

Nationhood and Immigration Part One: Xenophobia or Nostalgia?

November 27, 2018

Several characteristics of a nation are essential if its society is to thrive as a functioning democracy. Two of these characteristics are the protection of its borders and its adherence to the rule of law. The absence of either of these cornerstones can result in a flawed republic.

Several months ago, I sent an email to some friends. They live in the Washington, DC area, my former home. It is an area populated principally by citizens of blue political persuasions.

I got along in Washington, DC. I got along in Northern Idaho. While living in these two quite different political climates, I have found it was (is) helpful to look at another's point of view. This approach has made me less strident, lowered my blood pressure, and resulted in less anxiety on the part my wife and our dog.

This stance does not mean we should be a political Switzerland, swaying to whatever is convenient at the time. It means we simply, on occasion, try to look at others' dissenting opinions from those of ours...a difficult task for our species in these times of political acrimony.

The email to my friends was about the fairly recent influx of a large number of Latinos into my childhood hometown, a small community in southeast New Mexico. The relatively sudden demographic change (over the past 25 years or so) has changed the cultural climate of the town and its country side, a culture that had evolved for well over a century.

In my correspondence, I described two small, eclectic museums in the area. Both museums focus on the American cowboy and the cowboy's influence on this part of America.

I wrote that the dominant Latino population, one that now outnumbers WASPs, was not flocking to these museums. Admittedly, like others who regret witnessing their former way of life pass away, I expressed regret to my friends. But I also offered this thought: Who could blame the new citizens?

Why should these recent arrivals care about the famous Lincoln County Wars that took place in a nearby county or a former World Champion calf roper who grew up near this town? The museums have no Mexican-related exhibits of Benito Juarez; not even one of Poncho Villa, who is an integral part of southwest history and folklore. Why attend a museum to look at exhibits about strangers, many who helped dismantle (in the 19th century) the Mexican government's presence in the area where I was born and reared?

A person usually visits a museum whose exhibits reinforce preconceived beliefs. A patriot tends toward attending the Daughters of the American Revolution exhibits. An anti-Semite usually avoids the Holocaust museum in DC. A racist likely passes by the African American museum which opened recently on the National Mall.

The letter to my friends only expressed regret that I expected the American cowboy museums in my hometown would eventually close for lack of interest on the part

of the local citizens. I expressed nothing negative about immigration, for which I have long been an advocate---as long as it is gradual and legal.

One of these friends, reflecting a close relationship going back fifty-two years, and who knows my liberal views on immigration, responded that I was xenophobic! Granted, he is alt-left. In spite of this shortcoming, I still like him. Nonetheless, I was dumbfounded that a friend of such a long duration would label me as a person who was afraid of foreigners, when the very opposite is the case.

Gradual and controlled immigration has long been one of the strengths of America. But as we know, illegal immigration has been going on for many decades. Estimates vary, but most studies cite between 12 and 13 million illegal immigrants living in the United States. Is that a significant number?

Mathematically, no, as the current population of the U.S. is approximately 360 million people. The illegal population represents less than 5 percent of America's population.

Socially, ethically, and legally, it is significant. First, they are here in violation of our laws. Second, their presence is trampling on the rights of immigrants who are waiting in line to be admitted legally into our country. Third, do the illegal immigrants care about the first two points? Obviously not, as they violate our laws and ignore their fellow immigrants, who are working within the system.

Earlier in my life, I worked in the poverty stricken environs of Watts, California. (Try this occupation: A wet-behind-the-ears white man attempting to collect overdue loan payments in a black man's enclave.) A few years later I spent time in poverty-stricken barrios in the Philippines. If I had been a Filipino, I would have been doing everything in my power to make it into the United States---legally or otherwise. (As well, to get out of Watts, the subject for another article.)

Which brings us to the present situation: Thousands of people coming from Central America are now at America's door in the Mexican city of Tijuana. They have traveled hundreds of miles, leaving their homes---many of which are dangerous places and devoid of opportunity---to seek entry into America.

None of them were invited; none have the requisite paperwork. They came anyway, the subject of the second report in this series.

Nationhood and Immigration Part Two: Come One, Come All

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While living on the east coast, I visited the Statue of Liberty several times. On each visit, I read a passage that was inscribed on a plaque near the statue. As you likely know, the inscription reads as:

Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning
to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp
beside the golden door!

How can these proclamations, noble and inspiring as they are, to be reconciled with reality? How can they be squared with common sense?

Let us be clear about this matter. An open border between Mexico to that of California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas---one that some pro-immigration factions favor---would result in denigration of the rule of law in America and the abnegation of this nation's responsibility to its citizens.

Yet it appears to this writer that the marchers (or their sponsors?) from Central America to Tijuana started this trek with the expectation they would gain entrance into America.

These migrants are aware of the implications of their actions, but they are desperate and some are in fear of their well-being. At the risk of my friend labeling me xenophobic again, America cannot let these people into the country unless they go through an established process.

I recognize the thoughts in this paragraph may come across as harsh and judgmental. Nonetheless, no foreigner is entitled to U.S. citizenship. Yet by their actions of uprooting themselves and trekking across another country, they appear to believe they are somehow entitled to gain entry to this country. Else, why would they risk such a perilous journey?

If they are granted entrance ahead of those who have been waiting in the legitimate immigrants' queue; if they violate America's rules of law, this news will get back to Central America. The result? Form a caravan, trek your way northward, and come on in.

To my friend in DC who labeled me as xenophobic: Gradual immigration into another culture allows time for acculturation, for assimilation, for accommodation to dissimilar ways of life. Mass immigration leads to the balkanization of a nation. Thus, I respond to my friend: Read up on history---the current strife in Europe as the most recent example---then get back to me about your characterization of my character.

A Surreal Judgment

On a related matter, last week a Federal judge ruled that the policy of the administration forbidding asylum to immigrants who have entered the country illegally to be illegal. Judge Jon Tigar declared President Trump's approach to keep illegal immigrants from entering the country runs "afoul of U.S. law that specifically allows them to do so." (quote from *New York Times*).

Red or Blue, Pink or Chartreuse, take a deep breath if you re-read the previous paragraph. I am not well-versed in law. Before retirement, my specialty was computer networks. But I venture to risk stating that you and I, versed in fairness and common sense, find the judge's ruling strange.

Perhaps the ruling was taken out of context or perhaps it came from laws to protect people who were fleeing for their lives and seeking sanctuary. But the question remains. What is the logic and good sense of a law that prevents Uncle Sam from denying illegal migrants from crossing the border, essentially making illegal entry legal?

Postscript

A survey (*Time Magazine*, November 26 –December 3, 2018) claims that 47 percent of the migrants who pass a credible-fear interview and are granted entry into the U. S. do not later to submit an application for asylum. They enter the population and disappear into the populace.

Border patrol officials claim their numbers are growing and creating incentives for more aliens to attempt to pursue asylums. These officials favor keeping the migrants out of the country until their papers (yes or no) have been processed.

But that translates into months of delay. To speed the process: the pro-immigration side suggests adding more immigration/asylum courts, more review panels, more tents in Tijuana. That is putting band-aids on a large wound, with the wound growing larger with each passing month.

It is agreed by most parties that the solution is to re-vamp the political, social, and financial infrastructures of the Central American countries. Clearly, that is an impossible task, from both the United States' political and financial standpoint and the viewpoints of the Central American countries.

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As of this writing, Uyless and his wife, Holly, are immigrants. Last week, they began their migration from Hayden to Coeur d'Alene, with the expectation of having a better view of the fireworks across Lake Coeur d'Alene. Being newcomers, they are not sure if the lake's name of these waters should be Coeur d'Alene Lake or Lake Coeur d'Alene. They say that advice on this delicate subject is most welcome as they do not want to offend any incumbent native.