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Granddad and the New Tide

By Don Feder

The typical immigrant of the 1990s isn't my grandfather. (Which is probably just as well: who wants to see the nation overrun by Jewish tailors?) Having reached that painful conclusion, it's easier to rethink my position on immigration.

In the past, I confess, my thoughts on the matter were clouded by emotion and tinged with nostalgia. What if they'd kept my family out? Images of savage hordes swamping the nation were dispelled by memories of a decent, gentle man who worked hard all of his life and struggled to become a good American.

That was then: this is now. Chinese wading ashore in New York and HIV-infected Haitians released from Guantanamo Naval base may elicit sympathy, but are symptomatic of a crisis that must be confronted.

Unlike past immigrant waves, those currently walking, wading and floating to these shores are a net economic detriment. By and large, they are impoverished, unskilled, poorly educated and far less-assimilable than their predecessors.

We are fast approaching the point where generosity and blind allegiance to the "nation of immigrants" mystique verges on national suicide. With 4.7 percent of the world's population, we take in half of its emigrants.

They arrive at a rate of a million a year (legally), perhaps twice that number in illegal immigration. Annually, new arrivals equal 16 percent of native births.

Even coming from the *shtetls* of Eastern Europe, my grandparents were closer culturally to turn-of-the-century Americans than are current newcomers to today's population. Of the 11.8 million legal immigrants who arrived in the past 19 years, 85 percent came from the Third World, most from societies culturally conditioned to failure.

The nation's racial-ethnic composition is being transformed overnight, against the will of the majority. Since 1970, the Hispanic portion of the population has doubled, from 4.5 to 9 percent.

There were crime problems with the old immigrants (witness the Black Hand), but not to the extent of the present invasion. In 1987, 20 percent of the total arrests in our six largest cities were foreign nationals. Nearly a third of the first 6,000 arrested in the L.A. riots were illegal aliens.

When Grandpa opted for the American dream, you worked or went hungry. Many of today's immigrants prefer the dream of the Kennedys and

Clintons. While the number of Supplemental Security Income recipients grew 38.5 percent between 1982 and 1992, the number of immigrants partaking of this welfare program rose 370.2 percent. Economist George Borjas estimates that each year immigrants receive \$1 billion to \$3 billion more in welfare benefits than they contribute to the system.

All immigrants don't go on the dole, but those who work are a problem, too. They tend to be low-skilled and far more likely to take jobs than create them. In 1992, nearly 1.3 million foreign workers were certified for employment here, more than net job creation that year.

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How can our economy create enough new jobs for our own growing population, while straining under this burden?

Immigrants of the late 20th century are far less likely to assimilate than those who came before. In terms of past immigration, our genius was taking motley masses and turning them into little WASPS, in an ethnic sense. If not them, certainly their children.

Now, thanks to bilingualism, multicultural education and easy welfare, far too many immigrants remain part of an alien subculture.

In South Florida, Southern California, Texas and parts of New York City, there are millions of people who want to live here, but have absolutely no desire to learn our language, history or culture — who may never develop the commitment to the American ideal that led my grandfather to lie about his age in an effort to enlist in the U.S. Army at the outset of World War I. Is it racist or xenophobic not to want to see one's country become the Balkans of the Western world? A nation is more than a geographic entity, or a conglomeration of disparate, disputatious groups that happen to share two rooms and a bath—something the proponents of de facto open immigration seem not to understand.

I began thinking, as opposed to emoting, on this highly emotional subject when I read a piece by Peter

Brimelow, a Brit by birth, published in the *National Review* last year. Asks Mr. Brimelow rhetorically: "How can X be against immigration when the nativists wanted to keep his own great-grandfather out? This, of course, is like arguing that a passenger already on board the lifeboat should refrain from pointing out that taking on more will cause it to capsize." Which is where I came into this debate. ■