



Igor Kopelnitsky

## The Rough Landing We Give Refugees

By Sara Paretsky

**W**hen Ethel Krupnik was 12, soldiers broke into her home near Vilna, Lithuania, in the middle of the night and shot her father dead as she and the rest of her family covered in the kitchen. Her mother, fearing that Ethel would be killed in turn — her education, including the four languages she spoke, made her seem threatening to neighbors — sent the girl to a cousin in New York.

It was 1911, the year of a pogrom in Eastern Europe that produced a lot of refugees bound for America. The United States didn't have a complicated refugee policy then; if you could make it to an entry port and pass the health inspection, you were here. Neither the Federal nor the state governments offered any assistance to immigrants or refugees, who sank or swam as best they could. When Ethel's cousin refused to support his penniless relation and left her on her own on the streets of the great city, she survived by

Sara Paretsky is the author, most recently, of the novel "Ghost Country."

hemming shirt-waists in a sweatshop.

Nowadays it would be much harder for Ethel to get into this country, but if she were one of the 20,000 Kosovars the United States is accepting from among the 779,000 driven out of their homes by Serb terrorism, a state agency would get around \$500 in Federal money to cover her basic needs in the first 30 days. After 30 days she would be turned over to the public-assistance program in the state where the Federal Government sent her. There she would be covered by the welfare-reform law known as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families or by Refugee Cash Assistance, the program for adults without children.

The majority of refugees now arriving in this country are families with dependent children. Unfortunately, the temporary-assistance program lumps together all needy families, immigrant or not. Refugees who have just survived the most shocking scenes of violence and violation and who may speak no English, let alone understand how to navigate our culture, run under the same rules and the same timetable as people born and brought up in the United States.

Briefly, when we reformed the country's welfare laws three years ago, we eliminated Aid to Families With Dependent Children, long a fixture of the welfare system, and went to a work-based model — meaning we

were no longer stressing the needs of dependent children but pushing to get adults into the work force. Congress hoped to break what it saw as the cycle of many generations living on welfare without the skills or incentives to join the work force. However good or bad the new temporary-assistance program is, it is out of sync with the needs of refugees.

Under the program, the Federal Government gives states block grants to use in supporting needy residents. The states can devise whatever programs they want, but the Federal Government sets standards that the states have to meet in order to get the maximum amount of money. One requirement is that 90 percent of adults in temporary-assistance households be in some kind of work or work-training program. A single parent has to do 30 hours a week; in a two-parent home, the total is 35 hours.

Adults with young children are covered for a maximum of five years, but the state can choose a shorter maximum. And Federal incentives encourage states to keep shrinking their caseloads.

Applying the same rules to refugees and to people who were born here causes several hardships. It is difficult for someone just learning the language, and often recovering from severe stress, to get 35 hours of authorized work activity a week. And it is

punitive to both refugees and the states to count new refugees as part of state welfare caseloads.

The State Department allocates refugees among the states. The numbers remain fairly constant: New York gets about 10,700 new refugees every year, Illinois about 4,000 and New Jersey around 1,400. No matter how many people find jobs, the number of refugees on temporary assistance remains constant because each year

### Receiving sanctuary vs. receiving welfare.

newly arriving refugees are added to state welfare rolls.

It is a mistake to penalize states for providing services to a group of needy people whose presence on the temporary-assistance rolls is inappropriate in the first place. And if the Federal Government puts too much pressure on the states to cut caseloads, we will be in the position of bringing Kosovars, or Rwandans, or other desperate and terrified people, into the country and treating them the way Ethel's

cousin treated her: throwing them onto the street with no concern for how they'll survive.

We have a great opportunity now, in the wake of the Kosovo nightmare, to amend Federal policy so that refugees are not lumped together with those born and brought up here. The Federal Government should provide specialized cash and medical assistance to refugees during their first year in this country while they learn English, recover from the trauma of the violence they have witnessed and learn how to navigate a sophisticated job culture. That way the states could concentrate on the needy families that already live here.

Refugees are survivors. They want sanctuary and a chance to achieve and contribute, but it takes a reasonable period after arrival for them to find their way in an alien land.

A year's eligibility for specialized Federal cash and medical assistance would come back many times over in the productivity that refugee families ultimately generate. Ask Ethel's family: her seven surviving grandchildren paid around \$600,000 in Federal income taxes in 1998. I'm one of those seven. I'd like America to open its doors as widely as possible to the victims of persecution. And I'd like my Federal tax dollars to help other Ethels make an easier transition to their new homeland. □

## A Vote That May Haunt Congress

By Mickey Edwards

**I**t would be best for both parties if Federal lawmakers revisited the issue of gun control before the 2000 elections.

After the House of Representatives voted last week to kill the latest gun-restriction proposals, some analysts suggested that the issue would move out of Congress and instead be part of next year's battle for the White House. But with their votes against the measure, liberal and moderate Democrats missed a chance to add a few additional controls on gun sales, and the Republican Party looked as if it was unconcerned about the recent killings of schoolchildren. Richard Gephardt, the House minority leader, has hinted that the Democrats might be open to compromise. Republicans would be wise to take him up on the offer, or both parties will be left with a record that will be hard to defend.

J. Dennis Hastert of Illinois, still in his early months as Speaker, is skilled at shaping compromise. With 15 months before next year's elections, he has ample time to get representatives to work on a new gun bill or series of bills. He could also help reshape through a conference committee the divergent bills passed by the House and Senate, finding elements on which Republicans and Democrats can agree. He should do so soon.

Passage of gun-control legislation would go a long way toward reassuring a public that seems increasingly fearful of the dangers posed by easy access to weapons. It is especially important for Republicans to provide such reassurance.

The events of last week probably won't have much impact on House elections next year because members generally voted the way their constituents prefer. But for Republicans, the outcome adds to a general sense that too often the party does not, to borrow from President Clinton, feel or understand the country's pain, concerns or priorities. A small step forward, protecting the right of citizens to own guns but imposing some common-

### Why Federal lawmakers should revisit gun control soon.

sense safeguards, would help the party immeasurably.

It would also help Mr. Hastert. Analysts have often painted him as a weak Speaker under the thumb of the more confrontational majority whip, Tom DeLay of Texas. Those who know both men and the history of their relationship know this is an inaccurate picture, but once perceptions are set, they are hard to change. And so Mr. Hastert's legacy is on the line.

Republicans are ready to act. Many moderates and nonconfrontational conservatives in the party genuinely want some restrictions on gun access and resent being portrayed as captives of the National Rifle Association. The vote was on such a convoluted, half-full, half-empty measure that many moderates and conservatives disagreed among themselves, even within the same delegations. In New York, for example, Sherman L. Boehlert and Benjamin A. Gilman, two leading moderate Republicans, voted against final passage of the bill, while Arno Houghton, another moderate, voted in favor. Republican moderates have become more visible and stronger and will not want their votes last week to be the final word.

Meanwhile, many Democrats voted to kill the bill. If gun-control advocates could not get all they wanted, they reasoned, they should at least get the benefit of making Republicans look extreme and out of touch.

But the strategy backfired. As the record shows, John D. Dingell of Michigan, a powerful Democrat, led the fight against stiffer controls, and nearly a quarter of House Democrats voted with him. So Democrats, too, should be willing to work with Mr. Hastert to get some new restrictions passed; for them, half a loaf may turn out to be better than none.

By confronting gun control again, Mr. Hastert can help his party, bolster his reputation as Speaker and, incidentally, do something that is good for the country.

Mickey Edwards, a former Republican Congressman from Oklahoma, teaches at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard.

#### Correction

An article on June 18 misstated the prayer that was read as the first act of the Continental Congress. It was the 35th Psalm, not the 37th.

## Forests The Way They Used To Be

By David R. Foster

**I**n these days of computer-based global climate models, ecosystem experiments like Biosphere II and airborne analyses of ozone holes, it is easy to overlook a basic truth about nature: understanding its history is just as important as examining its present.

This is certainly true in the Northeast, where nature is, remarkably, still being transformed by the 19th-century relocation of the population off the farm and into cities and suburbs. For the near future, the continuous change driven by this history will have much more ecological impact than changes in global weather patterns.

In 1854, after years of walking the Massachusetts countryside, Henry Thoreau made an observation that seems incredible today. "Is not the muskrat the heaviest animal found wild in this township?" he wrote.

While reveling in the agrarian landscape of 19th-century New England, entertained by meadowlarks, whip-poorwills, bobolinks and bitterns, Thoreau lamented the loss of what he called the noble animals: the cougar, bear, moose, fisher and turkey. Deer, he observed, had not been seen in central Massachusetts for 80 years, and beavers had been extirpated by the early 1700's. Indeed, he even deplored that the black fly and no-see-um had disappeared before the hand of civilized man.

Today, coyotes wander the Boston suburbs, and moose-crossing signs line the highway just west of Thoreau's Concord. Beavers flood Connecticut suburbs, bears are a common sight at bird feeders in western Massachusetts and deer confound most efforts to control them. Confirmed reports of a wolf in northern New England and of cougars from Massachusetts northward indicate the potential for re-establishing large predators. Meanwhile, the marvelous open-land birds of Thoreau's day have largely disappeared and are major priorities for conservation.

As agriculture shifted west in the 19th century, Thoreau's landscape of extensive pastures, meadows and grain fields reforested naturally. Across the East, isolated and cut-over wood lots like the one around Walden Pond merged with these new woodlands to form a vast regional forest. Since 1900, forested areas in the Northeast have increased more than 50 percent, to upward of 70 million acres. Increases have been greatest in Vermont, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and Rhode Island (with the increase ranging from 65 to 85 percent), somewhat less in New Hampshire and New York (45 to 55 percent) and least in Connecticut and Maine (15 to 20 percent).

This forest continues to grow and mature. A recent survey in Massachusetts documented a 19 percent increase in total wood volume from 1985 to 1998 and an even greater increase



Pascal Lemaitre

(41 percent) in the volume of larger timber trees. As the woodland habitat spread and matured, forest wildlife arrived through migration (bears, moose, pileated woodpeckers), through expansion of some animals' native range (coyotes, opossums) or through successful reintroduction (beavers, turkeys, eagles).

But the return of the forests and animals does not mean that the original nature of the Pilgrims is being replicated. Our modern forest landscapes are the unique product of hundreds of years of human activity, including burning and cutting, grazing and plowing. Today, the species in adjoining forests may differ strikingly depending on whether the original plant cover was once eradicated for farmland. Similarly, our wildlife popu-

lations are dynamic and largely out of balance, with herbivores like deer and beavers growing unchecked without the large carnivores necessary to con-

### To manage our woodlands, know their history.

trol their numbers.

Though this might all seem to be obvious, there have been many shortsighted efforts to manage and conserve this landscape, the result of a

failure to consider history. For decades, for example, foresters across the Northeast clear-cut white pine forests and then tried to regenerate the trees, mistakenly assuming that they were here when the Pilgrims arrived. In fact, the white pine had often established itself on abandoned farm fields; after the pine was cut, it was often succeeded by a range of hardwood species like oak, maple and birch that grow naturally on these sites. Today in many areas the oaks, which thrived in woods that were burned and cut, are now declining and being replaced by red maple and other species, the result of a decrease in fire and logging.

Thus as we look to conserve and manage the Northeastern landscape, we have a range of options. If we protect large areas, the forests will

continue to mature and change, and our wilder, native wildlife will increase and expand. At the same time open land will continue to be overgrown, familiar vistas will be obscured and cherished species like whip-poorwills and bobolinks will continue to disappear.

However we manage this cultural landscape of the Northeast, we have to understand its past. As Thoreau said in 1860: "Our wood-lots, of course have a history, and we may often recover it for a hundred years back, though we do not. Yet if we attended more to the history of our lots we should manage them more wisely."

David R. Foster, director of the Harvard Forest at Harvard University, is the author of "Thoreau's Country."

## That Eastern State of Mind

By Kent Bottles

**I**t's been about a year and a half since our family moved from Iowa City to Lower Merion, just outside Philadelphia. A different world? You bet. Though whether that's good or bad remains open to debate.

For me, it's a relief living in a place where my high level of energy is not so unusual. I remember 10 years ago, when I first arrived in

Kent Bottles is managing director of an executive search company.

Iowa, racing off the airplane in Cedar Rapids Airport and slamming my California driver's license on the Hertz counter. The young woman behind the counter looked shocked.

"What's the matter with you?" she asked. When I told her I wanted to make sure Hertz didn't run out of cars, she said, "Mister, this is Iowa; we never run out of rental cars."

For my wife, Annie, the move east has been a mixed blessing. She's from St. Louis and loved raising our family in Iowa City. The aggression of Easterners puts her off.

At the oneg, or meal after services, at our synagogue in Iowa City, everyone waited patiently until after the blessing of the wine to eat the home-

baked cookies. At our new synagogue, sharp elbows are the order of the morning in pursuit of the catered pastries. On the other hand, it's a joy to know that here, there will always be a minyan, or group of 10, and a thought-provoking sermon, commodities rare in Iowa City.

As for the children, my son participated in Little League in both places. The quality of ball is higher here, but the most striking difference is the level of sophistication of coaching — radar guns, private baseball academies. My son's hitting tutor gave me a disdainful look when I said, "Oh, you're going to teach Colin to hit like Rod Carew." "Actually," came the reply, "we teach the more scientific-

cally sound rotational approach developed by Tom Emanski when he was the superscout for Houston."

Most telling was what happened when my wife, unfamiliar with our new Dodge Caravan, bumped into a car driven by a native Easterner. The aggrieved driver was expressing herself in the colorful vernacular of the locals when my wife said, "I am sorry; it is all my fault."

This stopped the other woman in her tracks. "Honey, you are not from around here, are you?" she said softly. "Where are you from?" When my wife answered, the woman took pity on her and gently explained the local custom: never admit fault, even when you know you are wrong. □