

Weasel Word on Immigration

Showing how far the moral intimidation has gone

by Thomas Sowell

New York's mayor, Rudolph Giuliani, helped launch yet another special-interest organization. This one is called the Immigration Coalition. Like so many such organizations today, its purpose is described not as trying to persuade others of the merits of its position, but as "educating the public." Apparently only the ignorant can possibly disagree with them.

There are many arguments that can be made for and against immigration in general and our current immigration laws and policies in particular. However, many of the pro-immigration spokesmen do not depend on arguments at all but on lofty talk about "educating" others, evasive talk about "undocumented" immigrants, nostalgic talk about immigration in a past era radically different from today and politically correct talk about "diversity" — a word more designed to silence others than to convince them.

For any one who respects

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logic and honesty, it is virtually impossible to talk about immigration in general because there is no such thing as an immigrant in general. Some immigrants — past and present — have brought priceless gifts

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to this country, while others have brought crime, disease and degeneracy. Not only do individual immigrants differ, so do whole groups from various parts of the world. Given the enormously different geographic, cultural and historical backgrounds from which they come, it could hardly be otherwise.

Yet any thought that the United States should more readily accept immigrants from nations whose track record is good than from nations whose track record is bad sets off howls of protest and charges of racism. More important, this moral intimidation shuts off discussion.

Mayor Giuliani laments that proposed federal legislation would not allow local governments to "provide zones of protection for undocumented immigrants." What specifically does this collection of weasel words mean?

Protection from what?

Under proposed new federal legislation, local governments could no longer pass laws forcing local officials to conceal the presence of illegal immigrants from the federal government. The very fact that we can no longer use the plain words "illegal immigrants" shows how far the moral intimidation has gone.

It is bad enough for individual citizens to obstruct the application of immigration law to people who are here illegally. It is staggering that there should be local laws deliberately set up to conceal people who are breaking federal laws.

Giuliani, like many other pro-immigration spokesmen, sidesteps this outrageous legal situation to argue that, on net balance, it is better not to pursue illegal immigrants too zealously, or to restrict their benefits too severely, for fear of social repercussions. Whatever the merits of that policy position, it is a position that should be argued before the federal lawmakers.

We cannot have local governments passing laws exempting people from those federal laws they don't happen to like or making it a crime for local officials to obey federal law. This is so blatantly obvious that nothing like this is even attempted on other issues.

Underlying such practices and rhetoric is the notion that it

is somehow wrong to stop people from coming to the United States. Those who adopt a "citizen of the world" air and lament the existence of national borders may enjoy a glow of self-righteousness but immigration is a virtually irreversible decision — and it is receiving nothing like the careful scrutiny that our irreversible decisions deserve.

A nation and a people is more than simply the sum total of the individuals who happen to live within its borders. For a multi-ethnic society like the United States, especially. It is a population which shares certain cultural traditions and moral values. Protecting those traditions and values means limiting how many people can enter, under what conditions and with what commitment to becoming American rather than remaining foreign.

The much-denounced restrictions on immigration to the United States in the 1920s at least served the purpose of encouraging the Americanization of the existing immigrants. All over the world, immigrants who are part of a continuing stream of immigrants from their homeland tend to remain foreign longer. Today, there are organized movements and government-subsidized programs to keep people not only foreign but even hostile to the very country to which they have immigrated.

Ironically, those who thus raise the cost of immigration to the American people are loudest in demanding freer immigration. ■