

Demography as Destiny

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MARK STEYN, *America Alone: The End of the World As We Know It* (Regnery, 2006), 256 pp.

In his book *America Alone*, Mark Steyn has accomplished an impressive feat of mental gymnastics: taking what is perhaps the most boring, albeit important, topic in the arena of international affairs and making it both fascinating and engaging to expert and novice alike. Unfortunately, the warning contained in the subtitle, “The end of the world as we know it,” is an appropriate foreshadowing of the future—one that is increasingly unavoidable unless the fundamental issues raised by Steyn are addressed in the very near future. It isn’t that demography is the only force at work in the world today. But it is undoubtedly one of the most fundamental. As Steyn puts it: “Demography doesn’t explain everything, but accounts for a good 90 percent.”

Yet *America Alone* is hardly an endless retelling of dry facts and figures. Far from it. Statistics are thankfully kept to a minimum. Instead, Steyn focuses on the implications that the demographic trends now under way worldwide will have upon the United States.

The results are sobering. Throughout the course of the book, Steyn illustrates what is in effect the death of one society and the potential

ascendancy of another. On the descent is an advanced society, possessing all of the technological, economic and social advantages that should enable strong growth, continuing development and pre-eminence. Ascendant is a society underpinned by a shared retrograde ideology more in tune with the 7th than the 21st century.

This paradox is further exacerbated by the very institutions and ideas that the governments of the West have developed in their efforts to benefit society. One of the more interesting absurdities highlighted in Steyn’s analysis is that of social entitlements. These institutional demands by the public, which are the most pervasive in the “nanny states” of Europe and Canada, have created a proverbial economic house of cards based on a dependency on population growth, low birthrates, and a socialized entitlement base.

Originally, these entitlements were sold as a way that society—through socialist political and economic policies—could assist in the development of strong and educated families. Over time, however, in countries where they have been applied, these policies have had the unintended effect of creating economic disincentives for the middle and working classes to have children, while at the same time handicapping their respective economies. The resulting decline in birthrates has created



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a shortfall in the number of workers available domestically to provide the economic basis for these entitlement policies. Until now, Europe has supplemented this discrepancy through the importation of workers from North Africa and the Middle East. Unfortunately, once inside the European system, these alien populations take full advantage of the entitlement programs offered by host governments, even while refusing to even try to assimilate.

To add injury to insult, these alien populations have higher birthrates than the local European populations. This, in turn, gives these alien, mostly Muslim, populations growing economic, social, and—perhaps most worrisome—political power within those nations which have traditionally been America's allies.

Although Steyn spends a great deal of time on the European vector of this “death spiral,” he makes clear that this is not a uniquely European problem. Rather, it is a nearly ubiquitous concern throughout the developed world, and in such potentially strategic places as Russia. This crisis, moreover, is only made worse by the growth and spread of radical Islamist ideology, both within the Muslim World and in the West. This corrosive ideology, combined with the global explosion of technology, has enabled the creation of a decentralized supernational identity that is openly hostile towards the Western world in general, and the United States in particular.

At the same time, one of the most intriguing indictments offered in Steyn's analysis is the West's own complicity in this crisis. The apologetic nature of today's discourse vis-à-vis modern economic and political institutions—and the corresponding ignorance and near pathological disdain European and American society

now holds for the cultural, religious, and historical foundations of its success—both undermines the existing order and encourages the spread of the Islamist ideology. As Steyn puts it: “... if (as Europe has done) you marginalize religion, only the marginalized will have religion.”

Perhaps the most dramatic part of Steyn's clarion call, however, is the picture that emerges of the world that the United States will face years hence—as its many allies continue down their self-imposed demographic and cultural downward spirals. Unfortunately, more likely than not, his warning will fall upon deaf ears. Today's elites are far too arrogant and sure of their rectitude to consider the possibility that the very social contracts they have so willingly embraced could hold the seeds of their own destruction.

