

# NATIONAL REVIEW

## The New Republic? Is That Still Around?

Mark Krikorian

March 13, 2017

The New Republic, a century-old liberal magazine, basically ceased to exist when most of its staff and writers resigned in 2014 in response to mismanagement by owner Chris Hughes, co-founder of Facebook. He sold the shell of the magazine last year to a lefty activist and publisher from Oregon, and what's now called TNR seems to be just another Salon. TNR's sad decline is demonstrated by two articles it published on immigration, one before the 2014 collapse and one from last week.

In 2013, it published "Why Liberals Should Oppose the Immigration Bill" by T.A. Frank, a thoughtful piece that made a pro-worker argument challenging the preconceptions of the magazine and its readership. Contrast that with "Where Trump Gets His Fuzzy Border Math," managing editor Laura Reston's diatribe attacking the Center for Immigration Studies, which I direct, and immigration skepticism in general.

It's a parodic screed that Daily Kos might reject as too over-the-top. Since they're certainly not going to publish the letter I sent today, I enclose it below: I was delighted to see that my organization, the Center for Immigration Studies, was recently featured in the pages of The New Republic.

Having testified before Congress more than 100 times, worked with the Census Bureau, the Justice Department, and the National Academies of Sciences, and been cited in a Supreme Court ruling, CIS drew a lot of journalistic attention long before Trump's political rise. But Laura Reston's screed would be unworthy of a college newspaper, let alone TNR. College papers have faculty advisers precisely to avoid publication of such an embarrassing piece.

The first thing a faculty adviser would have warned Reston against is comically hyperbolic language. "Far-right fringe," "rabidly xenophobic," "hard-line nativists" – this sort of thing belongs in an unmoderated comment thread, not in the published work of a journal with pretensions of seriousness. The next lesson would be avoiding errors.

There's a reason cub reporters were told "if your mother says she loves you, check it out." But Reston seems not to have read even the Cliff Notes version of the material she cites. For instance, she writes that "Yet another study, published in 2015, asserts that a whopping 51 percent of immigrant households are leeching off welfare—even though undocumented immigrants have been banned from receiving welfare since 1996."

Actually, illegal immigrants have been barred from welfare since long before 1996; the legislation passed that year restricted welfare access by legal immigrants – there's a difference. What's more, the report isn't just about welfare use by illegal immigrants; the very first line of the report refers to "immigrant (legal and illegal) and native welfare use" – which she would have seen if she'd even just clicked on the link. In another error, this one suggesting a reckless disregard for the truth, Reston writes that the Harvard Ph.D. dissertation of Jason Richwine, an independent researcher whose work CIS (as well as Politico, Forbes, National Review, and others) has published, called for "banning Hispanic immigrants because their IQs were lower than those of whites."

The most cursory examination of the issue would have shown this to be false, and any faculty adviser worth his or her salt would have flagged the comment for double-checking as potentially defamatory. A final error, a testament more to parochialism than malice, is Reston's reference to the Cato Institute as an example of "hard-core conservative organizations."

In fact, Cato is a libertarian think tank, devoted to unlimited immigration and opposed to all real-world steps to enforce immigration laws. It's also in favor of gay marriage, legalizing drugs and prostitution, and much else that doesn't qualify as "hard-core conservative."

A good faculty adviser would have suggested Reston venture beyond her bubble in trying to understand the outside world's complexity. Finally, undergrads hoping to make it in opinion journalism would receive instruction on how to write good screeds. Avoiding bad writing is job one. For instance: the late Cordelia Scaife May, who funded many groups skeptical of current immigration policy (as well as "Mr. Rogers Neighborhood" and others) is referred to by Reston, in consecutive sentences, as "[a]n environmentalist obsessed with protecting birds" (Oh no! The birds!) and then "obsessed with *The Camp of the Saints*," a French dystopian novel.

That's a lot of obsessing. A good screed should also take full advantage of opportunities for demonization. Reston, referring to several grants to CIS from the John M. Olin Foundation before its dissolution, refers to "thoroughbred breeder John Olin." I don't know anything about his interest in horses, but he was a gun manufacturer – it's punditry malpractice for a lefty tirade not to use this fact to its advantage.

Finally, the *pièce de résistance* of denunciatory incompetence: Reston seems not to have known that the Center for Immigration Studies was recently added to the Southern Poverty Law Center's blacklist of "hate groups." True, even the SPLC's ideological kin at *The Nation*, *Harper's*, and elsewhere have denounced it as a venal and dishonest racket. But Reston seems to still take the SPLC seriously and even quoted one of its commissars – but failed to note the "hate group" smear. For heaven's sake, if you're going to scurrilously vilify somebody, at least do it right!

