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THE CENTURY AHEAD

It's the Demography, Stupid

The real reason the West is in danger of extinction.

BY MARK STEYN

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Most people reading this have strong stomachs, so let me lay it out as baldly as I can: Much of what we loosely call the Western world will not survive this century, and much of it will effectively disappear within our lifetimes, including many if not most Western European countries. There'll probably still be a geographical area on the map marked as Italy or the Netherlands--*probably*--just as in Istanbul there's still a building called St. Sophia's Cathedral. But it's not a cathedral; it's merely a designation for a piece of real estate. Likewise, Italy and the Netherlands will merely be designations for real estate. The challenge for those who reckon Western civilization is on balance better than the alternatives is to figure out a way to save at least some parts of the West.

One obstacle to doing that is that, in the typical election campaign in your advanced industrial democracy, the political platforms of at least one party in the United States and pretty much all parties in the rest of the West are largely about what one would call the secondary impulses of society--government health care, government day care (which Canada's thinking of introducing), government paternity leave (which Britain's just introduced). We've prioritized the secondary impulse over the primary ones: national defense, family, faith and, most basic of all, reproductive activity--"Go forth and multiply," because if you don't you won't be able to afford all those secondary-impulse issues, like cradle-to-grave welfare.

Americans sometimes don't understand how far gone most of the rest of the developed world is down this path: In the Canadian and most Continental cabinets, the defense ministry is somewhere an ambitious politician passes through on his way up to important jobs like the health department. I don't think Don Rumsfeld would regard it as a promotion if he were moved to Health and Human Services.

The design flaw of the secular social-democratic state is that it requires a religious-society birthrate to sustain it. Post-Christian hyperrationalism is, in the objective sense, a lot less rational than Catholicism or Mormonism. Indeed, in its reliance on immigration to ensure its future, the European Union has adopted a 21st-century variation on the strategy of the Shakers, who were forbidden from reproducing and thus could increase their numbers only by conversion. The problem is that secondary-impulse societies mistake their weaknesses for strengths--or, at any rate, virtues--and that's why they're proving so feeble at dealing with a primal force like Islam.

Speaking of which, if we are at war--and half the American people and significantly higher percentages in Britain, Canada and Europe don't accept that proposition--then what exactly is the war about?

We know it's not really a "war on terror." Nor is it, at heart, a war against Islam, or even "radical Islam." The Muslim faith, whatever its merits for the believers, is a problematic business for the rest of us. There are many trouble spots around the world, but as a general rule, it's easy to make an educated guess at one of the participants: Muslims vs. Jews in "Palestine," Muslims vs. Hindus in Kashmir, Muslims vs. Christians in Africa, Muslims vs. Buddhists in Thailand, Muslims vs. Russians in the Caucasus, Muslims vs. backpacking tourists in Bali. Like the environmentalists, these guys think globally but act locally.

Yet while Islamism is the enemy, it's not what this thing's about. Radical Islam is an opportunistic infection, like AIDS: It's not the HIV that kills you, it's the pneumonia you get when your body's too weak to fight it off. When the jihadists engage with the U.S. military, they lose--as they did in Afghanistan and Iraq. If this were like World War I with those fellows in one trench and us in ours facing them over some boggy piece of terrain, it would be over very quickly. Which the smarter Islamists have figured out. They know they can never win on the battlefield, but they figure there's an excellent chance they can drag things out until Western civilization collapses in on itself and Islam inherits by default.

That's what the war's about: our lack of civilizational confidence. As a famous Arnold Toynbee quote puts it: "Civilizations die from suicide, not murder"--as can be seen throughout much of "the Western world" right now. The progressive agenda--lavish social welfare, abortion, secularism, multiculturalism--is collectively the real suicide bomb. Take

multiculturalism. The great thing about multiculturalism is that it doesn't involve knowing anything about other cultures--the capital of Bhutan, the principal exports of Malawi, who cares? All it requires is feeling good about other cultures. It's fundamentally a fraud, and I would argue was subliminally accepted on that basis. Most adherents to the idea that all cultures are equal don't want to live in anything but an advanced Western society. Multiculturalism means your kid has to learn some wretched native dirge for the school holiday concert instead of getting to sing "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" or that your holistic masseuse uses techniques developed from Native American spirituality, but not that you or anyone you care about should have to live in an African or Native American society. It's a quintessential piece of progressive humbug.

Then September 11 happened. And bizarrely the reaction of just about every prominent Western leader was to visit a mosque: President Bush did, the prince of Wales did, the prime minister of the United Kingdom did, the prime minister of Canada did . . . The premier of Ontario didn't, and so 20 Muslim community leaders had a big summit to denounce him for failing to visit a mosque. I don't know why he didn't. Maybe there was a big backlog, it was mosque drive time, prime ministers in gridlock up and down the freeway trying to get to the Sword of the Infidel-Slayer Mosque on Elm Street. But for whatever reason he couldn't fit it into his hectic schedule. Ontario's citizenship minister did show up at a mosque, but the imams took that as a great insult, like the Queen sending Fergie to open the Commonwealth Games. So the premier of Ontario had to hold a big meeting with the aggrieved imams to apologize for not going to a mosque and, as the Toronto Star's reported it, "to provide them with reassurance that the provincial government does not see them as the enemy."

Anyway, the get-me-to-the-mosque-on-time fever died down, but it set the tone for our general approach to these atrocities. The old definition of a nanosecond was the gap between the traffic light changing in New York and the first honk from a car behind. The new definition is the gap between a terrorist bombing and the press release from an Islamic lobby group warning of a backlash against Muslims. In most circumstances, it would be considered appallingly bad taste to deflect attention from an actual "hate crime" by scaremongering about a purely hypothetical one. Needless to say, there is no campaign of Islamophobic hate crimes. If anything, the West is awash in an epidemic of self-hate crimes. A commenter on Tim Blair's Web site in Australia summed it up in a note-perfect parody of a Guardian headline: "Muslim Community Leaders Warn of Backlash from Tomorrow Morning's Terrorist Attack." Those community leaders have the measure of us.

Radical Islam is what multiculturalism has been waiting for all along. In "The Survival of Culture," I quoted the eminent British barrister Helena Kennedy, Queen's Counsel. Shortly after September 11, Baroness Kennedy argued on a BBC show that it was too easy to disparage "Islamic fundamentalists." "We as Western liberals too often are fundamentalist ourselves," she complained. "We don't look at our own fundamentalisms."

Well, said the interviewer, what exactly would those Western liberal fundamentalisms be? "One of the things that we are too ready to insist upon is that we are the tolerant people and that the intolerance is something that belongs to other countries like Islam. And I'm not sure that's true."

Hmm. Lady Kennedy was arguing that our tolerance of our own tolerance is making us intolerant of other people's intolerance, which is intolerable. And, unlikely as it sounds, this has now become the highest, most rarefied form of multiculturalism. So you're nice to gays and the Inuit? Big deal. Anyone can be tolerant of fellows like that, but tolerance of intolerance gives an even more intense *frisson* of pleasure to the multiculti masochists. In other words, just as the AIDS pandemic greatly facilitated societal surrender to the gay agenda, so 9/11 is greatly facilitating our surrender to the most extreme aspects of the multicultural agenda.

For example, one day in 2004, a couple of Canadians returned home, to Lester B. Pearson International Airport in Toronto. They were the son and widow of a fellow called Ahmed Said Khadr, who back on the Pakistani-Afghan frontier was known as "al-Kanadi." Why? Because he was the highest-ranking Canadian in al Qaeda--plenty of other Canucks in al Qaeda, but he was the Numero Uno. In fact, one could argue that the Khadr family is Canada's principal contribution to the war on terror. Granted they're on the wrong side (if you'll forgive my being judgmental) but no one can argue that they aren't in the thick of things. One of Mr. Khadr's sons was captured in Afghanistan after killing a U.S. Special Forces medic. Another was captured and held at Guantanamo. A third blew himself up while killing a Canadian soldier in Kabul. Pa Khadr himself died in an al Qaeda shootout with Pakistani forces in early 2004. And they say we Canadians aren't doing our bit in this war!

In the course of the fatal shootout of al-Kanadi, his youngest son was paralyzed. And, not unreasonably, Junior didn't fancy a prison hospital in Peshawar. So Mrs. Khadr and her boy returned to Toronto so he could enjoy the benefits of Ontario government health care. "I'm Canadian, and I'm not begging for my rights," declared the widow Khadr. "I'm demanding my rights."



As they always say, treason's hard to prove in court, but given the circumstances of Mr. Khadr's death it seems clear that not only was he providing "aid and comfort to the Queen's enemies" but that he was, in fact, the Queen's enemy. The Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, the Royal 22nd Regiment and other Canucks have been participating in Afghanistan, on one side of the conflict, and the Khadr family had been over there participating on the other side. Nonetheless, the prime minister of Canada thought Boy Khadr's claims on the public health system was an excellent opportunity to demonstrate his own deep personal commitment to "diversity." Asked about the Khadr's return to Toronto, he said, "I believe that once you are a Canadian citizen, you have the right to your own views and to disagree."

That's the wonderful thing about multiculturalism: You can choose which side of the war you want to fight on. When the draft card arrives, just tick "home team" or "enemy," according to taste. The Canadian prime minister is a typical

late-stage Western politician: He could have said, well, these are contemptible people and I know many of us are disgusted at the idea of our tax dollars being used to provide health care for a man whose Canadian citizenship is no more than a flag of convenience, but unfortunately that's the law and, while we can try to tighten it, it looks like this lowlife's got away with it. Instead, his reflex instinct was to proclaim this as a wholehearted demonstration of the virtues of the multicultural state. Like many enlightened Western leaders, the Canadian prime minister will be congratulating himself on his boundless tolerance even as the forces of intolerance consume him.

That, by the way, is the one point of similarity between the jihad and conventional terrorist movements like the IRA or ETA. Terror groups persist because of a lack of confidence on the part of their targets: The IRA, for example, calculated correctly that the British had the capability to smash them totally but not the will. So they knew that while they could never win militarily, they also could never be defeated. The Islamists have figured similarly. The only difference is that most terrorist wars are highly localized. We now have the first truly global terrorist insurgency because the Islamists view the whole world the way the IRA view the bogs of Fermanagh: They want it, and they've calculated that our entire civilization lacks the will to see them off.

We spend a lot of time at The New Criterion attacking the elites, and we're right to do so. The commanding heights of the culture have behaved disgracefully for the last several decades. But if it were just a problem with the elites, it wouldn't be that serious: The mob could rise up and hang 'em from lampposts--a scenario that's not unlikely in certain Continental countries. But the problem now goes way beyond the ruling establishment. The annexation by government of most of the key responsibilities of life--child-raising, taking care of your elderly parents--has profoundly changed the relationship between the citizen and the state. At some point--I would say socialized health care is a good marker--you cross a line, and it's very hard then to persuade a citizenry enjoying that much government largesse to cross back. In National Review recently, I took issue with that line Gerald Ford always uses to ingratiate himself with conservative audiences: "A government big enough to give you everything you want is big enough to take away everything you have." Actually, you run into trouble long before that point: A government big enough to give you everything you want still isn't big enough to get you to give anything back. That's what the French and German political classes are discovering.

Go back to that list of local conflicts I mentioned. The jihad has held out a long time against very tough enemies. If you're not shy about taking on the Israelis, the Russians, the Indians and the Nigerians, why wouldn't you fancy your chances against the Belgians and Danes and New Zealanders?

So the jihadists are for the most part doing no more than giving us a prod in the rear as we sleepwalk to the cliff. When I say "sleepwalk," it's not because we're a blasé culture. On the contrary, one of the clearest signs of our decline is the way we expend so much energy worrying about the wrong things. If you've read Jared Diamond's bestselling book "Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed," you'll know it goes into a lot of detail about Easter Island going belly up because they chopped down all their trees. Apparently that's why they're not a G-8 member or on the U.N. Security Council. Same with the Greenlanders and the Mayans and Diamond's other curious choices of "societies." Indeed, as the author sees it, pretty much every society collapses because it chops down its trees.

Poor old Diamond can't see the forest because of his obsession with the trees. (Russia's collapsing even as it's undergoing reforestation.) One way "societies choose to fail or succeed" is by choosing what to worry about. The Western world has delivered more wealth and more comfort to more of its citizens than any other civilization in history, and in return we've developed a great cult of worrying. You know the classics of the genre: In 1968, in his bestselling book "The Population Bomb," the eminent scientist Paul Ehrlich declared: "In the 1970s the world will undergo famines--hundreds of millions of people are going to starve to death." In 1972, in their landmark study "The Limits to Growth," the Club of Rome announced that the world would run out of gold by 1981, of mercury by 1985, tin by 1987, zinc by 1990, petroleum by 1992, and copper, lead and gas by 1993.

None of these things happened. In fact, quite the opposite is happening. We're pretty much awash in resources, but we're running out of people--the one truly indispensable resource, without which none of the others matter. Russia's the most obvious example: it's the largest country on earth, it's full of natural resources, and yet it's dying--its population is falling calamitously.

The default mode of our elites is that anything that happens--from terrorism to tsunamis--can be understood only as deriving from the perniciousness of Western civilization. As Jean-Francois Revel wrote, "Clearly, a civilization that feels guilty for everything it is and does will lack the energy and conviction to defend itself."

And even though none of the prognostications of the eco-doom blockbusters of the 1970s came to pass, all that means is that 30 years on, the end of the world has to be rescheduled. The amended estimated time of arrival is now 2032. That's to say, in 2002, the United Nations Global Environmental Outlook predicted "the destruction of 70 percent of the natural world in thirty years, mass extinction of species. . . . More than half the world will be afflicted by water shortages, with 95 percent of people in the Middle East with severe problems . . . 25 percent of all species of mammals and 10 percent of birds will be extinct . . ."

Etc., etc., for 450 pages. Or to cut to the chase, as the Guardian headlined it, "Unless We Change Our Ways, The World Faces Disaster."

Well, here's my prediction for 2032: unless we change our ways the world faces a future . . . where the environment will

look pretty darn good. If you're a tree or a rock, you'll be living in clover. It's the Italians and the Swedes who'll be facing extinction and the loss of their natural habitat.

There will be no environmental doomsday. Oil, carbon dioxide emissions, deforestation: none of these things is worth worrying about. What's worrying is that we spend so much time worrying about things that aren't worth worrying about that we don't worry about the things we should be worrying about. For 30 years, we've had endless wake-up calls for things that aren't worth waking up for. But for the very real, remorseless shifts in our society--the ones truly jeopardizing our future--we're sound asleep. The world is changing dramatically right now, and hysterical experts twitter about a hypothetical decrease in the Antarctic krill that might conceivably possibly happen so far down the road there are unlikely to be any Italian or Japanese enviro-worriers left alive to be devastated by it.

In a globalized economy, the environmentalists want us to worry about First World capitalism imposing its ways on bucolic, pastoral, primitive Third World backwaters. Yet, insofar as "globalization" is a threat, the real danger is precisely the opposite--that the peculiarities of the backwaters can leap instantly to the First World. Pigs are valued assets and sleep in the living room in rural China--and next thing you know an unknown respiratory disease is killing people in Toronto, just because someone got on a plane. That's the way to look at Islamism: We fret about McDonald's and Disney, but the big globalization success story is the way the Saudis have taken what was 80 years ago a severe but obscure and unimportant strain of Islam practiced by Bedouins of no fixed abode and successfully exported it to the heart of Copenhagen, Rotterdam, Manchester, Buffalo . . .



What's the better bet? A globalization that exports cheeseburgers and pop songs or a globalization that exports the fiercest aspects of its culture? When it comes to forecasting the future, the birthrate is the nearest thing to hard numbers. If only a million babies are born in 2006, it's hard to have two million adults enter the workforce in 2026 (or 2033, or 2037, or whenever they get around to finishing their Anger Management and Queer Studies degrees). And the hard data on babies around the Western world is that they're running out a lot faster than the oil is. "Replacement" fertility rate--i.e., the number you need for merely a stable population, not getting any bigger, not getting any smaller--is 2.1 babies per woman. Some countries are well above that: the global fertility leader, Somalia, is 6.91, Niger 6.83, Afghanistan 6.78, Yemen 6.75. Notice what those nations have in common?

Scroll way down to the bottom of the Hot One Hundred top breeders and you'll eventually find the United States, hovering just at replacement rate with 2.07 births per woman. Ireland is 1.87, New Zealand 1.79, Australia 1.76. But Canada's fertility rate is down to 1.5, well below replacement rate; Germany and Austria are at 1.3, the brink of the death spiral; Russia and Italy are at 1.2; Spain 1.1, about half replacement rate. That's to say, Spain's population is halving every generation. By 2050, Italy's population will have fallen by 22%, Bulgaria's by 36%, Estonia's by 52%. In America, demographic trends suggest that the blue states ought to apply for honorary membership of the EU: In the 2004 election, John Kerry won the 16 with the lowest birthrates; George W. Bush took 25 of the 26 states with the highest. By 2050, there will be 100 million fewer Europeans, 100 million more Americans--and mostly red-state Americans.

As fertility shrivels, societies get older--and Japan and much of Europe are set to get older than any functioning societies have ever been. And we know what comes after old age. These countries are going out of business--unless they can find the will to change their ways. Is that likely? I don't think so. If you look at European election results--most recently in Germany--it's hard not to conclude that, while voters are unhappy with their political establishments, they're unhappy mainly because they resent being asked to reconsider their government benefits and, no matter how unaffordable they may be a generation down the road, they have no intention of seriously reconsidering them. The Scottish executive recently backed down from a proposal to raise the retirement age of Scottish public workers. It's presently 60, which is nice but unaffordable. But the reaction of the average Scots worker is that that's somebody else's problem. The average German worker now puts in 22% fewer hours per year than his American counterpart, and no politician who wishes to remain electorally viable will propose closing the gap in any meaningful way.

This isn't a deep-rooted cultural difference between the Old World and the New. It dates back all the way to, oh, the 1970s. If one wanted to allocate blame, one could argue that it's a product of the U.S. military presence, the American security guarantee that liberated European budgets: instead of having to spend money on guns, they could concentrate on butter, and buttering up the voters. If Washington's problem with Europe is that these are not serious allies, well, whose fault is that? Who, in the years after the Second World War, created NATO as a postmodern military alliance? The "free world," as the Americans called it, was a free ride for everyone else. And having been absolved from the primal responsibilities of nationhood, it's hardly surprising that European nations have little wish to reshoulder them. In essence, the lavish levels of public health care on the Continent are subsidized by the American taxpayer. And this long-term softening of large sections of the West makes them ill-suited to resisting a primal force like Islam.

There is no "population bomb." There never was. Birthrates are declining all over the world--eventually every couple on the planet may decide to opt for the Western yuppie model of one designer baby at the age of 39. But demographics is a game of last man standing. The groups that succumb to demographic apathy last will have a huge advantage. Even in 1968 Paul Ehrlich and his ilk should have understood that their so-called population explosion was really a massive population adjustment. Of the increase in global population between 1970 and 2000, the developed world accounted for under 9% of it, while the Muslim world accounted for 26%. Between 1970 and 2000, the developed world declined from just under 30% of the world's population to just over 20%, the Muslim nations increased from about 15% to 20%.

Nineteen seventy doesn't seem that long ago. If you're the age many of the chaps running the Western world today are wont to be, your pants are narrower than they were back then and your hair's less groovy, but the landscape of your

life--the look of your house, the layout of your car, the shape of your kitchen appliances, the brand names of the stuff in the fridge--isn't significantly different. Aside from the Internet and the cell phone and the CD, everything in your world seems pretty much the same but slightly modified.

And yet the world is utterly altered. Just to recap those bald statistics: In 1970, the developed world had twice as big a share of the global population as the Muslim world: 30% to 15%. By 2000, they were the same: each had about 20%.

And by 2020?

So the world's people are a lot more Islamic than they were back then and a lot less "Western." Europe is significantly more Islamic, having taken in during that period some 20 million Muslims (officially)--or the equivalents of the populations of four European Union countries (Ireland, Belgium, Denmark and Estonia). Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the West: In the U.K., more Muslims than Christians attend religious services each week.

Can these trends continue for another 30 years without having consequences? Europe by the end of this century will be a continent after the neutron bomb: The grand buildings will still be standing, but the people who built them will be gone. We are living through a remarkable period: the self-extinction of the races who, for good or ill, shaped the modern world.

What will Europe be like at the end of this process? Who knows? On the one hand, there's something to be said for the notion that America will find an Islamified Europe more straightforward to deal with than M. Chirac, Herr Schroeder & Co. On the other hand, given Europe's track record, getting there could be very bloody. But either way this is the real battlefield. The al Qaeda nutters can never find enough suicidal pilots to fly enough planes into enough skyscrapers to topple America. But unlike us, the Islamists think long-term, and, given their demographic advantage in Europe and the tone of the emerging Muslim lobby groups there, much of what they're flying planes into buildings for they're likely to wind up with just by waiting a few more years. The skyscrapers will be theirs; why knock 'em over?

The latter half of the decline and fall of great civilizations follows a familiar pattern: affluence, softness, decadence, extinction. You don't notice yourself slipping through those stages because usually there's a seductive pol on hand to provide the age with a sly, self-deluding slogan--like Bill Clinton's "It's about the future of all our children." We on the right spent the 1990s gleefully mocking Mr. Clinton's tedious invocation, drizzled like syrup over everything from the Kosovo war to highway appropriations. But most of the rest of the West can't even steal his lame bromides: A society that has no children has no future.

Permanence is the illusion of every age. In 1913, no one thought the Russian, Austrian, German and Turkish empires would be gone within half a decade. Seventy years on, all those fellows who dismissed Reagan as an "amiable dunce" (in Clark Clifford's phrase) assured us the Soviet Union was likewise here to stay. The CIA analysts' position was that East Germany was the ninth biggest economic power in the world. In 1987 there was no rash of experts predicting the imminent fall of the Berlin Wall, the Warsaw Pact and the USSR itself.

Yet, even by the minimal standards of these wretched precedents, so-called post-Christian civilizations--as a prominent EU official described his continent to me--are more prone than traditional societies to mistake the present tense for a permanent feature. Religious cultures have a much greater sense of both past and future, as we did a century ago, when we spoke of death as joining "the great majority" in "the unseen world." But if secularism's starting point is that this is all there is, it's no surprise that, consciously or not, they invest the here and now with far greater powers of endurance than it's ever had. The idea that progressive Euro-welfarism is the permanent resting place of human development was always foolish; we now know that it's suicidally so.

To avoid collapse, European nations will need to take in immigrants at a rate no stable society has ever attempted. The CIA is predicting the EU will collapse by 2020. Given that the CIA's got pretty much everything wrong for half a century, that would suggest the EU is a shoo-in to be the colossus of the new millennium. But even a flop spook is right twice a generation. If anything, the date of EU collapse is rather a cautious estimate. It seems more likely that within the next couple of European election cycles, the internal contradictions of the EU will manifest themselves in the usual way, and that by 2010 we'll be watching burning buildings, street riots and assassinations on American network news every night. Even if they avoid that, the idea of a childless Europe ever rivaling America militarily or economically is laughable. Sometime this century there will be 500 million Americans, and what's left in Europe will either be very old or very Muslim. Japan faces the same problem: Its population is already in absolute decline, the first gentle slope of a death spiral it will be unlikely ever to climb out of. Will Japan be an economic powerhouse if it's populated by Koreans and Filipinos? Very possibly. Will Germany if it's populated by Algerians? That's a trickier proposition.

Best-case scenario? The Continent winds up as Vienna with Swedish tax rates.

Worst-case scenario: Sharia, circa 2040; semi-Sharia, a lot sooner--and we're already seeing a drift in that direction.

In July 2003, speaking to the U.S. Congress, Tony Blair remarked: "As Britain knows, all predominant power seems for a time invincible but, in fact, it is transient. The question is: What do you leave behind?"

Excellent question. Britannia will never again wield the unrivalled power she enjoyed at her imperial apogee, but the Britannic inheritance endures, to one degree or another, in many of the key regional players in the world today--Australia,

India, South Africa--and in dozens of island statelets from the Caribbean to the Pacific. If China ever takes its place as an advanced nation, it will be because the People's Republic learns more from British Hong Kong than Hong Kong learns from the Little Red Book. And of course the dominant power of our time derives its political character from 18th-century British subjects who took English ideas a little further than the mother country was willing to go.

A decade and a half after victory in the Cold War and end-of-history triumphalism, the "what do you leave behind?" question is more urgent than most of us expected. "The West," as a concept, is dead, and the West, as a matter of demographic fact, is dying.

What will London--or Paris, or Amsterdam--be like in the mid-'30s? If European politicians make no serious attempt this decade to wean the populace off their unsustainable 35-hour weeks, retirement at 60, etc., then to keep the present level of pensions and health benefits the EU will need to import so many workers from North Africa and the Middle East that it will be well on its way to majority Muslim by 2035. As things stand, Muslims are already the primary source of population growth in English cities. Can a society become increasingly Islamic in its demographic character without becoming increasingly Islamic in its political character?



This ought to be the left's issue. I'm a conservative--I'm not entirely on board with the Islamist program when it comes to behaving sodomites and so on, but I agree Britney Spears dresses like a slut: I'm with Mullah Omar on that one. Why then, if your big thing is feminism or abortion or gay marriage, are you so certain that the cult of tolerance will prevail once the biggest demographic in your society is cheerfully intolerant? Who, after all, are going to be the first victims of the West's collapsed birthrates? Even if one were to take the optimistic view that Europe will be able to resist the creeping imposition of Sharia currently engulfing Nigeria, it remains the case that the Muslim world is not notable for setting much store by "a woman's right to choose," in any sense.

I watched that big abortion rally in Washington in 2004, where Ashley Judd and Gloria Steinem were cheered by women waving "Keep your Bush off my bush" placards, and I thought it was the equivalent of a White Russian tea party in 1917. By prioritizing a "woman's right to choose," Western women are delivering their societies into the hands of fellows far more patriarchal than a 1950s sitcom dad. If any of those women marching for their "reproductive rights" still have babies, they might like to ponder demographic realities: A little girl born today will be unlikely, at the age of 40, to be free to prance around demonstrations in Eurabian Paris or Amsterdam chanting "Hands off my bush!"

Just before the 2004 election, that eminent political analyst Cameron Diaz appeared on the Oprah Winfrey show to explain what was at stake:

"Women have so much to lose. I mean, we could lose the right to our bodies. . . . If you think that rape should be legal, then don't vote. But if you think that you have a right to your body," she advised Oprah's viewers, "then you should vote."

Poor Cameron. A couple of weeks later, the scary people won. She lost all rights to her body. Unlike Alec Baldwin, she couldn't even move to France. Her body was grounded in Terminal D.

But, after framing the 2004 presidential election as a referendum on the right to rape, Miss Diaz might be interested to know that men enjoy that right under many Islamic legal codes around the world. In his book "The Empty Cradle," Philip Longman asks: "So where will the children of the future come from? Increasingly they will come from people who are at odds with the modern world. Such a trend, if sustained, could drive human culture off its current market-driven, individualistic, modernist course, gradually creating an anti-market culture dominated by fundamentalism--a new Dark Ages."

Bottom line for Cameron Diaz: There are worse things than John Ashcroft out there.

Mr. Longman's point is well taken. The refined antennae of Western liberals mean that whenever one raises the question of whether there will be any Italians living in the geographical zone marked as Italy a generation or three hence, they cry, "Racism!" To fret about what proportion of the population is "white" is grotesque and inappropriate. But it's not about race, it's about culture. If 100% of your population believes in liberal pluralist democracy, it doesn't matter whether 70% of them are "white" or only 5% are. But if one part of your population believes in liberal pluralist democracy and the other doesn't, then it becomes a matter of great importance whether the part that does is 90% of the population or only 60%, 50%, 45%.

Since the president unveiled the so-called Bush Doctrine--the plan to promote liberty throughout the Arab world--innumerable "progressives" have routinely asserted that there's no evidence Muslims want liberty and, indeed, that Islam is incompatible with democracy. If that's true, it's a problem not for the Middle East today but for Europe the day after tomorrow. According to a poll taken in 2004, over 60% of British Muslims want to live under Shariah--in the United Kingdom. If a population "at odds with the modern world" is the fastest-breeding group on the planet--if there are more Muslim nations, more fundamentalist Muslims within those nations, more and more Muslims within non-Muslim nations, and more and more Muslims represented in more and more transnational institutions--how safe a bet is the survival of the "modern world"?

Not good.

"What do you leave behind?" asked Tony Blair. There will only be very few and very old ethnic Germans and French and

Italians by the midpoint of this century. What will they leave behind? Territories that happen to bear their names and keep up some of the old buildings? Or will the dying European races understand that the only legacy that matters is whether the peoples who will live in those lands after them are reconciled to pluralist, liberal democracy? It's the demography, stupid. And, if they can't muster the will to change course, then "What do you leave behind?" is the only question that matters.

Mr. Steyn is a syndicated columnist and theater critic for The New Criterion, in whose January issue this article appears.

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