

# Beginning Again: From Refugee to Citizen

---

Ahmed I. Samatar

All of our people all over the country—except the pureblooded Indians—are immigrants or descendants of immigrants, including even those who came over here on the Mayflower.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt,  
Address to the Daughters of the American Revolution.

## I. Introduction

A key feature of this phase of globalization is a speedy catalyzation of a heretofore unseen degree of human mobility and cultural interpenetration.<sup>1</sup> Unlike the earlier epochs in the making of the modern world (16th through the early 20th-century), when Europeans were the main groups leaving their homelands to find better lives in other parts of the world, the contemporary era is witness to a dramatic reversal movement. Many in Africa, Central and South America, and Asia have come or are earnestly planning to lift their heels for the “old” West (even to Southern and Eastern Europe) and “neo-Europe” (e.g., the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand). The phenomenal arrival of tens of thousands of Somalis in the United States within the last two decades (first as a trickle and then in larger numbers since the 1990s) is to a great extent part of this trend.<sup>2</sup> It is a happening that is, in one sense, part of an old story, as President Roosevelt correctly asserted, and a continuous aspect in the quintessential making of these United States, marked by the settlement of people from almost every region of the world. As a matter of fact, since the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965 and the Refugee Act of 1980, more than twenty million legal immigrants have entered the U.S.<sup>3</sup> A dramatic demographic consequence of these flows of people, according to the 2000 U.S. Census, is this: At present, those Americans who are foreign-born and their children compose around one-fifth of the American population.<sup>4</sup> If the Somali presence in America is one slice of the latest iteration, the poten-

tial for a decent, let alone notable success—in both material and mental terms—depends on how, individually and collectively, they assess the complexities of the new environment and, subsequently, snatch any legitimate turns of chance. To state this point is not to underestimate how difficult circumstances have been, are, or could be.<sup>5</sup> The life histories of others who came before Somalis, including some of European ancestry (e.g., the Irish and southerners from around the Mediterranean), testify to the cruel treatment that might await and the bogus hindrances that one must struggle against during the transition.<sup>6</sup>

Most notable here, of course, is the highly instructive story of the oldest Africans in America. Next only to the calculated ethnic cleansing of Native Americans, the fallout from the experience of the first Africans, forcibly brought here for the sole purpose of building this continent for European settlement and colonization, still haunts the contemporary American political economy and culture. More precisely, the impact of that past still shapes life-chances and acts as a powerful undertow on the full realization of what I call the American version of *positive pluralism*. Furthermore, the current global and national climate after September 11 seems more conducive to the distancing of Muslims.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, this is not a time of despair. The endowments bequeathed by the glorious and still ongoing civic exertion by the first Africans in America, Native Americans, and the women's movement have created a momentum towards a multicultural America. These provisions include daring ideas, role models, and institutional spaces that invite at once appropriation, proper utilization, and contributions that could enhance public-spiritedness as well as individual achievement. Through relatively recent enlargements of inclusion, these gains are undergirded by the clarity of the procedural firmness on the issue of equality adumbrated by Section I of the 14th Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America. It reads:

All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the Law.<sup>8</sup>

The first proposition of the essay is this: Citizenship is not to be reduced to the mere acquisition of documents that validate resettlement in the new country. To be sure, such a stage is a necessary first step required for formal and minimal claims for inclusion. But to limit oneself or community to this level is to discount one's potential as a historical agent and, in the process, miss out on the promise of America for personal and communal empowerment. A second proposition is that in order to aim for maximum civic stakeholding, the apotheosis of citizenship, one would need to develop a fitting conceptual frame, one capable of identifying pivotal issues and guiding effective tactics and strategies in real time.

This essay has four segments. First, I briefly underscore some of the main reasons that compel individuals to leave their home and seek a new life in another place. In addition, I comment on the key classifications that capture variations in this movement of people. Second, I discuss different waves of immigration to the United States and models to explain how new arrivals have been incorporated. Here, I will argue that, while each model may have some value, none is fully competent to meet the exigencies of the challenges facing Somalis in America (and perhaps others who come from cultures that are drastically different). Third, I touch upon the modalities of the Somali historical moment to distinguish between an earlier tradition of adventure-seeking among a relatively few and this epoch of massive flight. In this context, I also itemize some of the issues that Somalis in Minnesota have expressed as their most immediate concerns, and others that I add. Fourth, and finally, I bring forth the concept of *critical adaptation* as one plausible approach to effectively enter into the inner dynamics of the United States; that is, to become stakeholders able to negotiate the complexities of the circumstances, design worthy lives here, and make contributions to the shaping of the new homeland.

## II. Decampment

Our planet, individuals, and groups are all synonymous with movement and change. The plates of the earth have always been in constant, albeit extremely slow, motion, while humans, more swift, have swarmed into mobile throngs that have crossed into every continent since they left Africa nearly 750,000 years ago.<sup>9</sup> While the molecular reasons for leaving a place of birth are peculiar to a specific time, place, and culture, there are two broad and interdigitated rubrics that are

often suggested to organize the myriad factors behind decampment. The interplay and balance between them is subject to the vicissitudes of the context.

### **A. Push**

There are a number of preponderantly natural and/or human causes that drive men and women to decide to leave their place of birth. Among the first are calamities induced by inanimate and radical forces of ecological change, such as persistent droughts, floods, fires, and earthquakes. Particularly in communities that have minimal resources or weak technological adaptability, a most logical option is to relocate—normally to a safer or more accommodating zone within the same country. Where that is not a viable option, some of the vulnerable cross international boundaries to seek succor.

Perhaps more dramatic are those factors that result from direct human choices and actions. Here, the key examples include devastating wars, especially the filial kind; deranged governance and rule conducted through generalized repression and violence; “othering” and scapegoating of particular groups; and failed economic policies that engender diminishing opportunities if not outright destitution.

### **B. Pull**

To be sure, there are occasions when individuals come to the desperate conclusion that, as it were, “anywhere is better than here.” This is a central reason why, for instance, a few Somalis have willingly immigrated to few other countries in Africa (e.g., South Africa) outside of the neighboring region. In fact, even in countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, or Djibouti, where large numbers of denizens of Somalia are gathered, the vast majority spends its time exploring or inventing possibilities to relocate to what is perceived to be more desirable destinations. In the end, beyond the compulsion of the immediate moment of survival, people carry with them comparative criteria as to which target is most appealing, relative to the conditions to be left behind. Among other items, this matrix involves a secure physical and legal space, an accommodating—if not a welcoming—culture, and a socioeconomic ambience conducive to personal and family well-being. These, I contend, are some of the paramount reasons behind the familiar long lines that

are formed daily in front of the embassies of most member states of the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

### C. Terms

A classification of the status of individuals comes in a variety of types. Five that I deem relevant are: the internally displaced, refugee, immigrant, exile, and diaspora—a concept that looms large as the new arrivals settle and set generational roots. An *internally displaced* person is one who is compelled to abandon her/his habitat but who stays within the confines of the country. According to Roberta Cohen and Francis M. Deng, this category, traditionally overshadowed by those who cross borders, has now become a main feature in international deliberations. They write:

Between twenty and twenty-five million persons have been forced from their homes by armed conflicts, internal strife, systematic violations of human rights, and other causes traditionally associated with refugees across international borders... . The internally displaced remain within... dispossessed by their governments and other controlling authorities and forced into a life of destitution and indignity. Their plight poses a challenge of humanitarian, political and strategic dimensions.<sup>10</sup>

A *refugee* is an individual whose circumstances are similar to the internally displaced, but either is unable to find a modicum of shelter and safety in her/his homeland or decides that what is available is so unappealing and unappetizing that becoming a brittle and, at times, unwanted foreigner is a preferable fate. But it is a mistake to exaggerate this option. As I write, millions of human beings sit in wretched refugee camps around the world, waiting for a chance to either return or move on to another place.

The category of *immigrant* is designated to describe one who has made an autonomous and personal choice of “creative destruction”<sup>11</sup> to seek membership in another society—an act that can either be temporary or could culminate in new citizenship and, thus, national belonging. The latter is usually a fundamental change in civic identity and allegiance.

*Exile* connotes an individual who is the victim of an unfavorable confluence of factors. The act of leaving could be a result of direct deportation from the homeland or a personal resolution not to com-

promise. What is usually distinctive about this category is a mixture of restless engagement and, in Edward W. Said's memorable phrase, "the crippling sorrow of estrangement."<sup>12</sup> An exile, with an active and at times a highly accomplished new life, "jealously insists on his or her right to refuse to belong." This perspective is, to a large extent, animated by the guilt of unmet communal obligations, sometimes brought into a sharp relief by everyday events as well as the lingering hope of a return someday to a corrected place. For Bertolt Brecht, the lines between refugee, immigrant, and exile are almost nonexistent:

I always found the name false which they give us: Emigrants.  
That means those who leave their country. But we  
Did not leave of our own free will,  
Choosing another land. Nor did we enter  
Into a land, to stay there, if possible forever.  
Merely, we fled. We are driven out, banned.  
Not a home, but an exile, shall the land be that took us in.  
Restlessly we wait thus, as near as we can to the frontier.<sup>13</sup>

*Diaspora* is a complicated term.<sup>14</sup> Though close in its connotation to that of exile, the concept was coined to describe clusters of people (particularly Jews) forcibly cast out of their homeland. For the purpose of this essay, diaspora refers to communities that are made of a mixture of refugees, immigrants, and exiles who, despite the variability of their circumstances and personal attitude toward permanent relocation, come together to establish a new symbiotic and inclusive association focused on public usefulness. A main objective is to raise the collective awareness and programmatic pitch of their community. This level of vibrancy and cohesion is displayed in two simultaneous ways: the cultivation of local clout and the promotion of the interests of the old country. A diasporic status, then, is partly a mark of maturity and adroit adjustment.

### III. Waves and Models

Scholars who study the constant flow of new people into the United States have identified four great waves.<sup>15</sup> The first was made up of over a million Europeans, primarily from Britain, and around half a million Africans, forcibly seized and shipped. Together, these were to constitute the main population of what became the original thirteen colonies. A combination of the consequences of the Revolutionary War

and the turmoil surrounding the French Revolution caused the decline of European immigration for nearly three decades. Moreover, in 1808, the United States outlawed the trade in slaves from Africa.

The second wave was triggered by the Congress of Vienna. With many European people in dire conditions, the movement was then at the beginning stages. However, in the 1850s, the rush of immigrants became substantial, reaching into a few hundreds of thousands per year. Germans and Irish constituted the bulk of the new arrivals. The growing transformation of the American economy from agriculture to industrial production and organization of live-worlds fueled the third wave. Between the last two decades of the 19th century until the outbreak of the First World War, nearly 25 million Europeans arrived on the shores of the United States. Also admitted were smaller numbers of Asians, particularly Chinese and Japanese. In this third wave, most Europeans, unlike the preceding groups, came from the central, eastern, and southern part of the continent. Among them were many Jews and Catholics, whose religious identities made them objects of abuse and discrimination. Six years after the end of the hostilities of the Great War, the Congress of the United States adopted the National Origins Act. A main point of this Law was to set a maximum visa admission of only 150,000, less than a tenth of yearly intake. Furthermore, the Act stipulated a proportional preference for those countries whose populations had primordial ties or ancestral linkages to American categories of origin recorded in the U.S. Census of 1920.<sup>16</sup> This state edict gave countries such as Britain, Germany, and Ireland over three-quarters of the new allotments, while closing the door on any new Asians and classifying those already in the United States as outsiders not qualified for the consideration of citizenship. This was, bluntly, a racist project.

The repeal of the National Origins law in 1965 ushered in the fourth wave. With no national quotas to observe, most of the new arrivals in the past four decades have come from Latin America (especially Mexico), Asia, and, recently, Africa. American society had already entered a complex conversation over American national identity and character. The combination of the everlasting voices of earlier "people of color" and the continuing arrival of large numbers of people with the same origins means that this dialogue will only become more necessary and urgent.

If America has always, objectively, been a nation whose people have had varied national origins, the arrival of waves of newcomers and their offspring has inevitably brought about different ways of incorpo-

ration. Three such roads are often put forth: assimilation, chronic marginalization, and transnationalism. *Assimilation*, the oldest, starts with an assumption that there is a “unitary and unquestioned American way of life.”<sup>17</sup> Created by the cultural weight and experience of whites (particularly Anglo-Americans), the expectation has been that other groups, and particularly people of color, would dump their earlier folkways, languages, and values—their way of being in this world—and embrace conformity.

In time, fierce disputations over the nature, let alone efficacy, of this strategy arose, even among the Euro-Americans. On one side, the most orthodox people thought (and still think) that their historical formation and therefore their way of life is both a proven success in the milieu of advanced industrialism and is also available to others who are willing to adjust to its tenets. This, it is argued, is the chief secret that made America what it is: an achieving and democratic middle-class society that is the envy of the rest of the world.

Though one could affirm many truths and usable elements in such a strategy, including an entrance into mainstream institutions, an assumed synonymy of a particularist history with genuine universalism is striking. In response, and at the other end, are those dissidents who have emphasized a primary contradiction.

The one-sidedness of this conception overlooked the value and sustainability of minority cultures and, in addition, masked barely hidden ethnocentric assumptions about the superiority of Anglo-American culture. Indeed, it has been viewed as a form of “Eurocentric hegemony,” a weapon of the majority for putting minorities at a disadvantage by forcing them to live by cultural standards that are not their own.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to what amounts to stealthily constructed dominant Americanism, staunch assimilation, in the eyes of its critics, may enervate a valuable cultural knowledge (including language) and/or devalue skills that have the potential to link socioeconomic capacities to neighborhood needs and opportunities. It is the judgment of some that this model is so flawed that it is no longer workable for the America of the future.

*Chronic marginality* underscores a geographical space of isolation and a lived condition of impoverishment and public insecurity. Initially attractive for the new arrivals to huddle with a population of similar identity, such locations turn into cases of social exclusion that,

except in rare occasions, stymie individual potentialities and civic vitality.<sup>19</sup> The long-term consequences include material deprivation, stressful family life, intra-group predation, and a long lease on the life of old stereotyping and the possible invention of new and damning ones. Though, tragically, this mode is a familiar feature in many old urban centers and some rural areas of the United States, it is the least viable option, perhaps even a dead end.

*Transnationalism* is associated with this age of dispersal and hyper-encounters. Richard Alba and Victor Nee tell us:

...such an alternative envisions enhanced prospects for a vigorous ethnic pluralism in the contemporary world, generated partly by the advantages to be derived from welfare-maximizing features of ethnic connections and partly by globalization driven by enormous advances in technology, market integration, and mass air transportation—all of which make it feasible for immigrants and perhaps the second and inter generations to maintain significant relationships with their homeland and with relatives and towns that hold a special place in their hearts and memories.<sup>20</sup>

Transnationalism, then, not only facilitates immediate correspondence with the locality of origin but is also a conduit for, or a continuation of, memory and culture. If this living hinterland of consciousness offers a degree of confidence, its encounter with the new environment has the potential to bring forth enabling possibilities. However, a realization of such potentialities depends on how well one overcomes hidden liabilities. These liabilities include a sense of a divided self, predisposed to immobilizing psychophrenia or, even worse, a quick retreat to an ostensible native authenticity and uncompromising claims of uniqueness. The latter is a temptation that may arise in those tight spots when one is confronted with paying the price commensurate with winning a coveted place in America. The ultimate and consequential danger of an acute porosity of identity and the subsequent cacophony of voices clamoring for particularism has been cogently underscored by Will Kymlicka:

On the one hand, many of these groups are insisting that society officially affirm their differences, and provide various kinds of institutional support and recognition for their difference, e.g., public funding for group-based organizations... . On the other hand, if society accepts and encourages more and more diversity, in order to promote cultural inclu-

sion, it seems that citizens will have less and less in common. If affirming difference is required to integrate marginalized groups into the common culture, there may cease to be a common culture.<sup>21</sup>

To be sure, transnationalism is the most promising route of the three. Yet, given its own serious limitation, one must try to think beyond. This is the burden of the last section of the essay.

#### IV. The Somali Moment

##### A. *Tacabbir* vs. *Qaxootin*

Venturing into territories overseas to seek, primarily, more remunerative employment is not new to Somali people. Given the harsh economic ecology of the Somali areas, a few, mostly men, have always left for journeys into distant lands. This was usually the case when long-lasting droughts engulfed the Somali territories. In the middle of the 20th century, these trickles of individuals coalesced into tiny but cohesive and self-supporting communities in diverse locations such as New York, Cardiff, London, Rome, Aden, and the Arabian Peninsula. Somalis used to call this venture *tacabbir*. It connotes temporary adventures to improve one's material life and the ultimate return to either the place of origin or one of the more enterprising towns, with a degree of worldliness uncommon among contemporaries.

Our time could not be more different. This is the age of *qaxootin*, or desperate exodus, an epoch unprecedented in a number of features. First, the intensity of the internal institutional crises is of such magnitude that, a decade ago, I termed the condition a "catastrophe."<sup>22</sup> Second, the rupture in the collective identity is so severe that Somalis have taken almost *any* road out of the country. Third, the numbers are so large, perhaps in the millions. Fourth, those in flight come in almost all categories—men and women, old and young, poor and not so poor, statesmen and the ordinary, educated and uneducated, urban and rural. Fifth, while longing for a better Somalia, many are so disheartened that a return in the short term is a forlorn hope. Sixth, there is a rising new generation (Kapteijns and Arman essay) whose existential self-definition is being imminently shaped by the new circumstances. Seventh, Somalis are to be found in every continent, in cities, small towns, and villages. Eighth, the vast majority was let into their new countries as refugees and asylum seekers, and, to a much lesser extent,

as immigrants. Ninth, and finally, many of these dispersed Somalis carry with them trauma, venom, and guilt to an extent that enervates any attempt, thus far, at sustainable inclusive dialogue, never mind a collective effort towards reconstitution.

## **B. Issues**

Akin to all other refugees who have come without resources, Somalis in America have, when asked, identified a host of needs that they deem essential for partaking of American life. For instance, in a study undertaken by the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs at the University of Minnesota (2001), Somali individuals and the organizations serving them pointed to “housing, employment, education, and cultural support systems” as highly significant. In another study by St. Paul’s Wilder Research Center (2000), when compared with Hmong, Russians, and Latinos born outside of the United States, more Somalis expressed the “hope to return to their native country some day.”

In my own focused interviews with Somali groups in the Twin Cities and Rochester, Minnesota, as well as in less structured conversations in other parts of the country, I also found employment, housing, and education listed as most important. As one middle-aged and perceptive Somali remarked, “At first blush, America is a place of amazing possibilities. But one will be locked out unless one is well educated and employed.” Given the legendary impoverishment of Somali society, compounded by the destruction of what little there was as a result of the civil strife, the placing of education and employment at the top of their needs is not surprising.

This leads to the question that I have often been asked: Why have so many Somalis decided to settle in Minnesota? Despite the bitter cold of the winter months, these are some of the reasons articulated by Somalis themselves: economic opportunities, good education for the children, a caring state that is generous in its welfare support, and citizens known for their tolerance and progressive politics. Two final facts are the call of family ties and the urge to reunite, as well as the potential value of huddling in the shelter of a large density of people of the same origin.

In addition, there are less tangible but equally potent factors that will condition how much Somalis become an integral part of America, the antithesis of a refugee. These are command of the English language, struggles against racism, and the creation of an enabling Somali and Islamic identity within America. These challenges are formidable.

To be sure, how much success Somalis attain is contingent upon their own efforts. However, the nature of the attitudes, if not actions, of their fellow Americans could make a difference. The final section of the essay speaks to what Somalis might have to do and, to a lesser extent, how the relevant rest of the population responds.

## **V. The Dialectic of Critical Adaptation**

Critical adaptation as a strategy for successful incorporation begins with reflexivity, or self-monitoring. To try to stand outside of oneself is a cultivated act that is not easy to undertake. This is particularly hard for vulnerable individuals or groups. All the same, for one to undertake the demanding but necessary journey of a makeover, there seems no other viable and long-term option. The first part of becoming critically self-observant implies a skeptical evaluation of one's own assumptions, codes of behavior, and expectations. Since every human culture is liable to have its own shortcomings, the key is to consciously protect the valuable and to shed the liabilities. The second part of the task is to give the same treatment to the new culture, as knowledge of its particulars grows. Critical adaptation means, then, a life-changing assignment of synthesis, a creative and never-ending endeavor that strives to simultaneously preserve and change. More specifically, unlike transnationalism that accents relationships with others from the same homeland and undervalues the new country, critical adaptation stresses a dual task; that is, affirmation of the old particularity (being Somali) and a pursuit of an organic, not just instrumentalist, bonding with America. A successful articulation of these parts of the new self could extend the sense of citizenship to also include affinity with the rest of the world—that is, a cultivation of global values and awareness.

### **A. English Language**

The necessity of command over the English language is rather self-evident. First, a successful entrance into the highly competitive inner logic of mainstream America and its institutions is not possible without access to English. Second, and equally important, English has now acquired status as the medium through which global transactions are conducted. As Bruce Lawrence concludes in his splendid volume *Shattering the Myth*, “Not only for Malays, but also for other Muslims, the

future may yet belong to those who learn to wage economic jihad in English.”<sup>23</sup> Competent multilingualism combined with competitive skills are precious assets, especially in this age of globalization.

## **B. Racism<sup>24</sup>**

Violent hatred and social cruelty towards “people of color,” particularly Native Americans and Africans, has been a conspicuous facet of the inception and evolution of the United States.<sup>25</sup> Judicious learning of that history and its contemporary configurations is unavoidable in critical adaptation.<sup>26</sup> Here, the ugliness of America is to be encountered and respect for and solidarity with its victims fostered, while, at the same instance, a deep appreciation for all genuine warriors (and particularly those of the mainstream) is developed. Finally, and for the present and future, Somalis must become alert to two equally pernicious forms of contemporary racism: the right-wing version and the liberal/left type. The first is a direct continuation of the old and horrid form of outright white supremacy, recently manifested, for example, in Lewiston, Maine. The second is a repulsive kind of paternalism that arrogates itself to be the authority on what kinds of human beings “people of color” ought to be and how and when they should act, and that, moreover, willingly accepts mediocre performances of them. Both forms of racism are noxious, but I suggest that the first is not only easier to spot than the latter, but may also be, for the long haul, less dangerous. Many caring and honorable Americans do not fall in these categories. Discovering and establishing bonds of social mutual-ity with them is a priceless gain.

## **C. Somali and Islamic Identities**

There is little doubt that Somali identity has taken a severe battering in the last fifteen years. Its reclamation will be doubly difficult as a result of the magnitude of the damage and competition from other types of claims on individuals and groups. However, the new American environment has the potential to both offer spaces and resources for revival of a *soomaalinimo* that heals the old wounds and, at the same time, enthusiastically embraces the republican principles of American society. Such hybridity brings richness to both dimensions.

Muslims in America were always a marginal presence. In recent decades the number of Muslims has grown to the tune of 6–7 million.

Notwithstanding this growth, Muslim insignificance has been aggravated by the events of September 11. Although almost 500 Muslims (nearly a quarter of the dead) lost their lives in the attack, one clear fall out has been a resurgence of the demonization of Islam and Muslims.<sup>27</sup> If racial profiling is a common feature of the forces of domestic order, singling out specific religious affiliation, as in the case of Muslims, seems to be becoming a familiar practice. In such a context, Somalis who are Muslims need to think about what kind of American Muslims they ought to be.<sup>28</sup> Hiding one's Muslim identity or, at the other extreme, using it as an instrument of "othering" those who do not belong to the faith or who interpret it differently is counterproductive and only accentuates marginality. What is needed is a reasoning Islam, an Islamic identity that abides by the law of the land, is at ease with disputatious heterogeneity, and, consequently, is confident enough to enter into an open and respectful dialogue with others who share a civic identity but follow a different set of religious beliefs.<sup>29</sup>

One of America's most alluring attributes is the normalization of a continuing but by no means finished struggle for equality and diversity. In their march to become Americans, Somalis, as Africans and Muslims, ought to think innovatively. It is this spirit and ambition that will do well for all of us in this America of our times and beyond. As Philip Fisher tells us, America is still "the new world." He writes:

Assimilation in the United States today does not mean the surrender of some of a culture that they feel to be their authentic culture, so as to take on the stable culture of some other dominant group. It means instead the active discovery of large parts of the past in the name of a future that is equally new to everyone.<sup>30</sup>

A few final thoughts for mainstream Americans. First, there is waiting realization of the truth of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's assertion. Second, investing in attitudes of genuine inclusion accompanied by a social infrastructure that improves human development is a win-win situation.<sup>31</sup> This ought to be an immediate and calculated priority over generational time. It is one weapon against a destructive distancing that will, in the end, threaten everyone and diminish the civic project. Third, a cultivation of their own brand of critical adaptation towards self as well as the "other" is paramount. Fourth, in the wake of September 11, the Bush wars, and the conflict over Palestine, they ought to listen to Professor Bruce Lawrence again:

The greatest problem for the best informed non-Muslims, even when they are sincere and well-intentioned, is the absence of acquaintance with real-life Muslims... . The great difficulty is to separate the Muslims represented—and too often misrepresented—in the media from Muslims resident next door. To acknowledge diversity is the first step towards placing Islamic fundamentalism in its proper perspective, and replacing a negative image with a proper vision of its norms and values.<sup>32</sup>

Somalis in America have their lifetimes' work cut out. But, as it were, what is new? Such has been their state for at least the past two decades. History awaits to be made, both here in the United States (and other new domiciles) and in the old country. ●

---

## Notes

1. Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Vol. I (1996), II (1997), III (1998)); Martin Albrow, *The Global Age: State and Society Beyond Modernity* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1997); and Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004).

2. The latest and largest contingent of Somalis (particularized as "Somali Bantu") is the ongoing resettlement of the nearly 13,000 that are being transferred from refugee camps in Kenya. The first batch of families has arrived in locations as diverse as Houston, Salt Lake City, Nashville, St. Louis, Concord (N.H.), and Phoenix. Rachel L. Swarns, "U.S. a Place of Miracles for Somali Refugees," *New York Times*, 20 July 2003; Daniel Gonzalez, "A Family's Culture Shock," *The Arizona Republic*, 20 July 2003; and Todd Nelson, "Minnesota: A New Somali Influx Possible," *The Pioneer Press*, 11 May 2003.

3. It is important to note that this Act abolished the racist National Origins Statute, which undergirded the legal foundations of American immigration policy. Among other points, National Origins set national quotas that bluntly invested higher values into those whose ancestors were European.

4. This figure is compounded by many more millions who are here but are classified as "illegal" or "undocumented."

5. Desmond King, *Making America: Immigration, Race, and the Origins of the Diverse Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); and Roger M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

6. George Borjas, *Heaven's Door: Immigration Policy and the American Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 3.

7. Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslims, Bad Muslims: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004).

8. *The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 2002), p. 48.

9. Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); and Robert Clarke, *Global Life Systems: Population, Food, and Disease in the Process of Globalization* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).
10. Roberta Cohen and Francis M. Deng, *Masses in Flight: The Global Crisis of International Displacement* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution Press, 1988), p. 1; and *The Forsaken People: Case Studies of the Internally Displaced*, edited by Roberta Cohen and Francis M. Deng (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution Press, 1988).
11. Philip Fisher, *Still the New World: American Literature in a Culture of Creative Destruction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 272.
12. Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 182; and Kofi Anyidoho, ed., *The Word Behind Bars and the Paradox of Exile* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997).
13. Bertolt Brecht, "Concerning the Label Emigrant," in *Poems, 1913–1956*, edited by John Willet and Ralph Manheim (London, 1976), p. 301.
14. Gabriel Sheffer, *Diasporic Politics: At Home Abroad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
15. Desmond King, *Making America*; and David Kennedy, "Leur Pays," *London Review of Books*, February 2001, pp. 24–25.
16. King, p. 203.
17. Richard Alba and Victor Nee, *Remaking American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 1.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
19. Manuel Castells, *End of Millennium* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), pp. 128–149. See, for instance, Warren Hoge, "A Swedish Dilemma: The Immigrant Ghetto," *The New York Times*, 6 October 1998; and Richard Bernstein, "Wedding Vows can Lock Danes Out of their Homeland," *The New York Times*, 10 September 2004.
20. Alba and Nee, p. 6.
21. Will Kymlicka, *Recent Work in Citizenship Theory: A Report Prepared for the Department of Multi-Culturalism and Citizenship* (Ottawa, Canada: Government of Canada, 1992), p. 24.
22. Ahmed I. Samatar, *The Somali Challenge: From Catastrophe to Renewal?* (Boulder, Col.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), p. 8.
23. Bruce Lawrence, *Shattering the Myth: Islam Beyond Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 185.
24. George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).
25. Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972); and A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr., *Shades of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) and *In the Matter of Color* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).
26. Andrew Hacker, *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992).
27. Iftikhar H. Malik, *Islam and Modernity: Muslims in Europe and the United States* (London: Pluto Press, 2004).

28. Nancy L. Rosenblum, ed., *Obligations of Citizenship and Demands of Faith: Religious Accommodation in Pluralist Democracies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).
29. Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Sohail H. Hashmi, ed., *Islamic Political Ethics: Civil Society, Pluralism, and Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Khalid Bin Sayeed, *Western Dominance and Political Islam: Challenge and Response* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1995); Malise Ruthven, *Islam in the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).
30. Philip Fisher, p. 273; and François Manchuelle, *Willing Migrants: Soninka Labor Diasporas, 1848–1960* (Athens, Oh.: Ohio University Press, 1997). For a comparison, see Riva Kastoryano, *Negotiating Identities: States and Immigrants in France and Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).
31. Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); and Martin E. Marty, *The One and the Many: America's Struggle for the Common Good* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).
32. Lawrence, p. 152. Also, Charles Taylor, who writes:  
“...it is reasonable to suppose that cultures that have provided the horizon of meaning for large numbers of human beings, of diverse characters and temperaments, over a long period of time—that have, in other words, articulated their sense of the good, the holy, the admirable—are almost certain to have something that deserves our admiration and respect, even if it is accomplished by much that we have to abhor and reject.” In *Multiculturalism and “The Politics of Recognition”* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 72–73.