Liberty University
DigitalCommons@Liberty University

Faculty Publications and Presentations

Helms School of Government

1-1-2010

E Pluribus Unum? (GeoPolitica)

Steven Alan Samson
Liberty University, ssamson@liberty.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/gov_fac_pubs

Part of the Other Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons, Political Science Commons, and the Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons

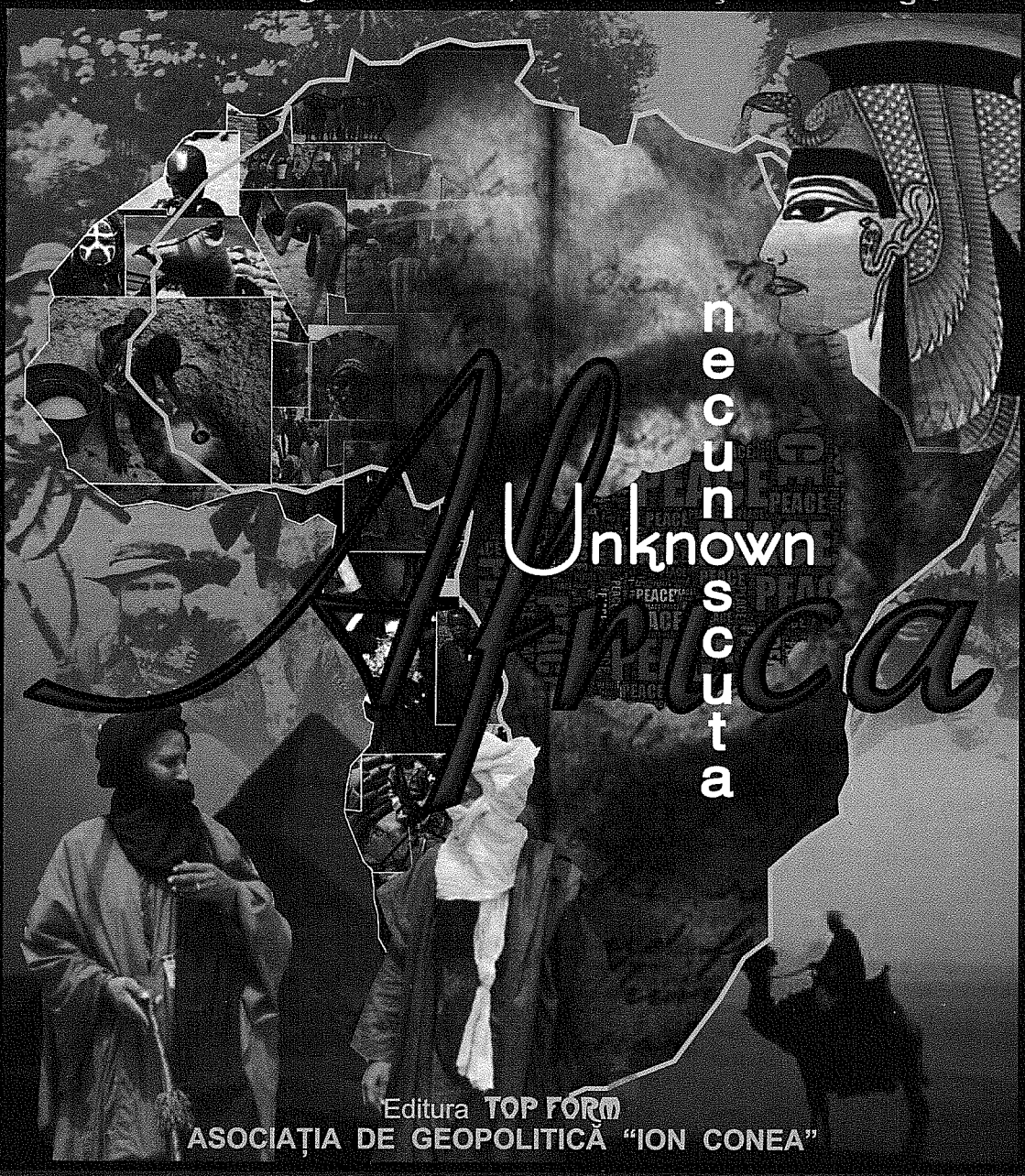
Samson, Steven Alan, "E Pluribus Unum? (GeoPolitica)" (2010). *Faculty Publications and Presentations.* Paper 341.
http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/gov_fac_pubs/341

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Helms School of Government at DigitalCommons@Liberty University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Liberty University. For more information, please contact scholarlycommunication@liberty.edu.

Anul VIII - Nr. 35

GeoPolitica

Revistă de Geografie Politică, GeoPolitică şi GeoStrategie



Editura TOP FORM
ASOCIAŢIA DE GEOPOLITICĂ "ION CONEA"

E PLURIBUS UNUM?[1]

Dr. Steven Alan SAMSON[*]

In the mid-nineteenth century, a German immigrant who launched the first American encyclopedia and who called himself a "publicist," laid the groundwork for a systematic political science. Francis Lieber wrote treatises on political ethics, political and legal hermeneutics, political economy, and the sources of civil liberty. He is best remembered for his codification of the rules of warfare that laid the foundation of the later Hague and Geneva Conventions.

Lieber introduced the concept of the nation-state into the English language, one of many Lieberisms we still use. But he also contrasted the national polity - that is, one nation for all - with what he called "centralism."

Centralism may be intensely national, even to bigotry; it may become a political fanaticism [meaning an ideology like communism or Rousseauism]; it may be intelligent and formulated with great precision [such as the regime of Louis Napoleon]; but centralism remains an inferior species of government... [D]ecentralization [by which Lieber explicitly meant "interdependence"] becomes necessary as self-government or liberty are longed for...

Lieber went on to outline how England - "with unbarred national intercommunication" - developed as a national polity long before the rest of Europe did and noted how England remained the least centralized state. Lieber's historical treatment of this matter may be instructive here as a reminder that "those large communities, which we call nations, formed on the continent of Europe out of the fragmentary people left by the disintegration of the Roman empire." Each was an amalgam of many. Can that be accomplished today without "ethnic cleansing?"

Lieber's account of the circumstances that preceded the long and very slow emergence of nation-states appears to be a fair description as well of the more recent ebbing tide of dynastic and colonial empires. Some of the legacies of these dead empires, though not nearly enough of them, have begun to stabilize; some, like Singapore, even thrive. Too many have not. But Lieber was not pessimistic, even though he foresaw the challenge of totalitarianism, a form of centralism he styled "democratic despotism," noting that in the Second Empire "the advance of knowledge and intelligence gives to despotism brilliancy, and the necessity of peace for exchange give it a facility to establish itself which it never possessed before." Is this perhaps descriptive of the future of China?

In his 1868 essay on "Nationalism and Internationalism," Lieber summarized "the three main principles which mark the modern epoch."

The national polity

The general endeavor to define more clearly, and to extend more widely, human rights and civil liberty, and the decree which has gone forth that many leading nations shall flourish at one and the same time, plainly distinguished from one another, yet striving together, with one public opinion, under the protection of one law of nations, and in the bonds of one common moving civilization.

Indeed, he believed "the multiplicity of civilized nations, their distinct independence (without which there would be enslaving Universal Monarchy), and their increasing resemblance and agreement, are some of the great safeguards of our civilization." This suggests Aristotle's mixed regime on a large scale.

While Lieber's description may sound naïve in light of some of the tragedies of the century that followed, his characterization of the principles of the Anglo-American tradition "of civil liberty and self-government," especially in his book of that title, merits careful review and application. A good summary of this tradition may be found in the Principles of the Portland Declaration of 1981 set down by Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, who noted in point twelve that "the state has an 'annexationist' character tending toward centralization and the development of a Provider State. We must uphold the principle of subsidiarity " [that is, a plurality of autonomous governing institutions].

---

[*] *Helms Scool of Government Liberty university, Lynchburg, SUA*

[1] Presented at Virginia State University, November 10, 2006

Here let us look at another writer in the Burkean tradition who suggests how the seeds of what Lieber called "institutional liberty" may be planted, nurtured, and protected. Roger Scruton has devoted much of his work - academic, political, and entrepreneurial - to this enterprise. In The West and the Rest, Scruton focuses on the profound differences that separate what he calls the "personal state" based on Roman law (*i.e.*, the West) from the essentially private space so many others inhabit without the protection of mediating institutions. Commenting on the motivation for the 9-11 attacks, Scruton identified the attacks' principal target in terms that Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau would have well understood:

[It] is neither Western civilization, nor Christianity, nor global capitalism, nor anything else that can be given an abstract profile... In an uncanny way, the Islamists have identified the core component of the system that they wish to destroy. It is not the American people who are the enemy. It is the American state, conceived as an autonomous agent acting freely on the stage of international politics, and so calling on itself the wrath of God. When Khomeini described America as "the Great Satan" he meant it literally. And his doing so showed that he grasped the fundamental difference between the West and the rest: namely, that in the West, but not in the rest, there is a political process generating corporate agency, collective responsibility, and moral personality in the state...

A nation-state... is a moral and legal person, which acts on its own behalf and is liable for what it does. The nation-state can therefore be praised and blamed, hated and loved, and the form of membership that it offers is also a bond of trust between individual citizens and the corporation in whose decision-making they share.

Scruton refers to it as "the personal State" Citizens are joint members of a political corporation who enjoy limited liability protections and are thius freed and even encouraged to become entrepreneurs.

The difference between the citizen of a personal state and the resident of a legal fiction like Iraq, or Somalia, or so North Korea calls to mind the ancient Athenian distinction between the citizen as the creature of the city-state and the essentially private individual, who is left naked to his enemies. As Pericles put it in the Funeral Oration, the Athenian who takes no interest in politics is not a man who minds his own business - "we say that he has no business here at all."

Scruton observes that citizens of personal states are clothed in their rights, they consent to being governed rather than ruled, they enjoy the protections of a system based on the rule of law. These are some of the ingredients of a potent and highly productive mixture but they require institutional safeguards:

In the absence of corporate personality, experiments in democratic government lead to social disruption, factionalism, and either the tyranny of the majority or the seizure of power by a clique... Without the framework of institutions and the underlying territorial loyalty, democratization is merely a staging post on the way to tyranny.

Indeed, without them we have the Hobbesian "state of nature." The instability of much of the developing world generally calls mind, often brutally, the J-curve theory of political violence. As summarized by James C. Davies:

The crucial factor [that predicts violence] is the vague or specific fear that ground gained over a long period of time will be quickly lost. This fear does not generate if there is continued opportunity to satisfy continually emerging needs; it generates when the existing government suppresses or is blamed for suppressing such opportunity.

How to change that perception or that reality - the absence of the rule of law - is an issue that demands attention.

In his essay on "The Need for Nations" Scruton issues a challenge to both the West and the rest of the world:

Never in the history of the world have there been so many migrants. And almost all of them are migrating from regions where nationality is weak or non-existent to the established nation states of the West... [F]ew of them identify their loyalties in national terms and almost none of them in terms of the nations where they settle. They are migrating in search of citizenship - which is the principle gift of national jurisdictions, and the origin of the peace, law, stability, and prosperity that still prevail in the West.

Citizenship is the relation that arises between the State and the individual when each is fully accountable to the other. It consists in a web of reciprocal rights and duties, upheld by a rule

of law which stands higher than either party. Although the State enforces that law, it enforces it equally against itself and against the private citizen. The citizen has rights which the State is duty-bound to uphold, and also duties which the State has a right to enforce.

Roger Scruton's final sentence here both echoes and refutes Roger Taney's defective understanding of the Constitution expressed in the Dred Scott case. The Civil Rights movement sought to repair a misrepresentation that had been long embedded in the national culture, one of the many varieties of what Frederic Bastiat called "legal plunder:" that is, the use of the law to "sanctify injustice," making lawful what is commonly regarded as "corruption." Too often it is the absence of institutional liberty and the unchecked flourishing of legal plunder that account for the struggles, conflicts, and migrations that trouble the whole world. To illustrate: Hernando de Soto and his associates conducted a revealing study the legal and other obstacles to setting up a business enterprise in a number of developing countries.

Scruton's point about the plight of migrants has present applications to the ongoing immigration debate here but it also rings with ancient controversies - recorded in the Bible, *The* Oresteia, the Melian debate - over the mistreatment, indeed the scapegoating of strangers, dissenters, and others who are different. René Girard has provided much insight into such behavior through his ideas about mimetic rivalry.

Concerning these migrants, including those who riot in the suburbs of Paris, people may object to Scruton's analysis by saying that, no, they are seeking opportunity, gainful employment, a means to stave off hunger or to escape turmoil. I imagine he would reply that these are only the particulars, the incidentals of the larger problem. What the migrants and their neighbors lack where they reside is the kind of life that is made possible through an institutional liberty nurtured within a territorial state that protects their property, that enables them to capitalize their assets and enjoy the fruits of citizenship in a thriving community. What they need, desire, and demand then is to have a home where their heart resides. Yet this is exactly what the West too often takes for granted:

Every citizen becomes linked to every other, by relations that are financial, legal, and fiduciary, but which presuppose no personal tie. A society of citizens can be a society of strangers, all enjoying sovereignty over their own lives, and pursuing their individual goals and satisfactions. They are societies in which you form common cause with strangers, and which all of you, in those matters on which your common destiny depends, can with conviction say 'we.'

The nation-state - as opposed to its rivals - offers an opportunity to reconcile the old dilemma of unity vs. diversity. This interplay of individuals, this synergy of forces, this weaving of one fabric out of many threads, has given the West its vitality and cohesion. The prevailing American notion of the nation-state is inclusive. All generations, kindred [*gentes*], and genders are welcome to contribute. No one is excluded. As David Landes puts it: "Literate mothers matter." But Pierre Manent warns that the West risks forfeiting its advantage through the erosion of its political forms, institutions, and families through globalization and democratization:

Commerce [binding individuals rather than citizens], right [allowing judges to rule directly in the name of humanity], morality [detached from its social framework]: these are the three systems, the three empires that promise to exit from the political.

In other words, political discussion yields priority to managerial techniques - rule by administrative mandarins who are not accountable to the political process.

Each in its own form: commerce, according to the realism, the prosaic character of interests rightly understood; right, according to the intellectual coherence of a network of rights rigorously deduced from individual autonomy; and finally, morality, according to the sublime aim of pure human dignity to which one is joined by the purely spiritual sentiment of respect.

Liberty, commerce, rights, and morality have thus become detached from their roots in Biblical ethics. Roger Scruton similarly characterizes this highly individualistic and irresponsible "morality" as a "culture of repudiation." Often it is the elite classes that repudiate the common core of values. This will only make the assimilation of migrants more complicated. For Kenneth Minogue, any "exit from the political" in the form of an abstract and poorly delimited "political moralism " is an entrance into the despotic. Let us hope instead that Africa, Asia, and Latin America can develop Lieber's "multiplicity of civilized nations" even as so many Europeans strive to repudiate theirs.

For Francis Lieber one of the two distinct facts that distinguish modern civilization from

antiquity is "the recuperative energy of modern states." Today it is evident that this statement must be qualified. Modern civilization can recover only to the degree that it can tap into the fiduciary reservoir of power: the consent of the governed. Personal states must somehow work together and address the issues of the day, binding people together while preserving their rich diversity, or global institutions will continue to fail to work as originally envisioned.

As Edmund Burke noted: "Society is indeed a contract ... it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born." Here let us conclude with an observation by the great French poet and essayist, Paul Valéry:

Power has only the force we are willing to attribute to it; even the most brutal power is founded on belief. We credit it with the ability to act at all times and everywhere, whereas, in reality, it can only act at one point and at a certain moment. In short, all power is exactly in the position of a bank whose existence depends on the sole probability (incidentally, very great) that all its clients will not come at once to draw out their deposits. If, either constantly or at any particular moment, a certain power were summoned to bear its real force at every point in its empire, its strength at each point would be about equal to zero...