

# That's it, Uncle Sam: I'm yours no more

**Boris Johnson** says he is renouncing his US citizenship — acquired as a result of his being born in New York — because of the idiotic and aggressive behaviour of US immigration

**R**ight. That's it. *Entre nous c'est terminé.* After 42 happy years I am getting a divorce from America. From the very emerging of my childhood consciousness I have been aware that in the eyes of billions of people around the world I have won first prize in the lottery of life. I possess it, the thing competed for by everyone from Rupert Murdoch to the most desperate Mexican wetback, and I have it by simple dint of my nativity, on the Puerto Rican Health Scheme, in New York General Hospital, NY, NY.

I am entitled to an American passport. I must confess that this knowledge used vaguely to tinge my sense of identity. My brothers and sisters are British, and so are my parents, and I would like you to know that I am a loyal subject of Her Majesty, speak in an English accent, and for years I have travelled exclusively on a British passport. But my first passport was green, and when we landed at Dover or Heathrow I felt secretly cool to be the one to present his document to be stamped.

Mine were the credentials furnished by the most powerful nation on earth, and signed by former secretary of state Dean Rusk; and when the going has got tough in England it has sometimes crossed my mind that I could yet activate the Schwarzenegger option and flee to the land of opportunity, perhaps beginning as a short-order chef in Miami before winding up as Colorado senator and, inevitably, president.

Always glowing at the back of my mind has been the light from that unused escape hatch. Let's face it, folks, we manage to endure so many of our earthly captivities by fantasising that we have somewhere a half-open door to another job, another career, another life, or indeed, if we are religious, a life of the world to come. The mere thought of that door is a consolation, even if, as things turn out, we never actually go through it.

Well, as of this week I slam that door shut, and in some indignation. It is not just that I no longer want an American passport. In fact, what I want is the right not to have an American passport, and it is that right, astoundingly, that the Americans are reluctant to give me.

Last Sunday lunchtime we were boarding a flight to Mexico, via Houston, Texas,

and we presented six valid British passports. As soon as the Continental Airlines security guy saw my passport, he shook his head. 'Were you born in New York?' he asked. 'Have you ever carried an American passport?'

Yes, I said, but it had long since expired. 'I am afraid we have a problem,' he said. 'The US Immigration say you have to travel on an American passport if you want to enter the United States.' B-but I'm British, I said, and my children chorused their agreement. Had the guy stuck around a moment longer, I would have told him how jolly British I was — but luckily for him he'd gone off in search of reinforcements.

When the ranking officer arrived, the story was the same. 'I'm sorry, sir,' he said, 'but you'll have to go to the US Embassy tomorrow morning and get a new American passport.' But I don't want an American passport. I said, inspiration striking me. I tell you what: I renounce my American citizenship. I disclaim it. I discard it.

'That's not good enough, sir,' he said. 'I need some official document saying that you are no longer American,' and that, of course, is the point of this piece.

I make this formal, public, and, I hope, legally valid renunciation, because as a result of this moronic rule I had to ask my wife (who bore this latest cock-up with amazing good humour) to take the chil-



dren on her own to Houston, and I then had to spend a stonking sum on another ticket. Because the Americans insisted I was American, and that it was only as an American that I could travel to America, America was the one country that I had to avoid.

So I circumnavigated America. I flew via Madrid, managing to beat the rest of my family to Mexico by 45 minutes; and yet I still seethe. It's not just the stupidity of the rule that gets me. It's the arrogance. What other country insists that because you can be one of its nationals, then you *must* be one of its nationals? Imagine if we told all British-born Americans that they could not arrive in this country except by use of a British passport. I haven't seen anything so insanely possessive since the negotiations on the Common Fisheries Policy, when the Irish used to claim that the cod stocks of the Atlantic were still Irish in their fishy souls, even though they had long since emigrated to Portuguese waters.

As far as I can interpret the psychology of the rule, which has only been applied since 9/11, it is part of America's new them-and-us mentality, the Manichaeic division of the world into Americans and non-Americans, obliterating any category in between. Listen, buddy, the Americans seem to be saying. You got a right to be American? Then you do us the courtesy of travelling on the world's number one passport when you come here. What you got to be ashamed of, boy?

Well, I love America. But I don't like being pushed around and kicked off flights to what, after all, they claim is my home country. Condi, Mr Ambassador, whoever is in charge — I hereby renounce my birthright. Strike me off the list.

Consider me, as you put it, an 'alien'. Even as I write these words I am conscious of the huge potential benefits my children will now never have. Of course, it is true that it is not all jam, carrying an American passport. You tend to be first overboard when your ship is hijacked by Arabs; but then these days the Brits walk the plank pretty soon, too; and think of the advantages, that priceless sense of *civis Americanus sum*; that the sanctity of your life is guaranteed by the hyperpower.

Compare America's tigerish love of her children with the pitiless indifference we show to British passport-holders from Zimbabwe. The Americans would never allow me to be tried by an international court. The Americans would never let me be extradited to face trial in the UK, even if — particularly if — I was involved in IRA atrocities, while we supinely offer up our subjects without demanding any evidence whatsoever.

These blessings must now remain untested by me and my descendants, and I tender my resignation from the United States, with sadness, but in the knowledge that she is probably big enough to rub along without me. Goodbye and God bless, America.