

Reflections on the Immigration Issue

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We look at our neighbors and "they are us." Perhaps it was a different time and a different country from which they emigrated, but they came for the very same reasons. Who are they in 2006?

At this time we should understand that some immigrants came for political reasons (sometimes forced out by fear and danger for their lives) but have been previously granted legal visas. Others are just incited by a community of headhunters that entice them to come here to make money (but will charge thousands to guide them through the borders illegally). Others come from the Caribbean are Bahamians who are mostly business people. Haitians come for work and have to sacrifice risking their lives to come by boat. Puerto Ricans enjoy the benefits of USA citizenship but Puerto Rico does not want to become part of the Union.

South Americans came when the left wing governments in Peru, Brazil and Argentina tried to take national control of private enterprise. Most are either business people or professionals. In particular, Venezuelans are now flocking to the area because of the Chavez government. Colombians are working and forming businesses in the area because their country is suffering guerrilla warfare that creates an insecure environment to raise a family. These are mostly educated professionals that want to enjoy peace and stability.

Most of these Hispanics have claimed some type of political asylum. The majority did not cross any borders but came flying into Florida with proper immigration visas. They have applied for permanent residence and request the opportunity to work legally and raise their families in our communities. They want to pay their taxes and build a future. They generally have family back in their native countries. They still would like to visit during vacation periods, but with the guarantee that they can return and continue living the American dream. Their children are growing up in our educational system and in our society. The children have assimilated our culture and our values.

Yet, it is the monetary incentives for both the immigrants and US employers that cause problems. Many Mexicans and Guatemalans come from the Chiapas and other poor agricultural provinces at the borders. They are mostly guided by "coyotes" representing American interests that charge outrageous sums to bring them to do manual labor in the farms around the USA. They are exploited and their women are many times violated and forced into prostitution to pay exorbitant fees charged for the crossing and transportation in subhuman conditions. Also the agricultural exchanges function at the Border States like Texas and Arizona where workers can obtain proper papers to work as temporary agricultural visitors. This program has been active many years and is successful.

It is this group of immigrants that can become problematic for society. They come alone and sometimes create havoc in communities. They are mostly single male men with nothing to do on weekends. They live in

groups that are noisy and with manners learned in their countries. They are inconsiderate of the neighbors. Their families are back in their birth countries. They send their disposable income to support those left behind caring for their children and other relatives.

In general all immigrants desire to work and gain the benefits of safety, security and political stability of our society. But ALL want to go back to visit and share their success with their relatives. Most of their children go to visit but admit they do not want to share their parents' homeland livelihood. The children will most definitely want to remain in USA and raise their families HERE. Most children will go through our educational system for the first 12 years; yet, cannot continue their higher education because they cannot pay their out of state fees - exorbitant for low income families' budgets. Generally they are forced to stay at entry level positions without many opportunities to prosper.

These immigrants want to work and want to work legally, want a legal drivers license, want to save and buy a home, improve their standard of living, educate their children beyond high school at affordable costs, maintain connections with their homeland and preserve their ethnic culture and traditions. Shall we punish these people in our midst who work each day long hours oftentimes at hard labor that many of our citizens will not do. Or should we help them to understand our laws, our tax system, and our banking system and invite them to be a citizen. We should do no less.