

Dissenting Voices on Immigration

Not all can be dismissed as 'racist, xenophobic'

by Scott Winokur

An opinion page writer in the *Los Angeles Times* [See previous article by Terry Anderson] complained that a house near him was likely to sell for much more than his own would command, then be rented to immigrants and occupied by 20 or 30 people who raised goats and grew corn in the front yard.

"If you speak up," he said, "you're called a racist."

The writer was an African-American mechanic who opposes our nation's unrestrained, ill-considered immigration policy.

This policy — if it can be dignified by that word — is being hotly debated this summer. You can expect the debate to continue at a high-decibel level into November, at least in California.

Congress is trying to come up with a compromise immigration reform measure before the fall elections, when the quadrennial urge to sling mud and shamelessly pander will obfuscate everything.

Scott Winokur is a reporter for the San Francisco Examiner. This article is reprint by permission from the July 16, 1996 issue.

But regardless of what happens in Washington, look for Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole to do in this state what Gov. Wilson did in November 1994: to remind California that hundreds of thousands of immigrants here are being accused of taking jobs, using public services and occupying seats in classrooms from Brawley to Eureka.

Well, just as it took a Richard Nixon to make an opening to China, and just as it may take a Benjamin Netanyahu to make peace with the Arabs, it may take a member of an

American minority group to say what many of us feel deep in our bones but are loath to express.

It's time for people to ask themselves if we can continue to sail our ship of state toward the uncharted waters of the 21st century carrying so large and unwieldy a cargo of immigrants.

Suzanne Feinberg of Orinda — a Clinton Democrat turned Perot Reformer — says we can't.

She says the current level of more than 1 million legal and illegal immigrants a year undermines education, over-burdens

welfare, harms the environment, drives down wages, hurts competing members of other minority groups and is, in fact, opposed by many naturalized immigrants.

She says we're damned fools if we think we can invite everyone to party at our place

"It's time for people to ask themselves if we can continue to sail our ship of state toward the uncharted waters of the 21st century carrying so large and unwieldy a cargo of immigrants."

and not have a catastrophic mess afterward.

Feinberg was born Yeh Ling-ling in Vietnam 43 years ago, the daughter of a Chinese rice mill owner. She grew up in Saigon, Cambodia, Taiwan and Paris where she obtained a law degree and planned to remain.

But the French kicked her out after her visa expired and she relocated to California, where she married a lawyer, went to work as a paralegal in an immigration law firm and founded the Diversity Coalition for an Immigration Moratorium.

Like the black op-ed writer, the coalition has had the gumption to come straight out and say we've got a problem. It is seeking a moratorium that would reduce legal immigration from about 800,000 to 100,000 for five years.

I asked Feinberg/Yeh how she would respond to the charge that she is what some zealous immigration advocates might call a narrow, reactionary person — a bad person, politically.

Feinberg/Yeh said she tells such accusers that they're engaging in sophistry — making clever, plausible, but ultimately unsound and misleading arguments.

"They want to make it a racial issue. They want to make it white versus nonwhite. They want to make people feel that immigration-reform supporters are essentially racist and xenophobic." She added: "We are now the greatest debtor nation on Earth. We have at least 39 million people of all backgrounds who are living below the poverty line. Our schools are full. Our labor markets are overflowing. How many more should we take?"

"If we keep impoverishing Americans by importing poverty and turning America into a Third World nation, would that increase America's ability to help Third World nations? Do we want America in 100 years to be as crowded as India is today?"

Answers to both questions are easy: no, and no. Answers to the underlying questions are infinitely more difficult, however.

Limited Resources

An aquifer that lies below Mexico City, supplying two thirds of the water for the capital's 20 million residents, is running dry. To encourage conservation, the city has planned to meter use and charge residents for the water they consume. But the action has been repeatedly delayed for fear of political repercussions. Another problem is that nearly 30 percent of the city's water is lost to robbery or leakage from antiquated pipes.

— *Financial Times* of London
by way of World Press Review
May 1996

Immigrant's Molestation Sentence: Learn English

LA CROSSE, Wis. — A Southeast Asian immigrant who molested his young stepdaughters was sentenced to English lessons instead of prison, shocking the girls' relatives and members of the community. Family members complained the judge misunderstood the victims' position on punishment. And they expressed outrage at the suggestion from Sia Ye Vang's lawyer that sex with girls is accepted in Vietnam, where the Hmong immigrant came from.

Vang, 32, was found guilty of four counts of sexual assault for fondling the two girls beginning in 1992, when they were 10 and 11. He could have gotten 80 years in prison.

At sentencing, Judge Ramona Gonzalez decided to allow Vang "the opportunity to continue in his education and his assimilation into our culture." Vang received 24 years' probation and was ordered to continue English classes and perform 1,000 hours of community service.

Gonzalez said her decision was affected by Vang's consistent denial of the charges, his good standing in the Hmong community and the victims' request that he not go to jail.

"There is no doubt in my mind that something happened, and no doubt they hate him," she said. "But I am perplexed that these girls do not want him to go to prison despite the fact that their own father went to prison" on similar charges.

Vang's lawyer defended the sentence on cultural grounds.

"My argument was that he is from Vietnam," Katherine Schnell said. "Part of what happens in an agrarian culture, sometimes young girls are married and that may have been a carry-over in their culture. In our country that happened not too long ago, young women were coupled."

— By Diana Bisswurm for the Associated Press
Reprinted from the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, August 29, 1996

