

Don Feder is a nationally syndicated columnist. This item appeared in The Boston Globe on December 2, 1993 and is reprinted by permission.

Citizenship Won't Alleviate Alien-nation

By Don Feder

In his response to growing outrage over failed immigration policies, Bill Clinton, Mr. 43 Percent, again shows how little he understands the concerns of average Americans.

The administration has announced an initiative to deal with the unassimilable masses swamping our society: confer citizenship on them. Washington will encourage the estimated 10 million legal aliens who are permanent residents of America to become citizens.

Doris Meissner, commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, believes this will check the troubling "anti-immigration feelings we see in various parts of the country and in Congress." So the INS, which has fewer than three agents to patrol each mile of our border, will invest its resources in selling citizenship.

Many thus recruited will be motivated more by pragmatism than patriotism. Citizens can immediately bring spouses, minor children and parents here.

The real objection to uncontrolled immigration has less to do with immigrants' status (illegal/legal, resident alien/naturalized American) than the apprehension that, whatever their designation, recent immigrants essentially are foreigners who happen to be living here. Citizenship papers won't make Americans of those who feel little affinity for our heritage.

The week before Thanksgiving, Boston's Martin Luther King Middle School celebrated the 500th anniversary of Puerto Rico. Students danced the limbo and merengue and sang songs in Spanish. It was part of the school's multicultural curriculum, which infects all disciplines. (In math, students are taught how certain African tribes used beans for counting.)

One-third of the school's teachers are bilingual. The principal recruits personnel directly from Puerto Rico. "I'm glad the current superintendent wants to acknowledge our existence and celebrate our diversity," comments School Committee member Luis Velez.

What happened to celebrating unity? When my mother, the child of Russian immigrants, was in school, the week before Thanksgiving was devoted to Pilgrim pageants, reciting "The Courtship of Miles Standish" and studying the impact of early settlements on the development of American democracy.

Now its limbo and merengue. Last year, a gang of multiculturalists in Long Beach, Calif., proposed changing the holiday's name to "Diversity Day," arguing that students whose roots are in Latin America and Southeast Asia can't relate to that Mayflower jive.

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We spend a billion dollars annually instructing immigrant children in foreign languages, so they won't have to learn English. In New York City, applicants for a driver's license can take their written test in one of 22 languages. Can multilingual road signs be far behind?

In July, a naturalization ceremony in Tucson was conducted in Spanish. A spokesman for the INS said that since many of the participants were exempt from the English requirement for citizenship, the service felt the ceremony would be "more meaningful" for them in their own language.

A *New York Times* article of June 29, "A Fervent 'No' to Assimilation in New America," reported on a survey of 5,000 eighth and ninth graders with foreign-born parents. Of the Mexican-Americans, 56 percent said they preferred their parents' native tongue to English, as did 49 percent of Vietnamese-Americans. Only 35 percent of Haitian-Americans consider America the best country to live in.

Therein lies a tragedy in progress. The old immigrants were touching in their eagerness to adapt. They were grateful to be here, eager to demonstrate their allegiance to their new land, determined to shed old ways as fast as possible.

As a whole, the new immigrants are decidedly ambivalent. They want the economic/political advantages of living here while maintaining their own cultural/national identities. They have formed alien enclaves in our major cities. They demand that their children be educated in Spanish, French, Chinese, or Lao, and taught ethnic pride.

They insist that the nation adapt to them, with bilingual ballots and interpreters in social service agencies.

But if their homelands are so swell that they must maintain ancestral ties, why did they come here? If immigrants have to be coaxed to become Americans, via a federal outreach program, what sort of citizens will they make?

In the Canadian province of Quebec, French is the official language. Posting signs in English is illegal. Following the last election, the province sent a solid separatist delegation to Ottawa.

Here is our fate, and sooner than you may think. Immigration accounts for one-third of America's annual population growth. Your grandchildren may grow up in a country that celebrates Cinco de Mayo with more gusto than Thanksgiving.

Clinton's feeble attempt to cash in on concern over our porous borders is doomed to have the same impact as Gerald Ford's WIN (whip inflation now) buttons on the economic malaise of the '70s. ■