

OPINIONS & LETTERS

Anti-Immigration Mindset: Is It Racism?

By Charlie Ara, President-emeritus,
Hubert Humphrey Democratic Club

A few weeks ago, my wife and I flew to Boston to share in an event where our youngest son was receiving a recognition of achievement from the New England Conservatory of Music. His M.A. will be awarded on May 22.

COLUMN LEFT

The highlight of our trip was taking in a view of Boston from the 50th floor of the Prudential Center. There, with headphones, we were given a history of immigration from the time of the Boston Tea Party, the midnight ride of Paul Revere, the signing of the Declaration of Independence by John Hancock and up to the present day. Over 100 ethnic groups have immigrated to Boston over the past 200 years.

Upon leaving our plane from Logan Airport, we had been made aware that Boston is a city made great by immigrants. Our cab driver was a Puerto Rican, our guide on the Freedom Trail was an Italian, the bellboy at the hotel was a Caribbean American, the state troopers at the Freedom Hall were Canadians, our waitress was an Irish lassie, our hostess was French, the hotel maids were Latino, the businesses were run by Armenians, Syrians, Lebanese, Jews, Italians, Irish, Chinese, Puerto Ricans, Filipinos and other people from around the world.

We were made aware that the section of the city called the Back Bay was built by Chinese labor. In those days, the term "illegal aliens" was not used. It was simply a matter of cheap labor and, in turn, the Chinese community helped build the economy of that city. A thriving Chinatown is testament to the economic contribution of Chinese labor.

However, in the 1920s, an anti-immigration mindset began to prevail. Most of us are familiar with the sign in Boston that read: "Help Wanted, no Irishman need apply." Fortunately, this type of racism was only for a short period in Boston. But what about now? Does racism exist in our beloved California and Southwestern states?

Our immigrant governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, has encouraged the Minutemen in their outlaw behavior of usurping federal authority in guarding our borders. Many political analysts feel the governor is using the immigrant issue to divert attention from his failure to keep his promises not to raise private funds as Governor Davis did, and to hide his failure to return \$2 billion of borrowed money from the state education system.

As his predecessor Pete Wilson did, Governor Schwarzenegger is appealing to latent racism against Mexican-Americans that exists in the minds of many prejudiced Americans who come from European backgrounds. Even President Bush has referred to these modern-day Minutemen as vigilantes. The real question is not whether or not they are outlaws but, rather, why is the government allowing the Minutemen to get away with breaking the law as so many of them are doing?

The federal government alone is charged with guarding our borders. It is not the business of the state or private groups. One might ask these vigilantes, is it not a crime to threaten to shoot people who don't meet one's criteria for citizenship? How can our governor support these people who are acting as a militia and taking the law in their own hands?

While immigration is a complex subject, one must remember that California and other Southwest states were once a part of Mexico. Latinos contribute billions of dollars to our economy. We Democrats are hopeful that the present anti-immigrant mindset will be a short-term phenomenon that will give way to the real moral value that we are all brothers and sis-

Text of Article

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