



No Reconquest: a Becoming American Guide for Dummies

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A lot has been going on regarding the immigration debate in the US. Now that the legislative branch is enjoying a well earned Easter recess - and perhaps this will mean they can go on a couple of weeks without spending or producing "earmarks" - it might be time to reflect calmly on the matter.

A summary of the current situation could be as follows. Considering the fact that 12 million people are in American soil illegally - others say 11 million, but figures are particularly tricky when it comes to count persons that are not supposed to be there - the Congress is debating a new immigration law that could eventually affect them, and not only potential newcomers.

A few very well organised rallies have crowded American streets in places where immigration - especially from the South border - is already plentiful. Dallas, L.A. and, of course,

New York have been spectators of such gatherings.

Most of the propositions that have been heard by Congress suggest that indeed 12 million illegals are a lot, and that although a better border control is needed for the future, it is almost impossible to apply the law as it is, and send all those people back where they belong. Certain forms of amnesty have been considered. One of them through the imposition of fines on grounds of misdemeanors and not felonies, starting a path to citizenship, provided it can achieve a certain bipartisan agreement. Word has it that "illegals are not criminals".

The first rallies were particularly forward mannered, to say the least, and the excess of Mexican flags plus some chants and cries related to some kind of re-conquest of American territory were seen - understandably - as offensive. Further down the road, word

was apparently passed by the organizers that flags should be shown... stars and stripes flags, that is.

Picking on the clumsy (?) movements of the organization, Fox News had its story all made and it cannot be blamed. A person named Javier Rodríguez - and that is a pretty common name - was interviewed because he was the representative of a group calling for a boycott on May 1st whereby immigrants were not to go to work, nor send their children to school. No less. And on May 1st! This meant promising half a month of building up, and marking a labour day that is foreign to American tradition, since the true labor day is the first Monday in September.

After watching this interview and the not so polite requests of the spokesman of this organisation, nobody would ever agree to accept a single immigrant into the US, legally or illegally, period. Well done Fox. Ill advised, Mr. Rodríguez. Or not?

Evidently this spokesperson was part of the lunatic fringe of an angry-immigrant crowd, or not even part of it. He was just an activist, making use of a controversial issue in order to step in the political arena and do whatever he was really intending to do. On this, more later.

Mr. O'Reilly and also Hannity and Colmes were putting forward the idea that what really mattered was "securing the border". The term "secure" rings instantly the bell of military or surgical solutions. That is, brings back the memories of how 9/11 could happen and links immigration -illegal immigration - to security problems. This is not wrong, but it is only one part of the issue.

Rush Limbaugh, at the same time, was making the point that the rallies were organised by groups such as one called ANSWER which apparently is a get-together for Americans against the war and was founded days after the terrorist attacks on America. Indeed some of these groups were trying to defend their political agenda, namely: America is an "evil empire" and its "neoliberal" economic policies are damaging other countries forcing "labour dislocation". For those reasons it has the "obligation" to take in the immigrants in whatever its form, legal or illegal.

But that's not it. The Wall Street Journal, all along this process, has published no less than three op-eds on the subject. All of them share what might be called a non-malthusian approach: An editorial, a piece by California Governor and former immigrant Arnold Schwarzenegger, and a very well balanced article by its popular and eloquent columnist, Peggy Noonan. The bottom line being here that of course laws should be complied with, but that immigration benefits the economy, brings wages down and therefore inflation, does not hurt employment, and provides for potential new good and creative citizens, while at the same time can benefit Republican outcome in next congressional elections. It does not forget the relevance of Christians supporting the Republicans, not only evangelical "Wilson's" but also catholic "Garcias". On the other hand, although it does not mention it, who could forget that the Elián affair might have been the clue of the whole Bush era. Remember, Florida recount, year 2000?

The Claremont Institute, a California based institution, publishes in its Web

site three magnificent articles on the subject of immigration. In particular Mr. Krannawitter elaborates on American citizenship. After recalling the importance of America as an idea, producing an excellent summary on the foundation, purpose and form of the American government, it dwells on the necessity of American civil virtues. He divides them into four categories: 1) Self-restraint; 2) Self assertion; 3) Civic knowledge, and 4) Self reliance. None of them have been demonstrated by the more vocal faces of the rallying crowds, American flags notwithstanding.

In this education for citizenship, self-restraint means being aware of the right of others and not step over them; self-assertion means denouncing abuse of powers by the public offices and standing up for everybody's rights; civic knowledge requires to distinguish what the people can do and what the government can do; and self-reliance means to go for help to private institutions before you go to Government, and beware of the control that Government might establish over people when it is the dispenser of welfare.

To sum up: the people wishing to immigrate and those already there, have allowed their purposes to be stolen by people who want to put forward a political agenda that is not their own. They should reclaim their rights and produce clear and serious messages. It could be suggested that their rallies should consist in masses trying not to sing out of key "America the beautiful", but getting to that point might not be necessary, although advisable. In any case, frankly, getting trapped in a "reconquest" discourse is the wrong thing to

do. By the way, for Spanish from Spain, the reconquest is a different matter. It means the recovery of Spanish territory from the Moors terminated in 1492, the same year Columbus went over there to extend Christianity and the Western Civilization, so badly served by this new "reconquest" proposal.

In the end what is at stake here is the defense of shared values. What most immigrants are looking for, and this was recalled in the Wall Street Journal editorial, is a piece of the beacon of liberty, a piece of the shining city President Reagan was so fond to talk about. After all, he loved his Rancho del Cielo, and we all know Cielo and Heaven mean the same thing.

People around the world are showing they would like to live under a Government based on a sound Rule of Law, a protection of fundamental freedoms including specifically the possibility to express themselves freely, and to try to achieve prosperity through freedom of enterprise, liberated from corruption and other encroachments. Another immigrant, who eventually went back to his native Europe, Friedrich A. Von Hayek, showed the way to many in this respect. The Americans knew it already since July 4th, 1776, when it was stated in the Declaration of Independence that "All men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness". This programme does not come cheap and people have to fight for it and deserve it. Perhaps and most of all by making it possible in their birthplaces. However, it can be presumed that the Congress will find the practical solutions

needed to provide for a fair legal background that does not benefit law transgressors. In the meantime it should not be forgotten that most

people wishing to become Americans have known too many roads to serfdom in order not to appreciate a true constitution of liberty.