

## IMMIGRATION NATION

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### *Whither (or wither) goest us?*

It's becoming apparent I seriously lack all the answers. So starting today I'm reaching out to my more opinionated pals and palettes on different sides of the spectrum... strike ideas off 'em, reach a common-sense middle ground.

I've known Red Rodman through the years, my true-blue, red-state, heartbeat-of-America drinking buddy from back at Ford Assembly, Wixom, Michigan. Laid off in '97, he spends most mornings working his carpet-cleaning business and most afternoons pumping aluminum at the Wixom Bar.

Like its rival The Copper Mug down the road in Walled Lake, the Wixom has seen some upgrades. Nothing detracts from the shot-and-a-beer atmosphere, but fights have declined to one per week. Yuppies walk the town streets fearlessly in the blossoming bosom of strip malls and trophy-home clusters.

"Yo, Red, how's it hangin'? You haven't changed a bit, at least not location-wise." I note the pack of Camels at his elbow, "Did you know 'nine out of ten men who've tried Camels prefer women?' So what you gonna do when they say you can't smoke in here?"

"Damned do gooders! But, hey, what's goin' on with you? The Flip said you'd gone off to New Hampshire, as the Freedom Rider, some such."

"Well," I say, "yes, it's the Free State Project. We killed a smoking ban there last year. I'm back from the freedom-movement front for a while to take care of Mama Bear."

"Good for you, B. Still ride?"

"Sadly, no. Someday, again. Heck, every other vehicle in the Free State is a Harley. Fact is, I'm too busy. I'm doing a Web business now trying to sell my 'pinions."

"What's that about assholes and opinions? Everybody's got one. So why would they want yours?"

"Good question." I pause a moment, then, "Most of what I write applies the kindergarten principle: 'don't hit people, don't take their stuff, and keep your promises.' But sometimes I run into an issue I wonder if a five-year-old can handle it... like immigration."

"What's tough about that?" Red comes back. "All you do is round up anyone without credentials and ship 'em back. Those Minutemen guys—you ever wonder why the illegals are such a big issue all of a sudden?—have the right idea."

"You serious?! Aside from the paperwork, what about the logistics? How do you find and move 12 million unwilling people back across a border? This isn't the Soviet system; there aren't enough boxcars. It would be a humanitarian nightmare, not to mention expensive."

I continue, "Man, these are people, just like you and me. They're trying to to their best for their families, struggling to get by. Who set up that border, anyway: do you think somehow you're less valuable a human being on one side of it than on the other?"

"How expensive?" Red asks.

"Hundreds of billions for sure, and you'd pay twice as much for lawn care and dining out."

"No thanks, can't afford those as it is."

"You know," I'm thinking out loud, "If we give up the bogus War on Terror and the insane War on Drugs, the government would have a cool trillion to play with, like right now. That could buy a lot of 'pushing people around to make sure they have their papers.' How would that be?"

"You serious?!" Red retorts. "Where do you think those goons in Washington got all that money! I figure a \$10,000 refund per taxpayer, and I want mine in cash, small bills."

"But Red, what about your desire for keeping America pure and WASPish? A lot of the illegals don't even speak English."

"What do I care? I live in Michigan."

"That seems a bit parochial, don't you think?"

But as I realize he probably doesn't know what parochial means, it dawns on me we've changed sides and I'm thinking we need some restraint on the influx of large numbers of relatively unskilled or uneducated people, especially if they don't want to assimilate. Virtually all the legal immigrant populations do want to assimilate.

"Hey, B, you all right?"

"Yeah, sure. I just was wondering what happens if, say, Islamic/Arabic culture and language come to predominate in Europe and Catholic/Hispanic culture and language come to predominate in America. It's not unrealistic according to some predictions. That might not be such a good thing; my Spanish, not to mention my Catholicism, is a bit rusty."

"Now who's being parochial?" Red says.

"Cute."

"Red," I say, "my two cents as of this five minutes is the government does a lousy job at anything, so policing the borders and setting up another bureaucratic system of papers and cards won't even work. We just have to do common-sense things to encourage English and assimilation; no government "benefits" for the undocumented. Citizen-based programs and competent police work can identify any terrorist threats. Cooperate with the Hispanic community; they want the same basic stuff we want, they're people. "

Red nods on this a minute, says "It sounds pretty cheap. I like it. Maybe add some incentives to get the donor country out of the misery and oppression business. Legalizing drugs, at least weed, would help; some honest land reform and a little people's capitalism wouldn't hurt either."

"Geez, Red, I can see you've been eating your smartenin' pills. Let me buy you a cold one."

He laughs, "Twist my arm."