

Reading Guide for *The Age of Walls* by Tim Marshall

Chapter 2, USA



<https://www.archipanic.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/01.-World-Border-Barriers.jpg>

“...a narrow definition of American.”

*This chapter analyzes the growing divisions in the United States, symbolized best by the border wall proposed by Donald Trump. The issue is not the wall, which may never be built. It is the disagreement in this country about immigration, & that disagreement includes the volatile topic of race in America. One revolutionary element that the United States’ founders introduced was that the people were united by **shared values**, not by race, religion, or ethnic background. Blood does not make one American, unlike conventional nationalism.*

*Donald Trump is a **nationalist**, and his slogan, “Make America Great Again,” implies the country has lost its greatness because of unpatriotic internationalist values. “Putting America first” is what he says the country must do. Go it alone, negate international trade agreements that encourage free trade with other countries, military alliances like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which the U.S. has led since the end of World War II. These are nationalist qualities, and nationalism, as you will read later in this book, is growing all over the world. The proposed border wall really is about more than illegal immigration. “The controversy about the wall,” Tim Marshall writes,, “gets to the heart of the debate about who gets to define what an ‘American’ means.”*

p. 44 The fear among some Americans that the U.S. will no longer be a white-majority country. This is **nativism**, and it’s peaked with Trump’s election.

p. 45-50 This section is an interesting history of the border area between the U.S. and Mexico.

- Two differences between white Americans and Mexicans in this area were over religion and slavery.
- The **Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo**, 1848
- “The Tortilla Curtain”



p. 51 Obama Administration’s approach to the issue of illegal immigration

Workers are a commodity for sale, like any market, and illegal immigration has been encouraged by American businesses willing to employ and exploit undocumented workers.

p. 52. Two ironies:

1. building a wall will not only keep people from getting in, it will also keep people from getting out, and the border has been porous in both directions for as long as it has existed.
2. Mexico has tougher immigration laws than the U.S. and deports more people than the U.S.

US-Mexico border fence

650 miles of existing fencing separates the US from Mexico



The New York Times

Texas Says It Will Build the Wall, and Asks Online Donors to Pay for It

Gov. Greg Abbott said he would draw on \$250 million of state revenues to begin work on a border wall and asked supporters to chip in with donations to a crowdfunding website.



Gov. Greg Abbott has turned to crowdfunding to fulfill his pledge of building a barrier to deter migrants crossing into Texas from Mexico. Montinique Monroe/Getty Images

p. 53 **Fear of terrorism** has influenced U.S. immigration policies, even though 80% of American terrorist incidents have been committed by U.S. citizens.

p. 54-55 Discussion of how a strong economy in Mexico will reduce illegal immigration, but Trump has followed an **isolationist** policy of withdrawing from international trade agreements like the North American Trade Organization (**NAFTA**) and military alliances like **NATO**. The U.S. can do this because it is big enough, but even so it will come at a cost.

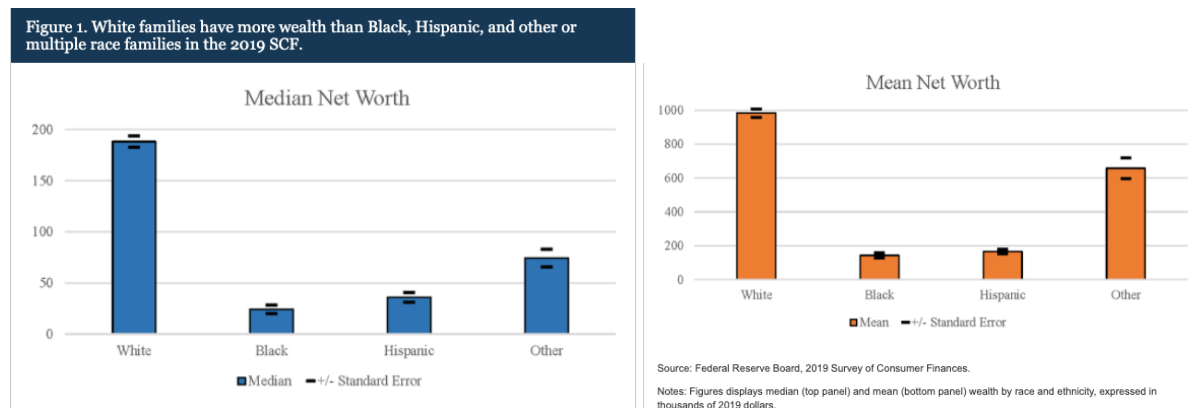


p. 55-58 Discussion of the financial costs of building a wall. Cost is very high, but “**sometimes symbolism can outweigh practicalities.**”

p. 58-62 Discussion of other divisions in the U.S. “A border defines a nation, and Trump’s wall is attempting to define what America is—both physically and ideologically.”

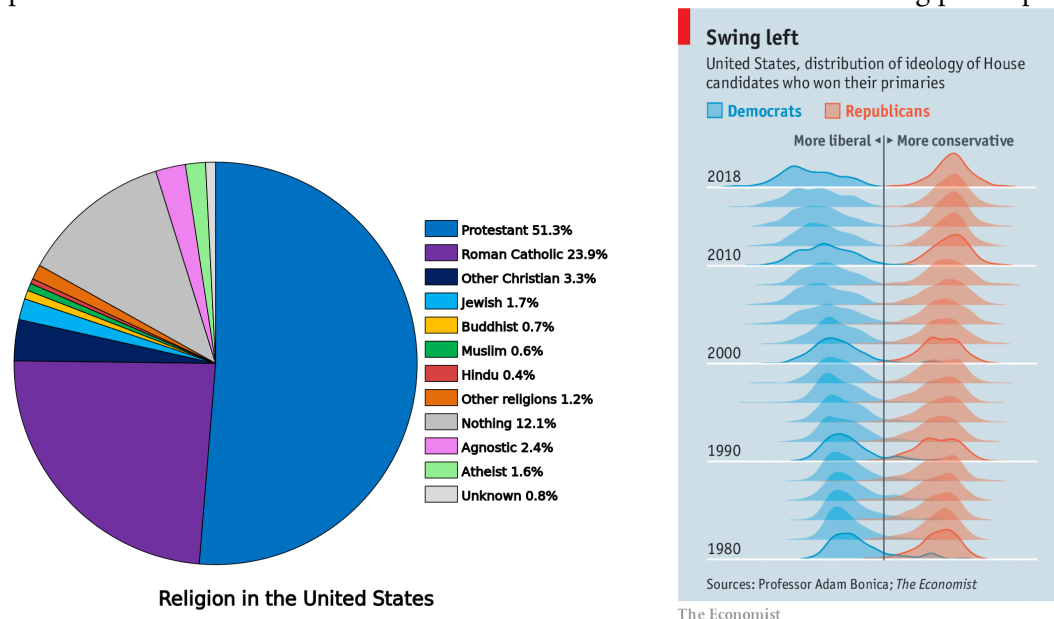
p. 58-60 America’s racial divisions...some white Americans fear the growing Latino/Hispanic population in the U.S. How would a wall would address this fear?

p. 60-62 Being black in America. Historical and contemporary racism has led to “lower health, lower wealth, lower expectations” among African Americans. The causes are many, but they start with America’s “original sin” of slavery.



p. 62 Religion in the U.S.

p. 62 The tension between **assimilation** and **multiculturalism** “...a melting pot? Up to a point.”



Make sure you know what **Identity Politics** is. This is crucial to today’s political life in America.

Polarization—you must pick a side, no moderates in between—between “left and right,” “liberal and conservative,” “Democrat and Republican,” “urban globalists and non-urban nationalists” (p. 65)
Know what these terms mean.

Some of the younger generation are the most intolerant. Colleges are seeing more radicalization and polarization and less tolerance for other points of view, “reducing the space in the middle.” (p 67)

At one extreme are black and white separatist groups: Charlottesville, Virginia, 2017 –
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/documenting-hate-charlottesville/>
Louis Farrakhan’s Nation of Islam –

“The racial, ethnic, and political divides all coalesce in this question of the wall—of what the USA is, what it should be, and how it carries forward its ideals of freedom and equality.”