberals have been loath to acknowledge.

But never before has so big a part of his argument been so thunderously wrong and so cheaply sustained. Those who value his chastening realism about liberalism's dicey prospects will have to work hard to follow his most important insight in "Who Are We?": that American cosmopolitans who would like to dispense with nations and multiculturalist zealots who would like to dismantle them have converged with American multinational profiteers to fray the fabric of liberal democracy, which only a renewed civic patriotism here at home can sustain. This argument, eminently worth arguing about, has already been overshadowed by another debate: one about Huntington's ill-conceived, crotchety and (pardon the word) undocumented jeremiad against Latino immigration.

The distraction is the fault of Huntington the stage manager as much as of Huntington the thinker. In 1993, to prompt a national debate about themes that would figure in his 1996 book, "The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order," he published a Foreign Affairs essay of virtually the same title highlighting his most important warning: The economic, ideological and nationalist rivalries that most global analysts and activists presumed were driving world affairs would soon be eclipsed by deep cultural and religious differences among civilizations. He foresaw the ferocity of our conflict with Islamicist terrorists and warned against the American unilateralism and moralism that have been brought to bear on it, widening the civilizational divide.

Huntington didn't clearly define these civilizations; he seemed unsure whether Latin America is a distinct civilization or is part of the West. Two months ago he seemed to answer the latter question by heralding "Who Are We?" with an essay in Foreign Policy, this one called "The Hispanic Challenge." It has made the book a lightning rod for the least credible of his warnings: America's Latino immigration deluge, he claims, is so little like any earlier wave, so hostile or resistant to sharing the common American language, civic rites and virtues upon which our republican self-governance depends, that it

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PHIL FOSTER For The Times

constitutes "a major potential threat to the cultural and possibly political integrity of the United States." If this clash isn't civilizational, what is?

The problem is that, most likely, it isn't, and "Who Are We?" doesn't persuade this reader that most Latino immigration is a threat to liberal democracy. Two months ago, Huntington also published (in the conservative journal National Interest) a less-noted essay, "Dead Souls: The Denationalization of the American Elite," whose title and contents come from another, smaller section toward the end of the book. Contradicting his own claims that the Latino tidal wave is shifting the balance of American political culture against patriotism, he announces, "A major gap is growing in America between its increasingly denationalized [academic, corporate and cultural] elites and its 'Thank God for America' public." The latter, he reports, has remained consistently patriotic over time, even as the former "reject expressions of patriotism and

[*Identity, from Page 3*] He doesn't take black Americans seriously in this book, by whatever name. It was the black civil rights movement that made Huntington's Anglo conformism even possible for millions of nonwhites, and yet he takes no cues from that breakthrough and its subsequent breakdowns: The fabric of American civic trust has been nowhere more severely tried than in blacks' cultural, electoral, legal and public psycho-dramatic renderings of disaffection with white America.

Nor does Huntington examine such Latino responses to black disaffection as a 1992 editorial in San Diego's Mexican American newspaper *La Prensa* that declared Latinos the new "bridge between blacks, whites, Asians, and Latinos." Latinos, the editorial said, "will have to bring an end to class, color, and ethnic warfare. To succeed, they will have to do what the blacks failed to do: incorporate all into the human race and exclude no one."

If Huntington wants "a non-racial society composed of multiracial individuals," shouldn't he reach for those Latino immigrants whose notions of race are more fluid and ecumenical than those of most blacks and whites, locked together for so long in a brutal embrace? Mightn't they lead in renewing the quasi-ethnic bondings of an American civic culture that, shorn of racist exclusions, could ask more of citizens than does the current ethnic pandering in commercialism and demagoguery?

There's no denying Huntington's observations about the uniqueness of the 2,000-mile-long border that (barely) separates Mexico's northern states from its former provinces in the United States, or that Mexican and other Latino immigrants' sheer numbers and concentration bring them linguistic and political hegemony, not only in southern Texas and California but also in Miami and parts of New York.

But he conflates demographic and political developments through intuition, stray anecdotes, newspaper stories and poll after vapid poll, whose findings are often contradictory: At times

noted quite rightly that American forces in Iraq are commanded by Army Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, who grew up in one of the dirt-poor, 98%-Latino counties in Texas that prompted Huntington's quasi-civilizational despair. But they and Huntington's Latino "nationalist" critics ignore his condemnation of American interventions abroad, such as the very war Sanchez is fighting. That skews debate about who we are as a nation. (It also misses the possibility that Huntington would be relieved if his pessimism about Latinos' becoming full Americans provoked enough of them to prove him wrong.) Keeping him busy answering charges of racism only spares him the trouble of having to own up to his book's anti-corporate arguments and implications.

For example, even as he angers multiculturalist activists by condemning the Ford Foundation's national "diversity" crusades — on the grounds that a country as diverse as ours should work overtime to deepen some common bonds — he also condemns Ford Motor Co., one of the corporations

he tells us no longer describes itself as American and has non-Americans as top executives. The company, even more than the foundation, drives what he bemoans as the "deconstruction" of civic patriotism. That's a point worth developing, as are his criticisms of such enemies of civic trust as these companies' intrusive culture of consumer marketing and what he con-

siders our government's faux-patriotic interventions abroad.

Huntington's condemnation of the latter, in which some honorable conservatives are now joining, is squarely in the tradition of his Harvard predecessors William James and Charles Eliot Norton, and of Andrew Carnegie and Carl Schurz, who opposed the Spanish-American War on republican grounds. And since he's writing about clashes between Mexican and American identities, why not examine Woodrow Wilson's disastrous, humiliating efforts to impose "democracy," Iraq-like, in Mexico in 1917?

Why doesn't he ponder the irony that George

Samuel P. Huntington writes as a patriot to defend a distinctive 'Anglo-Protestant' political culture.