

The Wall Street Journal

November 24, 2004

Commentary

Let Us Give Thanks to Our Immigrants

By RUPERT MURDOCH

November 24, 2004; Page A12

When B.C. Forbes sailed for America from Scotland in 1904, he was following a course well worn by generations of Scots.

I know how the founder of Forbes magazine must have felt. The Murdochs originally hail from the same part of Scotland. Today, we are part of the most recent wave of immigrants attracted by the bright beacon of American liberty.

These days, it's not always easy to talk about the benefits of immigration. Especially since 9/11, many Americans worry about borders and security. These are legitimate concerns. But surely a nation as great as America has the wit and resources to distinguish between those who come here to destroy the American Dream -- and the many millions more who come to live it.

The evidence of the contributions these immigrants make to our society is all around us -- especially in the critical area of education. Adam Smith (another Scotsman) knew that without a decent system of education, a modern capitalist society was committing suicide. Well, our modern public school systems simply are not producing the talent the American economy needs to compete in the future. And it often seems that it is our immigrants who are holding the whole thing up.

In a study on high school students released this past summer, the **National Foundation for American Policy** found 60% of the top science students, and 65% of the top math students, are children of immigrants. The same study found that seven of the top award winners at the 2004 Intel Science Talent Search were immigrants or children of immigrants. This correlates with other findings that more than half of engineers -- and 45% of math and computer scientists -- with Ph.D.s now working in the U.S. are foreign born.

It's not just the statistics. You see it at our most elite college and university campuses, where Asian immigrants or their children are disproportionately represented. And a recent study of 28 prestigious American universities by

researchers from Princeton and the University of Pennsylvania found something startling: that 41% of the black students attending these schools described themselves as either immigrants or children of immigrants.

The point is that by almost any measure of educational excellence you choose, if you're in America you're going to find immigrants or their children at the top. I don't just mean engineers and scientists and technicians. In my book, anyone who comes here and gives an honest day's work for an honest day's pay is not only putting himself closer to the American Dream, he's helping the rest of us get there too.

As Ronald Reagan said at the Statue of Liberty, "While we applaud those immigrants who stand out, whose contributions are easily discerned, we know that America's heroes are also those whose names are remembered by only a few."

Let me share some of these names with you.

Start with Eddie Chin, an ethnic Chinese Marine who was born a week after his family fled Burma. You've all seen Cpl. Chin. Because when Baghdad fell, he was the Marine we all watched shimmy up the statue of Saddam Hussein to attach the cable that would pull it down.

Or Lance Cpl. Ahmad Ibrahim. His family came to the U.S. from Syria when the first Gulf War broke out. Now Cpl. Ibrahim hopes to be deployed to Iraq -- also as a Marine -- to put his Arabic language skills in the service of Corps and Country.

Or what about Cpl. José Gutierrez, who was raised in Guatemala and came to America as a boy -- illegally! Cpl. Gutierrez was one of the first Marines killed in action in Iraq. As his family told reporters, this young immigrant enlisted with the Marine Corps because he wanted to "give back" to America.

So here we have it -- Asian Marines, Arab Marines, Latino Marines -- all united in the mission of protecting the rest of us. Isn't this what Reagan meant when he said that the bond that ties our immigrants together -- what makes us a nation instead of a collection of individuals -- is "an abiding love of liberty"? So the next time you hear people whinging about what a "drain" on America our immigrants are, it might be worth asking if they consider these Marines a drain.

Maybe this is more clear to businessmen because of what we see every day. My company, News Corporation, is a multinational company based in America. Our diversity is based on talent, cooperation and ability.

Frankly it doesn't bother me in the least that millions of people are attracted to our shores. What we should worry about is the day they no longer find these shores attractive. In an era when too many of our pundits declare that the

American Dream is a fraud, it is America's immigrants who remind us -- by dint of their success -- that the Dream is alive, and well within reach of anyone willing to work for it.

We are fortunate to have a president who understands that. Only a few days ago, the White House indicated that it intended to revive an immigration reform which the president had first offered before 9/11 and tried to revive back in January.

Politically speaking, a guest-worker plan is no easy thing. But as President Bush realizes, we'll never fix the problem of illegal immigration simply by throwing up walls and trying to make all of us police them. We've tried that for a decade or so now, and it's been a flop. What we need to do first is to make it easier for those who seek honest work to do so without having to disobey our laws. Fundamentally that means recognizing that an economy as powerful as ours is always going to have a demand for more workers.

Such a policy would benefit us all:

- It would help those who want nothing more than to work legally move out of the shadows.
- It would help our security forces stop wasting resources now spent on hunting down Mexican waitresses and start devoting them to tracking the terrorists who really threaten us.
- It would help the economy by providing America with the labor and talent it needs.

* * *

Given the tremendous pressures on President Bush and the considerable opposition from within his own ranks, the politically expedient thing for him to do would be to drop it. But he hasn't, and I for one am encouraged by his refusal to give in.

The immigrant editor B.C. Forbes spent much of the 20th century championing the glories of American opportunity. We who have arrived more recently likewise will never forget our debt we owe to this land -- and the obligation to keep that same opportunity alive in the 21st.

Mr. Murdoch is chairman and chief executive of News Corporation. This is adapted from a speech he gave last Thursday, in acceptance of the 2004 B.C. Forbes Award.